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Editorial

Businesses navigate a complex and ever-changing terrain in the contemporary global landscape, marked by the persistent pace of technological evolution, economic trends, and constantly evolving consumer expectations. This challenge is particularly relevant for enterprises in emerging markets, where competition is fierce. Adaptability and innovation become essential for success in this climate. Businesses must accept change as a constant. Keeping up with new technology developments, adapting corporate strategies promptly to economic changes, and developing innovative customer value propositions require staying abreast of technological advancements. Given this background, the articles in this Special Issue—Quality and Firm Performance—align perfectly to cover emerging nations from African, Asian and European contexts.

The leading article by Shora and Shora relates to quality services in hotel industry in the emerging markets of former Soviet states. A service-driven economy, where hospitality is essential, requires businesses to adapt to customer service quality perceptions. The growing diversity of global travelers highlights the need to recognize country-specific hotel service quality perceptions. The paper compares service quality expectations of tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries, revealing subtle differences. This study establishes a foundation for subsequent discourse on how tourists from former Soviet republics and Western countries develop perceptions of service quality that impact their level of satisfaction with hotels. The study emphasizes the need for a nuanced strategy to meet these two traveler groups' expectations. It offers tips on improving hotels' services to attract international customers.

Singhania and Panda in the second article highlight the significance of intellectual capital and the use of intangible assets in business innovations for the measurement of firm performance. They recommend comprehensive accounting system, recognizing Intellectual Capital in India. Since financial statements conceal nearly 90 percent of a company's market value, this study examines the understudied relationship between intellectual capital disclosure and financial performance. The paper shows that improved intellectual capital disclosure boosts market capitalization, investor confidence, and transparency. Relationship capital and structural capital disclosures boost financial performance by highlighting a firm's unique and non-substitutable assets. Still, Human Capital disclosures could hurt performance due to their sensitivity and the risk of competitors poaching key employees. Corporate managers can balance transparency with competitive advantage by strategically selecting annual report content.

In the next article, Khan and Azam explain the changing chatbot research landscape in hospitality and tourism in the face of the industrial revolution and technological advancement. They find that chatbots can help hospitality and tourism businesses identify customer experiences, improve service delivery, and transform operations. Their main contribution is the article’s bibliometric analysis of eight years of research in this field. The article lists five major research clusters contextualising chatbots' diverse hospitality and tourism roles. This article relates to the role of culture, customer emotions, and human-machine relations in the future. Service robots and other emerging technologies present challenges and opportunities that need exploration. The list of prolific authors, leading journals, influential articles, and dominant countries is helpful for academics, practitioners, and decision-makers.

Ubuntu, an African ideologue, offers hope and wisdom in a rapidly changing global business landscape. In the last article, Longweni and Mdaka examine Ubuntu's profound impact on business research in South Africa, and discuss Ubuntu's origins, descriptions, and business outcomes to illuminate its benefits and drawbacks. Based on compassion, interconnectedness, and ethics, Ubuntu could change business. It fosters collaboration, employee engagement, and belonging, creating a more inclusive and socially responsible corporate culture. Ubuntu has timeless relevance as the world seeks new ethical and inclusive business practices, and its extensive review can inspire managers and researchers. The paper suggests researching Ubuntu's principles to create a more compassionate and connected business environment.

In the book review section by Rebucas, the review of *Introduction to Global Business: Understanding the International Environment and Global Business Functions* by Gaspar, Kolari, Hise, Bierman, Smith, and Arreola-Risa is beneficial for students and professionals in this complex field. The book makes global business appealing. It tells a global trade story, not just facts and theories. The author's overview of the worldwide marketplace covers globalization, international cultures, legal frameworks, and ethics. The reviewer commends the book's teaching. Chapter openers, learning objectives, summaries, questions, mini-cases, and portfolio projects engage readers. The book addresses global business management challenges in an age of cultural intelligence, ethics, and corporate responsibility. Reviewers say the book shows how multinational companies plan, organize, and run their international operations. Globalization keeps industries and economies changing, making "Introduction to Global Business" relevant.

Each article and the book review presented in this Special Issue collectively shed light on crucial facets concerning the era that demands focus on quality and firm performance in emerging markets. These articles add various facets to these dimensions, emphasizing the need for a nuanced approach that embraces diversity, intellectual capital, organizational trust, and cutting-edge technologies. Quality and firm performance are vital to success, fostering an environment of greater interconnectedness, ethics, and inclusion.

We hope the articles in this issue will be both thought provoking and educational for the scholarly community. With such a diverse collection of materials, while researchers can discover new questions to explore, policymakers and executives will improve consumer information and use practical suggestions to improve their organizations' performance on a strategic and tactical level.

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Perceived service quality of tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries: a comparative study

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This study investigates differences in customer satisfaction between post-Soviet and Western tourists' perceptions of hotel service quality. Because of the post-USSR split in tourists, the West has divergent experiences in developing their services. There has been little research on whether tourists from former Soviet nations perceive service quality similarly to Westerners. The study adopted a qualitative analysis to address this gap and examined online Booking.com reviews utilizing the HOLSERV Plus scale to measure perceived service quality with ten crucial quality attributes. The findings of this study suggest that tourists consider tangible aspects, such as *rooms*, *facilities*, and *surroundings*, as important to Western tourists. At the same time, they distinguish the intangible elements of hotel services, namely, *employees* and *reliability*. These results provide a foundation for further discussion on how tourists from former Soviet republics and Western countries form their perceptions of service quality, ultimately affecting hotel satisfaction.

Keywords: service quality, tourist, western country,

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Introduction

Despite more than three decades since the collapse of the USSR, there is a dearth of empirical studies examining whether tourists from post-Soviet nations have attained parity with their Western peers in terms of their perception of hotel service quality. This knowledge gap is particularly concerning given the growth of the tourism industry in the region and the potential impact of customer satisfaction on the success of hospitality businesses (Tolkach & Tse 2016). In the contemporary service-driven economy, measuring service quality is critical to business success (Wong Ooi Mei et al. 1999). However, with the growing diversity of global travelers, it is increasingly important to recognize the variation in perceptions of hotel service quality according to their country of origin (Albayrak et al. 2010, Francesco & Roberta 2019). This issue has been examined in numerous comparative studies, such as those involving visitors from Asia and Australia (Reisinger & Turner 2002), different regions of Europe (Tsiotsou 2021) or China (Tsai et al. 2011). The results of these studies suggest that the service quality expectations of tourists can vary widely across nations, as evidenced by the fact that Italians may prioritize restaurant and room upgrades, while Americans may place a higher value on staff competence (Francesco & Roberta 2019). These findings highlight the importance of taking a country-specific approach to service quality in the hospitality industry and underscore the need for hotel operators to tailor their services. Despite the growing importance of the service sector in post-Soviet republics following the rapid structural changes of the 1990s and 2000s, there is a notable lack of research on how visitors from these countries perceive hotel service quality, which has been highlighted by several studies (Gnusowski 2020, Tsiotsou 2019). Identifying hotel attributes that contribute to customer satisfaction is a popular approach to evaluating how hotel guests perceive service quality. One widely used tool for measuring customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry is the HOLSERV Plus measurement tool (Boon et al. 2013), which is specifically designed to capture and assess key customer satisfaction indicators in the hospitality industry.

The study aims to address the identified research gap and explore differences in hotel service evaluations among tourists from post-Soviet states and Western countries. The first research objective is to identify ten hotel attributes of service quality that are most important to tourists from post-Soviet states and Western countries. The second research objective is to investigate service quality dimensions that may contribute to customer satisfaction of tourists from the former USSR and Western countries. The following section examines the differences between tourists from former Soviet republics and Western countries and introduces the concept of perceived service quality and the measurement tool, followed by the conceptual framework and propositions development. The methodology used for this study is covered in the following chapter, while the results are presented in a later chapter, concluding with a discussion and potential directions for future research.

Literature Review

Differences between Tourists from Former USSR and the Western Countries

Tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries have a range of historical, cultural, and economic differences that can significantly impact their satisfaction with hotels. Despite the significance of these differences, there has been relatively little research on the disparities in perceived service quality and customer satisfaction between travelers from post-Soviet and Western countries. While some studies focus on Eastern Europe (Tsiotsou 2019 2021) and Russia (Tolkach & Tse 2016), the rest of the countries dealing with post-Soviet heritage are yet to be researched. *Historical* distinctions between tourists from the former USSR and Western countries are particularly noteworthy, with tourism in the USSR being a fully state-controlled industry (Slocum & Klitsounova 2020). Furthermore, domestic tourism existed in the form of social tourism as a part of the benefit system for the working class, while outgoing tourism was heavily limited; thus, the great majority of Soviet citizens were never exposed to foreign tourist experience (Assipova & Minnaert 2014). After the fall of the USSR, 15 post-Soviet republics faced rapid and radical economic, political, and social changes, opposite to Western countries that gradually transitioned to service-driven economies. *Cultural* differences are one of the most significant distinctions between tourists from former USSR countries and Western countries. Ex-Soviet customers' perception of service quality was influenced by numerous factors, such as challenges of adjusting to the realities of the new world, lack of social trust (Gnusowski 2020), and differences in mentality (Keller 2005), to name a few. These factors translated into a somewhat contemptuous attitude towards workers in the service sector and their view as people unable to get employed for a *real* job (déric Jallat & Shekshnya 2000). *Economic* differences between the former USSR and Western countries can also influence tourists’ satisfaction with hotels. As developing countries, many post-Soviet states have lower incomes than Western countries (Usman et al. 2021), meaning that tourists from these countries may have less disposable income to spend on hotels and hotel services.

Perceived Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction

Service quality and customer satisfaction are closely related because the level of service quality that a hotel provides can have a significant impact on a guest's overall satisfaction. Research has shown a positive relationship between perceived service quality and customer satisfaction (Shafiq et al. 2019). Using online reviews and identifying the most common keywords, hotels can pinpoint areas in hotel service that may need improvement (Kalnaovakul & Promsivapallop 2022).

Hotel Service Quality Dimensions: Tangible and Intangible

The hotel product is not solely classified as either tangible or intangible, as it is a combination of both (Maric et al. 2016, Shostack 1977). The terms *tangibility* or *physical quality* typically refer to the external appearance of hotel facilities, including their accommodation and restaurant facilities, whereas intangible attributes are primarily service-related, such as customer service, understanding and caring on the part of hotel management or assurance (Ramanathan & Ramanathan 2011), and even ambient factors such as air quality, temperature, odour, and noise level (Suh et al. 2015). In the study of selected ex-USSR countries by Albayrak et al. (2010), tangible elements of hotel products had a greater influence on overall customer satisfaction than intangible elements (except in the case of Latvia). However, Maric et al. (2016) found that Serbian tourists generally attach more importance to intangible attributes, as guests value confidence in the hotel's staff. In the case of Western tourists, specifically British guests, Ekinci et al. (1998) found that intangible elements of service quality were rated higher than tangible elements. These findings support Heide et al. (1999) argument that customer satisfaction with hotel products depends on tangible and intangible dimensions.

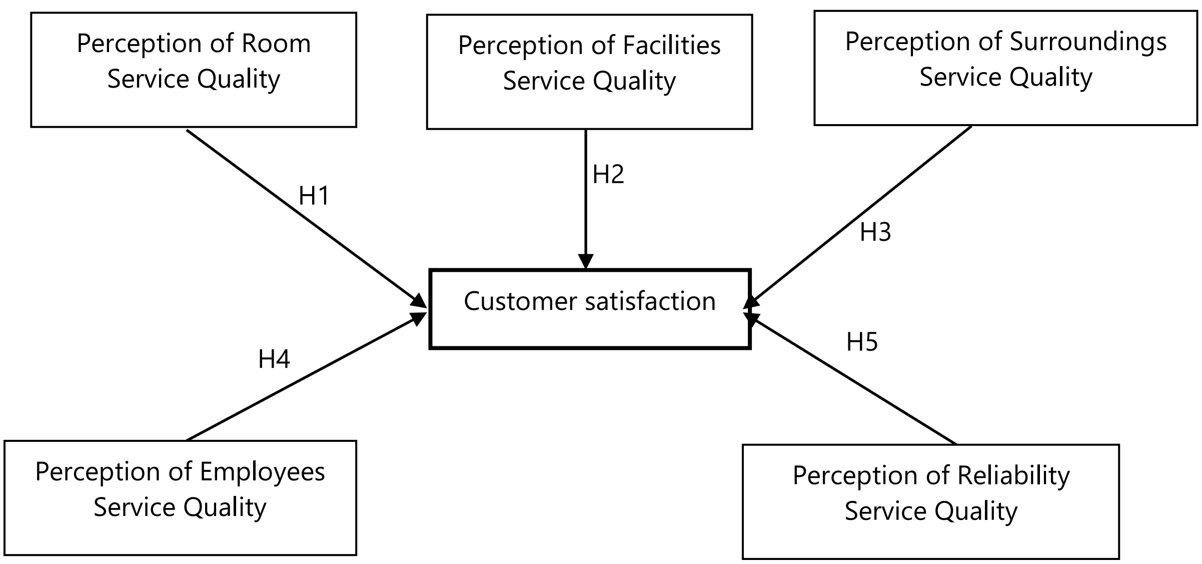
HOLSERV Plus

While SERVQUAL is a widely recognized multi-dimensional instrument (Shafiq et al. 2019), researchers have proposed alternative tools tailored to the hospitality industry. One such instrument is the LODGSERV scale, an adapted version of SERVQUAL comprising 26 questionnaire items developed by Knutson et al. (1990). However, to address the unique needs of the hotel industry, further refinement was deemed necessary, leading to the development of the HOLSERV scale by Wong Ooi Mei et al. (1999), which includes *employees*, *tangibles*, and *reliability*. The HOLSERV Plus scale is a newer alternative tool proposed by Boon et al. (2013), which is found to be particularly relevant for evaluating service quality in the hotel industry as it recognizes the tangible and intangible elements of hotel services. This newer tool consists of five dimensions described: (1) Room: Equipment, fixtures and fittings in the hotel room, services available in the room, cleanliness and user-friendliness. (2) Facilities: Facilities and services available in the hotel (outside the room) such as breakfast, restaurants and bars, pool and fitness or spa facilities. (3) Surroundings: Location of the hotel, proximity to amenities, public transport, and attractions. (4) Employees: General appearance and behavior of staff, promptness, politeness, understanding, neatness. (5) Reliability: The willingness of staff to help guests in specific situations, and the way they handle requests and complaints”.

