

# RRR

ROSEN RESEARCH REVIEW

SUMMER 2023



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## A message from Dean Youcheng Wang



**Rosen College of  
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# *We are proud to represent the future direction of hospitality education and research.*

**W**e live in both exciting and challenging times, where innovation and interdisciplinary research are the required tools and mindset to continue to break

the bottleneck and push for out-of-the-box thinking, ensuring that our research provides relevant insights to practice and application. UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management is a beneficiary of such a mindset, resulting in its prominence and excellence. Particularly in recent years, the College has adopted the HOSPITALITY Plus strategy in curriculum offerings and research programs development. This strategic and innovative direction not only demonstrates the evolution of the hospitality industry in the last 15–20 years, but more importantly represents the future direction of hospitality education and research. Under this model, hospitality is treated not only as an industry, but also as a culture which can be transferred to other service-oriented business sectors. As a result, the hospitality concept is considered a continuum expanding from Conventional Hospitality to Hedonic Hospitality, all the way to Utilitarian Hospitality. This model not only contributes to the College's No. 1 ranking in the nation, but also the most comprehensive hospitality curriculum and research program in the world.

The 10 articles featured in the Summer 2023 **Rosen Research Review** are great manifestations of such innovative and interdisciplinary research reflected in our HOSPITALITY Plus model, made available both digitally and in print. This issue carries a wide array of themes ranging from social servicescape and robotic service in the theme park industry, the smart destination concept, heritage tourism, destination loyalty, all the way to tourism development and poverty, determining factors to golf experience, and gender identification and stereotyping in service encounters. This issue's thought leader article focuses on Bruce Zagers, Commissioner



of Tourism for Saba, a Dutch island in the Caribbean. The Rosen College of Hospitality Management is collaborating with residents of Saba to emphasize and ensure the preservation of the region's natural resources for future generations.

The **Rosen Research Review**, produced by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management in collaboration with Research Features has been communicating important research directly to leaders and managers of the hospitality industry since 2019. We continue to be a contributor to the knowledge base of the hospitality industry, as well as peripheral industries who value guest services, by providing information that can be used by managers, owners, and entrepreneurs, as well as destination marketing firms, to help us all be better business partners. We have a commitment to life-long learning as we educate the future leaders of the hospitality industry at the #1 ranked college in the nation for hospitality research and education, according to the 2022 Shanghai Rankings.

Please enjoy reading the **Rosen Research Review** Summer 2023 issue. We hope that the magazine will enrich your human experience through our approach of inclusion, discovery, and innovation.

**Youcheng Wang, Ph.D.**  
**Dean and William C. Peeper Preeminent Professor in  
Destination Marketing**

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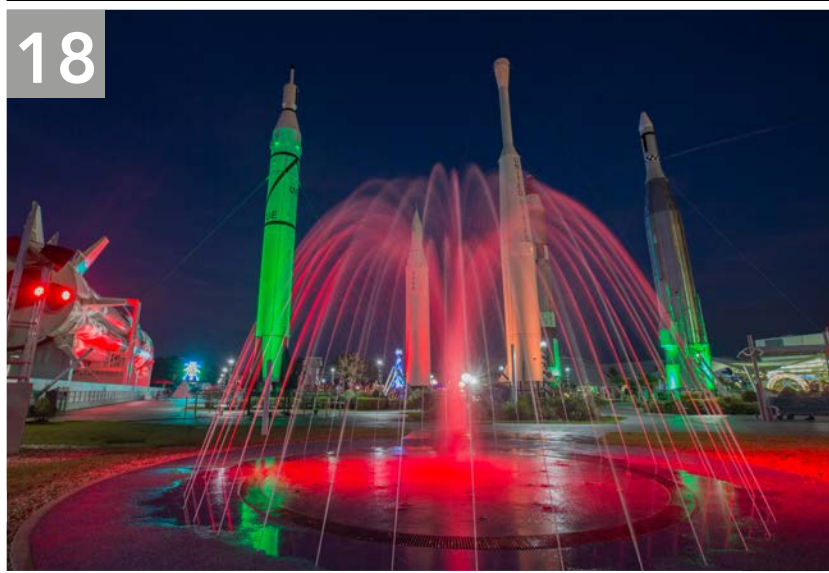




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Rosen Research Focus | Wei Wei

# JUST LOOKING

## Tourist gaze and the theme park experience

*What makes a memorable theme park experience? New research led by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Assistant Professor Wei Wei looks at how visitor experience is influenced by the 'tourist gaze'—the consumption of visual experiences, as well as other services, in a tourism destination. With important implications for theme park operators and managers, the study focuses on visitors' visual interactions with fellow visitors and finds they have a significant impact on visitors' emotions and the quality of their overall experience.*

**M**ore than 521 million people visited the world's top ten theme parks in 2019 according to the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA). Headed by the Disney Corporation, which welcomed around 156 million global visitors in the same year, statistical agency IBIS World estimates that the U.S. market alone is worth \$29 billion annually.

Theme parks are big business, but they are also places where visitors invest their emotions, share experiences, and make memories. To date, academic research has mainly concentrated on theme park services and attractions. New research led by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Associate Professor Wei Wei breaks new ground by using the two concepts of 'tourist gaze' and 'social servicescapes' to look at what makes a memorable theme park experience.

The 'tourist gaze' is a key concept for tourism studies. Identified by sociologist John Urry in the 1990s, it assumes that tourists consume visual experiences along with other, perhaps more tangible, services at tourism or leisure destinations, and that these experiences can both influence visitor satisfaction rates and be influenced by industry providers. A visit to Universal Studios, for example, is in many ways a staged experience similar to a theatrical performance—visitors might even dress as a favorite movie character. When this happens, the visitors 'spectate' each other, as well as the attraction.

Also defined in the 1990s, this time by Mary Jo Bitner, the concept of a 'social servicescape' is particularly associated with the hospitality industry. According to this model, the physical space in which hospitality services are consumed—and the physical presence of other people who share that

space—will also affect consumers. Not only does the staging of the attraction matter, the presence of other people is also important—people want to be surrounded by others who are sharing the same experience.

Published in the prestigious *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, the research team's study integrates the concepts of tourist gaze and social servicescapes. It uses the 'lens' of the tourist gaze to study how theme park servicescapes affect visitors' emotions and help to make the experience memorable.







Dr. Wei looks at how visitor experience is influenced by the 'tourist gaze'—the consumption of visual experiences, as well as other services, in a tourism destination.

What makes a memorable theme park experience?



## EMOTIONAL SPACE

A preliminary review of antecedent tourism literature identified three important dimensions of social servicescapes, namely visitors' appearance, behavior, and similarity to each other. Psychological studies also suggested that tourist gaze is strongly related to people's emotional responses, particularly their feelings of arousal and curiosity. The research team brought these ideas together in a three-stage model to study whether appearance, behavior, and similarity affect visitors' arousal and curiosity, and in turn create memorable theme park experiences.

of other visitors' appearances and behaviors at theme parks to refresh their memories and help them understand the focus of the research. After screening, 561 responses were subsequently analyzed.

Given that a theme park visit can cost hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars, participants' demographics are important. Respondents were fairly evenly split regarding gender and marital status, and relatively well-educated. The majority identified as white, a third as non-white, and income was fairly evenly distributed, ranging from less

## SOCIAL SERVICESCAPE AND TOURIST GAZE

Survey questions on similarity in the social servicescape included whether participants identified with other visitors and looked like they came from a similar background. Appearance questions probed items such as other visitors' facial and emotional expressions, e.g., whether they looked cheerful. Behavior was tested through such questions as whether other visitors were amusing and enjoyable to watch.

Participants' levels of arousal in tourist gaze were assessed by asking, for example, whether they found watching others interesting, or stimulating. Curiosity was tested by asking such things as whether they enjoyed learning new things about other visitors from their behaviors and appearances. To judge whether arousal and curiosity have an overall effect on memorable experience, participants were asked, for example, whether they felt revitalized or refreshed by their visit.

## VISITORS' AFFECTIVE STATES SUCH AS AROUSAL AND CURIOSITY ARE IMPORTANT IN HELPING TO CREATE POSITIVE MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES OF THEME PARKS.

Taking a quantitative approach, an online survey was designed and distributed through a leading crowdsourcing website. Conducted in the U.S. in early 2020, participants were asked about a memorable visit to a theme park in the previous six months. Respondents were shown photographs

than \$35,000 a year, to more than \$100,000. Some 59% of participants visited with family, and 36% with friends. The most common attractions visited were Disney entertainment resorts, followed by Six Flags adventure parks, Universal Studios movie-themed destinations, and Sea World marine zoological parks.





The study has important implications for theme park operators and managers.

### SOCIAL IDENTITY AND PERFORMANCE

As the researchers expected, the results of the study showed that perceptions of similarity to other visitors positively affected participants' states of both arousal and curiosity. In line with previous research on social servicescapes and social identity theory, this suggests that consumers' attitudes in hospitality settings are strongly influenced by their sense of belonging to a recognized social group, which in turn enhances their self-image.

The results also indicated that there was a significant relationship between participants' observation of other visitors' behavior and their feelings of both arousal and curiosity. This had also been anticipated by the research team, not least because it is in line with the theatrical performance literature. The research confirms that theme park visitors are spectators of both other people's behavior, and the performers who help to determine other visitors' response.

Contrary to the research team's expectations and to other studies, the results did not suggest that participants' observation of other visitors' appearance significantly impacts their feelings of arousal or curiosity. Wei and her collaborators argue that one possible explanation for this is that theme park visitors expect other visitors to look happy, energetic, and cheerful, and that the value of that particular measure is therefore reduced.

The findings confirm that visitors' affective states of arousal and curiosity are important in helping to create positive memorable theme park experiences. Being aroused and

## THEME PARK VISITORS ARE BOTH SPECTATORS OF OTHER PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR, AND PERFORMERS WHO HELP TO DETERMINE OTHER VISITORS' RESPONSE.

excited, as well as feeling curious and wanting to learn, are recognized by psychologists as drivers of memory—we remember the things and experiences to which we have had an emotional response.

### CUSTOMER SEGMENTATION AND BEHAVIOR

By using social servicescape and tourist gaze concepts to determine what makes theme park experiences memorable, Wei and her collaborators bring new insights and widen the scope of the academic literature which had previously concentrated on hospitality settings. In addition, while previous studies have investigated the impact of factors such as aesthetics and education on memorable tourism experiences, the researchers' study shows that the social servicescape and other visitors are also important.

The study has important implications for theme park operators and managers, not least given the cost of developing new facilities—the Disney Corporation, for example, recently announced that in the next ten years it needed to spend \$17 billion to expand its Florida resort.

Wei and the other researchers' findings imply that the impact of the social servicescape

and other visitors on a visitor's enjoyment of a theme park should not be ignored. In addition, the importance of visitor similarity suggests that marketers should pay particular attention to customer profile and segmentation in order to establish a homogeneous marketing base. Employers should also consider creating themed events to attract visitors who share similar interests, as well as promotions for specific groups, for example, to celebrate.

### NATIONAL GRANDPARENTS' DAY

Other opportunities include management interventions to promote desirable visitor behaviors. This could be through careful scripting of employees' interactions with



Wei's findings imply that the impact of the social servicescape and other visitors on a visitor's enjoyment of a theme park should not be ignored.

visitors in order to elicit specific responses. Photographs and images used in marketing and promotion should also be appropriate to the target customer base. Last but not least, given the study's findings on the importance of emotions in creating memorable theme park experiences, activities should be designed to be as emotionally engaging as possible.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Wei Wei studies the impact of the social servicescape and tourist gaze on theme park visitors' affective states and overall experience.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

**The research was based on visitors' pre-COVID-19 theme park experiences. Now that visitor numbers are returning to pre-COVID-19 levels, do you think people's feelings about the use of the social servicescape changed, and if so how?**

// Indeed. People will become more aware of the importance of personal space and be more accustomed to measures taken to safeguard hygiene and safety. On the other hand, given the increasing desire for social connection in the post-COVID-19 era, people will have higher expectations and standards for how social servicescapes are designed and managed by service providers. //

## Dr. Wei Wei



Dr. Wei Wei is an Associate Professor at the UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. Her research focuses on hospitality and tourism consumers' experience, psychology, and behaviors at innovative service encounters. Dr. Wei serves as an Associate Editor for *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research* and sits on the Editorial Board for six journals.

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# THEME PARK VISITORS PREFER HUMAN-LIKE ROBOTS IN CUSTOMER SERVICE INTERACTIONS

*Service robots are becoming increasingly popular in many industries and social settings, including education, childcare, elderly therapy centers, and even theme parks. Tourism and hospitality industries are adopting robots enthusiastically and are being closely studied to observe guest engagement and reaction to robotic services. UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management researchers, Dr. Ady Milman and Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci, have investigated how theme park visitors perceive four robot types to better understand the qualities and functions customers seek from robotic servers.*

**W**ith society experiencing a technological revolution, robots are becoming an increasingly common sight in our everyday lives, including in the tourism and hospitality industry. In North America, theme parks have adopted robotic servers to enhance the experience of visitors, but how do customers perceive robots in this setting? Research in this field is limited, especially in the context of theme parks, and it is not known whether robots enhance the visitor experience, can perform valuable tasks, or if they may even have an impact on visitor loyalty. With the global service robotics market predicted to grow by 21.8% between 2020 and 2026, understanding the impacts of robots on theme park visitors is essential.

## A ROBOTIC WORKFORCE

The study of consumer usage and acceptance of robots in tourism and hospitality settings is still in its infancy, but UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management researchers Dr. Ady Milman and Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci are working to overcome this knowledge gap. The authors conducted an online survey to understand customer reactions to the qualities and functions of robots—all 399 respondents were seasoned theme park visitors who had visited



Robots provide customer service experiences at lower operational expense compared to human staff.

a theme park within the past 12 months and their self-assessed level of technological 'savviness' was also recorded.

Each participant was randomly assigned one of four robot types, identified through their important attributes and impacts as anime, cartoon-like, human-like, and animal-like. The participants were asked to imagine a variety of interaction scenarios with the

type of robot they had been assigned. Respondents were then tasked with rating perceived robotic qualities including human likeness, similarity to human perception capabilities, emotional range, safety characteristics, and the level of co-experience (shared social experience) they felt. All participants then evaluated the functionality of their particular robot when performing theme park tasks, before measuring





Understanding how customers feel about robotic interactions in different facets of the theme park experience is essential.



their anticipated behaviors in response to the actions proposed by the robot.

The survey results revealed that across the tourism sector, museums and art galleries were the top choices of respondents for incorporating robots to enhance the visitor experience (20.8%), followed by theme parks (18.9%), entertainment and sporting events (9.3%), then zoos and aquariums (9.1%). As theme parks often have accommodations and restaurants, respondents liked seeing robots in both full-service (48.8%) and limited-service hotels (43.2%). For food and beverage venues, respondents preferred to see robots

in quick-service restaurants (32.4%) compared to full-service (32.4%) and self-service (22.2%). Overall, however, most participants also commented that they preferred the service of skilled and well-trained staff in restaurants, rather than robots.

#### **HIGH-TECH HOSPITALITY INTERACTIONS**

Understanding how customers feel about robotic interactions in different facets of the theme park experience is essential—by 2030, robots are predicted to account for 25% of the hospitality and tourism workforce. Public service robots, particularly those with in-built artificial intelligence (AI), can provide customer

service experiences without the same level of operational expense as human staff. This move towards robotic service can be seen in existing tourism and hospitality operations, such as Hilton Hotels using pioneering robotic technology to create Connie, an AI-powered robot that interacts with guests and responds to their queries based on visual and audio recognition functions. At Munich Airport, robot Josie Pepper assists passengers by providing information about restaurants, shops, and flight schedules.

Chatbots are another variation of robotic technology, providing online customer service support through instant messaging functions. Theme park executives may choose to deploy robots in certain areas of their workforce—such as booking, information provision, or others—to improve the visitor experience. However, they should

*BY 2030, ROBOTS ARE PREDICTED TO ACCOUNT FOR 25% OF THE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM WORKFORCE.*





When used effectively, robots can improve user experience, even generating humorous and entertaining moments.

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also be aware that robotic services rely on well-developed and serviced systems to ensure that the robots provide an excellent, functional customer experience. As a result, robots are not a complete replacement for a human workforce.

When developing robots for a theme park, executives should keep in mind key parts of the guest experience. These include reducing wait time and the need to interact with employees; ensuring the robots are always available; eliminating human errors through pre-programmed responses; providing useful information and learning experiences; greeting guests and performing storytelling activities; communicating with guests about food, beverages, and merchandise; processing payments accurately; assisting in ticket purchasing; accurately signposting guests within a park to other facilities; and promoting fun and curiosity among all ages. If harnessed appropriately, robots could help to encourage return visits to the theme park by creating a memorable, welcoming, and engaging place to enjoy.

#### REIMAGINING ROBOT FACES

Gaze and stare are key social signals that impact people's perceptions and ability to interact with another person, or in this case, a robot. Milman and Tasci found that respondents preferred the appearance and perceived emotions of human-like robots, which feeds into our natural tendency

to empathize with other humans more than animal or cartoon characters. When used effectively, robots can improve user experience, even generating humorous and entertaining moments. For example, three Smithsonian Institution museums have embraced human-like qualities in their robots, choosing characters with engaging voices and motions, and programming the robots to pose for selfies, play games with guests, and even dance. Theme parks are also incorporating more robotic motions in their rides, with the Walt Disney Company taking this a step further by developing cartoon-like robots that can walk in parades and tell stories to create an engaging and innovative environment for all visitors.

### ROBOTS COULD ENCOURAGE RETURN VISITS TO THE THEME PARK BY CREATING A MEMORABLE, WELCOMING, AND ENGAGING PLACE TO ENJOY.

