Inter-organisational Knowledge Sharing through Social Media: A Social Capital Perspective

Transforming Higher Education in Sudan: Challenges and Prospects

Post pandemic education – a look at the mature student enrolment at ITS

Social Entrepreneurship and Crowdfunding Model: From Social Entrepreneurship Perspective

The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in repositioning sustainable development in Nigeria

Post-pandemic challenges and recommendations: What is the future of Tourism Studies in Malta?

The Covid-19 Pandemic and its' Impact on the Meal Experience in Casual Dining Restaurants

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Contents

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Abstract

Inter-organisational knowledge sharing (IOKS) between airport security organisations has become increasingly vital to maintain the highest standards of security and public safety. Failure to share knowledge between agencies can lead to the loss of critical knowledge to combat crime and terror and impede broad access to critical knowledge. Social media has become a source of significant disruptive impact on traditional knowledge management systems. The purpose of this research is to investigate IOKS in social media between key organisations in policing and airport security. Data from social network and qualitative interviews contribute insights into IOKS in social media and the impact on intellectual capital. The findings reveal the structural characteristics of knowledge sharing in social media. Knowledge sharing was frequent, informational and unidirectional focused around communities of interest. Preliminary results suggest that social media can realise significant benefits but is constrained by perceived risks and cultural factors.

Index Terms— Knowledge sharing, inter-organisational knowledge management, social media, social capital, intellectual capital, airport security, UAE

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge sharing (KS) between aviation security organisations has become increasingly vital to maintain the highest standards of security and public safety (Sanders and Henderson, 2013; Griffiths et al., 2013). Among approaches to managing future airport security risks, international civil aviation bodies at a recent high level conference underscored inter-organisational engagement and discussion to improve security practices (ICAO, 2018). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a world leading hub for international air travel and its airports are among the most visited and active in the world (Zaatari, 2017). While noted for the development of rigorous security standards and protocols (OSAC, 2019) the high number of visitors means that airport security systems need to be streamlined but effective to ensure efficient passenger flow through the airport (Airport Technology, 2018). Responsibility for airport security is distributed among different bodies and agencies that are overseen by the Ministry of Interior. The Aviation Security Affairs Sector, the UAE Civil Aviation Authority, Immigration Authority, Customs Authority, the UAE Police Force, airports, airlines, and other airport agencies are authorised to coordinate and collaborate closely to ensure airport security (ADA, 2014). Security and policing is increasingly an information-rich process in which the effective sharing of knowledge both within and between security agencies is essential for success (Kim et al., 2013; Sanders and Henderson, 2013). Inter-agency coordination is a vital process to achieving desired goals of preventing and minimising crime and terrorism threats (Carter, 2014). Coordination between security agencies is important to allow aggregation and analysis of disparate pieces of information distributed across different entities to develop accurate intelligence on the overall threats and risks facing the country (Foley, 2016). The rapidly evolving security landscape is characterised by new technologies and techniques that are transforming airport security by generating diverse and increasing forms of knowledge across all areas. Social media has become a source of significant disruptive impact on traditional knowledge management systems. The widespread diffusion of social media within organisations and technologies from blogs to social networks has influenced a major shift in organisational communication practices enabling the conduct of communication and interactions in ways that were formerly challenging or impossible (Nisar et al., 2019; Eshraghian and Hafezieh, 2017; Kane et al. 2014; Koch et al., 2013).

This paper addresses a gap in inter-organisational research within the context of social media and Arab contexts. Increasingly, organisational networks and inter-organisational knowledge sharing have received attention over past years with the most frequent themes associated with innovation, performance, absorptive capacity, social networks and their characteristics (Marchiori and Franco, 2019). The research challenge for inter-organisational study is associated with the disruptive influence of social media to organisational processes and the increasing importance of knowledge sharing between organisations. Research on knowledge sharing and social media is evolving but few studies have given attention to the implications of social media adoption for knowledge sharing between organisations. Social media is giving rise to more flexible and dynamic knowledge sharing with new, unstructured knowledgebases and multilateral connections and interactions. Social networking has enabled organisations to take advantage of new and popular knowledge sharing tools, such as corporate blogging, which allow the accumulation of knowledge for internal and external purposes, such as industry news or internal projects, as well as including feedback and linking mechanisms (Ojala, 2005). Few studies have examined the dynamics of knowledge sharing using social media in organisational networks. New theory needs to develop inter-organisational understanding of forms of knowledge sharing, benefits and risks of effectively integrating social media within existing knowledge management.