Several studies have demonstrated the tool’s practical value. Bigi and Bonera (2016) have emphasized the usefulness of HOLSERV Plus in their research on tourists' perceptions of wine districts and hotels. The authors found that the distinction between the three tangible dimensions of *room*, *hotel* and *outside* helped them better understand the features that mattered most to their participants. Rus et al. (2019) have found that this scale's dimensions were more consistent than those of the SERVQUAL scale. Specifically, they utilized hotel reviews from the Traveloka website to measure sentiment toward hotel service quality. Moreover, Kalnaovakul and Promsivapallop (2022, p.21) further demonstrated "the robustness of the HOLSERV Plus model that can be applied to the online review context with some modifications" by applying topic modeling to online reviews and identifying dimensions that corresponded well to those of the HOLSERV framework.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

The proposed conceptual framework for this study posits that customer satisfaction is a function of five service quality dimensions, which are measured using the HOLSERV Plus scale. The framework was inspired by Shafiq et al. (2019), who tested the relationship between Servqual dimensions and customer satisfaction, whereas the framework adapted for this study tests the relationship between perceived service quality of HOLSERV Plus dimensions and customer relationships. As shown in the framework suggests that each of these dimensions (independent variables) has a direct effect on customer satisfaction (the dependent variable). The study hypothesizes that by measuring the salience of each dimension, it will be possible to assess how tourists from post-Soviet countries and Western states prioritize different dimensions of service quality in the hotel setting. Boon et al. (2013) have highlighted that HOLSERV Plus can be used to identify differences based on geographical location. Therefore, this study applies the HOLSERV Plus scale to measure the perceptions of service quality across the five dimensions for tourists from post-Soviet countries and Western states. Using this conceptual model, this study aims to compare the tourists' scores and identify any significant differences in their perceptions of service quality. Overall, this approach will shed light on the factors that drive customer satisfaction in the hotel industry.



Source: the authors

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Given the current lack of relevant information in English-language academic research, it is essential to consult literature pertaining to individual post-Soviet countries and the Eastern Bloc countries to formulate hypotheses.

Room

The findings of comparative studies on tourists from the former Soviet Union and Western countries indicate that “room” dimension plays a significant role in customer satisfaction. Tsiotsou (2019, 2021) reported that Eastern Europeans place greater importance on room quality, cleanliness, and sleeping quality than Western and South European tourists but less than Northern Europeans. In contrast, Üngüren et al. (2021) found that Russians prioritize hygiene and cleanliness slightly less than Germans but value room design and comfort slightly more than German tourists. When considering single-country studies, differences in how tourists prioritize hotel attributes become apparent. For example, Tolkach and Tse (2016) discovered that among eight studied themes in tourist reviews, Russian travelers ranked room amenities as the third most popular theme, with modern fittings and large room sizes receiving the highest number of comments. In contrast, the bed and sleep quality were mentioned significantly less. Comparatively, Tsai et al. (2011) found that representatives from Western countries (i.e. the UK, the USA, Australia, and France) placed less emphasis on room spaciousness and comfort of bedding, instead prioritizing cleanliness, non-smoking rooms, and soundproofing. Based on the findings of comparative studies, we suggest the following hypothesis:

H1. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place higher importance on the perceived service quality of the room dimension than Western tourists.

Facilities

The *facilities* dimension is highly variable, making comprehensive discussion challenging. However, comparative studies have shown that Russian tourists prioritize such hotel attributes as beverage variety, aquaparks, spas, parking, and pools, while German travelers prioritize buffet variety (Üngüren et al. 2021). Single-country studies have identified insightful differences. For instance, Tolkach and Tse (2016) found that food and beverage was the second most common theme in Russian tourist reviews (44%), with a particular emphasis on tasty food (20%) and a variety of dishes and cuisines (10%). This contrasts with Western tourists, as demonstrated in Torres et al.'s (2014) study, where the average percentage of reviews mentioning culinary options in room service and restaurants was only 11-13 percent per country (i.e. USA, Northern Europe, Canada). Other facilities, such as spas, gyms, and saunas, were cited less frequently by Russian tourists, with less than 5 percent of reviews (Tolkach & Tse 2016) in contrast to Westerners who referenced them in up to 23 percent of reviews (Torres et al. 2014). Leaning to the findings of single-country studies, we propose the following:

H2. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place higher importance on the perceived service quality of the facilities dimension than Western tourists.

Surrounding

The *surrounding* dimension has received relatively little attention in academic literature. Tsiotsou (2019) reported that Eastern European tourists gave the location the lowest rating compared to Northern, Western, and Southern Europeans. However, Üngüren et al. (2021) found that beaches and landscaping were more important to Russians than Germans. According to single-country studies, Russian tourists appear to place more emphasis on location, including scenic views and accessibility (Tolkach & Tse 2016), while Western tourists highly prioritize convenience in tourist attractions (Tsai et al. 2011), which was the second most important attribute among 11 overall attributes for tourists from the USA and UK, with *ambience* and *near MTR station* ranking fifth and sixth, respectively. Thus, we propose the following:

H3. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place relatively lower importance on the perceived service quality of the surroundings dimension than to Western tourists.

Employees

The *employees* dimension of the HOLSERV Plus scale pertains to intangible aspects of hotel services. Comparative studies have shown that Eastern Europeans rank service slightly higher than other Europeans (Tsiotsou 2019 2021). Üngüren et al. (2021) found that Russian and German tourists valued "employee's attitude and behavior" similarly. Single-country studies have shown that Russian tourists tend to rank employees (22% of all reviews) lower than other service quality categories, with emphasizing attentiveness (8%), friendliness (7%), and speed of service (3%) (Tolkach & Tse 2016). Simultaneously, Georgian tourists have shown a higher level of appreciation for the *responsiveness* (22%), *empathy* (16%), and *assurance* (11%) dimensions of hotel service (Todua & Jashi, 2016). In contrast, tourists from the US, Northern Europe and Canada showed a greater emphasis on services. Specifically, they emphasized a high importance on accommodating or flexible service (32-53% of cases), friendliness (52-79%), professionalism (16-58%), needs fulfillment (34-42%), personalized services (3-16%) and efficiency/timeliness, (20-32%) (Torres et al. 2014). Furthermore, Tsang and Ap (2007) reported that Western tourists preferred proactive aspects of service, such as *made to feel welcome* and *willingness to help*. Based on the relatively lower ranking and percentage of tourists from the ex-USSR in comparative studies, we propose the following:

H4. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place lower importance on the perceived service quality of the room dimension than to Western tourists.

Reliability

Due to the scarcity of extant literature, it is challenging to conclude the significance of the r*eliability* dimension. However, single-country studies shed some light on this matter. For instance, Russian tourists value staff's ability to respond to enquiries, with five percent of all reviews mentioning this aspect (Tolkach & Tse 2016). Additionally, Georgian tourists rated reliability as the most critical aspect, assigning it a 32 percent share in the SERVQUAL study (Todua & Jashi 2016). In comparison, tourists from the US, Northern Europe, and Canada emphasized *problem resolution*, with shares of 26.4 percent, 42 percent, and 42 percent, respectively (Torres et al. 2014). Moreover, "responding effectively to enquiries" was identified as a significant aspect by guests from the US, Australia, and Canada (Tsang & Ap 2007). Based on the studies, we suggest the following:

H5. Tourists from post-Soviet countries place lower importance on the perceived service quality of the reliability dimension than to Western tourists.

Methodology

Data Collection

The data were collected from online reviews posted on Booking.com pages of selected hotels between November 2018 and December 2021 through the web scraping technique using BeautifulSoup. This Python library allows online data extraction (Egger et al. 2022). Forty-three hotels located in 12 former Soviet countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan) and operating under one of the world's largest and renowned hotel brands were chosen as the analysis sample. The customers' reviews were separated into two categories based on the reviewers' countries of origin: fifteen former Soviet republics and select Western countries (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland). In total, 11,609 reviews were sourced: 10,591 for former USSR and 1,018 for Western countries.

The results of web scraping were stored in Microsoft Excel for processing. First, the data were cleaned by filling in missing scores, country of origin and reviews. Second, the non-English reviews were identified and labeled according to their respective language names by utilizing langdetect. This Python-based library is a direct port of Google's language-detection library (Egger & Gokce 2022). Once the language of the reviews was identified, the reviews were then translated into English using TextBlob, a Python library suitable for performing translations (Bonta et al. 2019). Then, the text mining approach was adopted via SpaCy, a Python package, for distinguishing word couples (Egger & Gokce 2022). The next four steps have been suggested in some studies (Khotimah & Sarno 2018). First, the tokenization technique was applied to cut text into a couple of words. Second, the words were given their basic forms by being removed from affixes and reduced to their roots via stemming algorithms. Third, the lemmatization technique was adopted to group the synonymous forms of words into single root forms for further analyses. Lastly, stop words (i.e. conjunctions, *hotel*, the hotel's brand) were eliminated, and punctuation removal was applied.

Data Analysis

Two-word clouds (one per country group) were produced in Python as a means to visualize the terms that tourists use to convey their satisfaction (Seočanac & Čelić 2020). It should be emphasized that only terms that could be classified according to the HOLSERV Plus dimensions were included in the subsequent analysis. For instance, the popular term *comfortable* was mentioned in relation to both rooms and facilities in the reviews, making it an ambiguous attribute, and, therefore, it was excluded from the analysis. To identify the ten most frequently mentioned hotel attributes among tourists from the former Soviet Union and Western countries, attribute salience was calculated using a formula adopted from Kalnaovakul & Promsivapallop (2022):

Attribute salience = Number of Reviews/Total Number of Reviews

Attribute salience represents the percentage of reviews containing a particular attribute divided by the total number of reviews. A higher attribute salience indicates that a larger proportion of reviews are related to a particular hotel attribute compared to the total number of reviews. Further, the dimension salience was calculated by summing the hotel attributes falling under each of the HOLSERV Plus dimensions.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the ten hotel attributes that were most frequently mentioned.

Table 1. Hotel Attributes

Dimension/attribute	*USSR Salience (%)*	*West Salience (%)*
Room	52.53	45.78
Facilities/breakfast	45.51	39.49
Employees/staff	27.29	34.97
Surrounding/location	18.36	23.48
Room/bed	16.32	16.70
Facilities/spa	11.09	13.46
Facilities/parking	10.25	12.87
Employees/friendliness	10.18	12.57
Facilities/restaurant	9.76	10.90
Surrounding/window	9.46	9.53

Source: the authors

The findings indicate that eight out of the ten hotel attributes were consistently important for both groups of tourists, namely: *room, breakfast, staff, location, bed, spa, friendly, and restaurant*. However, tourists from the former USSR have identified *parking* and *window* as the two most important attributes, while Western tourists have prioritized *service* and *helpful* hotel attributes. In terms of ranking, the study found that tourists from the former Soviet Union consider the importance of dimensions influencing hotel service quality in the following order: *facilities, room, employees*, and *surroundings*, with *reliability* not being regarded as significant. In contrast, Western tourists place importance on the dimensions in the following order: *employees, facilities, room, surroundings,* and *reliability*.

Table 2 compares the importance of each dimension for tourists from both the former Soviet Union and Western countries and enables the confirmation or disconfirmation of propositions through the depiction of dimension salience values. The results of the study indicate that all propositions, except for one (H3), received support from the data.

Table 2. Hypotheses

No	*Hypotheses (Service quality of)*	*Former USSR (%)*	*Western Countries (%)*	*t/p values*	*Result*
H1	*Room*	68.84	59.23	4.52/.00	Supported
H2	*Facilities*	76.62	62.48	4.50/.00	Supported
H3	*Surroundings*	27.82	23.48	.19/.84	Unsupported
H4	*Employees*	37.47	64.54	-7.63/.00	Supported
H5	*Reliability*	0.0	10.90	-7.54/.00	Supported

Discussion

There is little doubt that understanding the ways tourists perceive hotel service quality allows hotel managers to work toward improvement of customer satisfaction. Tourists from post-Soviet states may have distinct perceptions of hotel service quality due to cultural differences, such as their mentality, experiences, and expectations (déric Jallat & Shekshnya 2000, Gnusowski 2020), which highlights the need for hotel managers to adapt their strategies for this customer segment in comparison with Western travelers. Around 30 years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there is still a lack of empirical research on tourists' perceptions of hotel service quality. Thus, one justification for this study is to address that shortage. The study found that there were relatively minor differences in perceived service quality of tangible elements (i.e. room, facilities, and surroundings) between tourists from post-Soviet Union and Western countries, while more significant differences were observed in intangible aspects (i.e. employees and reliability). Upon examining the importance assigned by tourists from the ex-USSR, it is evident that while two tangible dimensions are of utmost importance, one intangible dimension holds greater significance than the third tangible dimension. These findings are somewhat at odds with Albayrak et al. (2010) claim that tangible elements of hotel services had a greater impact on overall customer satisfaction than intangible elements (except for Latvia) in their study of selected ex-USSR countries. Still, they align with Maric et al.'s (2016) finding that Serbian tourists placed greater importance on intangible attributes. For Western tourists, the study supports Ekinci et al. (1998) conclusion (among British guests) that intangible elements of service quality were rated higher than tangible elements. Our study complements the work of Gnusowski (2020), who investigated service markets (e.g. retail, financial) among citizens in Eastern bloc countries, while our study focuses on tourists from fifteen former Soviet republics and their perceptions of hotel service quality.

As the relevant academic literature pertaining to tourists' understanding of service quality is limited to scarce research on Eastern Europe and Russia, our discussion relies on the knowledge of tourist perceptions of service quality from other parts of the world. The room hotel attribute in the "room" dimension is the most important attribute for travelers from both ex-USSR and Western countries, as hotels primarily serve as a place to sleep when away from home. However, tourists from ex-USSR place greater importance on the room and bed attributes than those from Western countries. Therefore, it is advisable to prioritize the preferences for room design and bed quality of tourists from the post-Soviet Union when necessary. At the same time, hotel managers must always strive to offer satisfactory quality rooms and beds, which would benefit the satisfaction of tourists from both country groups. The importance of breakfast in the *facilities* dimension reinforces its significance for perceived service quality, as it is consistently highlighted as a crucial hotel attribute in other studies (Seočanac & Čelić 2020). As breakfast is more important to tourists from former Soviet countries than Western travelers, hotels should prioritize catering to this preference. On the other hand, since spa facilities are slightly less important to tourists from ex-USSR, hotels should pay closer attention to the preferences of Western guests regarding this aspect. Parking is a distinct hotel attribute that stands out in reviews from tourists from ex-USSR, potentially indicating their preference for independent travel and do-it-yourself culture, as discussed by Gnusowski (2020).