It is important to consider the appropriateness of the robot design for each setting. This novel study revealed that most respondents preferred interactions with robots that display human-like social exchanges and behavior (such as touching or showing emotional reactions) as cartoon robots are associated with children's movies and toys, which do not always generate human qualities (such as emotions and safety precautions). It is

therefore important to carefully consider which of the four robot types would have the greatest impact in individual settings across a theme park, considering both user experience and company branding.

#### FINE-TUNING CUSTOMER SERVICE

The survey results report no significant differences in the functions that respondents expected all four robot types to perform, and also no difference in how they would respond to the information provided by each type of robot. In essence, as long as the robot was able to complete the required task with speed, accuracy, and cost-effectiveness, the customer was satisfied. This aligns with previous research which found tourists preferred robotic services in busy hospitality settings compared to interactions with human staff as the efficiency of service was increased.

The dynamic interactions that robots can provide to theme park guests should improve communication, information availability, and entertainment value for visitors. This research, therefore, helps theme park executives understand which robotic qualities and functions are well-received by customers, allowing them to adopt the most effective robot types for optimum outcomes. However, theme parks should make sure to balance a robotic and human workforce as introducing robots universally across the hospitality industry could have negative consequences. These may arise from the high expenses of equipment upkeep, the creation of a potential skill shortfall, as well as the changes a robotic workforce would have within an organization's culture. Nevertheless, robots are seen as an

innovative approach to providing customer service and future research can fine-tune their value to the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries by focusing on the robot delivery service, mobility, and interactivity features. The work of Milman and Tasci, therefore, provides a helpful guide toward developing future robot looks, qualities, and functions to generate more interactive environments and experiences within theme parks.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Ady Milman and Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci investigate theme park visitor perception of robots to inform management decisions on which robot forms optimize the guest experience.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

**If human-like robots are preferred, should they be used in all customer-facing roles at a theme park (for example, queues, restaurants, accommodation, and guest assistants around the park) or could different types of robots be used in different areas?**

// Different types of robots may be used in different theme park settings and experiences. The type of robots may also be impacted by the physical environment and the culture in which the theme park operates. //

## Dr. Ady Milman



Dr. Ady Milman is a Professor at the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at UCF. His background includes teaching, research, and publications in theme park and attraction management, consumer behavior, experience management, and more. He is frequently invited to speak internationally, is a recipient of several awards, and serves on editorial boards.

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## Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci



Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci is a Professor in the field of tourism and hospitality marketing at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. After receiving her doctoral degree (destination marketing) from Michigan State University in 2003, she worked in Turkey, Hong Kong, and the U.S.A. Her research interests include tourism and hospitality marketing, particularly consumer behavior. She completed several studies measuring destination image and branding with a cross-cultural perspective.

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# PROVIDING A CLEAR FOUNDATION FOR SMART DESTINATIONS

*Smart destinations are a nascent and growing category in destination marketing but suffer from a lack of clarity. What is a 'smart destination'? UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Dr. Youcheng Wang and Dr. Alan Fyall led an international team of hospitality management specialists tasked with providing a clear foundation for smart destination researchers and practitioners. Their study, published in the Journal of Destination Marketing and Management, provides significant insight and stokes the fire beneath destination marketing organizations.*

It is undeniable that 'smart destinations' are becoming an increasingly popular offering in any innovative destination marketing organization's portfolio. However, what is unresolved is what a 'smart destination' is exactly. It is a broad term referring to a nascent destination category; a clear definition is needed. Two researchers from UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management have accepted the challenge, together with their colleagues. They are part of an international team of specialists who developed a conceptual framework for smart destinations which draws on data from real-world case studies and expert opinions. One of the key outcomes should make destination marketing organizations sit up and rethink their role.

In hospitality parlance, a 'smart destination' uses technology and innovation to enhance the visitor experience, optimize resource use, and improve the destination's sustainability and competitiveness. The term weaves together current and emerging expressions of I.T., governance, and environmental responsibility. But as an evolving and increasingly important category, it lacks a clear definition to guide implementation and, importantly, research. To date, studies under the broad umbrella of smart destination research have focused on diverse components, including I.T.

connectivity and interoperability, personalized experiences, the liveability of communities, sustainability, and the role of entrepreneurs. The accumulated knowledge is fragmented which is problematic. More precise operational definitions in research are integral to the practical implementation and accurate evaluation of smart initiatives. Definitions are also critical for one of the essential stakeholders in promoting and coordinating tourism experiences at smart destinations—the destination marketing organization (DMO).

Clarifying exactly what a 'smart destination' is a challenge that merited investigation by Dr. Youcheng Wang, the dean and preeminent chair professor in destination marketing at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Dr. Alan Fyall, the associate dean of academic affairs and chair professor of tourism marketing, and a team of other specialists in hospitality management from the U.S. and the U.K. The researchers understood that if they were to



Smart destinations focus on delivering highly personalized tourist experiences that are context-specific.

design a conceptual framework to guide the hospitality sector's understanding of a smart destination, they needed to evaluate current concepts around the term, examine their implementation in the field, and recognize the input of diverse stakeholders. Because the DMO plays a critical role in tying all this together, it is a keystone organization, and therefore the researchers realized that it should be at the center of their analysis.

## THE FOUR PILLARS OF A SMART DESTINATION FRAMEWORK

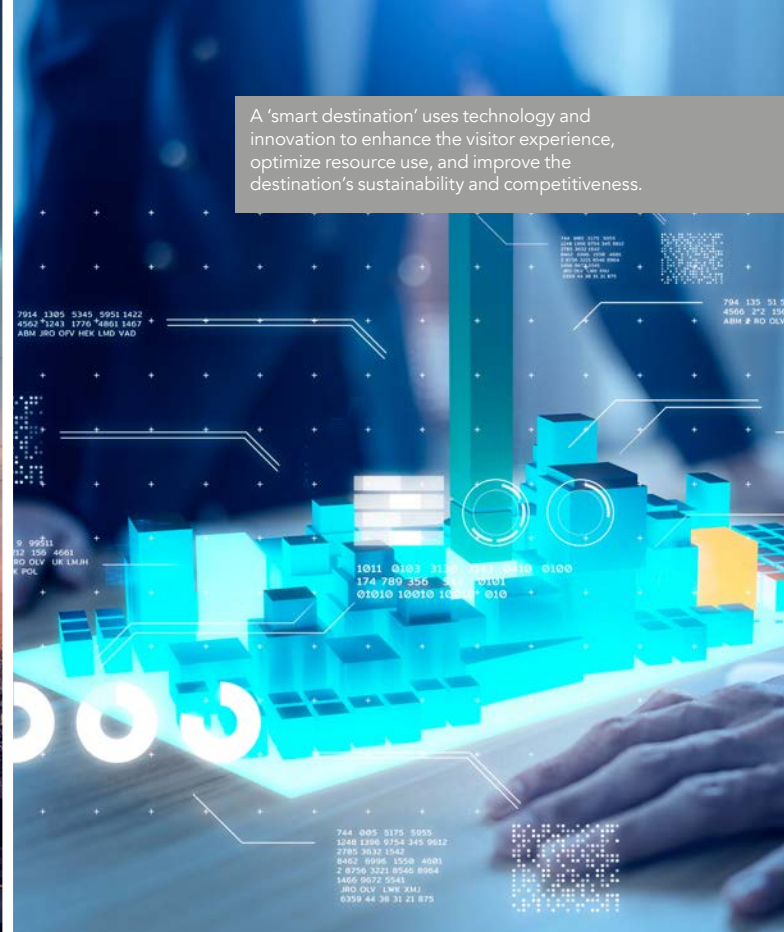
Tracing the origins of smart destinations to the development of smart cities, Drs. Wang, Fyall, and their colleagues proposed four pillars to form the foundations of a smart destination framework: I.T. infrastructure, e-governance, sustainability, and liveability. State-of-the-art technology is vital for smart destinations,

AS AN EVOLVING AND INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT CATEGORY, IT LACKS A CLEAR DEFINITION TO GUIDE IMPLEMENTATION AND, IMPORTANTLY, RESEARCH.



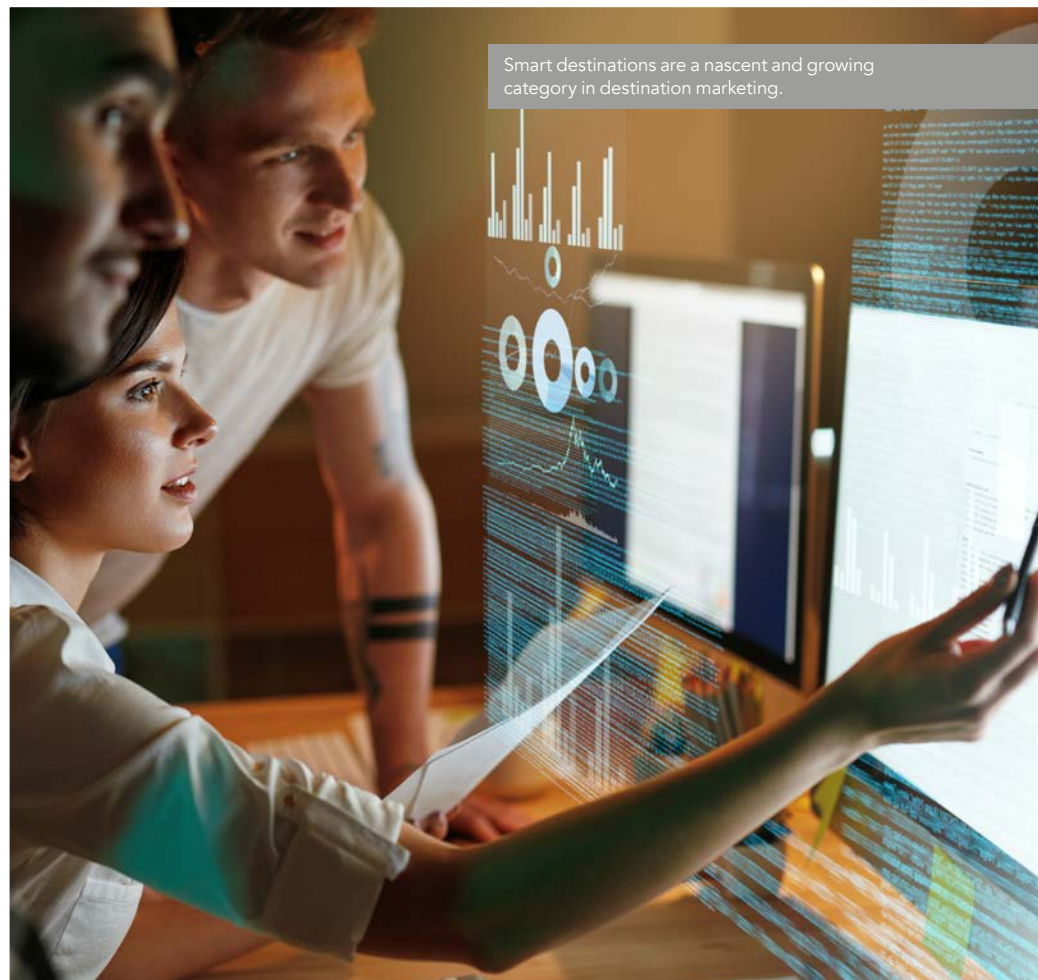


A 'smart destination' uses technology and innovation to enhance the visitor experience, optimize resource use, and improve the destination's sustainability and competitiveness.



and its 'smartness' depends on the level and interconnectedness of the Internet of Things (IoT)—a network of physical objects that interact via the Internet—cloud services, and end-user services such as mobile apps. The connectivity of all three is critical for smart tourism systems to be able to function.

Connectivity is also vital for collaboration between the stakeholders who are responsible for governing a smart destination—hence the term 'e-governance.' For the researchers, e-governance entails using intelligence to help tourism entities function effectively within the emerging smart ecosystem in a way that respects the needs of not only visitors to a destination, but also those of the pre-existing residents. This is tied to the third pillar—sustainability. In this study, the researchers' definition of sustainability is not limited to environmental and ecological issues, but also includes social, cultural, and economic concerns. Integrating these helps secure the fourth pillar—liveability. Within the scope of the researchers' investigation, a smart destination is safe for tourists and residents alike and encourages mobility, opportunity, and engagement within the destination.



Smart destinations are a nascent and growing category in destination marketing.



The study presents a framework for future research and practice, to help build a future for smart destinations.

The connections between the four pillars are complex, hence the importance of DMOs which have the necessary fundamental technological framework—a web-based destination marketing system (DMS)—to coordinate and facilitate those connections. Importantly for the researchers, DMSs are also data-rich. Drs. Wang, Fyall, and colleagues turned to four leading DMOs that integrate some of the latest technologies in web-based destination management and marketing: Visit Britain, Visit the U.S.A., Visit Manchester, and Discover Hong Kong. The researchers analyzed all the information on the DMO websites, including textual, visual, audio information,

evaluate and develop the framework and provide insight on the technologies that could impact the future of smart destinations. They interviewed ten DMO representatives, two representatives of city councils from popular tourist destinations, seven academic experts, and two industry professionals. In principle, the stakeholders supported the framework and drew on their expertise, insights, and diverse priorities to add the necessary fine-tuning. Among the critical points of emphasis was the need for inclusivity—a smart destination is not just for the benefit of tourists—and that personalizing experiences should be about more than customizing—they should

## THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDY WAS PROBABLY ABOUT HOW DMOs FIT INTO THE SMART DESTINATION FRAMEWORK.

and then coded it using MAXQDA software according to function and ‘smartness’ with respect to brand promotion, transaction, information, relationship, and communication. In total, they arrived at over 10,000 coded segments and a data-supported guideline for the next step of their study.

### THE POWER OF SERENDIPITY

With a basic proposed framework in place and data from the DMSs as context, the researchers turned to leading industry stakeholders to

include random, exciting novel experiences to lure visitors away from over-prescribed destinations. A term emerged for this: the power of serendipity.

Tying together the quantitative and qualitative data, Drs. Wang, Fyall, and colleagues developed the following definition: ‘A smart destination is one where the application of the technology is ubiquitous and ensured through a myriad of available technologies interconnected with the infrastructure in

real-time.’ The researchers add that ‘Smart destinations focus on delivering highly personalized tourist experiences that are context-specific, and include serendipity or random and exciting discovery elements.’

In this way, smart destinations can balance the needs of local communities as well as visitors, create sustainable and responsible tourism, generate an authentic aspirational brand, and ensure ease of access to attractions through affordable and smart technologies.

### EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

The research also identified specific smart technologies largely unconsidered in other studies, notably robotics and autonomous vehicle technology, AI-based systems, and specific domains of practice that could be important to smart destinations, namely crowd and traffic control. These have largely eluded previous research. It also highlighted some uncomfortable realities, notably that even though the DMOs selected for the study were leaders in their class, they still trailed behind expectations for integrating increasingly widespread technologies such as immersive technologies.

A significant development of the study was that it identified how DMOs fit into the smart destination framework. While previous studies have recognized the coordinating function of DMOs and, thus, their key role in the development of smart tourism and smart destinations, this study made it clear that the role of DMOs is far more important. The findings suggested that DMOs had a leadership responsibility—they were expected to be at the forefront and instrumental in launching smart tourism initiatives. With their institutional knowledge, coordinating approach, technological capacity, and centralized platforms, these organizations have what is needed to integrate the multitude of smart functions to power and steer smart destinations.

If DMOs are to play a leadership role in shaping and developing smart destinations, the research of Drs. Wang, Fyall, and colleagues provide the necessary direction. But their study does more than that. It also presents a framework for future research and practice—a clear foundation for tourism academics and practitioners to help build a future for smart destinations.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Drs. Wang, Fyall, and colleagues identify and quantify a conceptual framework for smart tourist destinations.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

***This study provides a clear foundation for smart destination research; how would you like to see it developed?***

“ The study is only a starting point in the conceptualization of smart destination, it will be interesting to see how destinations at various levels in different regions will formulate and implement smart destination strategies to enhance efficiency and experiences. This can be an exciting albeit challenging task owing to the multi-stakeholder nature of destination management at the macro level, and a wide range of facilitating and inhibiting factors affecting the adoption and implementation of smart initiatives at the individual business levels, including recourse availability, management support, innovativeness, and technology capability. ”

## Dr. Youcheng Wang



Dr. Youcheng Wang is the Dean and preeminent chair professor in destination marketing at the Rosen College of Hospitality Management at University of Central Florida and a fellow of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism. He is also the co-editor of *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*.

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Rosen Research Focus | Carissa Baker

# THEME PARK KNOWLEDGE HUB OF THE FUTURE



UCF Rosen College is launching a Bachelor of Science in Theme Park and Attraction Management in Fall 2023.



**T**he global attractions industry has grown in size and innovation in the last few decades. Encompassing theme parks and waterparks as well as cultural and natural attractions, this segment has diverse career opportunities and constant potential for growth in mature and emerging markets. Theme parks alone garnered a billion visitors in 2019. Post-pandemic, the industry bounced back quicker than expected, with most operators seeing increased attendance and revenue. The attractions industry continues to develop new concepts which provide amazing experiences for guests around the world. However, retirement during the pandemic, coupled with the industry's rapid expansion, created a greater need for formal, specialized education.

UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management has had curriculum in the Theme Park and Attraction Management field for more than

twenty years. A long-term Theme Park Advisory Board, comprised of leaders from key operators, helps maintain currency. Students have demonstrated engagement through taking courses, adding the program track or certificate, being involved in the Future Theme Park Leaders Association student organization, and using required internships at theme parks and attractions. Our two largest internship employers are Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando, and students have shown high interest during recruitment events like Universal Day, Disney Day, and the Rosen College Career Fair.

To enhance this strong base of participation, UCF Rosen College is launching a Bachelor of Science in Theme Park and Attraction Management in Fall 2023. This full degree program responds to student demand, workforce needs, and our distinctive location in the heart of the 'Theme Park Capital of the World.' Six of the world's top fifteen theme

parks are nearby, as are dozens of attractions, design firms, suppliers, the world headquarters of the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA), and the annual IAAPA Expo trade show. Central Florida is a thriving hub of economic and creative activity, allowing students to learn in a living lab of themed entertainment. The degree's start is timely as it coincides with the opening of Universal's Epic Universe (expected 2025), which is located right next to our campus. Universal Orlando noted that this destination theme park will need 14,000 employees, and estimates are that the park will generate \$11.5 billion in economic impact.

The degree has a unique focus that will appeal to both domestic and international students. Industry legend Bob Rogers once said that theme parks are considered 'An art, as well as a science, as well as an enterprise.' The new degree takes this to heart. While drawing on





the College strength of hospitality, the degree will also introduce pillars of Management, Creativity, and Technology. The exciting new courses will be based on a variety of topics including culinary experiences, merchandise management, storytelling, technology and innovation, managing cultural attractions, managing natural attractions, and international theme park and attraction management. These complement existing courses in guest experience, employee experience, product development, risk management, and operational issues. The degree represents an interdisciplinary collaboration, as students may take select courses in other colleges. The industry is multi-faceted, and this approach allows students to get the breadth of knowledge necessary to be not only workforce-aligned, but well-informed innovators ready for high levels of responsibility.

The new degree will have an immediate impact on the region, creating a pipeline of leaders to significant theme park operators, with four of the global top ten having operations in Central Florida. Theme parks play a major role in Florida's tourism industry, the key economic driver. Florida has the most employees in the national amusement parks sector, and Walt Disney World is the industry's largest single-site employer. This is a global sector, however, and multiple alumni have had opportunities to open theme parks in several countries. Students will now be even more ready should those international opportunities arise.

UCF Rosen College has been a leading institution in theme park and attraction management research for decades. More than a dozen faculty members have contributed to the dissemination of knowledge on theme parks and attractions through teaching, publications, academic conference or industry presentations, and collaborations with scholars on multiple continents. We look forward to continuing to participate in the theme park and attraction industry and helping to shape its development through the education of future leaders and the sharing of knowledge for years to come.

## SELECTED RECENT RESEARCH IN THEME PARK AND ATTRACTION MANAGEMENT:

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Milman, A., Tasci, A.D.A., & Panse, G. (2021). A comparison of consumer attitudes toward dynamic pricing strategies in the theme park context. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*. [doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2021.1988879](https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480.2021.1988879)

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**Dr. Carissa Baker** is an Assistant Professor in theme park and attraction management at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. She received her doctoral degree in texts and technology from the University of Central Florida. Her primary research interests are in aspects of themed entertainment including narrative, culture, guest experience, technology, and emerging markets. In addition to publishing and presentations related to her research, Dr. Baker is active in global attractions, industry organizations, and academic-industry collaboratives.

# TOWARDS MORE AUTHENTIC HERITAGE DESTINATION EXPERIENCES



*Heritage destinations have a significant responsibility to visitors. In countries like China, where heritage plays a significant role in a person's identity, such destinations offer visitors an opportunity to develop a deeper sense of self. For this reason, they need to be authentic, but so do the visitors. UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management researcher Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu joined a team of experts based in China to identify how the perceived authenticity of two of China's most revered heritage sites affects visitors' personal sense of authenticity, their wellbeing, and how memorable they found their visits.*

**N**ot all tourists are just out to have a 'good time.' For some, going on vacation is part of a longer, more meaningful journey to develop a richer sense of self. Their search is beyond the realm of secluded getaways offering space for quiet reflection—it is tied to notions of identity. Heritage destinations provide such opportunities, but they need to be authentic for the experience to be real and be able to fulfil the visitors' needs. Therefore, the concept of 'authenticity' in heritage destinations has attracted significant research within tourism. However, 'authenticity' is more

than an ideal related to relics and events; it is a desired sense of being for visitors. This higher level of personal authenticity has a name: existential authenticity. UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu, together with a team of experts based in China, is helping provide a clearer understanding of how this is linked to authenticity at heritage destinations, tourist wellbeing, and making experiences memorable.

Existential authenticity is rooted in the philosophy of existentialism, a philosophy which emphasizes individual freedom and the

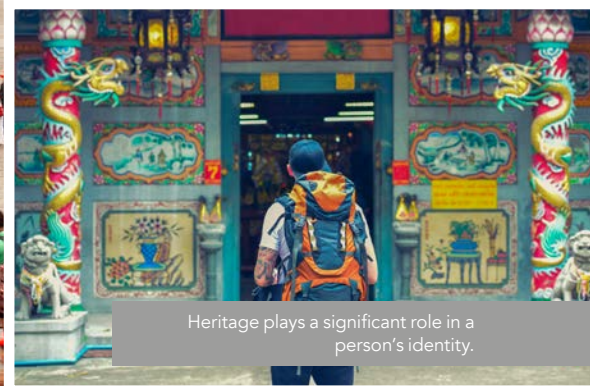
importance of creating one's own meaning in life. It suggests that humans must confront the inherent meaninglessness of existence and make choices that reflect their own unique perspectives and experiences. For those who cannot achieve this within the confines of their daily routine and immediate environment, their path to doing so may lie in immersing themselves in heritage experiences. As a result, scholars of heritage tourism sometimes see consumers as pilgrims searching for authenticity through travel.

In China, where heritage is such a strong part of an individual's identity, destinations offering such experiences are highly popular. Tourism studies suggest that for such experiences to be meaningful and help contribute to a sense of wellbeing, they must be authentic. However, there's little research that explores the multi-faceted components of authenticity in a tourist's visit to a heritage site, and the mechanisms that tie those components to wellbeing and complete an experience by making it memorable.





Heritage destinations have a significant responsibility to visitors.



Heritage plays a significant role in a person's identity.

### THE COMPLEXITY OF AUTHENTICITY

There are essentially two categories of authenticity of interest to heritage tourism research: object- and activity-related authenticity. The first is tied to physical and cultural relics and events at destinations, and the second to how tourists interact with them. The more personal existential authenticity falls under activity-related authenticity and is broadly divided into intrapersonal authenticity—being true to oneself—and interpersonal authenticity—being true in relationships with others. Tourism scholars believe tourism can be a catalyst for both.

### RECONNECTING WITH THEIR HERITAGE

Fu and her colleagues started their research by designing a conceptual framework showing the hypothesized relationship between perceived authenticity, existential authenticity, psychological wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, and memorability. They then identified two of China's most important heritage sites that tourists often visit when looking to reconnect with their heritage: West Lake, in the city of

## THE CONCEPT OF 'AUTHENTICITY' IN HERITAGE DESTINATIONS HAS ATTRACTED SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH WITHIN TOURISM.

Hangzhou, and the Old Town of Lijiang in Yunnan Province. Both are UNESCO-listed world heritage destinations but with slightly different characters. West Lake is more of a landscape destination and the ancestral home of many of China's revered poets and artists

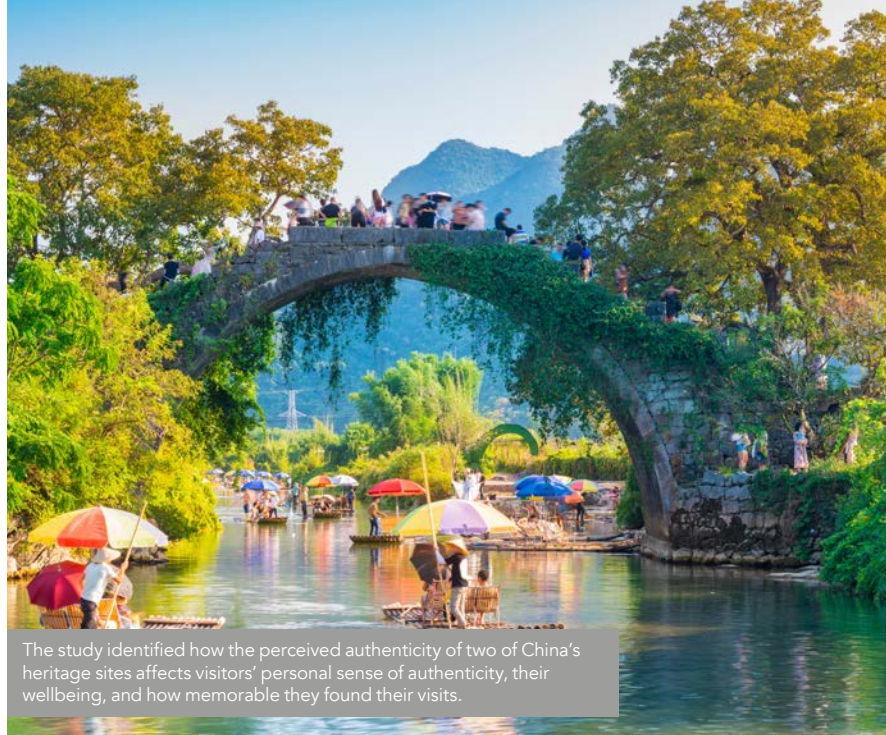
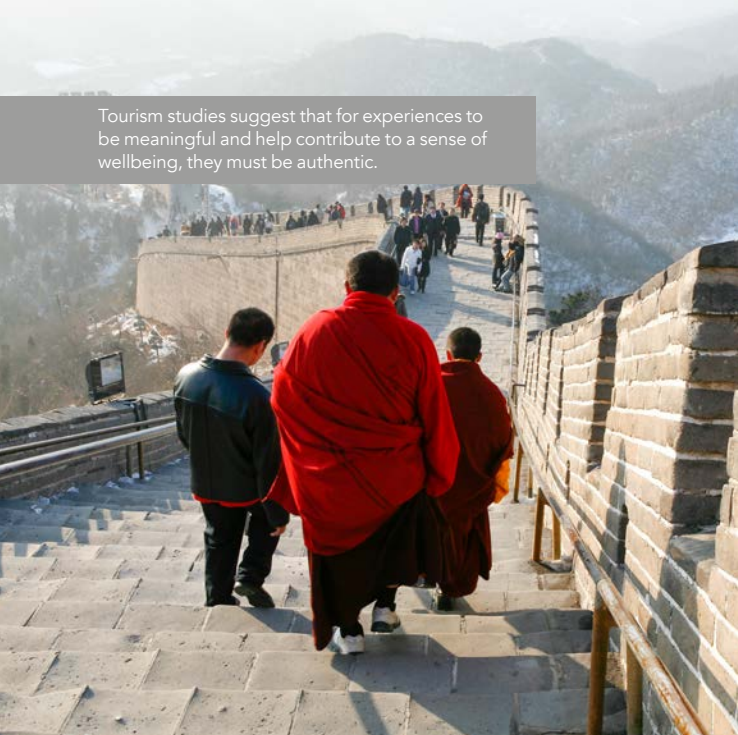
dating back to the 9th century, while Old Town is a site famous for its ancient architecture.

The researchers designed a 21-statement questionnaire with statements pertaining to each construct within their conceptual





Tourism studies suggest that for experiences to be meaningful and help contribute to a sense of wellbeing, they must be authentic.



The study identified how the perceived authenticity of two of China's heritage sites affects visitors' personal sense of authenticity, their wellbeing, and how memorable they found their visits.

framework. The respondents were asked to measure each statement on a seven-point Likert-type scale. For example, on the matter of perceived authenticity, the respondents were asked to rank the tangible and intangible heritage in local architecture, paintings, inscriptions, and storytelling; to measure existential authenticity, they were asked to rate statements that measured their pursuit of self-satisfaction and the authenticity of their interactions with fellow travelers; and to measure psychological wellbeing, they ranked statements that reflected their personal growth.

The researchers received a total of 825 completed questionnaires from both sites. Most respondents were visitors from outside

### TYING OTHER STUDIES TOGETHER

The data supported every one of Fu and the research team's hypotheses. It was clear that perceived authenticity positively contributed to existential authenticity; that this was significantly associated with both psychological and subjective wellbeing; that existential authenticity and psychological and subjective wellbeing all positively contributed to memorability; and, therefore, that existential authenticity and wellbeing mediate the positive relationship between perceived authenticity and memorability.

The scope of the research and the data's explicit support for the team's conceptual framework has significant theoretical implications. Most notably, the research

and experience involvement can induce long-term memories.

### A MORE MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCE

It's probably true that tourism destinations ultimately hope that what they provide visitors is not only experiential, but memorable. This is especially true for destinations designed to give visitors more than just 'a good time.' Destination marketers know that visitors to heritage destinations are hoping for a deeper, more meaningful experience. Such visits are akin to pilgrimages—an opportunity for visitors to learn as much about themselves as the place they are visiting. There is an intensely personal, formerly unrealized, connection to the destination that is part of their self-discovery.

For this reason, this study has considerable implications for heritage destinations. It shows, without doubt, that if heritage destinations are serious about providing such a meaningful experience, they must be committed to authenticity. Local authorities at heritage destinations must focus on maintaining the authenticity of the areas' tangible and intangible assets—experiential tourism is more than viewing buildings and landscapes; it involves personal storytelling. Furthermore, they should look for ways to develop those assets so that visitors can participate in them, as this helps tourists in their journeys of self-discovery and make their visit truly memorable. Critically, at every step of the way, their journeys—both physical and spiritual—must be authentic; their wellbeing is at stake.

## THE SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH AND THE DATA'S EXPLICIT SUPPORT FOR THE TEAM'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK HAS SIGNIFICANT THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS.

the sites' areas and between the ages of 16 and 35. The latter point is noteworthy because it challenges the perception that heritage sites are mainly popular with older tourists. Using bootstrapping methods to resample the data, the researchers arrived at a quantitative assessment of their conceptual framework, and the results were overwhelming.

manages to tie together disparate focuses of individual studies within heritage tourism. It also corroborates the outcomes of other studies, such as those that show how existential travel can help tourists gain autonomy and personal growth, how tourists' experiences can be more memorable when they engage with others through activity participation, and how existential moments



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu investigated the relationship between perceived authenticity, existential authenticity, psychological wellbeing, subjective wellbeing, and memorability.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

### ***In what way could this research impact our understanding of expectations on heritage destination experiences in other parts of the world?***

// The research on integrating authenticity, wellbeing, and memorability in heritage tourism can provide insights into the expectations, needs, and preferences of tourists, which can help heritage destinations worldwide improve their tourism offerings. Firstly, it can help us understand the common factors that are important for tourists seeking heritage experiences, regardless of the geographical location. For example, the research may identify that tourists value the authenticity of heritage experiences, the ability to enhance their wellbeing, and the creation of memorable experiences. This information can be applied to other heritage destinations worldwide, enabling destination managers to create more effective and attractive tourism experiences. Secondly, the research can highlight the unique factors that differentiate heritage tourism experiences in different parts of the world. For instance, the heritage experiences in Europe may have different expectations compared to those in Asia or Africa. By understanding these differences, destination managers can tailor their offerings to meet the specific needs of their target audience. Lastly, the research can also help in identifying the potential challenges or barriers that heritage destinations may face in delivering authentic, wellbeing, and memorable experiences. For example, inadequate infrastructure, lack of community engagement, or poor preservation of heritage sites could impact the overall quality of heritage tourism experiences. Addressing these issues can result in a more positive impact on the local economy and community, and enhance the visitor experience. //

## Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu



Xiaoxiao Fu is an Associate Professor at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. Dr. Fu's research expertise is consumptive experience in tourism and hospitality, addressing how destinations and firms improve consumer experience. As an award-winning scholar, Dr. Fu has published many articles in top-tier journals.

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Rosen Research Focus | Asli D.A. Tasci

# INFLUENCES ON DESTINATION LOYALTY

*Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci from UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management and fellow researchers have undertaken research in the popular tourist destination of Antalya, Turkey to investigate destination loyalty. The study explores whether place-oriented or people-oriented factors have a larger influence on tourists' likelihood to revisit the same destinations, while also considering the differences between domestic and international tourists. The findings from this research will support tourism managers' understanding of how to drive repeat visits in a market with overwhelming competition.*

**D**estination loyalty refers to the phenomenon whereby individuals choose to revisit the same vacation destination multiple times. It is a relatively well-known concept often used as an important measure of commercial success within the tourism industry, as it reflects visitors' strong personal desire to return to a specific location. Many researchers have focused on understanding how to encourage tourists to return to a prior destination, especially when there is a whole world of possibilities to explore.

Prior research indicates that many of the driving factors, including satisfaction, risk, loyalty, facilities, climate, and even the friendliness of hosts or staff, are place-related. So far, there have been fewer studies into the impact of people-related influences, which may include cultural differences, social distance, and emotional solidarity. It is important to consider people-related factors as well, as tourists may be motivated

by discovering authenticity in the real lives of others, far away from their everyday realities.

Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci from UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management and fellow researchers have developed a model of destination loyalty that integrates both people-oriented and place-oriented factors. Their research aimed to uncover the impact of cognitive image factors—i.e., tourists' pre-existing perceptions—as well as the influence of more emotionally driven perspectives upon place attachment (the bond between a tourist and a location). It also examined the interactions between social distance, cultural familiarity, and emotional closeness, while determining their effects upon destination loyalty. Tasci and her colleagues hope their research will be useful to tourism managers as it will provide insight into how they can inspire destination loyalty in their customers.