Hotel managers have no control over the location of their property, which is a key attribute in the *surroundings* dimension. Therefore, they can either leverage the location to their advantage by promoting scenic views and proximity to popular attractions or mitigate its negative impact by providing shuttle services. The higher importance of location to Western tourists may be attributed to their unfamiliarity with the countries of the former Soviet Union. Interestingly, tourists from ex-USSR place a higher value on windows, consistent with the findings of Tolkach and Tse (2016), who noted the tourists' appreciation for scenic views. Hotel guests from ex-USSR countries place less importance on the staff and friendly hotel attributes belonging to the *employees* dimension. In contrast, Western tourists' high appreciation for personalized service has been highlighted in previous studies (Torres et al. 2014; Tsiotsou 2021). Therefore, it is critical for hotel managers to ensure the highest level of personalized service possible when dealing with Western guests. Although personalized services must be offered to all guests regardless of their origin, Western tourists would be the ones to appreciate it the most. The *reliability* dimension, represented by the helpful hotel attribute, is only highly appreciated by guests from Western countries. The study by Tsang and Ap (2007) confirms that Western tourists highly value hotel employees' eagerness to help. Therefore, it is critical for hotel managers to ensure that personnel attitude and willingness to help and effectively handle guests' requests and complaints are of the highest level when dealing with Western guests. This does not mean that guests from post-Soviet countries do not value helpful staff, but rather that they may be less likely to ask for help due to their low-trust societies and DIY culture (Gnusowski 2020).

Implications for Managers

The findings of this study offer two key benefits for hotel managers. Firstly, by identifying the specific aspects that guests from post-Soviet Union and Western countries value most highly, hotel managers can more efficiently tailor their services and amenities to meet these preferences. Secondly, it is recommended that hotel managers utilize the HOLSERV Plus scale to evaluate customer satisfaction and measure service quality as perceived by their guests. To satisfy guests from both the former Soviet Union and Western countries, hotel managers should ensure the basic quality of tangible elements of hotel services (room, facilities and surroundings) and effectively differentiate intangible aspects (employees and reliability). For instance, as eight hotel attributes are featured on the list of the ten most frequently mentioned hotel attributes by both groups of tourists, it is crucial to ensure satisfactory service levels to satisfy guests from the former Soviet Union and Western countries. Additionally, tourists from the ex-USSR prefer rooms with windows that offer scenic views. Therefore, accommodating these guests in rooms with scenic views could result in higher customer satisfaction. Furthermore, guests from Western countries place a high value on the competency and reliability of staff members, which is not as crucial for tourists from post-Soviet states. Therefore, hotel managers should prioritize staff training to ensure they can meet the expectations of Western tourists. Additionally, self-service technology such as kiosks providing various information (e.g. tourist attractions, hotel facilities) or services (e.g. check-in/check-out) may be more suitable for guests from post-Soviet countries.

Conclusion

This study aimed to examine differences in hotel service quality satisfaction between tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries using Booking.com reviews for 43 hotels in post-Soviet countries. The study facilitates a comparison of customer satisfaction using five dimensions of the HOLSERV Plus scale, designed to measure hotel service quality through a qualitative analysis of hotel evaluations. Two lists of the ten most frequently mentioned hotel attributes comprised tourists from former Soviet states and Western countries. The findings indicate significant similarities in perceived service quality between tourists from ex-USSR and Western countries, as eight out of ten hotel attributes are common to both groups of tourists. The study revealed that tourists placed comparable importance on tangible aspects (room, facilities, and surroundings) while distinguishing intangible elements of hotel services (employees and reliability), which presents opportunities for service customization. This study provides a basis for further discussion on how tourists from former Soviet republics and Western countries form impressions of service quality that influence their satisfaction with hotels.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

The study acknowledges several limitations with respect to its scope, sample size, and analysis. Firstly, the study was restricted to data obtained from Booking.com, which resulted in partial information and excluded tourists who may have been unwilling to share their opinions online or who did not book accommodation through this platform. Thus, the study's results cannot be generalized to the entire tourism industry. Additionally, as the study is limited to English references only, other sources in different languages could have significantly improved the research and provided perspectives or insights not available in English sources. Furthermore, it is possible that some errors occurred while translating the original reviews into English, given the scope of the translated languages and the potential loss of language nuances in translation. Finally, some hotel attributes may have been classified into alternative dimensions of the HOLSERV Plus scale, as the classification was subjective in some cases.

Future research should be conducted using various data sources to examine the findings of this study, which has the potential to have greater applicability by utilizing other sources and exploring various factors that may impact tourist satisfaction. For instance, in addition to Booking.com, another popular website such as TripAdvisor could be used to gather tourists' opinions. Additionally, sentiment analysis of hotel attributes would enhance the discussion of customer satisfaction and perceived service quality by differentiating tourists' positive, negative, or neutral attitudes toward such attributes. Also, exploring the perception of service quality based on trip modes, such as business trips, family vacations, or couples' gateways, would provide insight into tourist satisfaction from both country groups. Moreover, analyzing hotel attributes based on star ratings would clarify distinctions between these tourists. Finally, investigating the hotel attributes most frequently mentioned in online reviews by tourists from the former Soviet Union and Western countries who stay in Western hotels (rather than in the ex-USSR countries) would also provide valuable insights.

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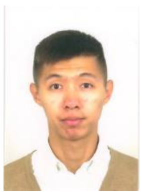

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Intellectual capital disclosure and firm performance relationship: evidence from leading Indian firms

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This study analyses the impact of intellectual capital disclosure on the firm's financial performance by developing a comprehensive intellectual capital disclosure index. The study reveals that although intellectual capital disclosure has an insignificant impact on the return on assets, it positively impacts the firm's market capitalization. Among the components of intellectual capital disclosure, Structural capital and Relational capital disclosure positively contribute to the relationship, while Human capital disclosure negatively impacts firm performance. These insights can aid firms in making strategic decisions regarding intellectual capital management and disclosure practices, potentially leading to improved firm performance. The originality of our study lies in the fact that while the literature on this relationship is scarce, with no study in the Indian context, our study provides a realistic conclusion to the intellectual capital disclosure-firm performance relationship and adds value to the current intellectual capital-driven competitive market.

Keywords: capital disclosure, firm performance, relational capital, structure capital, human capital

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Introduction

The unaccounted capital in business due to the traditional accounting system has been attributed to the knowledge aspect, which is the firm's intellectual capital (Abeysekera 2006). Presently, almost 90% of the firms' market value is not reflected in their financial statements due to the failure of the traditional accounting system to account for these value-creating resources (Ocean 2020). The increasing importance of these intangibles in the present knowledge economy has forced many firms and academicians to measure, manage, and report these resources. As a response, many researchers in the field of accounting and corporate governance have tried to measure the extent of Intellectual Capital (IC) disclosures across industries in different parts of the world (Bontis 2003, Joshi et al. 2012, Kamath 2008b). Some companies invest heavily in IC items like research and Development, skills, training, attitude, relationships, and other knowledge aspects needed to maintain competitive advantage, leadership, and profitability within the industry. Thus, it is important to report these IC items in the annual reports to keep investors well informed about the resources of the firm, which will not only reduce the information asymmetry and its related agency costs but also send a better signal to the market that gets reflected in firm performance and market price. However, it is explored that 78% of the global intangible value remains undisclosed (GIFT*TM* 2022).

Although there is a plethora of Intellectual Capital disclosure (ICD) research, there is no universally accepted disclosure index. The extant literature on IC has widely accepted three components: Human Capital, Structural Capital, and Relational Capital (Bontis et al. 2000, Vishnu & Gupta 2014). While studies on ICD have considered a list of items within these three components to measure the level of disclosures (Kamath 2008a, Salvi et al. 2020), these items include synonyms which are not clearly explained or defined. The consequential result is inaccurate scores due to the error of principles (omission or commission) by synonymous words and lack of explanation for the items to remove ambiguity. For example, Kamath (2017), in his framework, has used Knowledge Assets, Intellectual assets, intellectual resources, and IC as separate items within structural capital. So, a company can report the same asset with different names in different sections of the annual reports to get multiple scores for the same asset. Other studies (Abdolmohammadi 2005; Bukh et al. 2005) have considered a different IC division having four to ten components that cannot be compared to other studies on ICD and IC performance. After an extensive exploration of the extant literature, we could trace only one empirical study (Li et al. 2008) that defined the IC items for a proper disclosure index. However, this study is UK-based and can hardly be generalized to a developing country like India.

Many studies have related IC efficiency with firm performance (Hamdan 2018, Xu & Li 2022). However, we could trace only three studies regarding the relationship between ICD and firm performance (Orens et al. 2009, Vitolla et al. 2019). Although these studies conclude a significant positive effect of ICD on firm performance, it suffers from many limitations. While the study by Orens *et al.* (2009) focusing on European countries considers only a section of the year (Summer of 2002), Vitolla et al. (2019) have considered a small sample of 45 integrated reports that too for only two years and their analysis reveals the overall ICD, not the individual components. Further, the study by Abdolmohammadi (2005) has become, on the one hand, obsolete as its sample dates back to the previous century and, on the other hand, incomparable as it has used a different classification for the IC components.

Given the aforementioned research gap, our choice of an Indian study setting rests on the interesting fact about the value of intangible assets and its disclosure observed during the post-pandemic period. While the global intangible asset value decreased by almost 20 trillion USD in 2022 due to the apprehended financial recession following the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, during this period, India's intangible asset value rose by 1376 billion USD (the highest increase among all the nations), positioning it at the sixth spot for the total intangible asset value. Over 60 percent of India's asset value is intangible, but over 90 percent of these assets are undisclosed, indicating a lack of transparency and a need for better disclosure practices in India (GIFT*TM* 2022). In light of the above research problem, we have identified the following two pertinent research questions to be addressed. (1) How to correctly measure the disclosure of IC information? (2) Does ICD influence the firm performance in India?

In this study, we analyzed a sample of 133 NSE-listed firms for five years, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, using the PLS-SEM technique to unearth the effect of ICD and its components on firm performance measures: market capitalization and return on assets. The results reveal that ICD by the Indian firms positively influences their Market Capitalization but has an insignificant impact on their ROA. Among ICD components Relational Capital and Structural capital disclosure positively impact, while Human capital disclosure negatively impacts the firm performance. Our results will guide the management in deciding which IC information to report for increased firm performance and which information must be suppressed to retain competitive advantage. The results also imply that firms should upgrade their annual reports with a proper framework to report IC information in a structured manner without any ambiguity.

Our study contributes to the literature on ICD and its relationship with financial performance. Firstly, we propose an improved ICD framework that addresses previous limitations, including overlapping effects and a lack of item descriptions. Secondly, we add to the literature by analyzing the relationship between ICD and firm performance, an area neglected so far in the previous studies. Thirdly, we bridge the incomparability gap between IC performance and disclosure by utilizing the same IC components as prior studies on the relationship between IC and firm performance. Lastly, we refine the measurement of ICD by weighting each component based on its effect, providing a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between total ICD and firm performance.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Skandia AFS has broadly defined IC as "the possession of knowledge, applied experience, organizational technology, customer relationships, and professional skills that provide the firm with a competitive edge in the market" (Edvinsson 1997). The literature has widely accepted that IC is composed mainly of three components: human capital (the knowledge, skills, and experience of the employees), structural capital (knowledge in the organizational databases and processes of the firm), and relational capital (relationships with customers and other stakeholders) (Bontis 1998, Mubarik et al. 2022). The efforts to measure the ICD began in the previous century as many researchers tried developing a framework for measuring the ICD. The framework by Sveiby (1997) had 28 items divided into three categories: external structure, internal structure, and employee competence. This was one of the first coding frameworks. Another framework by Petty & Guthrie (2000) had 26 items classified into the same previous three categories. Further, Bontis (2003) had 38 items. However, there was no division of categories in his framework. The framework by Beattie & Thomson (2004) had 128 IC items divided into Human capital (HC), Structural capital (SC), and Relational capital (RC). Li et al. (2008) had 61 items divided into three categories: HC, SC, and RC. This framework explained each item to avoid errors of omission and commission. However, their framework has grouped items at a minimal level and ignored some crucial aspects. E.g. while they considered employee number, age, and diversity as separate items, they have ignored the health and safety measures taken by the company, their replacement ratio, and retirement benefits. Recently, in a theoretical analysis, a comprehensive framework was developed by Singhania & Panda (2023) in the Indian context, having 16 items in HC, 14 in RC, and 12 in SC. This framework has provided an explanation for each item, thereby removing ambiguity and withstanding the contemporary market requirement. However, we could not trace any empirical study using this framework.

While the literature on IC has focused chiefly on the IT Industry (Bhasin 2011, Joshi et al. 2011) and the Pharmaceutical Industry (Pal & Soriya 2012, Vishnu & Gupta 2014), a few studies on other industries have also been carried out (Kamath 2007). The previous study has found that the ICD of Indian Knowledge-sector firms, particularly in IT companies, is very low (Joshi et al. 2011). However, compared to countries like Australia, Indian companies report more IC information in their annual reports (Joshi et al. 2012). Kamath (2008b) found that IT companies have more disclosures than any other industry among her sample of 30 companies studied for the financial year 2005-06. With an increasing disclosure of IC information, knowing its impact on firm performance is vital. In line with signaling theory (Spence 1973), disclosing more IC information will send a better signal to the market about the companies' competitive advantage due to their IC. The market will comprehend this signal and behave accordingly by offering a higher price than those without the signal. In line with agency theory (Jensen & Meckling 1976), disclosing IC information will reduce the information asymmetry between the management and the stakeholders, thereby reducing agency costs and increasing trustworthiness. This will result in increased performance by the firm. Empirical studies on this relationship are very scarce. We could trace only three studies on this relationship (Orens et al. 2009, Vitolla et al. 2019), and all three studies found a positive impact on ICD on firm performance. Accordingly, we formulate the following generic and derivative hypotheses by considering the theoretical arguments and the previous empirical evidence from various study settings.

H1. Intellectual capital disclosure increases firm performance

Among ICD components, Human capital consisting of the collective capabilities and knowledge of employees is a valuable and scarce resource, which in line with resource-based theory, can lead to sustainable competitive advantage and in turn, improvement in firm performance. Reporting on human capital is crucial for effective management, allowing informed decisions and the leveraging of employees' abilities for a competitive advantage and increased firm value. Such transparency in annual reports signals trust and accountability, fostering reliability, while in the data-driven environment, it empowers decision-makers to allocate resources more effectively. Accordingly, a positive relationship between human capital disclosure and firm performance is hypothesized.