## PLACE-RELATED PARTICULARS

An initial aim of the study was to investigate if destination image—a place-oriented concept

that encapsulates a tourist's combined knowledge, emotions, and intentions regarding specific locations—has an impact on an individual's place attachment. Prior research has been undertaken across a selection of domestic and international tourist populations, from golf retreaters in China to Korean pop fans, to examine the connection between destination image and place attachment. All previous data indicates that destination image has a positive influence on place attachment.

Other research has also demonstrated that place attachment plays a central role in destination loyalty. This explains how the emotional bonds tourists may create with a particular destination can drive their intention to revisit. Positive links have been recognised between place attachment and destination loyalty. Therefore, Tasci and her colleagues formed the hypothesis that place attachment would have a significant impact on loyalty in their research.

## PEOPLE-ORIENTED FACTORS

Along with the examination of place-related factors, the research team analyzed the relative importance of people-oriented elements including perceived distance.







Tasci studied the drivers of destination loyalty in relation to place- and people-related factors.

Lower Duden Waterfalls, Antalya.

The concept of 'distance' does not always refer to the number of miles a person has traveled to reach their destination, but can also relate to more abstract concepts, such as cultural or social distance. Prior research has demonstrated that when perceived distance is smaller, or there are strong cultural similarities between tourists and residents, it can lead to stronger emotional solidarity. The research team predicted that perceived differences could have a negative influence upon a tourists' emotional solidarity. This refers to how strongly a tourist may identify with a place and its people, possibly influencing their intention to return—or not.

The researchers also believed it was important to consider the relationship

between hosts and guests to gain a better understanding of place attachment as social experiences and interpersonal relationships strengthen bonds and attachments to a destination. Dr. Tasci predicted that emotional solidarity would have positive influence on both place attachment and destination loyalty. Another major factor investigated by the team was the difference between international and domestic visitors in relation to destination loyalty. Tourists traveling from abroad may have different reasons and motivations for returning to a travel destination than local visitors. For example, foreign tourists are more likely to visit another country to experience a culture different from their own, whereas domestic tourists may be returning to visit a specific event or attraction.

## PERCEPTIONS OF DESTINATION LOYALTY IN ANTALYA

The research was conducted in the popular tourist destination of Antalya, Turkey. At hotspots around the city, such as beaches, heritage sites, and natural attractions, tourists were approached and asked to take part in a short survey. Both domestic and international tourists were recruited. Those from outside Turkey tended to live in European countries such as Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Spain, Azerbaijan, and the U.K. A total of 510 tourists (260 domestic and 250 international) completed the survey, which was carefully designed to measure information about their current and past visits to this destination.

The researchers wanted to capture both cognitive and affective image for destination image to ensure a complete assessment of this element. Cognitive factors such as sights, activities, attractions, shopping, nightlife, and cuisine were measured with a Likert-type scale, whereas the affective factors were recorded using emotional scales. These ranged from pleasant to unpleasant, arousing to sleepy, exciting to gloomy, and relaxing to distressed. There were also questions measuring cultural distance, social distance, emotional solidarity, place attachment, and destination loyalty.

*TASCI AND HER COLLEAGUES HOPE THEIR RESEARCH WILL BE USEFUL TO TOURISM MANAGERS AS IT WILL PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO HOW THEY CAN INSPIRE DESTINATION LOYALTY IN THEIR CUSTOMERS.*



## IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS

The findings from this study demonstrate specific differences between the perceptions of domestic and international visitors to Antalya. The researchers found that domestic tourists were more likely to rate the festivals and nightlife highly, as well as considering the destination to be more pleasant. This may be due to domestic visitors engaging more with local activities. In comparison, international tourists rated shopping, food, and local hospitality as better. Despite major tourist cities in Turkey tending to adopt elements from other European cultures, international tourists often have a stronger interest in local features such as cuisine and authentic souvenirs. International tourists also felt a higher cultural difference than domestic tourists, indicating that cultural difference is not directly related to social difference. Domestic tourists also tended to give higher ratings to emotional solidarity, place attachment, and past and future loyalty.

Interestingly, both place-oriented and people-oriented factors played a role in destination



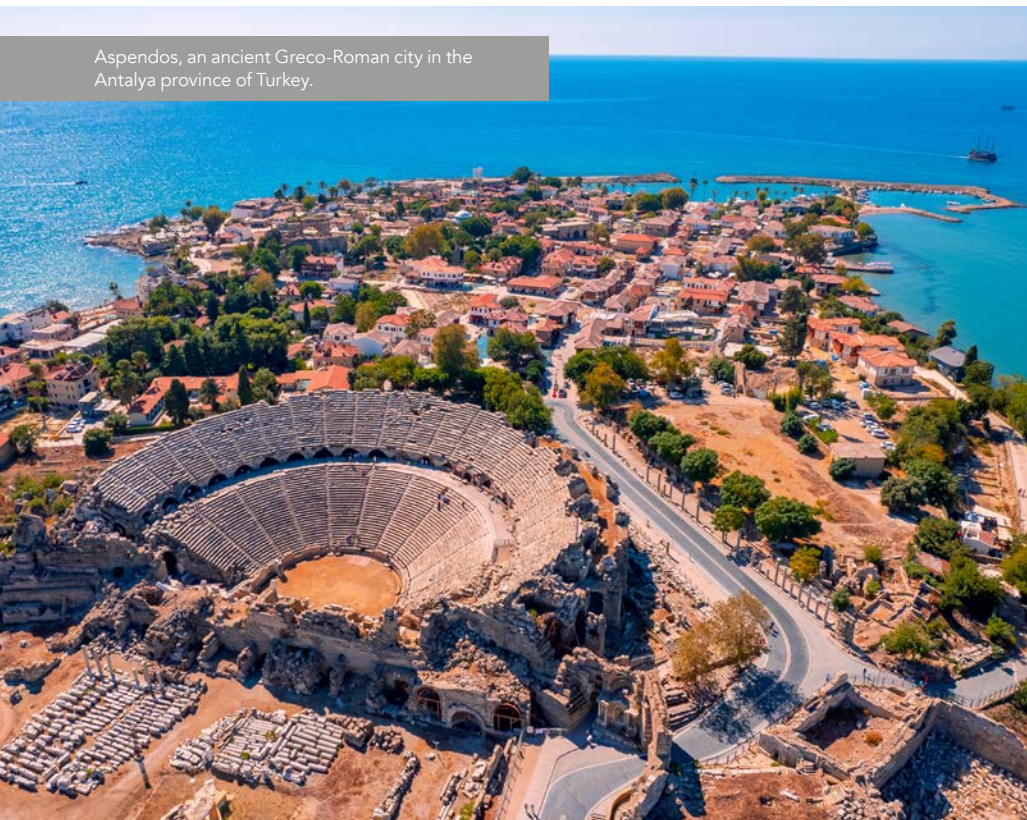
Both place-oriented and people-oriented factors play a role in destination loyalty.

loyalty, particularly in relation to destination image and place attachment. Both cognitive and affective images had a positive influence, although the impact of cognitive images was felt more strongly. The research team believed this highlights that, although affective elements are important, tourists' knowledge of attributes is a more significant driver in destination loyalty.

As predicted, place attachment had a significant positive influence on destination loyalty. Interestingly, place *identity* had a higher influence on past loyalty, whereas place *dependence* had a greater influence on future loyalty. Tasci and her fellow researchers believe this makes sense as place identity is more related to personal impressions of a destination, whereas place dependence relates to future behaviors. In terms of the influence of perceived distance upon emotional solidarity, social distance was found to have a significant positive influence on emotional closeness and sympathetic understanding. This supports the theory that social interaction affects emotional bonds surrounding place attachment. The team believes these findings emphasize the prominence of social distance more than cultural distance as a key factor in loyalty.

INTERESTINGLY, BOTH PLACE-ORIENTED AND PEOPLE-ORIENTED FACTORS PLAYED A ROLE IN DESTINATION LOYALTY, PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO DESTINATION IMAGE AND PLACE ATTACHMENT.

Aspendos, an ancient Greco-Roman city in the Antalya province of Turkey.



## FUTURE USE

The model was a better predictor of future rather than past loyalty, establishing that place-oriented factors were more significant predictors of destination loyalty than those that were people-oriented. Thoughts and emotions regarding the destination were more of a driver than interactions with locals. The research reveals that certain tourist attributes are needed for people to feel attached to a place. Tasci and collaborators feel that these results demonstrate the need for tourism managers to highlight authenticity and heritage for international customers, while also providing exciting activities and nightlife for domestic tourists who are more familiar with the culture. Using promotional materials showing locals and tourists having positive interactions would also be helpful in creating perceptions of social unity and sympathetic understanding.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci investigates the main drivers of destination loyalty in relation to place- and people-related factors.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

**Based on this research, what advice would you give to tourism managers looking to drive greater destination loyalty?**

// Image is still everything; destination managers need to focus on improving the knowledge about their touristic attributes to attract repeat visits from both domestic and international visitors. //

## Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci



Dr. Asli D.A. Tasci is a Professor in the field of tourism and hospitality marketing at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. After receiving her doctoral degree (destination marketing) from Michigan State University in 2003, she worked in Turkey, Hong Kong, and the U.S.A. Her research interests include tourism and hospitality marketing, particularly consumer behavior. She completed a number of studies measuring destination image and branding with a cross-cultural perspective.

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The Temple of Apollo, Side Old Town, is a notable tourist attraction in Antalya Province.



# Saba: 'The Unspoiled Queen'

Bruce Zagers became Commissioner of Tourism, Public Entity, Saba in 2017. Dr. Kelly Semrad interviews him about his role, and the development of a new tourism master plan for the island.

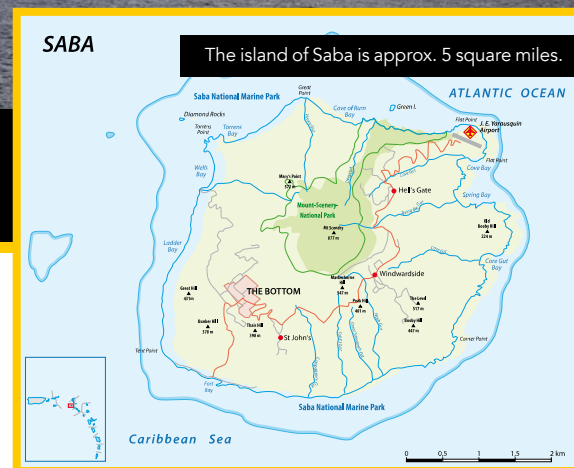
**T**ourists who are looking for an island that is environmentally unspoiled and want to unplug from technology, relax, and immerse themselves in the tranquility of nature—both above water and below—should explore the Dutch island of Saba. A small volcanic island located in the Caribbean Sea; Saba is approximately 5 square miles in size. Saba is the smallest Netherlands municipality and is part of the Lesser Antilles Volcanic Arc chain of islands. The neighboring islands include Sint Eustatius, Sint Maarten, and Sain Barthelemy. Tourists can arrive by ferry (sea) or airplane. The airlift capacity is limited. When arriving by air, tourists will land on the shortest runway in the world and immediately find themselves immersed in the local culture given that there is no mass tourism on Saba, so there are barely any tourists on the island.

The island is primarily known for its beautiful scenery and weather, unique architecture, pristine scuba diving, ecotourism activities, a cloud rainforest, and being 'small' in size and population. The sea surrounding Saba is rough. The island is home to about 2,000 people who have ancestry from the Netherlands, England, Scotland, Ireland, and Africa. Most Saban families have lived on the island for generations.

Bruce Zagers is Commissioner of Tourism at Saba. Dr. Kelly Semrad interviews him about his role as commissioner, the challenges of climate change, and his collaboration with UCF's Rosen College of Hospitality Management in the development of a new tourism master plan.

## **WHAT DOES A COMMISSIONER OF TOURISM FOR THE PUBLIC ENTITY OF SABA DO?**

The role of Commissioner of Tourism is not necessarily clearly defined. Being responsible for the tourism portfolio means that I am politically responsible for what happens in tourism on the island. Over the years, the role has been more reserved, whereas I support the initiatives that come from our tourist office as they are the experts. More generally, I lobby for money both locally and nationally, to support the tourism initiatives. I am also very active with the connectivity groups, as this remains one of the bigger challenges for us as a tourist destination. If there needs to be stakeholder consultations, or if there are questions coming from the Island Council about tourism-related matters, I am responsible for addressing these groups accordingly. I also lobby and spearhead programs when assistance is needed for the hospitality sector, such as with the stimulus



fund that was created to help businesses during the pandemic.

## **HOW DOES ONE BECOME A COMMISSIONER OF TOURISM IN SABA?**

After each election, two Commissioners are appointed by the Island Council. Those two Commissioners, along with the Island Governor, then form the Executive Council. Once this process has been completed, the Executive Council will meet to determine how the portfolios are to be divided between them. For the past few terms, I have had more of the economic and infrastructure-type portfolios, which include tourism, whereas my colleague Commissioner has more of a focus in the social domain and healthcare fields.

## **WHAT ARE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACE IN YOUR CURRENT PROFESSIONAL POSITION?**

Being a Commissioner on such a small island isn't always an easy job. On a personal





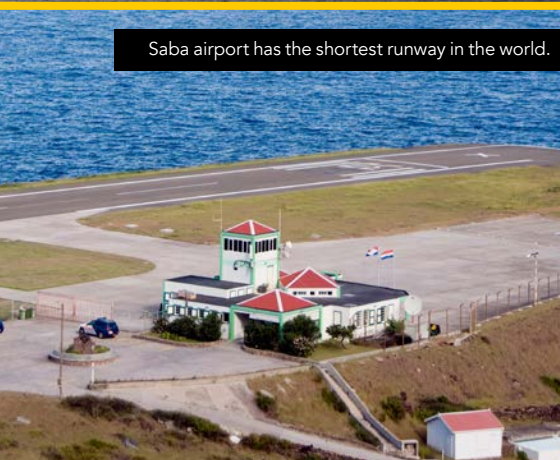
and become 90% reliable on solar and wind energy. We are also increasing our focus on producing more of our own food locally through initiatives that will make traditional farming more attractive as well as through the introduction of hydroponics.

**ASSUMING THAT YOU ARE NOT FORMALLY EDUCATED IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY, HOW DO YOU CLOSE THE 'KNOWLEDGE GAPS' REGARDING THE MANAGEMENT OF A UNIQUE TOURISM DESTINATION?**

In my role, I am not responsible for the daily decisions about which markets we target and what platforms we use to create awareness about our tourism product. We often rely on the expertise within the tourism office, the knowledge of the tourism stakeholders, and consultants for their advice. This keeps our approach well-balanced. Although I do not have a formal education or background in the field, I am passionate about it, and having traveled to many different destinations, I have a pretty good idea of what works and what doesn't.

In addition to being responsible for tourism, I am also responsible for the island's infrastructure. So, when infrastructure decisions are made, I often find myself wearing both hats, because it is important to me that whatever we improve on the island, should also be something that improves our tourism product as well. For example, building a new harbor is important to ensure that we have a more hurricane resistant marina that offers protection to local and visiting vessels, while also providing redundancy if our cargo harbor is damaged. At the same time, it is important that it is inviting and accommodating for tourism-related activities. Having the ability to carry both functions allows me to be creative in our approach to improve our overall product.

**WHAT ARE THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACE WITH REGARD TO MANAGING THE SMALLEST TOURISM DESTINATION IN THE CARIBBEAN?**



Saba airport has the shortest runway in the world.



A volcanic paradise.

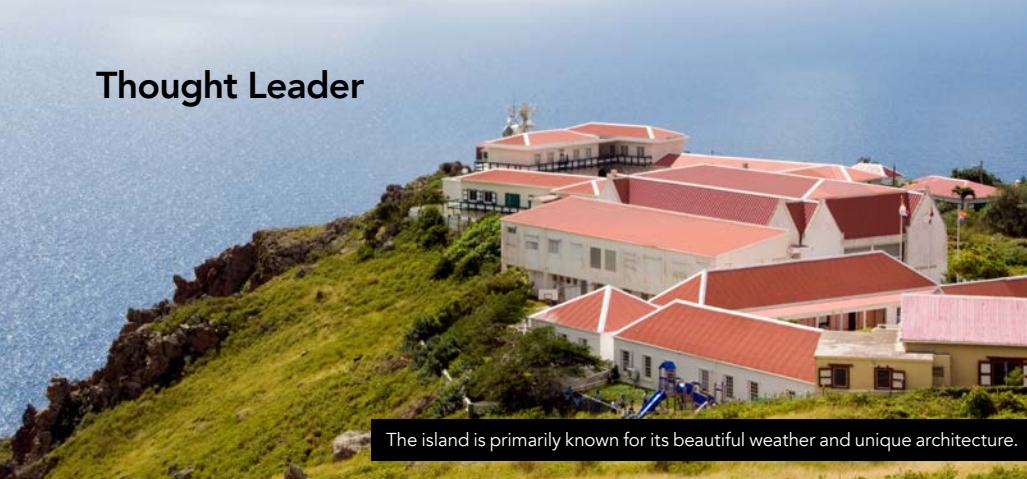
level, not only am I the Commissioner at the office, but I am also the Commissioner at the grocery store, at the restaurants, and everywhere imaginable! Knowing everyone on the island and having to, at times, make complex decisions about people you know can be difficult, especially when you know that you will see these same people regularly. There is no such thing as having a private life where you are not seen as a political leader as your every move is watched and analyzed. This does become overwhelming at times.

Although Saba is a special municipality of the Netherlands, we face many of the same challenges as other islands in the Caribbean region such as poverty, high cost of living, limited connectivity, etc. Over the years we have seen vast improvements because of our relationship with the Netherlands, however, the pace of these improvements is sometimes slow even though we share the same ambitions.