H1a. Human capital disclosure increases firm performance

Structural capital refers to a firm's infrastructure and intangible assets that enhance the firm’s ability to leverage its human capital effectively. By disclosing its structural capital, a firm signals the quality of its internal processes, systems, and knowledge management practices. Disclosing structural capital enhances a firm's transparency and credibility, reducing uncertainty and risk, and subsequently lowering the cost of capital, as evidenced by Mondal and Ghosh (2021). This reduction in the cost of capital, coupled with increased revenue, is expected to positively impact financial performance. Additionally, structural capital disclosure informs stakeholders about the company's intangible assets, intellectual property, patents, and trademarks, signifying its competitive advantage and helping protect these assets. Based on these arguments, the following sub-hypothesis is formulated:

H1b. Structural capital disclosure increases firm performance

Relational capital refers to the firm’s relationships with customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders, demonstrating its ability to generate future revenue and secure resources at a lower cost. It was initially a new concept, with a focus on customer capital, previously considered a part of structural capital. Customer capital, representing customer perceptions, is a key part of relational capital. Positive customer perceptions reduce promotional expenses while enhancing pricing opportunities, resulting in higher earnings. Positive relationships with other stakeholders lead to cost savings on inputs. Accordingly, a positive relationship is hypothesized between relational capital disclosure and firm performance.

H1c. Relational capital disclosure increases firm performance

Methodology

Based on the OECD classification, six industries, i.e., three Knowledge-intensive Industries (Information Technology, Pharmaceutical, and Chemical) and three traditional Industries (Food and Agro-based, Metal and Metal products, and Consumer goods), have been chosen for the study. All 151 companies under these six industries appearing in the top 500 NSE-listed companies based on market capitalization as on 31st March 2020 constitute our sample. Eighteen of these 152 companies were dropped due to a lack of consistent information. Thus, the final sample consists of 133 companies representing 94 percent of the total market capitalization of the six industries in NSE. To measure the ICD, content analysis of the annual reports has been widely used in the literature (Guthrie et al. 2004). This method assigns codes to the qualitative or quantitative data to derive a specific pattern in the disclosure of information in the annual reports. The item codes are assigned in the following manner: 3 if the information is given in the numerical, graphical, or tabular form, 2 if the information is explained in detail, 1 for the simple presence of the information, and 0 for the absence of information. Content analysis requires a taxonomy of themes. For this taxonomy, a comprehensive ICD framework is required which overcomes previous limitations by providing explanation to each item. Therefore, the framework developed by Singhania & Panda (2023) in the Indian context which, provides explanation for all the items, has been used for this study. These items are briefly listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Intellectual Capital Disclosure Framework

Human Capital	*Relational Capital*	*Structural Capital*
Employees/Human Resource	Customers	Intellectual Property
Employee's education	Market share	Management Philosophy
Employee's knowledge	Customer satisfaction	Corporate culture/ value/ principles
Employee skills/know-how/ expertise	Customer loyalty	Process
Employee Training	Customer training and awareness	Organizational structure
Employee value	Company's reputation/ image	Research and Development (R&D)
Employee motivation	Brands	Innovation
Employee's commitment	Distribution channels	Knowledge management
Employee's productivity/ efficiency	Suppliers	Information Technology
Team	Public relations	Networking
Remuneration	Business agreements/deal	Infrastructure
Health and Safety	Awards	Intellectual capital
Work environment	Marketing	
Retirement benefits	Customer service	
Employee replacement		
Employee Capabilities		

Source: Singhania & Panda (2023)

Based on the above-mentioned framework, the current study develops an index to capture ICD from the companies' annual reports covering the study period from 2015-16 to 2019-20. The index for disclosure of an IC component is computed using the model below:

$$ICD_{ckt} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} X_{ikt}}{N_c}$$

Where *c*=IC component; *k*=company; *i*=item/sub-component; *t*=time; N_c=Maximum score possible under a component, i.e. 3xNumber of items in each component; X_{ikt}=score of each item *i* for company *k* in the period *t*.

Total ICD is considered a construct measured by the sum of the weight of its components. These weights are assigned with the help of the 'path weighting scheme' of the PLS-SEM algorithm provided by SmartPLS4 by running *Mode B* for the formative measurement model, in accordance with the suggestion by Hair et al. (2021). In mode B, the weights of AC characteristics are estimated using multiple regression, in which the construct (ICD) represents the dependent variable, and its associated indicators (IC components score) are the multiple independent variables. As a result, regression weights are obtained for the relationship between the indicator and the construct, representing the indicator weights. Firm performance is measured using two parameters: Return on Assets (ROA) as an accounting-based measure and market capitalization (MAC) as a market-based measure (measured as a natural log of market capitalization) of firm performance. Firm-specific characteristics are controlled by considering the firm size (measured by the log of total assets) and Profit Margin (Net profit/ Net sales) as control variables. Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS4 developed by Ringle et al. (2022) is used for analyzing the relationship. We have used 10,000 bootstrap samples to test the significance of the models.

Results

Figure 1 presents the PLS-SEM model used to test the relationship between the ICD and firm performance. In this model, the ICD is a construct measured in a formative measurement model by the impact of the components of the ICD, i.e., the Human Capital Index (HCI), Relational Capital Index (RCI), and Structural Capital Index (SCI), on the measures of firm performance, i.e. ROA and MAC. The firm size and profit margin are control variables.

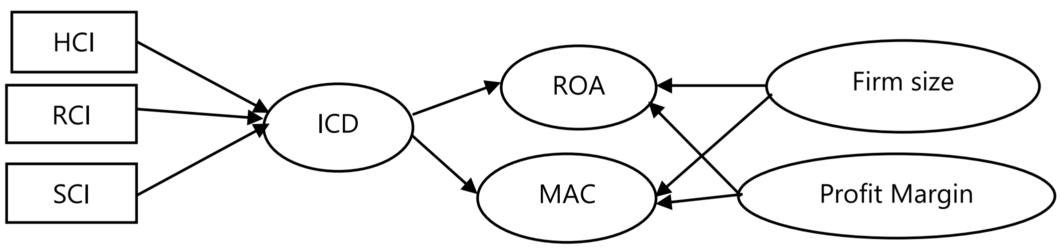

Figure 1. Relationship between ICD and Firm Performance
Source: the authors

To check the model fit, we used the normed fit Index by Bentler & Bonett (1980), which uses the Chi-square value to judge the model fit, and a value above .9 represents an acceptable fit. Further, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual is used where a value less than .10 is considered a good fit. The model fit indicators showed that the model is a good fit with the normed fit Index of .97 and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual of .02. To test for the endogeneity issue among the latent variables, we have used the Gaussian Copula approach. Here, Copulas were created for each endogenous variable and tested for endogeneity. We found that firm size has endogeneity with both the measures of firm performance, while profit margin has endogeneity with ROA only. Therefore, three copulas connecting the endogenous variables with the measures of firm performance are included in the final model to control the endogeneity problem. Further, for reliability and validity, the formative measurement model requires testing for multicollinearity, convergent validity, and the significance of indicator weights (Hair et al. 2021). Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) is used to test multicollinearity. A value of less than five generally indicates no collinearity issue following the extant literature (Gupta & Mahakud 2021, Singhania & Panda 2022). Convergent validity requires redundancy analysis with an alternative reflective model of the same construct with a correlation coefficient of .70 or above (Cheah et al. 2018). Table 2 shows the indicator's weights, significance, VIF values, and redundancy analysis. With significant weights (p<.05), VIF values less than five, and a correlation coefficient of redundancy analysis above .70, the indicators are reliable and valid.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity

Indicators	*Weights*	*p values*	*VIF*
HCI	-.22	.03	1.24
RCI	.54	.00	1.28
SCI	.72	.00	1.31
Redundancy analysis (coef.)	.99		

The bootstrapping results in Table 3 show the relationship between ICD and firm performance. The result shows that ICD has a significant positive impact on MAC and an insignificant impact on ROA. Among the control variables, the firm size significantly and positively influences both the measures of firm performance. Profit Margin is unrelated to both the measures of firm performance, while the Gaussian Copula terms of firm size and profit margin (to control endogeneity) have a significant negative impact on firm performance.

Table 3. Path Coefficients

SEM Paths	*Coefficients*	*t values*	*p values*
ICD→ MAC	.18	7.20	.00
ICD→ ROA	-.03	.95	.34
Firm size→ MAC	.54	4.27	.00
Firm size→ ROA	.28	1.88	.06
Profit Margin→ MAC	-.07	1.25	.21
Profit Margin→ ROA	.14	.90	.36
GC (Firm size)→ MAC	.25	1.95	.05
GC (Firm size)→ ROA	-.51	3.13	.00
GC (Profit Margin)→ ROA	.44	3.31	.00

Discussion

The result shows that ICD has a significant positive impact on MAC and an insignificant impact on ROA. This result fails to reject our Hypothesis H_1. It implies that more disclosure of IC information in annual reports improves the firm's market capitalization, although it does not impact ROA. ICD enhances investors' confidence, improves transparency, and differentiates itself from competitors by establishing its unique value statement. The weights in Table 2 show that RCI (.54) and SCI (.72) have a significant positive weight in this relationship, indicating that more disclosure of RC and SC positively impacts firm performance, while HCI (-.22) has a negative weight, indicating a negative impact on firm performance. Hence, we reject our hypothesis H_{1a} but fail to reject our Hypotheses H_{1b} and H_{1c}. This may be because RC and SC are the firm's owned assets that belong to the firm through its infrastructural developments, environments created within the organization, and its relationship with the external parties. Therefore, disclosing information about the RC and SC of the firm informs the investors about this value-generating asset, increasing the firm's market value. Among RC and SC, while RC is the relationship between the firm and external parties, and it can be sensitive to any negative information about the firm, SC is the firm's internal structure that is more rigidly related to the firm's success. Hence, SC has a higher weight compared to RC.

On the other hand, HC is the employees' capabilities within an organization, which leaves the organization when employees leave. A firm cannot own this capital as it is the innate ability of the employees. Disclosing more information about HC signifies the firm's dependence on its HC. Further, HCD also informs the competitors about the HC of the firm, leading the competitors to acquire the HC through different incentives and perquisites, including the options for moonlighting. Therefore, HCD negatively contributes to ICD in the relationship between ICD and firm performance. The insignificant impact of ICD on ROA may be because, while ICD as a disclosure practice influences the investors' perspective by reducing information asymmetry, it does not influence the operation of the firms.

Conclusion, Implications and Future Research Directions

This study extends the literature on ICD by analyzing its impact on firm performance. Our results from the PLS-SEM model show a positive impact of ICD on MAC and an insignificant impact on ROA. This positive influence is attributed to the reporting of RC and SC, which informs the investors about its inimitable and non-substitutable intangible assets, leading to a competitive advantage. However, HCD negatively influences firm performance as HC leaves the company when employees leave. This result has several implications. It informs the corporate managers that while RC and SC information can be reported in the annual reports to improve firm performance, reporting HC information may have a negative impact on profitability as it informs the competitors about its competitive advantage. Hence, the company should avoid reporting sensitive information about this capital. The findings also signify that firms should strategically decide which IC information to report in annual reports without blindly focusing on transparency such that its value increases without losing competitive advantage.

This study is unique in several ways. Firstly, it employs a new and detailed disclosure framework to measure the ICD in the annual reports, synthesizing the previous disclosure indices and covering the entire IC domain without any error of principle (commission or omission). Secondly, the novelty lies in analyzing the relationship between ICD and firm performance. While we could trace only three studies on this relationship, those studies cannot be compared with IC performance due to a different classification of IC components. Our disclosure framework aligns with the classification used for IC performance and facilitates the comparison of ICD with IC performance. Thirdly, it uses a new methodology to analyze the relationship. While PLS-SEM is relatively new in accounting literature, the software used, i.e. SmartPLS4 by Ringle et al. (2022), is of recent origin and facilitates weighting the components based on their contributions to the relationships.

The study has limitations. The period is limited to 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted the market. Further, as the content analysis is time-consuming, the study covers only six industries. Hence, future studies can consider other industries and make a cross-industry comparison to further understand the relationship in the Indian context and at the global level.

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Chatbots in hospitality and tourism: a bibliometric synthesis of evidence

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Chatbots are now widely used in the hospitality industry because they offer round-the-clock support, engage clients in human-like dialogue, and lighten the workload of human agents. However, despite being a relevant technology, scholarly research on the application of chatbots in Hospitality and Tourism remains scant and dispersed. The present review employs a bibliometric review approach to synthesize this domain and identify relevant research lines for future academics. This study uses a mixed review methodology that combines the SPAR-4-SLR protocol and bibliometric tools. Using the Scopus database, the authors compiled 164 articles about chatbots in hospitality and tourism research. The data were examined using Vosviewer, Bibliometrix-R and MS-Excel. This review, which tries to comprehend the changes in this domain over the last eight years in terms of prolific writers, most prominent journals, significant issues, and the field's intellectual and social structure, serves as the foundation for research on chatbots in hospitality and tourism. The findings indicate that this field is still in its infancy. To aid researchers in advancing this field of study, this review aims to offer deeper insights for the pursuance of future research.

Keywords: bibliometric review, chatbots, hospitality, tourism, visualization

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Introduction

Chatbots are understood as machine-based conversation systems that connect with human users using terminology more similar to genuine conversational speech (Liu & Duffy 2023). The current literature describes a chatbot as "an artificial intelligence program and a Human–computer Interaction (HCI) model" (Adamopoulou & Moussiades 2020, p. 1), which is complemented by cloud technology, big data, advanced mobile technology and biometrics, while taking cues from natural language processing such as semantic analyses, which generates answers sourced from databases. Textual or spoken exchanges may occur in any style while interacting with a chatbot. Interactions with chatbots are made possible by sophisticated backend systems, which make the process of interacting with end users straightforward (Li et al. 2021). Access to the chatbot interface may be gained via specialized devices such as Google, Siri, and Amazon Alexa, in addition to personal PCs and mobile devices. Chatbots are known to facilitate customers with activities such as selecting, adopting, buying and disposing of products and services (Carvalho & Ivanov 2023). Conversational system capabilities are being made available for use in sales, marketing, and customer support due to the growing popularity and use of digital intelligent assistants and chatbots (Ladeira et al. 2023). They can give clients human-like dialogues that are more interesting since the discussions are powered by machine learning and clever software algorithms (Pillai & Sivathanu 2020).