Because we are such a small island, we are also faced with the challenge of being very dependent on the outside world. Almost everything that is needed on the island must be imported. We do have regular shipping lines and for the most part we are all able to offer most products and amenities that can be found on bigger islands and countries, which is a pleasant surprise to our visitors. However, when something happens, for example to St. Maarten or in the Miami area, this impacts our ability to get the supplies that we need. This is why we are beginning to focus on becoming more self-sustainable. In the coming years, our goal is to reduce our dependence on diesel-generated energy

***In addition to being responsible for tourism, I am also responsible for the island's infrastructure.***

## Thought Leader



The island is primarily known for its beautiful weather and unique architecture.

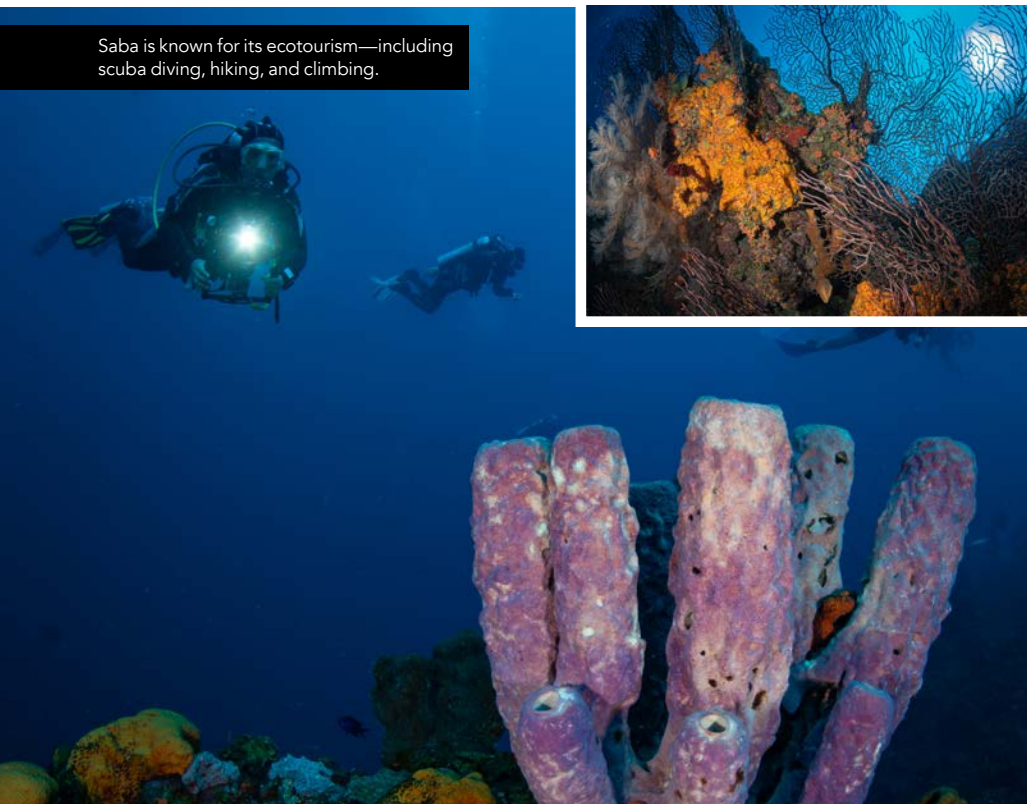
Essentially, Saba is the last stop on the road. There are many outside influences that greatly impact our destination. There are many travelers who are not able to distinguish the differences between islands or more generally, Saba from the Caribbean in its entirety. We are often having to push our message that Saba is different to most Caribbean Islands. Consequently, if something happens on one island it doesn't necessarily mean it is having an impact on Saba as a tourism destination.

Because of our small market, we feel the impact of numbers very quickly. Before the hurricanes of 2017 and the COVID-19 pandemic, our hospitality sector was doing exceptionally well. We saw considerable growth because tourist arrivals were relatively high and consistent. Now that our destination is gradually recovering from the

pandemic, not only can we see, but we can feel, that our tourism numbers are not what they used to be. This impacts all walks of life here on the island. Our goal has never been mass tourism—we have always focused on quality over quantity, but having higher and consistent arrivals remains a challenge.

Pandemics and hurricanes are risks that we need to become better prepared for. Even though we are investing heavily in increasing our exposure to several markets, the ability for a tourist to travel to Saba is difficult. Tickets to our hub island St. Maarten are rather expensive, and once there, opportunities to get to Saba are either expensive, limited, or inconvenient. Despite these challenges, we feel that we offer a unique product that is worth the challenge of getting here. Many of our return visitors are people who visited during a day trip on one

Saba is known for its ecotourism—including scuba diving, hiking, and climbing.



of the ferries. Once you experience Saba, you will always want to return!

### **WHAT MITIGATION PLANS DO YOU PERCEIVE AS CRITICAL FOR SMALL ISLAND DESTINATIONS TO CONFRONT CLIMATE CHANGE AND RISING SEA LEVELS?**

Recently there was a mission from the Netherlands led by a former Minister, Mr. Ed Nijpels to create awareness about climate change in the Dutch Caribbean. For Saba, the rising sea levels isn't so much as a priority, but we are taking this into consideration with the design of our new harbor. For Saba, extended dry seasons, the lack of regular rains, and stronger and more frequent hurricanes are very relevant.

With Mount Scenery being the highest point on the island, some of the steeper slopes in the range of hills that surround it can experience problems with erosion. With very long dry seasons, followed by excessive rainfall in short periods of time, we now have more areas where erosion is increasing. Because of the extended dry periods and because of the free-roaming goats, vegetation in many of these areas has slowly diminished.

To confront these challenges, we have already started a few initiatives. For more than a year we have been busy with a goat removal project. The goal of this project is not to discourage goat ownership, rather we want to encourage that it is done in a responsible way. Removing all free-roaming goats will allow the natural vegetation to recover, which will help with the erosion problems. We have also started a reforestation project and aim to plant 5,000 trees. These trees come from the estimated number of free-roaming goats that will be removed, essentially replacing each goat with a tree. We also have several new projects planned, such as new school buildings and a new harbor. When designing these projects, climate change preparedness is one of the main factors that is taken into consideration.

With regards to hurricane preparedness, here on Saba we already build stronger than most islands in our region do. After the hurricanes in 2017, government made a considerable effort to not only repair the damaged homes but to do so in a much



stronger and safer way. Each repaired home, where possible, now has at least one room with a concrete roof. In the coming years, we need to continue these efforts to maintain and strengthen homes and structures so that we can become more resilient.

**SABA HAS RECENTLY RELEASED ITS NEW TOURISM MASTER PLAN DRAFTED BY UCF RESEARCHERS. WHAT IS ITS FOCUS?**

The plan provides directions to help Saba capitalize on new tourism-related opportunities and overcome challenges that have emerged post-pandemic. It lies on four guiding principles: value, inclusivity, opportunity, and sustainability, with the following focus areas:

1. Ensure resources for the Tourism Bureau,
2. Increase accessibility and increase international demand,
3. Position Saba as an attractive destination,
4. Raise tourism awareness among the community,
5. Encourage and support innovation and sustainable practices,
6. Encourage training to enhance a skilled and professional workforce,
7. Have effective partnerships to achieve benefits for Saba.

Now that we have this master plan, we can start to structure our tourism-related initiatives in a more organized way. The plan also serves as a foundation that will be used as a guideline to strengthen our product. It also creates a platform to lobby for additional funds for marketing or for increased connectivity.

**WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR EXPERIENCE IN WORKING WITH UCF'S ROSEN COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT?**

Overall, we have been extremely pleased with the work and support received from Rosen College. We were impressed with their approach from the very beginning when we initially made contact, right through the project until the point at which we received the final plan. The support from the experts at Rosen College was always very professional and the team pleasant to work with. During stakeholder consultations, their professionalism and ability to tackle somewhat difficult conversations were vital,

helping guide all stakeholders through challenging discussions.

With the extensive experience of the investigators and the credentials of Rosen College, who have a fantastic track-record of conducting similar plans and reports for other destinations, we were confident that the end product for Saba would be a very well-thought out tourism master plan. We weren't disappointed. It was a bottom-up participatory research approach, involving multiple layers of tourism stakeholders including residents, government officials, business owners, NGOs, community leaders, local organizations, and tourists. Because of this well-rounded approach, all sectors can find themselves in the master plan, which is essential for gaining confidence and support as we work towards implementing the recommendations.



**Dr. Bruce Zagers**

**Commissioner of Tourism,  
Public Entity, Saba**

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**The bottom-up participatory research approach involved multiple layers of tourism stakeholders—residents, government officials, business owners, NGOs, community leaders, local organizations, and tourists.**

**FINALLY, CAN YOU PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF?**

I was born and raised on the beautiful island of Saba. I am the youngest of three children and my family comes from many generations of Sabans. I have been married to Tracy for almost 18 years and we have two awesome children, Kristin who is 14 and Nicholas who is eight years old.

At the age of 17 I left Saba to further my education at Flagler College, in St. Augustine, Florida. At Flagler, I earned a Bachelors Degree in Accounting. In 2003, without any hesitations, I returned to Saba

to make my contribution to my island. I started working in the Finance Department for the local government and a few years later, I transitioned to Harbor Master, while still continuing with some financial tasks. In 2007, I decided to get involved with politics. Although my initial plans were only to gain experience during my first election, I received sufficient voter support that I became one of the two Commissioners at only 26 years old. I have now participated in five consecutive elections, and with the exception of my first one, I have been able to gain the popular vote in each one.

When I am not working or spending time with my family, I enjoy fishing. Going out into the Caribbean Sea with no distractions allows me to unwind and distracts me from the stress that comes with being a Commissioner. I also enjoy watching sports (I'm a big New York Yankees fan) and participating in a very competitive fantasy football league with local friends.



Interview conducted by **Dr. Kelly Semrad**, Associate Professor of tourism and hospitality live entertainment events at the Rosen College of Hospitality Management.

Dr. Semrad served as part of the research team for the 2023 Saba Tourism Master Plan.

# BEYOND A 'LIKE'

## Building parasocial relationships with baby boomers on Facebook

*Baby boomers are a crucial cohort for hospitality marketing as they have more money to spend and more time on their hands than younger cohorts. However, reaching them on social media is harder. There is one social media platform popular with baby boomers: Facebook. Dr. YunYing Zhong and Dr. Valeriya Shapoval at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, together with their collaborator, have combined their different areas of expertise to analyze the effectiveness of social media marketing directed at baby boomers from an unusual angle: the illusionary and imaginary relationships we build with fictional characters.*

**B**aby boomers are a boon for the hospitality sector, especially in the U.S.A. While younger cohorts struggle with the rigors of growing up and the financial burdens and time restraints of raising families, 'boomers' have more leisure time, a higher disposable income, and can travel more frequently. However, reaching them with digital marketing is challenging—as they are generally considered to interact with more traditional marketing methods. Given how much they value remaining in contact with friends and relatives, this makes Facebook an attractive avenue for hospitality brands to reach out to this highly valuable cohort. To date, studies in such social media marketing have largely followed classical theories. A team led by researchers at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management have taken things into a new direction.

Dr. YunYing Zhong has a strong academic interest in hospitality services for older people and helped found the College's Bachelor of Science degree in Senior Living Management. Her colleague Dr. Valeriya Shapoval uses data analytics to steer strategy within the sector. Together with Prof. James Busser from the Department of Hospitality, William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration, University of Nevada, they make a formidable team and

when they wanted to get a clearer idea of how the sector could connect with older people through social media, they thought it best to consider how people feel about their favorite fictional characters.

### A PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Social media is a rich hunting ground for marketing research. It synchronizes various technologies, including text, visual, and audio, thus generating significant data and multiple routes to follow that data. Most research in social media marketing embraces classical theories that examine a bilateral relationship between consumers and a brand, focusing on issues such as the formation of trust and commitment. However, there's growing interest in reviewing a more immersive relationship between consumers and a brand—as a parasocial relationship.

The term 'parasocial relationship' is usually applied to mass electronic media, such as T.V., radio, and films, and refers to the long-term sense of friendship and intimacy that audiences have with media characters. A perfect example is a viewer feeling strongly associated with a popular T.V. series character. The relationship is obviously one-sided; it is also illusionary and imaginary. However, the emotional intensity for the viewer is real—it is comparable to that of an interpersonal relationship—and this is where

the interest lies in marketing research: imagine the marketing potential if consumers develop a parasocial relationship with a brand. Hence, the focus for the researchers on social media.

While mass marketing has tools to generate an emotional reaction in consumers, it lacks the intimacy of one-to-one marketing. Look beyond the 'likes' for a brand's marketing messages on its Facebook page, and there's an opportunity to connect with consumers in a more intense and immersive way. Importantly, such a connection can exist beyond the actual interaction on social media, becoming a longer-term relationship. Such a relationship is achievable through carefully crafting textual, visual, and multimedia communication, and, according to the research team, its success may rely on certain factors.

### HAVING A GOOD TIME

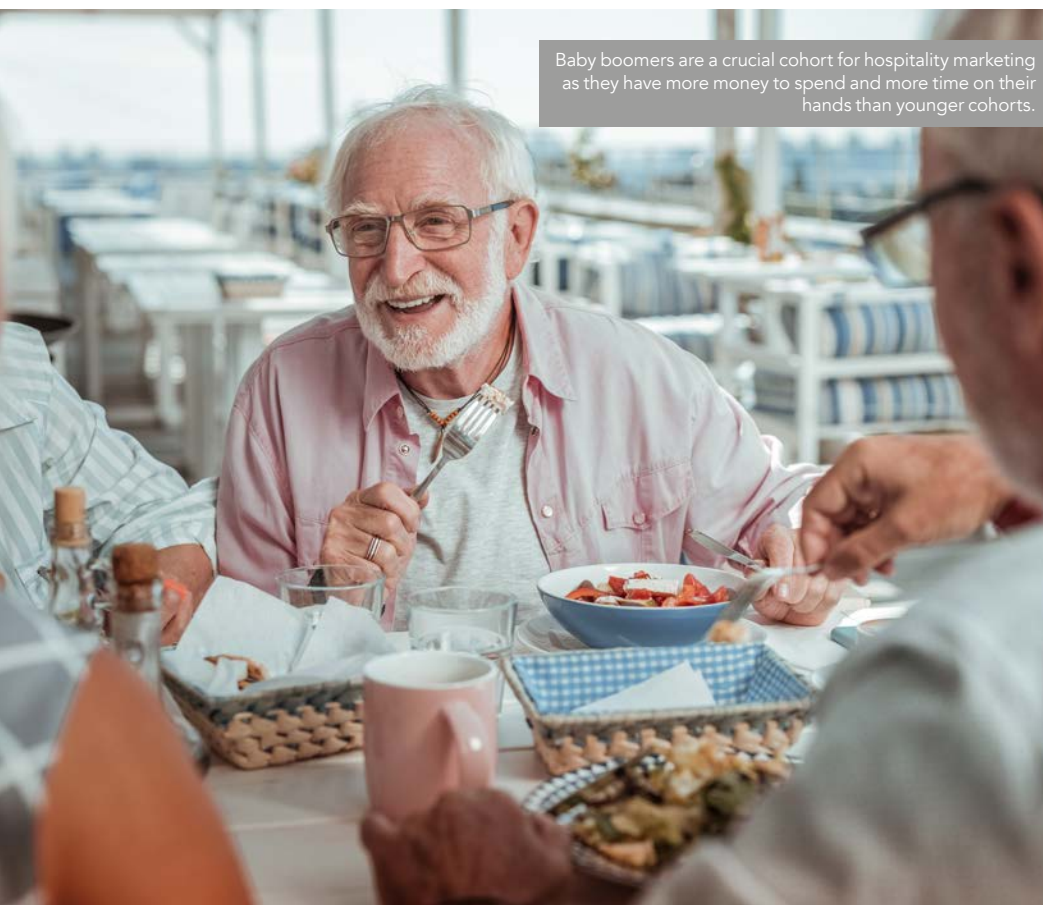
The researchers started their study by hypothesizing that baby boomers' likelihood to develop a parasocial relationship with a hospitality brand through social media depended on the nature of the engagement—how open and interactive it was—and the value it provided, both in its utility and enjoyment.







## IMAGINE THE MARKETING POTENTIAL IF CONSUMERS DEVELOP A PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH A BRAND.



Baby boomers are a crucial cohort for hospitality marketing as they have more money to spend and more time on their hands than younger cohorts.

The ideal is a brand interacting with consumers on social media in a way that the consumers think that, instead of a disembodied marketing department disgorging promotional content, they are talking to an honest, open, lively person engaged with their conversation. This way, they become emotionally and cognitively immersed in the brand and emerge as active advocates, even offline—they're not just clicking a 'like' button.

The researchers designed an online survey directed at baby boomers who had interacted with at least one hospitality brand on Facebook in the past three months. The respondents—mostly female, caucasian, between 50 and 69 years old—first answered questions about the frequency of the interaction, their experience, and, in general, how much they used Facebook. They then ranked statements on a seven-point Likert scale that measured seven related key constructs: the level of interactivity and its seeming openness of the brand; the utilitarian and hedonistic benefits of its content; the parasocial nature of the interaction; how much they engage with the brand; and how loyal they are to it. Examples of statements included, on interactivity, 'I felt like that the brand listened to what I had to say on Facebook,' and, on a possible parasocial relationship, 'I can relate to this brand in many ways on Facebook.'

Results from the study showed that while boomers valued promotions and sales offers and useful, up-to-date content from a hospitality brand's Facebook page, the perceived hedonistic benefits in the engagement were the most effective predictor for their establishing a parasocial relationship with that brand. Essentially, baby boomers reacted cognitively and emotionally with a hospitality brand when interacting with pleasant, fun, and entertaining text and multimedia content on its brand Facebook page and felt part of a community. Saving money through promotional offers was less important than being entertained and listened to. Drs. Zhong, Shapoval, and their collaborator believe that baby boomers likely prefer more conventional communication channels, such as mail and telephone, over social media for brand information.

### MAKING THEM FEEL GOOD

One of the more intriguing outcomes of the study was that perceived openness





Careful content development can help the hospitality sector connect with older people through social media.

## CONTENT DEVELOPMENT IS CRUCIAL, AND MARKETERS SHOULDN'T THINK THIS COHORT IS JUST ABOUT SAVING PENNIES; THEY WANT A GOOD TIME AND TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES.

and interactivity on social media didn't seem that important to baby boomers. This outcome differs from previous studies that suggest consumers generally react more positively towards a brand they consider open and interactive. The results of this study indicate that, for baby boomers, the honesty and interactive nature of a brand wasn't as important in developing a parasocial relationship as how good it made them

feel—perhaps, feeling good made them feel more youthful, and being part of a community meant they didn't feel alone. Importantly, the research team's study provided strong empirical evidence that baby boomers who felt this way were likelier to engage with and be more loyal to a brand.

Such an outcome shines a new light on social media marketing and how to study

it. By approaching from the angle of parasocial relationships, the researchers have encouraged a reframing of how hospitality brands should engage with consumers on social media, especially valued baby boomers. Content development is crucial, and marketers shouldn't think this cohort is just about saving pennies; they want to have a good time and feel good about themselves. Hospitality brand marketers should also interpret such 'enjoyableness' and 'informativeness' from the eyes of baby boomers—who like to see themselves as younger and more active than their chronological age—rather than from their own perspective. Having said that, when it comes to the essence of what a brand offers, baby boomers may prefer the more traditional route of picking up the phone and calling or sending an email for customer support, so brands should keep those details clearly viewable on social media platforms.

We mustn't lose sight of the fact that, in hospitality, baby boomers are a consumer cohort of their own. They have the money and the time to spend, but they are unabashed with their need to have a good time and to feel good about themselves. They are also active on social media, simply in a way that's different from younger consumers. As Drs. Zhong, Shapoval, and their collaborator have shown, hospitality brands willing to reach out to baby boomers on social media and dedicate a little more time to ensuring content makes them feel good and active and part of a community are more likely to secure a long-term loyalty that has far more value than the metric of a simple 'like.'



Drs. Zhong and Shapoval apply parasocial relationship theory to understand the hospitality brand relationship with baby boomer consumers on social media.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Drs. YunYing Zhong and Valeriya Shapoval apply parasocial relationship theory to understand the hospitality brand relationship with baby boomer consumers on social media.

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

**Based on what you've learned, what is the most significant way that traditional social media marketing directed at baby boomers is getting things wrong, and why?**

Social media marketing is often carried out by younger marketing professionals, who may treat consumers of all ages as a homogenous group or completely overlook older consumers in the social media space. In addition, the effectiveness of social media marketing is mostly assessed by simple quantitative measures such as the number of likes, shares, and comments. Our study shows that baby boomer consumers are worth of unique attention in designing a targeted social media marketing campaign. They can develop a parasocial relationship with a hospitality brand when interacting with pleasant, fun, and entertaining text and multimedia content on its brand Facebook page. As compared to online engagement indicators such as numbers of likes, parasocial relationship—a qualitative measure—is a much stronger predictor of baby boomer consumer's offline brand support and loyalty behaviors.

## Dr. YunYing (Susan) Zhong



Dr. Zhong is an Assistant Professor at Rosen College of Hospitality Management and a member of the Disability, Aging & Technology Cluster and at University of Central Florida. Her research focuses on relationship marketing and workforce training in hospitality and tourism, and bridging hospitality to senior living and healthcare.

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## Dr. Valeriya Shapoval



Dr. Valeriya Shapoval joined the faculty of the Rosen College of Hospitality Management in August 2016. She received her Ph.D. in Hospitality Management and a Certificate in Big Data Analytics from the University of Central Florida. Dr. Shapoval also has an MPS in Applied Statistics from the School of Industrial Labor Relations, Cornell University (2005), M.S., and a B.S. in Education from Khersonsky State University Ukraine. Dr. Shapoval has over 12 years of experience in the hospitality industry in the U.S.A. and internationally.

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## *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*

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## *Event Management*

is an interdisciplinary journal examining the economics and social implications of events and festivals on the places, people, and communities that host them.  
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**Editor-in-Chief:** Dr. Michael Duignan





# DICK POPE SR. INSTITUTE FOR TOURISM STUDIES



The Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies is based at the University of Central Florida.

In 1979, the University of Central Florida established the Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies (DPI), after receiving \$25,000 from the Florida Public Relations Association (FPRA), Orange Blossom Chapter. The name honors the late Dick Pope Sr., the former owner of Cypress Gardens, one of Florida's first modern-day attractions, and the first commercial tourist entrepreneur in Florida.

The Institute was established for the purpose of (1) conducting proprietary and public domain research, (2) promulgating information to the public at large about the contributions of the hospitality and tourism industry, especially along economic, sociological, environmental, and quality-of-life dimensions, and (3) carrying out credit and non-credit educational activities.

Since 2005, DPI has secured over \$1.4 million in contracts and grants for research purposes.

Its extensive client list includes:

- categorical sampling*
- destination management organizations*
- convention and visitor bureaus*
- hotels*
- hospitals*
- vacation homes*
- restaurants*
- theme parks*

DPI has also played a significant role in facilitating over \$4 million in non-credit educational programs with international partners. UCF's Rosen College doctoral students are extraordinarily essential to the Institute's ability to meet its objectives and its commitments. In addition, contracts and grants funded through DPI have been an invaluable source of external funds to support graduate assistantships for the doctoral students.

## APPLIED INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

The Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies is the intelligent choice for private and public domain hospitality research, both domestically and abroad. We have conducted research for organizations in countries as widespread as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Ecuador, Aruba, and South Korea.

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF TOURISM

We are dedicated to increasing the benefits of tourism through research, public awareness, and education. We invite you to visit the Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies digital collection to access our portfolio of research, publications, and white paper series. You may access the digital collection via this link: [stars.library.ucf.edu/dickpopeinstitute/](https://stars.library.ucf.edu/dickpopeinstitute/)



Doctoral students from UCF's Rosen College contribute to the research at DPI.



Rosen College of Hospitality Management, is among the top five hospitality and tourism colleges.

In 1983, the Institute's advisory board successfully lobbied the Florida University System's Board of Regents and created the Hospitality Management undergraduate degree program at UCF. Its successor, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, is among the top five hospitality and tourism colleges in the world with five undergraduate degrees, a master's degree, and a Ph.D. program in hospitality management.

# UNRAVELLING THE TOURISM-POVERTY NEXUS



Until now, the academic literature on tourism and poverty has been disjointed.

*Literature on the links between tourism development and poverty alleviation is surprisingly fragmented. A new model, the Tourism-Poverty Interdependence Diamond (TPID), from Dr. Jorge Ridderstaat and Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, offers a tool to unravel the complexities of this relationship. Using Honduras as a case study, this new approach clearly shows that tourism development can impact poverty, and highlights that poverty can also impact tourism development, with the links ranging from direct to indirect.*

**T**he tourism industry is responsible for a staggering 10.4% (approx. U.S.\$ 9,170 billion) of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and a similar proportion of all jobs worldwide (approx. 334 million). When managed effectively, tourism can be a route to economic growth via income and job generation; in turn, this can lead to poverty alleviation via both direct and indirect pathways. Poverty levels are directly impacted by job creation and the establishment of new businesses; indirect impacts include social empowerment and inclusion, favorable tax policies, and socio-economic initiatives.

However, despite its undisputed importance to global, national, and local economies, the academic literature on tourism and poverty is disjointed. Many studies have considered the topics of tourism development, poverty, economic growth, and human development, but few have analyzed them as interrelated issues. When the body of literature is reviewed together, links between poverty and tourism become apparent, but only via inference and indirect correlations. The picture that emerges strongly suggests that this relationship is complex and not one-sided; tourism development can impact poverty, but poverty can also impact tourism development. A clearer view of the situation requires a new, and less fragmented approach.





Ridderstaat and Fu have developed a new framework to analyze the links between tourism development and poverty.



economic crises, etc.). A key aspect of the TPID framework and its approach is that it considers correlations across multiple sets of variables.

#### **SITUATION ON THE GROUND: A HONDURAS CASE STUDY**

To test the TPID framework, the research team applied it to the Central American country of Honduras. Despite recent growth outstripping that of neighboring countries, Honduras still faces widespread poverty, with 50% of the population considered to be in extreme poverty. Up to 75% of the population lives in rural areas, and socio-economic inequality is high. While not as widely viewed as a tourist destination as some other countries in the region (e.g., Costa Rica), prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism accounted for approx. 12% of the national economy and approx. 540,000 jobs. The country boasts significant natural attractions, such as world-class diving sites, and two UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The vast majority of visitors are from the United States and four other Central American countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica), which together account for 75% of all tourists visiting Honduras.

In addition to basic socio-economic data (e.g., GDP; indices related to economic development, human development, and human rights), the researchers collected data on tourism demand from the five key markets

The TPID framework hypothesizes that tourism directly affects poverty, and that poverty directly affects tourism development. With regards to indirect factors, the model hypothesizes that tourism development is indirectly affected by economic growth and human development, and that both of these factors are in turn affected by poverty. However, the TPID also takes it a step further, by hypothesizing that tourism development (poverty) indirectly affects poverty (tourism development) through the mediation of

### *TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CAN IMPACT POVERTY, BUT POVERTY CAN ALSO IMPACT TOURISM DEVELOPMENT.*

A team led by two researchers from UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, Dr. Jorge Ridderstaat and Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu, have taken up the mantle and developed a new integrative framework for analyzing the links between tourism development and poverty, taking into account the interrelated spheres of social and economic development. They have named their approach the Tourism-Poverty Interdependence Diamond (TPID).

#### **TOURISM-POVERTY INTERDEPENDENCE DIAMOND**

The Tourism-Poverty Interdependence Diamond, or TPID, provides a framework for exploring both direct and indirect relationships between tourism development and poverty.

economic growth via human development, and through human development via economic growth.

To test these hypotheses and build an integrative model that can be applied to a given location, the TPID framework relies on the collection of a diverse dataset of relevant variables, including measures of economic development (e.g., GDP, poverty indices), social development (e.g., human development indices, human rights indices), key tourism markets (e.g., measures of demand for tourism services from other countries), and major shocks (e.g., impacts of specific natural disasters, civil or military unrest, global pandemics, global and national

(i.e., the countries listed above). In addition, data on major shocks to the country included the global financial crash of 2008–2010; Hurricane Mitch, which had a devastating impact on the country in 1998; and the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York.

The results of the analysis suggest that, in Honduras, the relationship between tourism and poverty is mostly direct; however, it is also highly market-specific. For example, when considering the U.S. market, tourism development has a direct alleviatory impact on poverty, and poverty has a direct impact on tourism development. For El Salvador and Guatemala, tourism development also directly alleviates poverty, but not vice versa.





No relationships were found with regard to the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan markets. In short, the potential of the poor to drive tourism development has not been effectively harnessed, with the focus solely on the U.S. market. This represents a missed opportunity for more widespread grassroots alleviation of poverty.

Regarding external shocks, Hurricane Mitch reduced the number of tourists visiting Honduras, clearly depressing economic and social poverty-related measures. The

poverty; in particular, as participation in education increases, poverty also increases, likely because people are no longer economically active. Improvements in human development were also positively correlated with tourism development; that is, as social conditions improve, people are more likely to support the development of the tourism industry (e.g., by offering tourism services). Sadly, this positive impact is not reciprocal, with tourism development having a negative impact on human development. This likely reflects massive issues of inequality across

perspective, this highlights the need for market segmentation studies. From a practical perspective, it shows the importance of market-targeted policies to support positive feedback mechanisms between tourism development and poverty alleviation. By carefully selecting the right set of variables, policymakers have the opportunity to holistically view the tourism development/poverty landscape at different spatial scales (national, local, destination), allowing for a more integrated and structured approach to both developing the tourism industry and alleviating poverty.

## THE TPID MODEL OFFERS A NEW TOOL FOR GOVERNMENTS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS TO INTEGRATE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION.

negative impact on the U.S. market was particularly damaging, given the emphasis placed on catering to this market. Similarly, the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York also had a detrimental effect; while not directly impacting Honduras, they did reduce travel demand from the U.S. market.

The study resulted in a number of other interesting findings. For example, improvements in some social/human indices were positively correlated with increased

the country, with the benefits from tourism not distributed evenly and the poor profiting the least.

### PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research team believes that the TPID model offers a new tool for governments and other stakeholders to effectively integrate tourism development and poverty alleviation. Honduras's results clearly show that tourism development's influence on poverty (and vice versa) is market-specific. From an academic

At a national level, governments can provide a landscape that is conducive to both goals; for example, the national implementation of social programs to build capacity (e.g., childhood immunization, education, etc.) and financial reforms that capitalize on tourist income (e.g., tourist taxes). Indirectly, addressing national issues such as weak institutions and socio-economic inequality is critical. At a local level, education is vital; for example, improved levels of education would open doors to employment opportunities within the tourism sector for the poorest in society. Local policymakers should also consider existing and potential tourist markets (in terms of country of origin and types of tourists) and focus their marketing strategies accordingly. In Honduras, this might involve the development of eco- and cultural tourism promoted to new markets in Europe.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Jorge Ridderstaat and Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu studied the links between tourism development and poverty alleviation, using Honduras as a case study.

## CO-AUTHORS

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## PERSONAL RESPONSE

### **Would the method also work for countries with higher levels of economic development?**

// The Tourism-Poverty Interdependence Diamond (TPID) has the potential to be universally applied across diverse nations, regardless of their socioeconomic status. The affliction of poverty is not restricted solely to developing nations but can manifest in a variety of contextual settings. //

## Dr. Jorge Ridderstaat



Dr. Jorge Ridderstaat is an Associate Professor at Rosen College of Hospitality Management, UCF. His research agenda focuses primarily on the dynamics in tourism and hospitality, where he specializes in data decomposition and analysis using econometric techniques. Dr. Ridderstaat received his doctorate from the Free University of Amsterdam (Netherlands), where his dissertation focused on the determinants of tourism demand dynamics in a small island destination. He is the author of two books and many academic publications (refereed journal articles, book chapters, encyclopedia entries, and conference papers).

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## Dr. Xiaoxiao Fu



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# OFF-COURSE

## Understanding the popularity of alternative golf experiences

*Alternative golf is a nascent leisure product category that is growing in popularity. However, little is known as to why, its potential impact on traditional golf, and whether it will encourage more and diverse people to play traditional golf. Drs. Juhee Kang, David Kwun, and Jeeyeon Jeannie Hahm at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management investigated the relationship between consumers' value perceptions, satisfaction, and involvement at golf entertainment venues, and whether those influenced their desire to return or refer, and, ultimately, spread their wings onto an actual golf course.*

Despite its popularity as a competitive sport on T.V., golf has several barriers that limit its uptake as a recreational sport. Traditional golf can be intimidating—it demands considerable skill to play correctly, the equipment can be costly, and it generally requires club membership. It is also considered the reserve of older white males, and an average game can take hours to play. But remove those barriers, take the game off-course, and people flock to play it. This is evident in the rising popularity of 'alternative golf', an umbrella term for activities at driving ranges, indoor golf simulators, and golf entertainment venues, all of which fall firmly into the hospitality sector. Purists may dismiss such activities, but the reality is that America's National Golf Foundation considers alternative golf to be a branch of traditional golf and analyzes it as part of the overall golf industry. The Foundation also hopes alternative golf will be a springboard for getting more diverse people onto a traditional golf course. Researchers from UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management have provided valuable insight into whether alternative golf could have this effect, and what other changes could help. They have also encouraged a rethink on what inspires consumers to revisit or recommend a hospitality venue to others.

For Drs. Juhee Kang, David Kwun, and Jeeyeon Jeannie Hahm, golf entertainment venues such as Topgolf, Drive Shack, and 4ORE are productive places to study consumer behavior. They boast multiple hospitality outlets such as restaurants, bars, and interactive game spaces catering to public and private events. But, as researchers, what they find most interesting is that these venues could be a gateway to traditional golf. The National Golf Foundation acknowledges that traditional golf faces constraints that make it unapproachable for the average consumer interested in playing recreationally. The Foundation is optimistic about alternative golf venues, believing they will eventually bolster the on-course game, but research from South Korea suggests they may become competition. Data on the relationship between the two is patchy as alternative golf is still a nascent leisure product category. In fact, before the Rosen College researchers' study, no empirical research studies had examined the link between alternative and traditional golf, making this study invaluable in its novel insights.

### NEED FOR A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING

The researchers wanted to get a more precise idea of the relationship between consumers' value perceptions, satisfaction,

and involvement in alternative golf and whether those influenced their intention to continue playing and, ultimately, take up traditional golf. They were also interested in whether gender influenced those decisions. Value perceptions, satisfaction, and involvement are vital components in determining whether consumers intend to re-engage with a leisure activity—hence their value for marketing research. However, they are not isolated causal factors—they influence







The study aimed to understand the relationship between consumers' value perceptions, satisfaction, and involvement at golf entertainment venues.



## BEFORE THE ROSEN COLLEGE RESEARCHERS' STUDY, NO EMPIRICAL RESEARCH STUDIES HAD EXAMINED THE LINK BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE AND TRADITIONAL GOLF.


each other, and this relationship differs from activity to activity. Given that alternative golf is still finding its feet as a leisure activity, there's a need for a clearer understanding of what will draw people to golf entertainment venues, encourage them to revisit, and, for the benefit of the broader game, maybe spread their wings onto an actual golf course.