In recent years, the hospitality and tourism field has witnessed a significant transformation with the advent of chatbot technology. Chatbots, driven by artificial intelligence (AI), have emerged as a powerful tool for enhancing customer engagement and improving service delivery in the hospitality and tourism industries (Pereira et al. 2022). These virtual assistants can simulate human-like conversations, provide personalized recommendations, and offer round-the-clock assistance to guests, making them an invaluable asset to businesses in this sector (Jung et al. 2023). The application of chatbots in hospitality and tourism extends beyond basic customer interactions. They are now employed in various aspects of the industry, i.e., tourism (Belanche et al. 2021), shopping/retail (Song et al. 2023) and airlines (Pillai & Sivathanu 2020), providing support for a diverse variety of goals and responsibilities. By harnessing the power of natural language processing and machine learning algorithms, chatbots can understand user queries, interpret their intentions, and respond with relevant and accurate information (Carvalho & Ivanov 2023). This streamlines operations and enhances the guest experience, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, chatbots offer several advantages over traditional customer service channels (Jung et al. 2023). They are available 24/7, eliminating the limitations of time zones and enabling guests to receive immediate assistance whenever required. Chatbots can handle multiple inquiries simultaneously, ensuring efficient and timely responses, even during peak periods (Tuomi & Ascenção 2023). Moreover, they provide a consistent level of service, eliminating human errors and ensuring uniformity in information dissemination. Consequently, using an AI chatbot is becoming the most prominent new trend in academia and industry (David-Ignatieff et al. 2023). Customers who shop online usually find it more tempting to buy from a business that provides real-time communication with greater engagement, such as chatbots (Sivaramakrishnan et al. 2007). The State of Chatbots Report found that 27 percent of adult customers in the United States are open to purchasing basic items through chatbots (Drift 2018). Over the course of the last several years, hospitality operators (hoteliers) have been assigning an increasing amount of frontline activities to machines. These machines range from artificially intelligent (AI) customer care assistants (such as chatbots) to service robots (Tuomi & Ascenção 2023). Chatbots are increasingly being used in place of human agents to carry out specific activities in service provision across various sectors, with hospitality and tourism being some of the most prominent examples of this trend (Gursoy et al. 2023). In particular, recent literature in hospitality and tourism management has been vociferous about how "intelligent automation" of frontline service work requires positions in the hospitality industry to be rebuilt to leverage people's and machines' unique skills (Tussyadiah 2020).

By critically analyzing existing research, this review article aims to provide insights into the potential of chatbots in shaping the future of hospitality and tourism. It also addresses key considerations associated with chatbot implementation. Ultimately, this article seeks to serve as a valuable resource for researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers interested in harnessing chatbot technology's transformative power in the hospitality and tourism industry. To fulfil that purpose, we carried out a bibliometric variant of systematic review that broadly includes (i) performance analysis for charting the trends of the domain and (ii) science mapping via co-occurrence analysis, complemented by thematic mapping to chart the intellectual knowledge structure of the domain. These tools helped us identify the performance and science of the domain, as these indicators are considered relevant from the point of view of in-depth comprehension and understanding of the domain (Patil & Rahman 2022). Based on the aforementioned rationale and following state-of-the-art bibliometric reviews (Al-Ansi et al. 2023; Li et al. 2023), we pursue the following research objectives (RO) in our bibliometric enquiry to: (1) highlight the publication trends in chatbots in hospitality and tourism; (2) identify the leading authors, journals, articles and countries in the domain of chatbots in hospitality and tourism; (3) o determine the main themes (structure of knowledge) and topics that characterize the intellectual structure of chatbots in hospitality and tourism; and (4) outline future research lines in chatbots in hospitality and tourism.

After this introductory section, we discuss the review methods employed to map the domain. The nest section elaborates on the results and findings of the review article, followed by examinations of the results while also suggesting future research directions.

Methodology

Tabble 1shows review process and bibliometric information related to research on chatbots in hospitality and tourism.

Table 1. Review Protocol using the SPAR-4-SLR Protocol

Assembling →	Arranging →	Assessing
Identification *Domain:* Chatbots in Hospitality and tourism *Research Objectives:* Intellectual structure and Performance trends of chatbots in hospitality and tourism (RO1 to RO4) *Source Type:* Peer-reviewed Journal Articles & Conference Proceedings *Source Quality:* Scopus Journal List (2022), ABDC JQL-2022	**Organization** *Organizing Codes*: Article Title. Journal title, author name, author keywords, number of citations, country of affiliation, and publication year *Organizing framework:* Not Applicable	**Evaluation** *Analysis Method:* *Performance Analysis:* article publication trend, article, author, country, and journal performance *Science mapping*: bibliographic coupling *Software:* Bibliometrix in R, Vosviewer *Agenda Proposal Method:* Thematic Gap Analysis (future research avenues)
↓	↓	↓
Acquisition *Search Mechanism and Material Acquisition:* Scopus *Search Period:* Up to May 2023 *Search Keywords:* See Table 1 *Total Number of Articles returned from Search:* Scopus n=606	**Purification** *Article type excluded:* Non-English Language Papers *Article type included:* *Source Type:* Journals and Conference Proceedings *Subject areas:* Business, Management and Accounting & Economics, Econometrics and Finance *Final dataset for Analysis:* n=164	**Reporting** *Reporting Conventions:* Tables(metrics), figures(networks), word(narratives) *Limitations:* Data type (only English-language peer-reviewed journals were selected), Data limited to Scopus, Review was limited only to bibliometric information.

Source: the authors

This review article employs a mix of bibliometric analysis toolbox and the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) protocol (Paul et al. 2021), which consists of three major stages: assembling (implies the *identification* of research questions and *acquisition* of data), arranging (implies the *organization* and *purification* of data), and assessing (implies the tabulation, *evaluation* and *reporting*).

Assembling

To find relevant articles on chatbots in hospitality and tourism, this review article compiled the search keywords from past literature reviews published in elite journals. We have mentioned the search keywords used in Table 2. Our search string was run on the Scopus academic database in the "article titles, abstract and keywords" option. Scopus was used because it is the largest and most reliable academic database (Hanaa & Abdul 2023). It has been followed and recommended by several renowned marketing academics (Correia & Kozak 2022). This database is commonly recommended for bibliometric assessments since it offers thorough and quality data for review. The Scopus search returned 606 total documents.

Table 2. Search Strings

Key Concepts	*Search String (Boolean Operators and Keywords)*	*References*
Chatbots	"Chatbot*" OR "Conversational Agent*" OR "Virtual Service Agent*" OR "Messenger Bot*" OR "E-Service Agent*" OR "Service Robot*"	Ramesh & Chawla (2022)
	AND	
Hospitality and Tourism	"Hospitality" OR "Tourism*" OR "hotel*" OR "Hospitality and tourism" OR "H & T" OR "tourist" OR "travel" OR "destination"	Knani et al., (2022)

Arranging

The articles found in Scopus were then categorized using the following filters: topic area, document type, source type, and language. We focused on compiling articles published in peer-reviewed quality journals indexed in Scopus as they undergo a stringent review process (Alalwan et al. 2017). Peer-reviewed articles and review papers are essential because they provide information on the development of the domain under consideration. Additionally, the selected language was English, and the subject areas of the domain were restricted to business, management, accounting, and economics. This resulted in a reduced and final dataset comprising 164 articles.

Assessing

The research questions mentioned in the Introduction section were followed to analyze the 164 articles that made up the final corpus of the literature. The evaluation techniques included (1) performance analysis of publication trends, identification and study of top articles, top journals, top authors and countries (RO1 and RO2), and (2) science mapping techniques, including co-occurrence analysis and thematic mapping, which helped highlight the recurring topics and intellectual structure (RO3) of chatbots in hospitality and tourism. The bibliometric assessment came to its conclusion with the identification of research gaps based on science mapping (RO4). Bibliometrix-R (Aria & Cuccurullo 2017), Microsoft Excel, and VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman 2010) were the software employed for this work.

Results

Publication Trends

Research on chatbots and hospitality in tourism has a history spanning eight years (2015–2023), with a total of 164 publications being published during that time. As is evident from the trends discovered, this domain of study is relatively new. Nevertheless, it is quite rich in the number of publications it has garnered over the course of eight years. Since 2019, the domain has seen rapid expansion (e.g., more than 40 articles published each year), with 2022 being the most fruitful year in terms of publication output (49 articles). We observed that before 2015, there was negligible research in the domain, signifying that the domain is in its early development stage, and there may lie many pitfalls and hotspots in the area for future research.

Most Prolific Contributors

Tables 3 includes top-ranking list of countries and journals with the highest publications. There are 164 articles on chatbots in hospitality and tourism research that have been contributed by researchers from 31 countries and sourced from 63 journals. Most articles have two or more authors (152), and the rest are authored by a single author (12). China is the most productive country in this research domain, with 29 articles to its credit, followed by the USA and Korea, with 17 and 10 articles, respectively. The top three most productive journals in the domain of top-ranked hospitality journals are the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management with 22 articles, the International Journal of Hospitality Management with 19 articles and the Annals of Tourism Research with eight articles. The top most productive authors in the domain are Stanislav Ivanov from Varna University of Management (6), Aarni Tuomi from the University of Surrey (5) and Dogan Gursoy from the University of Zaragoza (4).

Table 3. Most Prolific Countries and Journals for Chatbots in Tourism and Hospitality Research.

Rank	*Country*	*Total articles*	*Rank*	*Journal*	*Total articles*
1	China	29	1	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	22
2	USA	17	2	International Journal of Hospitality Management	19
3	Korea	10	3	Annals of Tourism Research	8
4	Spain	10	4	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	7
5	Turkey	10	5	Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management	7
6	Hong Kong	8	6	Electronic Markets	6
7	United Kingdom	8	7	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	5
8	India	6	8	Tourism Management	5
9	Malaysia	5	9	Tourism Management Perspectives	5
10	Austria	3	10	Journal of Tourism Futures	4

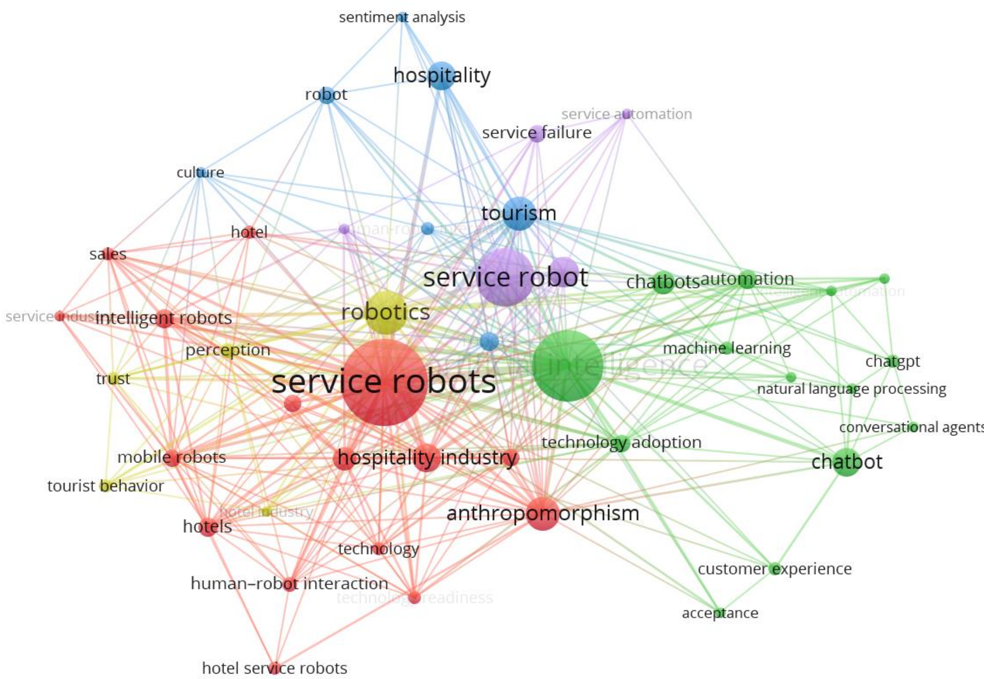
Source: the authors

Most Cited Articles

The most cited articles on chatbots in tourism and hospitality research focus on myriad issues. Notably, the studies that have garnered the most citations discuss chatbots in the context of tourism and hospitality research in conjunction with service robot integration and willingness (Lu et al. 2019), application of automation in tourism (Tussyadiah 2020), innovative service with hospitality robots (Kuo et al. 2017), service robots (Qiu et al. 2020), tourism service robots (Park 2020), AI-based chatbots (Pillai & Sivathanu 2020), robotic service and brand experience (Chan & Tung 2019), service robot failure (Belanche et al. 2020) and robot concierge (Shin & Jeong 2020).

Major Clusters or Themes

Following Khan et al. (2023), we conducted a co-occurrence analysis of articles with a threshold of at least three occurrences to establish the key clusters or themes for chatbots in hospitality and tourism research. The outcome is 47 keywords matching the threshold out of 729 articles divided into five major clusters or themes, as shown in Figure 1. The following list summarizes the main characteristics of each cluster.



Source: VOSviewer, the authors

Figure 1. Keyword Co-occurrence Network of Chatbots in Hospitality and Tourism

Cluster 1 (Red Network): Anthropomorphic Chatbots and Hospitality

The first thematic cluster comprises thirteen keywords and focuses on the phenomenon behind the functioning of chatbots or service robots in the hospitality industry, i.e. anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism is the process that endows human characteristics to non-human or non-living entities (Caporael 1986). The co-word metrics in this cluster indicate that "anthropomorphism" and "hospitality industry" have been investigated in tandem with *human-robot interaction, service industry, service quality, mobile robots, intelligent robots*, etc. Research falling in this cluster explores the behaviour and reaction of travellers towards robotic services offered by high-tech hotels (Çakar & Aykol 2021). Additionally, Li et al. (2021) identified five quality dimensions of chatbot services and examined customers' effects on user confirmation, leading to user continuance.

Cluster 2 (Green Network): Robots and Service-Related Consumption

The second thematic cluster contains nine keywords and concentrates on how service-related consumption behavior was observed during COVID-19 and what role the service robots played in enhancing the customer service experience during the pandemic. The co-word metrics in this cluster indicate that *service failure* and *service robot* have been investigated in tandem with *COVID-19, tourism,* *consumption behavior, and sentiment analysis*. Researchers have examined customer perceptions towards robots working in a restaurant. It was concluded through a grounded theory approach that the introduction of robot chefs in a restaurant process is still a utopian idea (Fusté-Forné 2021). This exploration was part of several initiatives and ideas being considered and examined during pandemic-like situations through which human contact could be avoided.