Drs. Kang, Kwun, and Hahm designed an online self-administered questionnaire

targeting current and potential golfers who were at least 18 years old and had played golf at a golf entertainment venue at least once within the past 12 months. Because the researchers were looking for the relationship between the perceived value of alternative golf, involvement, satisfaction with their experience, and their intention to revisit an alternative golf venue and play traditional golf, they earmarked those as constructs and structured statements around them. For example, to measure how participants rated perceived value, the questionnaire presented statements such as 'Overall, my last visit to XXX was a good buy' and to measure their intention to play traditional golf, statements such as 'I will make an effort to play golf at a real golf course in the future.' Participants were asked to rank the statements using a Likert-type scale from 1, representing strongly disagree, to 7, representing strongly agree. A research company distributed the

questionnaire during the summer of 2018, receiving 493 valid responses.

One of the encouraging aspects for the researchers was the balanced gender spread of the respondents: 55.6% were female, and 44.4% male. Interestingly, 68% had already ventured onto a golf course—either just starting out, or had already played a few rounds of traditional golf. Most of the respondents—well over 75%—were white. One of the standout points was that over 95% of respondents had visited the venue as part of a group, usually as a family, with friends, or in company outings. This makes sense, considering that the alternative golf venues bill themselves as multiplex entertainment venues. But it does shine a light on why alternative golf is becoming popular, especially considering traditional golf's more formal and structured nature. It also may explain some of the results of the study.



Despite its popularity as a competitive sport on TV, golf has several barriers that limit its uptake as a recreational sport.

### RETHINKING PERCEIVED VALUE

Within the scope of the many activities that fall within the hospitality sector, the perceived value of an activity is a direct precursor to consumers' intentions to re-engage with that activity. If people pay to do something, they're more likely to do it again if their perception is that they're getting value for their money. However, this study showed that this was not the case with alternative golf. Instead, the perceived value was a precursor to their *involvement* and *satisfaction* with their experience and, through that, their intention to return to or refer an alternative golf venue. So, there was a link between perceived value and the intention to return or refer, but it was *indirect*. This is probably because, unlike other hospitality-focused activities with a core feature, such as a restaurant meal or a driving range, visits to a golf entertainment venue involve multiple hospitality contact points.

The multidimensional nature of golf entertainment venues could explain why the data from the study emphasized the value of satisfaction of the cumulative experience on whether consumers wanted to revisit an alternative golf venue or recommend visiting it to others. The relatively lower influence of

involvement in alternative golf in wanting to revisit or recommend, as the study showed, could be explained by the purpose of the initial visit—the playing of golf-related activities may not have been the primary purpose; perhaps it was simply to have fun with friends and family.

If having a good time was the primary purpose for most people visiting an alternative golf venue, it does pour some cold water on the hopes of organizations such as the National Golf Foundation that people who visit such venues might be one step closer to walking 18 holes. However, this study showed that favorable experiences at an alternative golf venue could encourage revisits and referrals, ultimately leading to more interest in and a willingness to play traditional golf. This is encouraging because more than half the respondents were new to the sport. However, mainly male respondents felt so; female respondents seemed less enthused. These results suggest traditional golf's organizing bodies need to do more than make golf part of a fun activity to encourage more women to play the game.

### A NEED TO UP THEIR GAME

Managers of golf clubs and alternative golf

venues should pay close attention to this study. Drs. Kang, Kwun, and Hahm have provided empirical evidence showing that the traditional golf industry should consider alternative golf not as a threat but as an opportunity. In their research, published last year in the *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, they recommend golf clubs and local alternative golf facilities develop symbiotic partnerships to encourage patrons to visit each other.

For alternative golf venues, the study sends a clear message that good value is not the main factor to consider if they want patrons to revisit or refer—they should concentrate on ensuring that patrons are satisfied with their overall experience. Therefore, the researchers recommend that venue management focus on delivering a high-quality service in a well-maintained and serviced venue, with a generous range of food and beverage options and, importantly, a fun atmosphere.

However, while such venues should encourage people to have a good time, another aspect could be timely for promotion: golf is a physical activity, and for a nation still in the wake of an epidemic, health and well-being are front of mind. As for the gender differences in the intention to transition to traditional golf, the researchers suggest that alternative golf venues up their game by encouraging more female coaches and developing special programs for female groups—beyond the costs and time of taking up traditional golf, most barriers remain perceptual.

THESE RESULTS SUGGEST TRADITIONAL GOLF'S ORGANIZING BODIES NEED TO DO MORE THAN MAKE GOLF PART OF A FUN ACTIVITY TO ENCOURAGE MORE WOMEN TO PLAY THE GAME.



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Understanding the relationship between consumers' value perceptions, satisfaction, and involvement at golf entertainment venues.

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Kang, J., Kwun, D.J., & Hahm, J.J. (2022). Investigating the effect of alternative golf experience on traditional golf: An integrated framework of perceived value, satisfaction, and involvement. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 34(11), 4266–4287. [doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2021-1231](https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2021-1231)

## PERSONAL RESPONSE

### **How would you like to see other researchers develop on your insights from this study?**

Despite the possibility of the growing population in traditional golf, a further and deeper understanding of how recreational golfers become 18-hole golfers is needed. Based on the information provided in this study, we hope that other researchers will develop new research frameworks and develop new insights into potential golfers' motivations and behaviors, and suggest more effective solutions for alternative and traditional golf industries.



### Dr. Juhee Kang



Dr. Kang joined the Rosen College of Hospitality Management in 2012. She earned her Ph.D. in Hospitality Management from Iowa State University. She is a Certified Hospitality Educator. Dr. Kang teaches Hospitality and Tourism Marketing at the Rosen College. Her research interests have focused on social media marketing, consumer behavior, brand image, and brand experience.

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Rosen Research Focus | Heejung Ro

# MIND THE SERVICE GAP

LGBT+ customers' hospitality experience

*Hospitality managers could be missing out by not paying enough attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) guests. New research by Associate Professor Heejung Ro, UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management, looks at this growing and valuable customer segment, and studies how sexual minority guests perceive they are welcomed by hospitality staff. In one of the first studies of its kind, Dr. Ro finds that delivering the right service experience is about more than just flying the rainbow flag.*

**T**he lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT+) travel and tourism market is worth \$63 billion a year in the United States, and \$218 billion globally, according to figures presented at the World Travel Market in 2018. With greater cultural acceptance of people who are open about their gender and sexuality, as well as their not insignificant spending power, the importance of this customer segment is set to grow rapidly.

Hospitality and tourism is a diverse and welcoming industry, and much has been done to market services and destinations to LGBT+ customers. However, academic research has so far focused on topics such as travel motivation and destination choice, and little attention has been paid to the hospitality service preferences of non-heterosexual customers. In an important addition to the literature, new research by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Associate Professor Heejung Ro looks at

lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) customers' perceptions of service encounters with frontline hospitality staff.

Published in the prestigious *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, the study is based on a survey of delegates who attended a LGBT+ event held in the United States. The survey asked participants about the importance, or otherwise, of hospitality staff recognizing and acknowledging guests' sexual orientation identity.

## PASSING OR REVEALING

Psychologists confirm that sexual orientation is fundamental to an individual's sense of self and wellbeing. It affects how people perceive themselves, as well as influencing their interactions with others. Yet despite the welcome change in attitudes towards people who identify differently from heterosexual



norms, in some societies and situations there is still a stigma attached to homosexuality. This can make some people wary of revealing their sexual orientation identity.

Sexual orientation is not easily identified by physical appearance. When meeting someone new, some LGBT+ individuals may feel able to reveal their identity, but others may prefer to remain silent. This may be through fear of not being accepted and/or prejudicial attitudes, or even fear for their personal safety. As a result, they may adopt various behavioral strategies to keep their identity private, including

followed by 14% Hispanic, 10% Black African, 3% Asian, and 5% other. The majority had a college education, and more than half had an annual income between \$40,000 and \$79,000.

The survey asked participants to rate the importance of a series of statements according to a seven-point scale which varied from 'not at all important' to 'extremely important'. Respondents were first asked how important it is that hospitality service employees acknowledge them as LGB. The survey went on to probe to what extent they believe staff could identify their sexual orientation, and how they

react when staff mistakenly identify them as heterosexual. Last, the study asked participants how their perceptions of staff behavior related to how open they are about their sexual orientation identity.

#### **OPENNESS AND SELF-ESTEEM**

The survey results confirm that there are significant differences in LGB customers' perceptions of service encounters, according to whether or not they reveal their sexual orientation identity.

Those who were open about their sexual orientation attached a higher importance to hospitality staff acknowledging them as LGB. They were also more likely to believe that service employees were aware of their sexual orientation, and were more likely to disclose their sexual orientation if employees wrongly identified them as heterosexual. Those who were less open about their sexual orientation were less likely to believe that service employees were aware of their sexual

## *THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN LGB CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE ENCOUNTERS, ACCORDING TO WHETHER CUSTOMERS REVEAL THEIR SEXUAL ORIENTATION IDENTITY.*

'passing' or feigning a heterosexual identity. This problem can be all the greater in service encounters, such as hospitality situations, when engaging with strangers in a public space for a relatively short period of time.

Hospitality staff may also feel unsure about how to behave. Even if an employee senses that a customer identifies as LGBT+, they may be afraid of saying the wrong thing, and therefore give a more cautious, less friendly greeting. They may also commit service errors, such as addressing a welcome note to a same-sex couple as 'Mr. and Mrs.', or assigning them a twin-bedded room, both of which can offend and make people feel unwelcome. Such errors can seriously affect customers' evaluations of their hospitality experience.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND PERCEPTION**

The survey designed by Dr. Ro to investigate sexual orientation issues in service encounters was bespoke, and conducted at an annual LGBT+ event held in Florida that regularly attracts around 150,000 visitors.

Concentrating on LGB minorities, 177 participants were recruited after speaking to researchers. Of these, 77% identified as gay, 15% as lesbian, and 8% as bisexual. For gender, 78% reported being male and 21% as female. Around 67% of participants were white,

The study explored how sexual minority guests perceive they are welcomed by hospitality staff.



The study highlights that training is needed to ensure that employees welcome LGB visitors appropriately.



*HOSPITALITY COMPANIES SHOULD PROVIDE SERVICE EXPERIENCES THAT WELCOME SEXUAL MINORITY GUESTS WITHOUT JUDGMENT AND MAKE THEM FEEL COMFORTABLE BY APPROPRIATELY PREPARING SERVICE EMPLOYEES.*

orientation, and less likely to disclose their sexual orientation if employees wrongly identified them as heterosexual.

Dr. Ro finds that, given that psychological research suggests that people who are open about their sexual orientation have higher self-esteem, travelers who reveal their sexual orientation identity want to be recognized and respected as valued customers. In addition, those who think that they can be easily identified as LGB have higher expectations that staff will recognize their particular needs and do their best to meet them. Conversely, customers who are less open about their sexual orientation will seek to avoid discussing their requirements with staff, and may adopt behaviors which allow them to pass as heterosexual.

The results confirm that how sexual minority customers perceive their sexual orientation identity directly influences their perceptions and behaviors in hospitality service encounters.

### **TRAINING AND COMMUNICATION**

The challenge for hospitality businesses is therefore how to identify LGB customers' sexual orientation, so that they can respond appropriately to their needs. The research confirms that LGB guests want to be treated as equal to heterosexual customers, but not as heterosexuals. Dr. Ro highlights four action points for managers and employees, from receptionists to porters, and from room service and housekeeping teams to restaurant and bar staff.



Those who were open about their sexual orientation attached a higher importance to hospitality staff acknowledging them as LGB.

The most important takeaway from the study is that training is needed to make sure that employees welcome LGB visitors appropriately and do not commit service errors. More than focusing on compliance with anti-discrimination laws, training needs to be directed towards understanding LGBT+ guests' expectations, and what they need to do to avoid giving negative experiences.

Communication—both verbal and non-verbal body language—matters too. This is also about much more than producing marketing literature which presents a venue or service as LGBT+ friendly. Staff need to be equipped with the communication skills to engage with sexual minority guests, and to feel comfortable in discussing their preferences and requirements. This includes things as basic as asking a guest how they would like to be addressed.

Hospitality organizations should also raise employees' wider awareness of LGBT+ issues, including encouraging employees to

respect diversity, and if necessary address their own prejudices and homophobia. While this is in order to be more sensitive to the needs of LGBT+ customers, Dr. Ro warns that managers should also be sensitive to employees whose religious beliefs may be less tolerant of homosexuality.

The final learning point is that managers should consider benchmarking LGBT+ friendly companies and brands that are already popular with LGBT+ travelers. Such businesses can provide insights and help them to improve their practices too, not least by creating an authentic culture of inclusivity and care that is demonstrated in practice as well as promoted in their marketing.

As Dr. Ro finds, 'Hospitality companies should provide service experiences that welcome sexual minority guests without judgment and make them feel comfortable by appropriately preparing service employees.'



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Heejung Ro investigates sexual orientation issues in service encounters from the perspective of lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual (LGB) customers.

## REFERENCES

Heejung, R., (2023). Sexual orientation identity matters: Lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual customers' perceptions of service encounters. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 32:1, 75–94. [doi.10.1080/19368623.2023.2125473](https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2023.2125473)

## PERSONAL RESPONSE

***This was a fascinating study in an important new area for the academic literature. Where would you like the research to go next?***

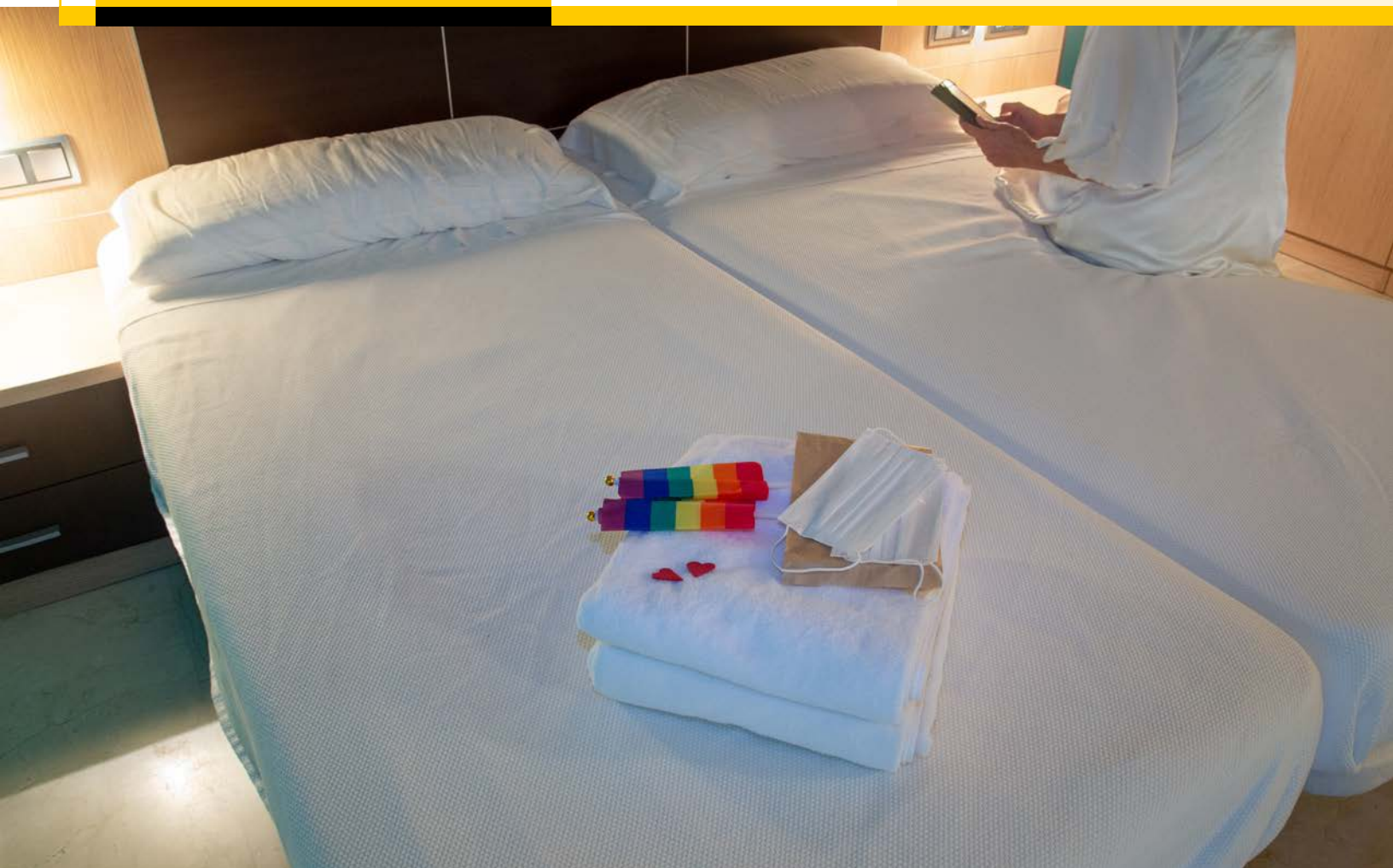
Future research should examine how well-prepared hospitality employees are to provide appropriate services to LGBTQ+ customers. For example, service employees' attitudes and training in relation to their role clarity and job confidence in the LGBTQ+ customer service encounter context.

## Dr. Heejung Ro



Dr. Heejung (Cheyenne) Ro, is Associate Professor at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management. Her research focuses on the evaluation of service encounters that involve customer behaviors and frontline employee interactions with customers. Her specific research interests include customer complaining behaviors, service recovery, emotions, and LGBTQ+ customers' perceptions of hospitality services.