Cluster 3 (Blue Network): Technology and Service Experience

The third thematic cluster consists of nine keywords focusing on technology's role in the hospitality and tourism industry to enhance the customer experience. The co-word metrics in this cluster emphasize *culture, hotel industry, robotics, technology readiness, tourist behavior*, and trust. Research in this cluster has explicitly examined how tech-enabled service robots and their attributes influence customers' experience in hospitality settings (Qiu et al. 2020). Furthermore, Pillai and Sivathanu (2020) explored the antecedents of chatbot adoption intentions of travellers; several antecedents, such as anthropomorphism, perceived trust, and perceived intelligence, were found to influence chatbot adoption intentions.

Cluster 4 (Yellow Network): Artificial Intelligence and Hospitality & Tourism

The fourth thematic cluster comprises eight keywords encompassing the role of artificial intelligence in the hospitality industry. The co-word metrics in this cluster emphasize *conversational agents, customer experience, intelligent automation*, and *chatbot*. Researchers have primarily examined human-robot interactions and the role of robotic agent presence in hospitality settings (Lei et al. 2021). Additionally, the peculiarities of the usage of conversational agents were discovered. In particular, Tung and Law (2017) evaluated chatbot users' intention to reuse. Further, Calvaresi et al. (2021) suggest that chatbot-based activities can build an attractive service proposition for next-generation tourists.

Cluster 5 (Violet network): Human-Robot Interaction

The fifth thematic cluster includes eight keywords concentrating on chatbots and human-robot interaction in the hospitality and tourism sector. The co-word metrics in this cluster mainly emphasize *natural language processing, social robots,* and *virtual reality*. Researchers in this cluster have primarily explored robotic interactions with humans, such as Liu et al. (2023), who discovered that in the hotel sector, clients displayed more unethical consumer behaviour when human employees excluded them compared to service robots, but more unethical consumer behavior when they were serviced by robots as opposed to human workers when the service was inclusive. Additionally, Huang et al. (2021) developed a conceptual framework for customer experience with robotic service agents and provided insights into customer-robot interactions. A thematic map analysis was also conducted using the same set of keywords used in the previous analysis. This analysis can be helpful in the development of novel research themes within a discipline which is useful for informing researchers and stakeholders (Agbo et al. 2021). There are four sections to a thematic map. Here is a rundown of what each section means:

Motor Themes

The first quadrant includes those themes that are thoroughly developed and serve as the foundation for the journal's study. Because of their great density and strong centrality (i.e., connected by an extensive list of keywords), motor themes are significant for the field of research that focuses on the creation and formation of knowledge. The following topics fall under this quadrant: hospitality industry and customer autonomous robots, *Chatbots, tourism, service robot, COVID-19, and service failure*.

Niche Themes

Highly developed, closely related, and highly specialized themes are described as having a niche. Significant progress is being made in these topics (Llanos-Herrera & Merigo 2019). This quadrant contains only one cluster, which includes the themes of (topic) *mixed methods, perceived intelligence, and tourism marketing.*

Emerging or Declining Themes
Weak themes are illustrated in this quadrant. Weak themes are either in their early stages of development as emerging subjects or are in their latter stages of development as declining topics; both are characterized by low density and centrality. This quadrant includes *conversational agents, service encounter, "human-robot interaction, hospitality management, robots, hotels, and technology*.

Basic and Transversal Themes
High centrality and low density characterize these basic themes, which are significant and highly central to the field of study but not fully fleshed out (Llanos-Herrera & Merigo 2019). The following themes fall under this quadrant: *service robots, artificial intelligence,* and *anthropomorphism.*

Implication for Managers

The use of chatbots in the hospitality and tourism industry has increased dramatically in the last several years, and this bibliometric synthesis attempts to provide useful insights to managers in this fast-paced business in an ever-evolving industrial landscape. Firstly, our study highlights the relevance of chatbots to improve visitor experiences by revealing a considerable concentration of research on chatbots in the context of customer service and interaction within the hospitality and tourist industry. These insights may be used by managers in this sector to create and deploy chatbot systems that are tailored to individual customer requirements and preferences, increasing customer happiness and loyalty (Whang et al. 2022).

Second, our bibliometric synthesis notes the growth of creative uses for chatbots in domains including recommendation systems and destination marketing. Based on this study, managers may create strategies that use chatbots to promote tourist destinations and provide tailored travel suggestions. Sidlauskiene et al. (2023) have shown that chatbots are an efficient way to include passengers in pre-trip preparation, provide customized recommendations, and gather useful data for market research. This will eventually result in more focused marketing campaigns and help tackle the heightened competition in the industry. Third, Policymakers should provide frontline employees the chance to upskill or reskill in the event that their jobs are replaced to prepare the hospitality industry for this shift. Odekerken-Schröder et al. (2022) advocate imparting specialized cooperation skills to the employees so that a chatbot and human team can work together effectively. Fourth, businesses using chatbots as a CRM approach should prioritize core service quality. Many businesses use operational, analytical, and collaborative CRM software. Business operations, such as sales, marketing, and service automation, are streamlined by operational CRM. Chatbots' core AI service quality may significantly enhance service automation and boost customer loyalty (Hsu & Lin 2023).

Conclusion

To this end, we concluded that our bibliometric review is the first to gauge the existing research on chatbots in the hospitality and tourism industry. We contributed to the extant literature by identifying the most productive contributors (articles, countries, authors and journals) to the research domain, hence providing a reference point for early-age academics, new-age scholars and industry professionals interested in the domain who wish to go through a brief snapshot of the field. Further, we orchestrate the nomological network, or significant thematic clusters and topics that show how chatbots might influence customer outcomes in the hospitality and tourism industry. With the growing interest in research on chatbots, a wealth of opportunities exists for deepening the understanding and comprehension of the application of chatbots in hospitality and tourism. We have identified and curated the opportunities for future research:

Directions for Future Research

Based on the keywords found in the thematic knowledge clusters that belong to the significant studies, we chart several research opportunities for future research. First, the usage of service robots or chatbots in the hospitality industry is an emerging topic, so there is a need for encouragement from research that may expand the understanding of the field from myriad perspectives, such as the perspectives of service providers, managers and staffers. Second, future research can explore (1) the challenges involved in implementing functional service robots in restaurant settings and (2) the perception of the difference between the effectiveness of service employees and service robots (Fusté-Forné 2021). Third, future studies can plan on further explorations into how humans react and respond to AI-based technologies, especially those used in tourist and hospitality settings (Li et al. 2021. Fourth, future investigations can examine the effects of culture, values and beliefs on the acceptance of robotic agents in the service sector in different regional and geographical contexts (Chi et al. 2023). Fifth, such explorations can be conducted using lesser-used research designs such as dyadic and triadic research designs, and method triangulations can be used. Sixth, further explorations may incorporate different case studies that expand the line of inquiry on robotic and human baristas and their effect on visiting intentions and perceived safety (Liu et al. 2023). Additionally, Despite the critical ideas included herein, this study's diversity of bibliometric perspectives is still somewhat restricted. As a result, subsequent reviews may expand the thematic insights included within this one with trending topical insights utilizing different bibliometric analytical approaches, such as PageRank analysis in conjunction with temporal analysis. Future evaluations may expand the *what* and the *how* of the domain by performing a content analysis of the many theories, contexts, and methodologies that are now accessible to serve as a roadmap for future studies on the topic.

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Ubuntu’s business edge: a systematic literature review and future directives

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This systematic literature review explored the application of Ubuntu, an African philosophy, in business contexts. Ubuntu has been increasingly recognized for its potential to advance positive outcomes in various settings. However, despite its growing prominence, a comprehensive understanding of Ubuntu's antecedents, descriptors and consequences is still required. This paper analyzed existing articles, using a thorough search strategy to identify relevant literature. The findings of this paper reveal that the most ubiquitous precursors of Ubuntu in businesses are a mandate for corporate social responsibility and cultural diversity. A business culture of fairness was found to be the most prevalent driver of implementing this philosophy. Conversely, individualism was determined to be the prevailing inhibitor of Ubuntu. Humanness and interdependence were found to be the most frequently used descriptions of Ubuntu in the included articles. Increased collaborative decision-making and better stakeholder relations are the most common outcomes found. This study concludes with managerial implications and recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Africa, systematic literature review, Ubuntu

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Introduction

Africa has characteristics that make it poised to be an ideal setting for international business scholars to create pioneering ideas that may be used in numerous situations worldwide. The continent's outstanding cultural, political and economic variety presents many prospects for research and analysis into various philosophies, business models, methods and practices, adding to the body of knowledge in management sciences (Nachum et al. 2022). As a setting, Africa is not only a breeding ground for revolutionary research but also contributes unique angles to traditional business and management problems, such as Africapitalism and Ubuntu (Kamoche & Wood 2023), where Africapitalism refers to a cutting-edge strategy for attracting private capital wealth creation for the individual as well as the community at large (Elumelu 2014). Correspondingly, Ubuntu is an idealistic philosophy rooted in compassion, kindness and interconnectedness of individuals for the advancement of society (Etieyibo 2020). Additionally, it strives to harness the true potential in the self by recognizing and activating the true potential of the other. When put into the perspective of a business setting, Ubuntu is commonly linked to ethics. Notably, regardless of the context wherein it is applied, the major tenets of this philosophy remain the same. These tenets are uniquely aligned to achieve the outcomes presented in this review by being encapsulated in a single construct (Etieyibo 2020). Taylor (2014) asserts that in a practical sense when managers make decisions that aid the cohesion among individuals and mutual beneficence, they are morally correct. Conversely, pursuing choices that diminish interconnectedness and devalue any individuals or groups are deemed morally incorrect actions. Adopting the philosophy of Ubuntu can enhance business success by promoting discipline among employees, creating an environment that facilitates collaborative leadership styles and unlocking a business's creative potential by promoting enhanced divergent thinking.

Based on the observed advantages of Ubuntu, one would expect exhaustive empirical inquiry into its application in businesses, particularly in developing countries. However, although there has been some research interest in the topic, most publications are theoretical. Likewise, although previous authors conducted various literature reviews of Ubuntu (Ewuoso & Hall 2019, Molefe & Magam 2019), some even in business settings (Mangaroo-Pillay & Coetzee 2022, Thakhathi 2021), there has never been one explicitly and exclusively focused on empirical studies. The authors of this review paper focused on empirical studies to differentiate it further from existent works.

Additionally, this paper highlights these empirical studies and stimulates additional interest in the topic. Thus, this study aims to encourage more research on Ubuntu in corporate settings by providing specific guidelines for established authors and emerging researchers. Additionally, this paper intends to streamline the implementation of the philosophy in business by exploring the contextual variables that proved favorable in the past, determining the factors that drive and hinder this process, and outlining the expected results of its application. The rest of this paper provides an overview of the background literature related to this study and the research question. After that, the method followed to answer this research question was discussed. Thereafter, the reviewers discuss their findings and make recommendations for future research endeavors. The penultimate section covers managerial implications. This study concludes with closing remarks.

Literature Review

The concept of Ubuntu, the African philosophy, has garnered attention in various fields. This section presents an overview of the literature used to formulate and conceptualize this study regarding Ubuntu's antecedents, descriptors and outcomes in business settings. Interest in the topic of Ubuntu is not new; it has been on authors' radars as far as 27 years back (Gyekye 1996). In addition, the term evolved from referring to *human quality* to relating to the Nguni adage *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* since the 1990s. The Nguni proverb means *a person is a person through other persons*. More nuanced interpretations are, *I am because you (we) are*. This means our humanity is inherently connected and dependent on the humanity of others. Moreover, people's capacity to be just and good toward others relies on the justice and good nature (or lack thereof) seen in others.

Benefit of Ubuntu is that it acknowledges the value of relationships and promotes compassion, respect and empathy towards one another, which may lead to more fruitful interpersonal interactions and meaningful relationships (Akpey-mensah & Muchie 2020). Ubuntu's basic tenets strongly emphasize teamwork and finding mutual understanding, which may lead to more collaborative, deliberate and efficient decision-making. People are more likely to be driven and effective when they have a connection to their work and their coworkers. Equally, workplace productivity may increase because Ubuntu fosters a sense of belonging and purpose (Mangaliso et al. 2018). Ubuntu promotes treating others with dignity and deference, which may improve customer service and foster closer customer relations. Ubuntu stresses the importance of giving back to the community, which may encourage a sense of social responsibility and motivate people and organizations to do the same (Etieyibo 2020).

With all the perceived benefits of Ubuntu, there have been significant academic inquiries into the topic. However, Ubuntu also has its drawbacks. The term is often misused to exploit others, particularly if there is a resource disparity (Imas & Weston 2012). Respectively, a compulsion to adhere to group standards can occasionally result in a focus on community and consensus-building, restricting individualism and creativity.

The Ubuntu ethos highlights the common good and communal prosperity, often at the price of personal motives and objectives. Moreover, focusing on harmony and reaching consensus can occasionally result in a low tolerance for disagreement or criticism, preventing the possibility of fruitful discourse and differing points of view (Mangaliso et al. 2018). Additionally, the many translations in different languages and cultures may cause some confusion about philosophy's implementation (Imas & Weston 2012). Notably, there is no consensus on authors' criticisms of Ubuntu; in fact, the criticisms are not unanimously held. Similarly, while Ubuntu may offer several advantages, it is crucial to remember that it is not a cure-all or a universally applicable solution. Furthermore, the advantages of Ubuntu differ based on the circumstance and cultural setting, which creates a need for more research and nuance in this area.

Research Gap and Research Question

From a broad perspective, Africa needs knowledge production. Past scholars have suggested that Africans create knowledge form Africans and for Africa (Hountondji 2009, Nabudere 2006, Okolie 2003). Another publications cite the importance of ownership of knowledge creation, dissemination, and positioning (Arowosegbe 2016, Oppong 2017). This knowledge should be accessible, self-reliant and for the betterment of African societies. This advancement, however, could also benefit foreign societies. Language usage and emergent African concepts are crucial to understanding how research and, more importantly, business is done on the continent (Kamoche & Wood, 2023; Nachum et al., 2022). Preceding scholars have called for more research on Ubuntu in business (Ewuoso & Hall 2019, Mangaroo-Pillay & Coetzee 2022). To aid Nachum et al. (2022) in their specific call for international business scholars to take an interest in Africa, utilizing guidelines set out by (Kamoche & Wood 2023) and understanding that systematic literature reviews are often used as a tool to generate more academic attention to specific topics (Goyal et al. 2021) the authors of the current manuscript sought to answer the following research question: What are the antecedents and outcomes of Ubuntu in a business context?