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# CONCERN OR CONTROL?

## Gender stereotyping and hospitality leaders

*Although most managers in the global hospitality industry are still male, an increasing number of women are taking on leadership roles. But how exactly do employees perceive masculine and feminine leadership styles? New research led by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Associate Professor Bendegul Okumus and the research team she works with looks at gender stereotypes and finds that the most successful managers, in the eyes of their staff, have a management style that combines both masculine and feminine leadership traits.*

**D**espite decades of fighting for equality in the workplace, female employees in hospitality and other industries still experience sexism at work. According to research conducted by UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management's Associate Professor Bendegul Okumus and the research team she works with, discrimination is a particular problem in Asian contexts, where women have strong career ambitions and female managers have significantly contributed to the rapid development of the tourism sector.

Published in the prestigious journal *Tourism Management*, the study looks at gender stereotyping and the effects of masculine stereotypes on female workers. The research was conducted with university colleagues and participants in Guangzhou—the third-largest city in China. A major port on the Pearl River, about 75 miles north of Hong Kong, Guangzhou is seen by many global brands as a gateway to the rest of the country.

According to social role theory, gender is a social construct and gender stereotypes are shaped by the behaviors that individuals observe in other people. Behaviors are held to be either 'communal' or 'agentic'. Strongly associated with women, 'communal' attributes are based on concern for the welfare of others, and demonstrated in qualities such as kindness, helpfulness, and sympathy. Usually associated with men, 'agentic' attributes focus on independence

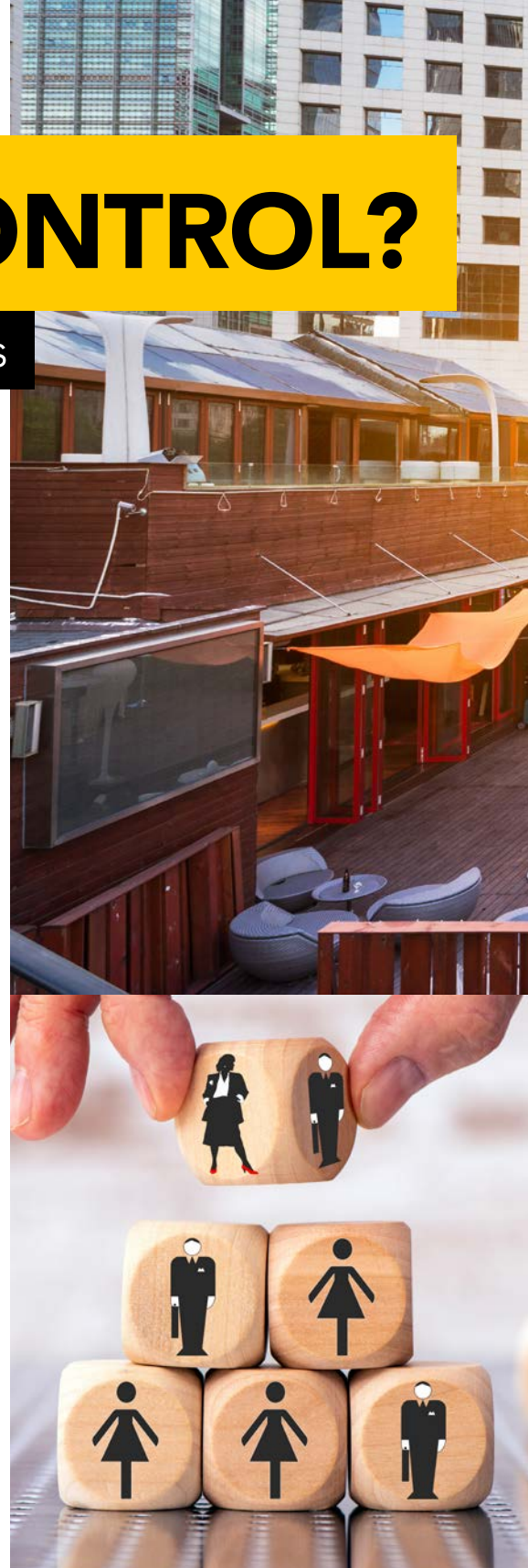
and self, and are shown in qualities such as confidence, control, and assertiveness.

In a leadership context, social role theory implies that women usually have a more communal, emotional leadership style and are able to build a positive emotional atmosphere in the workplace—especially valuable in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, feminine stereotypes are still not adequately understood. For example, the academic literature has studied the benefits of emotional leadership for such things as public relations, but until now little attention has been paid to employees' perceptions of female managers' leadership styles.

### LEADERSHIP PERCEPTIONS

This research is therefore timely. The mixed-methods study was conducted with the help of participants who were either interns or employees in mainland China hotels. There were three main research questions: whether masculine leadership traits and feminine emotional traits are common in the hospitality industry; whether a counter-stereotype exists of androgynous leadership, combining both masculine and feminine traits; and to what extent participants' ideal gender roles of leadership (IGRL) affect their perceived emotional leadership (PEL).

Three independent but complementary studies were conducted for the research. These comprised two 'implicit association tests'—widely-used, computer-based classical

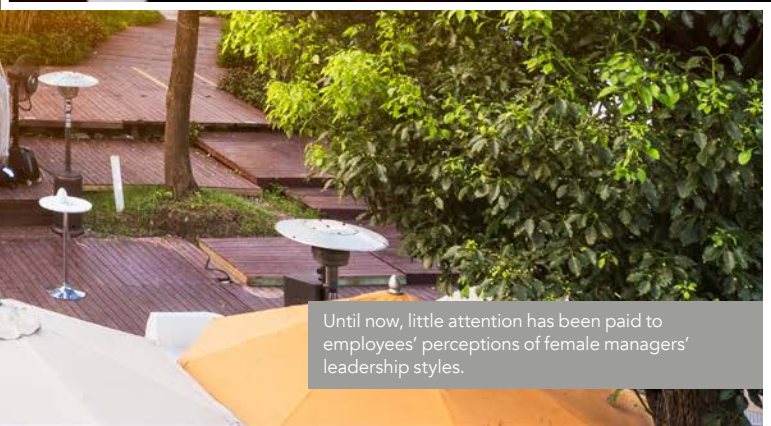


research tests which use word association to check unconscious bias—and a survey that investigated the impact of gender stereotype on the perceived emotional leadership of front-line hospitality employees.





According to social role theory, gender is a social construct and gender stereotypes are shaped by behaviors that individuals observe in other people.



Until now, little attention has been paid to employees' perceptions of female managers' leadership styles.

## *PARTICIPANTS WERE MORE LIKELY TO ASSOCIATE MALE MANAGERS WITH POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES, AND FEMALE MANAGERS WITH NEGATIVE ATTRIBUTES.*

### **BOLD MEN AND JOYFUL WOMEN**

The first test considered the masculinity stereotype about hotel leadership traits. With an average age of 22, 31 male and 32 female hospitality students took part, all of whom had completed hotel internships. Their task was to look at online images of male and female managers. Using different keys on their computer keypad, participants were then asked to respond quickly to a series of words flashed onto the screen, indicating whether they associated each word with the male or female image.

After preliminary exercises, the target words were narrowed down to ten positive and ten negative attitudes, for example,

laziness, confidence, enthusiasm, impatience, indolence, selfishness, intelligence, and boldness. The results were moderated and analyzed using recognized computer software. As the researchers anticipated, they confirmed that the masculine stereotype of hospitality leaders still exists. Participants were more likely to associate male managers with positive attributes, and female managers with negative attributes.

The second test looked at the femininity stereotype about emotional traits. This time, 61 hospitality students with an average age of 22 took part, all of whom had completed hotel internships. As before, participants were asked to look at online images of male

and female managers and indicate whether they associated a series of words with the male or female image.

The target attributes for this study were words suggesting happiness and anger. The words were chosen according to widely used psychological studies and previous research, and the validity of the words in Chinese contexts was also tested. As in the first test, the target words were narrowed down to ten 'happy' words and ten 'angry' words, for example, joyful, outraged, amused, indignant, pleased, irate, irritated, and cheerful. These results were also moderated and analyzed as before. As the researchers anticipated, the results confirmed that the feminine stereotype regarding emotional traits still exists. Participants were more likely to associate male managers with angry emotions, and female managers with happy emotions.

### **ANDROGYNOUS LEADERSHIP**

The third study explored gender stereotypes and hotel leadership traits. In particular,



Dr. Bendegul Okumus investigates gender stereotyping in hospitality and its impact on employees' perceived emotional leadership.

it considered to what extent participants' ideal gender roles of leadership affect their perceived emotional leadership.

Frontline employees were recruited from 15 five-star hotels in Guangzhou's highly competitive hospitality market. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the researchers cooperated with managers to conduct an

stage measured 14 indicators of masculinity and 12 indicators of femininity. Participants were asked, for example, to rate their managers for traits such as self-reliance, gentleness, and independence, according to a five-point scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. According to the results, managers were rated in one of four categories of leadership: predominantly masculine,

agree' to 'strongly disagree', employees assessed their managers for such things as 'motivating employees when the team is happy after fulfilling a task' and 'encouraging employees to look on the bright side when the team is in deep trouble.'

Analysis showed that employees' perception of excellent leadership was no longer confined to binary gender roles, and that the ideal role combined masculine and feminine traits and was androgynous or undifferentiated. As researchers anticipated, the findings confirmed that employees with different ideal gender roles of leadership have different degrees of perceived emotional leadership. Participants in the androgynous group had the strongest perceived emotional leadership overall.

### HEALTHY GENDER CULTURE

By measuring the implicit attitudes of hospitality employees in an Asian context, the research confirms the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the industry. Importantly for the academic literature, it also reveals that employees respond better to managers with temperaments and personality traits associated with both masculinity and femininity. The implication is that managers should adopt androgynous leadership styles.

The study shows that hotel staff have more positive implicit attitudes towards male managers than female. However, it does not suggest that in order to succeed, female managers have to adopt the more agentic behaviors commonly associated with men. As the report finds, 'Female leaders have greater potential to overcome masculine stereotypes by showing higher emotional leadership.'

Much needs to be done to address existing problems in the hospitality sector which is a notoriously demanding, low-wage, labor-intensive industry. Given that the majority of its employees are female and the majority of its managers are male, the research also suggests that hospitality must work towards creating a healthy gender culture which provides promotion pathways for all employees.

As the report concludes, 'Gender equality is promoted not only by creating a balance of masculinity-leadership and femininity-emotion stereotypes, but also by blending the emotional intelligence, passion, and caring nature commonly associated with women.'

## HOSPITALITY MUST WORK TOWARDS CREATING A HEALTHY GENDER CULTURE WHICH PROVIDES PROMOTION PATHWAYS FOR ALL EMPLOYEES.

online survey of staff from various departments, from housekeeping to reception, as well as food and beverage. Data was subsequently analysed from 466 staff who completed a questionnaire which asked them to rate the personality traits of their managers.

Ideal gender roles were determined in two stages. Based on previous studies and recognized leadership evaluations, the first

predominantly feminine, androgynous (exhibiting both masculine and feminine attributes), and undifferentiated (predominantly neither masculine nor feminine).

To measure perceptions of emotional leadership, participants were asked to rate their managers according to whether they increased positive emotions and decreased negative emotions. Using a six-point scale from 'strongly



# RESEARCHERS IN FOCUS

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Dr. Bendegul Okumus and the research team investigate gender stereotyping in hospitality and its impact on employees' perceived emotional leadership.

## CO-AUTHORS

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Xiong, W., Chen, S., Okumus, B., & Fan, F. (2022). Gender stereotyping and its impact on perceived emotional leadership in the hospitality industry: A mixed-methods study. *Tourism Management*, 90, 104476. [doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104476](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2021.104476)

## PERSONAL RESPONSE

### **How applicable do you think the research findings are to hospitality businesses in different cultural settings?**

// Given the severity of gender discrimination that still exists in some cultures, this study once again proved to hospitality human resources (HR) professionals the importance of a healthy gender culture, fair wages, and promotion pathways for all employees in the hospitality industry. Therefore, the negative effects of gender culture and gender leadership stereotypes are important issues that should be addressed by HR management. This study gives tips in promotion and recruitment that can be considered for the entire hospitality sector.

Higher Perceived Emotional Leadership means better emotional management that can help employees respond more positively to stress from the pandemic and further enhance their perceived organizational trust or loyalty to get through such difficult times now and in the future. Similar points are emphasized in the Gender Research Report of the International Labor Office, and it is stated that many organizations expect both masculine and feminine qualities from leaders to ensure work balance and job satisfaction among employees at all levels. As a result of the global diversity of tourism and hospitality, women's cultural and political roles in the economic and employment sectors are increasing, encouraging female workers to showcase their talents at the same level as their male counterparts. As a result, hiring leaders with androgynous management traits will help establish a different management style in the workplace. Also, as our study supports, gender equality is promoted not only by creating a balance of masculinity-leadership and femininity-emotional stereotypes, but also by blending the emotional intelligence, passion, and caring nature commonly associated with women. Carefully crafted communication channels will help motivate leaders with androgynous management characteristics to showcase their talents in workplace settings. When selecting speakers or trainers for staff training, conferences or other activities, priority may be given to successful leaders (especially women) with androgynous personalities to promote social dialogue and gender equality in the workplace. //

## Dr. Bendegul Okumus

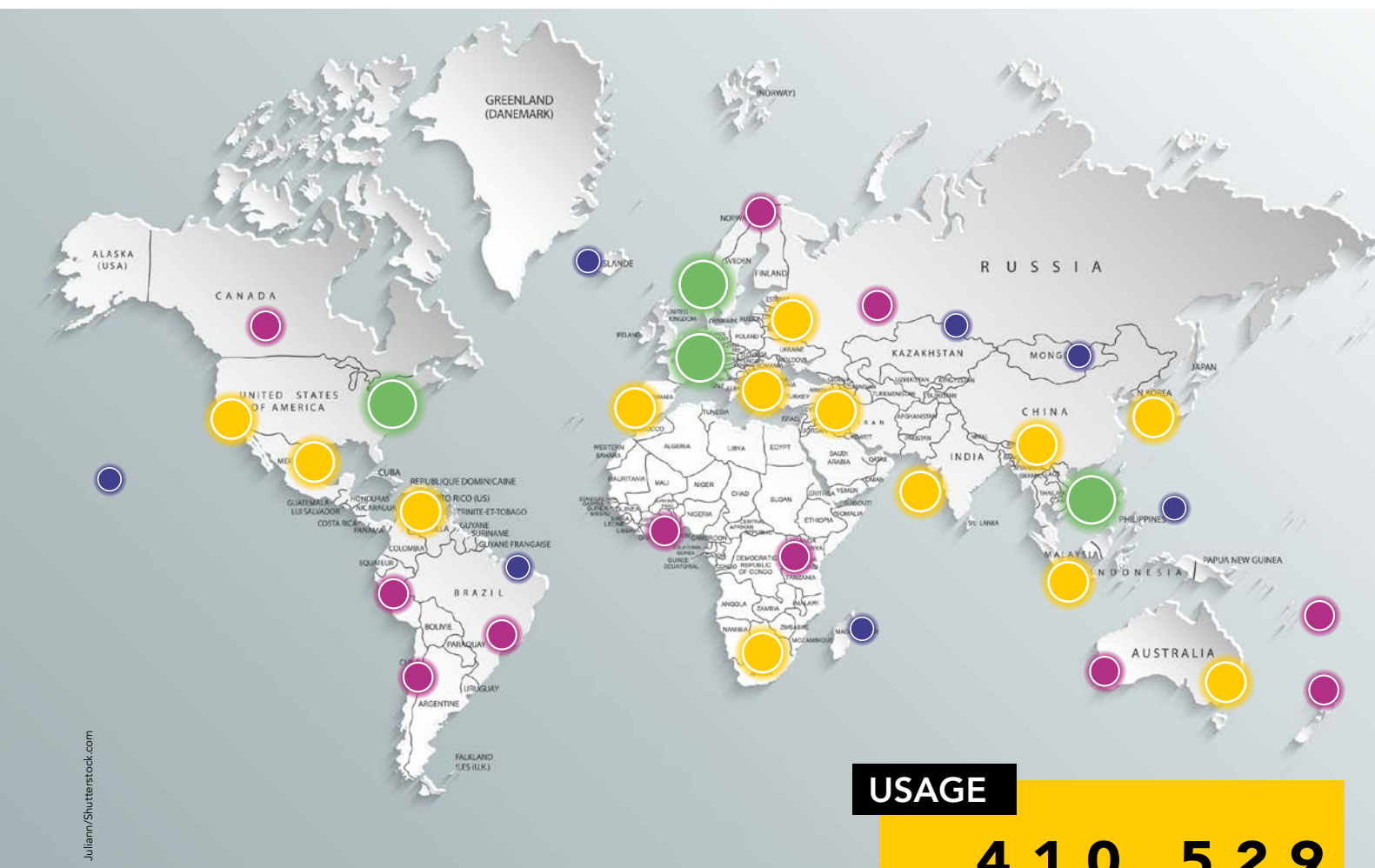


Dr. Bendegul Okumus has been at UCF Rosen College of Hospitality Management since 2016. Her primary teaching areas include nutrition concepts and issues in food services, sustainability, and health and wellness management in hospitality and tourism. Her research focuses on food safety, eating behavior and habits, food and culinary tourism, food waste and sustainability, health, and wellness in hospitality, and occupational wellness.

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# ROSEN COLLEGE RESEARCH DISTRIBUTION MAP AND RESEARCH

Below are statistics for the Rosen College of Hospitality Management's faculty research. These statistics include Rosen Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works, Dick Pope Sr. Institute for Tourism Studies, and the Rosen Research Review.



## USAGE

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## ABSTRACT VIEWS

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