Bridging the Gap

The reviewers present this study to aid in knowledge creation in Africa by Africans. This paper attempts to provide a comprehensive conceptual framework of Ubuntu's antecedents, descriptors and consequences in a business environment by incorporating principles of a systematic literature review. Before conducting this study, the authors sought previous publications and discovered that many reviewers had taken an interest in Ubuntu. However, most previous works are not related to the manifestation of Ubuntu in the business world. The authors of this paper could only find two preceding works in business and management sciences. Mangaroo-Pillay and Coetzee (2022) investigated the similarities between Ubuntu and lean manufacturing to aid in accepting lean principles and philosophies in South Africa. Thakhathi (2021) sought to understand the inhibitors of the inclusive long-term potential of developmental corporate social responsibility. The background literature presented above elucidates the potential benefits of Ubuntu's implementation in business settings, such as superior collaboration, enhanced employee engagement and satisfaction and improved corporate social responsibility. However, criticisms such as potential exploitations and restricted individualism should be noted before applying the philosophy. This overview sets the stage for this review by highlighting the need for more research on Ubuntu. The reviewers were particularly interested in regional settings, methodological coverage, as well as the antecedents, descriptors and outcomes of its adoption in a corporate context.

Methodology

The current review can be described as an overview with elements of a systematic literature review. The reviewers applied a systematic search for the inclusion of research articles, summarized and tabulated characteristics of relevant studies and presented a conceptual framework that answers the research question. The rest of this section discusses the search strategy implemented and explains the section criteria, quality assessment and data extraction.

Search Strategy

In this systematic review, the authors developed a search strategy to identify relevant literature sources. This search strategy was tailored to four comprehensive databases: Web of Science, Scopus, Emerald Insight and Science Direct and the following search terms were used: Ubuntu and Business. All searches covered sources published until the end of 2022; only English research journal articles, review papers and conference proceedings were included. The 2022 sources were included to provide as many records as possible and report the most up-to-date findings and trends while preserving replicability. With a combined 654 works, there is a significant interest in the concept of Ubuntu in a business context.
Table 1 shows the search stings used in the four selected databases.

Table 1. Search Strings with Resulting Outputs

Database	*Search string*	*Hits / Results*
Web of Science	"Ubuntu*" (Title) OR "Ubuntu*" (Abstract) AND business* (Abstract) "Ubuntu*" (Author Keywords)	538
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("Ubuntu*") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (business*)	101
Emerald insight	(content-type:article) AND (title:"Ubuntu*" OR (abstract:"Ubuntu*") AND (abstract:"Business*"))	13
ScienceDirect	Title, abstract, keywords: "Ubuntu" AND Business	2

Source: the authors

Selection Criteria

The Page et al. (2020) guidelines were employed in developing the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement presented in Figure 1. The study was focused on mapping available literature on Ubuntu in the field of economics and business management. All other publications were deemed ineligible for inclusion. The authors narrowed the subject to business and management sciences fields. The research span was from inception to 2022 (ending the inclusion of sources in December of 2022), which allowed the authors to include some of the most recent records. No geographical limitations have been put on the records included, as the initial results provided a scope of the inquiry that was sufficiently narrow. The total goes from 654 to 58 research articles identified at this stage of the review process. Figure 1 (PRISMA statement) illustrates inclusion and exclusion of at every stage of the systematic review.

Quality Assessment

This study was only concerned with original research articles, review papers and conference papers. To increase the quality of this systematic literature review, the reviewers identified six duplicate records by using the sorting function in Microsoft Excel; these records and four other review articles were removed from the consideration list. The result of these removals left 48 articles that were assessed for eligibility by reading their full abstracts. This stage of the screening process resulted in removing 17 articles; two were removed for being related to the Linux computer program, 13 were removed for being conceptual papers, and two were deemed inedible because they were not business-related.

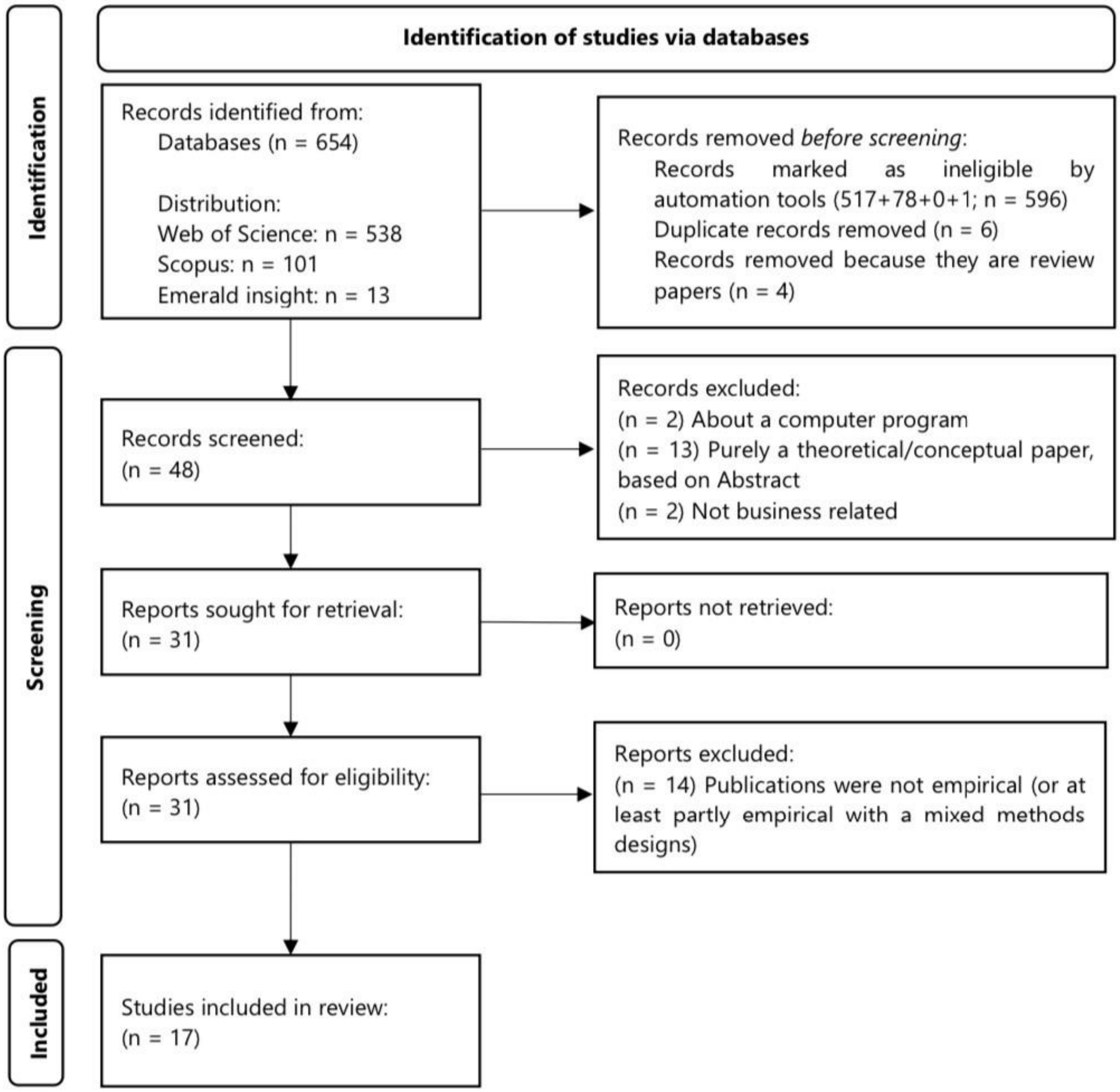


Figure1. PRISMA Statements
Source: the authors

All 31 articles remaining at the second screening stage could be retrieved for full-text assessment. Upon scanning the complete records, 14 articles were excluded because they were not empirical studies (or at least partly empirical studies), leaving 17 articles determined to be edible to answer the research question posed in this study. Moreover, the included works must have mentioned Ubuntu in the article's title, abstract or/and keywords, and the study must have been conducted within a business context.

Data Extraction

In the data extraction phase of this review, 17 articles were selected, and the characteristics extracted were: Original research manuscripts that were peer-reviewed and published as articles, conference papers or review studies. Conceptual papers, reports and case studies were excluded. The outputs must have been published in English in the discipline of managerial sciences. From these papers, the reviewers were interested in the following aspects of the articles: The abstract of the research output to determine and/or confirm the inclusion of the article; The literature review portion was used to determine the relevant aspects of Ubuntu covered in the publication and conceptualize and comprehend the antecedents, mediation, moderation and consequences presented in the findings; The methods followed in the study to make methodological recommendations for future empirical works; and, The paper's results, findings and/or conclusions to finalize the empirical advancement section and resulting conceptual framework presented in the current study. Notably, the reviewers placed no limitations in terms of the aspects of Ubuntu during their analysis of the 17 included articles. The reviewers we interested in all forms and descriptions of the phenomena.

Results and Discussion

With reference to methodical summary, a variety of research approaches in empirical articles about the practice of Ubuntu within businesses was noted. Due to the reviewers focusing on purely empirical works, mixed-methods papers that emphasized systemized literature review portions were not included. Notwithstanding, as a result, data collection from respondents often employs both qualitative and quantitative techniques. Survey methods were chosen as the primary method of data collecting for the studies under consideration. Consequently, we implemented either exploratory and confirmatory analysis or content analysis. We find that there were no causal studies conducted on the topic under discussion. We suggest investigating the causes and effects of the acceptance and/or rejection of the Ubuntu philosophy among modern managers. Additionally, future emergent researchers can find inspiration in conducting this kind of research because the included articles have an average of 37 citations, indicating marginal research interest.

Now we discuss the geographical settings used to execute the studies used in this systematic analysis. Although no geographical limitations were placed on the inclusion criteria for the articles in this study, there is clearly a focus on the African continent when empirically investigating Ubuntu in businesses. Nevertheless, there is an impressive regional spread within the continent, considering that 25 African countries were represented in the included articles. Encouragingly, particularly for future prospective researchers outside of Africa, the topic under discussion was researched in North and South America, i.e., USA and Brazil. Content analysis shows that South Africa and Mozambique were the most popular destinations for conducting Ubuntu research within businesses. This trend is unsurprising as the philosophy is mainly associated with Bantu cultures and Nguni languages. As per the Kamoche and Wood (2023) mandate and the rationale of this systematic literature review, we suggest that future researchers focus on the Americas for managers' application of the Ubuntu philosophy in businesses. Researchers may also choose to start in the USA and Brazil, as previous publications have proven these countries feasible for this kind of research. We used the Table 2 information to exhibit these regional contexts and make suggestions for future researchers based on observed trends and identified research gaps.

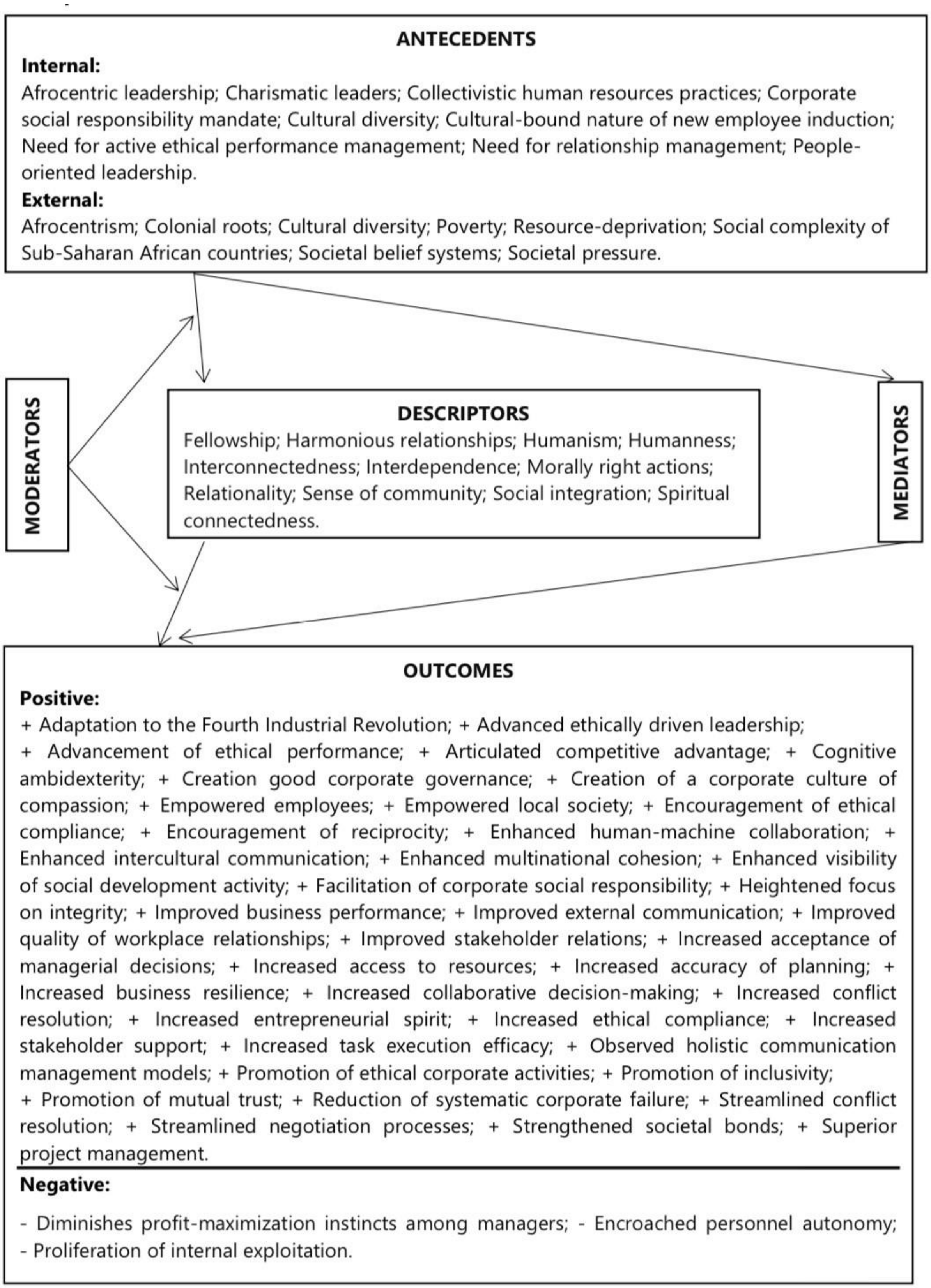
The authors of future works are aided by additional categorizations made through content analysis. Notably, due to the use of general categories, there is some overlap between different aspects of the conceptual framework presented. The antecedents are divided into internal and external items. The papers highlighted nine internal variables and eight external factors that may lead to implementing Ubuntu in businesses. Micro-environmental factors that businesses and/or managers have complete control over are classified under internal antecedents. In contrast, market and macro-environmental factors that can only be influenced to a certain degree or not at all are articulated as external antecedents.

Table 2. Regional Summary

Publication	*Single Country*	*Multi-country*	*Continent*
Rwelamila et al. (1999)		Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; South Africa; Swaziland; Tanzania; Zambia	Africa
Sartorius et al. (2011)	Mozambique		Africa
Wanasika et al. (2011)		Nigeria; Zambia; Zimbabwe; South Africa	Africa
Imas & Weston (2012)		Brazil; Zimbabwe	South America; Africa
Mària et al. (2012)	Malawi		Africa
Mashingaidze (2014)	Mozambique		Africa
De Villiers Scheepers et al. (2018)	South Africa		Africa
Steenkamp & Rensburg (2018)	South Africa		Africa
Grobler & Singh (2018)		Mozambique; Namibia; South Africa; Swaziland; Zimbabwe	Africa
Niankara (2018)	United States of America		North America
Okereke et al. (2018)	Nigeria		Africa
Eyong (2019)		Cameroon; Nigeria	Africa
Grobler et al. (2019)	South Africa		Africa
Schultz (2021)	South Africa		Africa
Phaswana & Pelser (2021)		Angola; Botswana; Côte d'Ivoire; Ethiopia; Ghana; Kenya; Lesotho; Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Nigeria; South Africa; South Sudan; Swaziland; Tanzania; The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC); Uganda; Zambia; Zimbabwe	Africa
Lerutla & Steyn (2021)		Angola; Botswana; Comoros; Lesotho; Madagascar; Malawi; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Seychelles; South Africa; Swaziland; Zambia; Zimbabwe	Africa
Ferri et al. (2022)	Mozambique		Africa

Source: the authors

Future researchers can use the same distinctions in their empirical works. Moreover, a corporate social responsibility mandate is the most ubiquitous antecedent, followed by cultural diversity within business



Source: Authors' compilation

Figure 2. Antecedents, Descriptors and Outcomes of Ubuntu in a Business Context

and society. It is noteworthy that cultural diversity has been grouped under both internal and external categories because a business's ability to have diversity is directly dependent on the variety within the social environment.

Although some aspects presented in Figure 2 may seem self-evident, this review is the first to compile them in a single conceptual framework, making them more practicable to future researchers. Figure 2 derives the antecedents, determinants, and outcomes (ADO) model, providing a digestible answer to the research question (Goyal et al. 2021). The reviewers followed the logic of preceding publications for the categorization of the elements found in Figure 2 (Aparna & Menon 2020, Goyal et al. 2021). Future scholars can empirically test the various mediators and moderators in the figure in multiple ways.

We found 25 unique mediators of Ubuntu in a business setting in their interpretation of the included articles' text. These were grouped into five categories: business culture, demographic, external factors, leadership, and skills. Business culture mediators were accountability, cultural hybridization, desire for resilience, effectual logic, fairness, internal group solidarity, respect, responsibility, transparency, and trust. Experienced staff members were the demographic mediator. The external factors were ethical pressure, institutions of governance, and resource abundance. Seven leadership mediators were found, these were ethical leadership, humane oriented leadership, Jewish business ethics system, management programs, paternalistic leadership, performance management, and training. The skills-based mediators were casual logic, commercial awareness, interpersonal skills, and systems thinking. Fairness, accountability, ethical leadership, respect, responsibility, training, and transparency were discovered to be the most prominent. Therefore, conducive business culture was determined to be the most crucial driver for the successful application of Ubuntu. Empirical researchers are advised to focus on business culture as a mediator in their research models. The items mentioned can be used to explore, validate, confirm, and form the construct for testing in qualitative or even quantitative designs. Only 18 possible moderators were found through analysis of the included works. The reviewers categorized them under the same groupings as the mediators, except for skills. The moderator categories were business culture, demographic, external, and leadership factors. Business culture moderators were a capitalistic mindset, a culture of corruption, elitist mindsets, individualism, poor relationship management, profit-seeking emphasis, self-interest, tribalism, and Western business approach. Business size and hyper masculinity were the two demographic moderators. The external factors were corruption, institutional voids, overbearing political figures, and outdated systems. There were three leadership moderators were found; these were a formal culture management committee, inappropriate business structures, and inappropriate project structures.

Individualism was determined to be the most prevailing moderator of Ubuntu in businesses. A Western business approach is the only other item to appear more than once. However, tribalism, as an inhibitor of Ubuntu, might present a more feasible and exciting avenue for future research endeavors. Consequently, the reviewers recommend that academics focus on individualism and tribalism as moderators of Ubuntu in proceeding publications. The descriptors of Ubuntu in businesses were mainly classified according to the nine core aspects as discussed by Ewuoso and Hall (2019); namely, fellowship, harmonious relationships, interconnectedness, interdependence, morally right actions, reconciliation, relationality, sense of community and social integration. However, these nine aspects were insufficient to cover all of the ways that the included articles describe, interpret and apply the philosophy of Ubuntu; thus, the reviewers added the humanism stance, as explained by Pietersen (2005), the state of humanness and the feeling of spiritual interconnectedness or *moya* which transcends the physical realm and recognizes that individuals are also linked by their connected ancestors (Rathbone 2006). Notably, none of the empirical works covered reconciliation as a descriptor of Ubuntu.

Humanness, interdependence and morally right actions were the most prevailing descriptors of Ubuntu, whereas *moya* and social integration were the least prevalent determinants. A qualitative investigation may seek to affirm the corporate relevance of describing Ubuntu; these terms could be a worthwhile project. An interviewer could directly ask top managers about their views on the accuracy of describing Ubuntu as it occurs in their businesses as spiritual interconnectedness and then confirm this description with middle managers in the form of focus groups. Future quantitative researchers can use the descriptors presented in Figure 2 as items that form the Ubuntu construct in surveys or even treat each descriptor as its own constructs that reflect the concept of Ubuntu in the business environment. The reviewers of this paper were able to discern 47 outcomes from the included papers, 40 of which were considered positive and three outcomes were deemed negative. Notably, there were four instances where a neutral effect was present, meaning Ubuntu had no bearing on the envisioned outputs. For this reason, they were not included in the conceptual framework, as they do not represent attractive avenues for future research. Increased collaborative decision-making and better stakeholder relations are the most common outcomes found. Any combination of the recommendations made can be used to confirm these outcomes. Notably, articles where Ubuntu was linked to enhanced collaboration in decision-making mostly collected quantitative data. In line with this, emerging researchers may use questionnaires to corroborate the preceding works. In contrast, advanced future researchers may consider using quantitative and qualitative techniques to triangulate the true nature of the linkages proposed.

Managerial Implications

The benefits of Ubuntu are readily apparent; however, managers should be conscious of potential problems in its implementation. Consensus-building and seeking harmony may silence dissenting opinions and stifle effective conflict resolution. To ensure employee autonomy, managers must encourage meaningful debate and tolerate opposing viewpoints while avoiding exploitation. Managers can leverage Ubuntu's principles to promote collaborative decision-making and inclusivity within their businesses. To fully unearth the advantages of the philosophy, managers are advised to encourage a positive and balanced work culture based on the recognition of individual contributions and collective goals. Doing so will boost employee engagement and satisfaction. Managers can also integrate Ubuntu into corporate social responsibility initiatives; aligning business objectives with the values of the philosophy to enhance the business' reputation and deepen the societal impact Ubuntu can be particularly beneficial in multicultural and multinational businesses. The challenges that arise through the diversity in these businesses can be smoothed by the philosophy's emphasis on fellowship and relationality. This paper creates a foundation for managers' understanding of the principles of Ubuntu. Having a nuanced grasp of Ubuntu is necessary for applying its tenets and applying them is likely to improve team cohesion in highly diverse businesses. Leading by example is crucial for managers to set the stage for Ubuntu's implementation, instilling interdependence, empathy, respect, and fairness in their interactions with all stakeholders. They are also required to effectively communicate the principles and expected benefits of applying the philosophy to obtain buy-in at all levels of the business. Finally, managers must evaluate the success of adopting Ubuntu with measurable indicators and transparent evaluation methods. This paper can be used as a benchmarking tool to aid this endeavor. In summary, adopting Ubuntu requires being aware of its challenges, promoting inclusion and diversity, and leading by example, effective communication, and developing assessment techniques for long-term success.

Conclusions

This systematic literature review bolsters the foundation of the existing body of knowledge by emphasizing the included articles and making them more accessible to researchers and business leaders. Likewise, this review can be a jump-off point for those who want to educate themselves on applying Ubuntu within a corporate context. The authors of this review suggest that conformist empirical researchers should continue the documented trend of focusing on Africa when investigating Ubuntu in businesses. These researchers may elect to conduct exploratory, survey-based studies in South Africa, the most common setting and design of such studies. However, future studies may be more valuable by conducting the research in a different emerging market like one of the many African countries where such studies have not been conducted yet. Other emergent markets outside Africa are equally viable, particularly for comparative studies. Contrarian scholars may rather elect to focus on the causes and effects of the acceptance and/or rejection of the Ubuntu philosophy among modern managers in North and South America since this is a clear research gap found in this paper. The adoption of Ubuntu's philosophies in businesses is a micro-environmental issue. Correspondingly, the antecedents, mediators and moderators are mostly internal variables. Future researchers who wish to follow a more established path can focus on empirically proving or discounting these interactions with the positive outcomes depicted in the conceptual framework. This is the primary directive of this systematic literature review, and it is particularly suited for more novice researchers. More established academics, conversely, can instead pursue the least beaten path of external antecedents, with external drivers and inhibitors of Ubuntu's application in businesses. These researchers can focus on the negative consequences of Ubuntu, which were found to be either under-reported or rare. Regardless of their experience level, quantitative scholars can use the descriptors presented in this study as items or constructs in their questionnaires. Managers who want to adopt Ubuntu can use this study to determine the factors that will aid the success of their efforts. Additionally, the variables that can undermine the Afrocentric manager's efforts can be mitigated proactively. Finally, through this systematic literature review, managers are alerted to Ubuntu's potential positive outcomes and negative consequences. This information assists in identifying what to expect when implementing this philosophy. In conclusion, managers will likely observe elevated collaborative decision-making by applying Ubuntu's business philosophy.

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BOOK REVIEW

Book

Introduction to global business:
understanding the international environment and global business functions
Bierman L, Smith LM & Arreola-Risa A
2019 Cengage. ISBN: 978-981-48-4424-6

Reviewer

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Globalization is not an overnight process; careful planning and understanding of the global markets and their dynamics are crucial. Globalization as a process of rapid economic, cultural, and institutional integration among countries requires massive preparation and in-depth cultural intelligence to succeed. Globalization generally implies that business expands from local to international, from developed or industrialized countries to developing or emerging economies; understanding the global business environment and its foundations may develop the knowledge for a successful business career. In pursuing a thriving domestic and international business career, the book's primary target readers are business students and instructors worldwide. A clear understanding of the global business environment dynamics will better prepare the students to apply their learning to the real-world global business landscape. A team of experts in the book of Gaspar et al. *Introduction to Global Business Understanding the International Environment and Global Business Functions* presented four parts with fifteen chapters that carefully bring global business issues to a personal level to entice business students to be more engaged in the contents. A cohesive, comprehensive, and authoritative presentation of international business based on the challenges and feedback of business students and instructors worldwide is this book's decisive competitive advantage and critical feature.

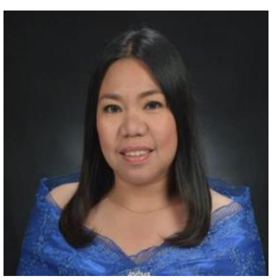
Other key features of the book are the chapter openers, wherein each chapter begins with an outline and a list of learning objectives. The chapter summary helps the students retain their focus on critical concepts and issues. Another feature is the end-of-chapter pedagogy that carefully reinforces the relevance of learning contents, ideas, business environment, operations, and strategy. This book provides various learning materials and tools, such as chapter questions, mini-cases, point-counterpoints, interpreting global business news, and portfolio projects. The book addressed the issues in the three significant areas of globalization: economic, cultural, and political. The book aims to elucidate the main points of the three essential areas of globalization but with the entire discourse on economic globalization only.

Part I covers the four chapters with in-depth discussions on the rise of globalization, the evolution of international business, regional economic integration, and the international flow of funds and exchange rates. This part successfully highlighted how globalization functions and how information technology bridges the gap of the global digital divide. Part II focuses on the global business environment, wherein it elaborates on the cultural dimensions of conducting business in individual countries and highlights the importance of culture for managing and marketing overseas. The Legal and political environment of global trade, emphasizing both political and economic risks and corruption and ethics in international business, is captivating. Noteworthy descriptions of how various countries in East Asia, Arab, and Latin America do business relevant to its cultural dimension and business philosophies. The authors presented relevant global business strategy and organization presentations in Part III. A straightforward, concise, and narrative conversational approach in Multinational National Enterprises (MNEs) and their strategic motives while understanding the control function and its organization is achieved. This part of the book challenges the readers and business leaders to make effective decisions aligned with corporate values, corporate social responsibility, and ethics. In the last part, the authors described the global business's challenges. The chapter begins with understanding Hofstede's five work-related values in national culture. These are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, and long-term/short-term orientation. These dimensions of cultural differences tremendously impact how MNEs manage international human resources and the appropriateness of human resource management practices. This Part also covers other essential business functions: global operations and supply chain management, global financial management, and accounting and taxation in global business. The authors explained the interplay between international standards and these vital business functions. Multinational firms face risks and opportunities that affect their financial management. Still, a thorough analysis of financial statements will provide a more comprehensive overview of a company's finances.

The unique content of this book is the generous sharing of global business strategy and management written by authors with expertise in the major functional areas of business. A world-view presentation of the fundamental pillars of the worldwide landscape covering culture, economic development, ethics, and information technology makes the book more interesting. However, to improve the book and its contents, it is good to consider including a thorough discussion on Sustainable Development practices of worldwide companies. Sustainable Practices can give readers a glimpse of personal internal management practices that would make every organization sustainable while operating globally.

Finally, to make globalization work for all, policy-makers in countries should focus on how to best manage the globalization process at both local and international levels. In this way, a better integration into the world economy may prosper.

Reviewer



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