The literature emphasises a range of challenges in Arabic contexts: optimisation of knowledge strategies; development of formalised knowledge management strategies (Al-Esia and Skok, 2014); lack of formal framework and policy for inter-organisational knowledge management; cultural barriers to IOKS (Al Bad, 2018; Yeo and Gold, 2018; Al-Esia and Skok, 2014; Skok and Tahir, 2010; Al-Alawi et al., 2007). While the areas of IOKS and KS have received increasing attention over the past decade, few studies have examined IOKS using social media. Increasingly organisations are utilising social media platforms for communication and knowledge sharing purposes yet with limited understanding of the risk and negative impacts. The research context is situated in policing and airport security in the UAE, a modern Arab state, to investigate IOKS in social media between key organisations involved in UAE border control: Abu Dhabi Airports Company (ADAC), Abu Dhabi Police combined unit comprising police and immigration officers and Abu Dhabi Customs. By investigating knowledge sharing practices and the use of social media in an Arab context a valuable contribution can be made in understanding the cultural influence on the structure and patterns of connections in IOKS. Specifically, how social media mechanisms are employed to facilitate knowledge creation processes and enhance intellectual capital from the perspective of law enforcement and policing in the airport context. Such an investigation can provide insights into socio-organisational factors that impact on IOKS and consideration of risk and benefits that can inform strategy.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A synthesis of this literature reveals the preponderance of research focused on the western context and research gap in terms of KM in Arab policing and public service context. Neither is there Arab research of inter-organisational knowledge sharing or collaboration, resulting in limited understanding of how Arab national culture impacts knowledge sharing with external stakeholders, and supporting the case for this investigation. The focal theory that will inform this investigation draws on knowledge theory, social capital theory and intellectual capital theory. Research suggests the

importance of knowledge networks and relationships to facilitate knowledge transfer and creation contributing overlapping perspectives.

Inter-organisational Knowledge Sharing

Inter-organisational knowledge transfer can be defined as "an event through which one organisation learns from the experience of another" (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008, p.677). Inter-organisational knowledge sharing (IOKS) implies ongoing interactive processes relating to the movement of knowledge between two or more organisations. Social networking increasingly represents a mode of IOKS which can be defined as social entities, either individuals, groups or units, connected to each other to exchange knowledge. A social network perspective emphasises the relational processes and the "informal, interpersonal relations in social systems" (Scott 2000, p.7). Social networks are considered key resources for organisations to obtain knowledge and information, and critical resources for competitiveness and long-term sustainability in the current knowledge society (Garcia-Sanchez et al., 2017).

The significance of social media on this process is an emerging theme in the literature with social media surmounting many of the constraints of earlier knowledge management technologies (Kane, 2017; Von Krogh, 2012). This has influenced a shift from traditional top-down curated models of knowledge management (Orlikowski, 2002) to more flexible, bottom up modes that integrate a more personal knowledge management approach (Razmerita et al., 2014). Knowledge content is no longer created in a point in time but is generated from a shifting and interactive social interaction such as a discussion. Thus the focus of knowledge management is increasingly the management of unstructured, uncurated content that to some extent renders obsolete the accumulated best practices, models and typologies, and technologies of traditional modes of managing knowledge (Roblek et al., 2013).

Studies have highlighted the benefits of social media for organisational performance and competitive advantage especially in terms of knowledge sharing (Leftheriotis and Giannakos, 2014; Leonardi et al., 2013). However the review identified a gap in the literature on inter-organisational knowledge sharing using social media as few studies have addressed this topic. Further the majority of this research is concentrated in the west and Asia and there is limited understanding of complex interactions and structures of knowledge sharing in the Middle East (Yeo and Gold, 2018; Al-Esia and Skok, 2014). This gap motivates this inquiry to identify the key characteristics of knowledge sharing through the use of social media that results in enhanced intellectual capital. Evidence shows that employees through social media can stimulate consequences at the organisational and inter-organisational level (Clark and Roberts, 2010). This is because social media enables frequent and direct two-way communication and dialogue and augments organisational knowledge bases with employee-generated content (Nisar et al., 2019). Some have characterised social media as a boundary between employees and organisations that is more flexible and shifting than previously (Harris et al., 2012; Harrison and Corley, 2011).

Social Capital Perspective

Contemporary research in the field of information science has utilised social capital as an underlying framework applied to the analysis of information behaviour (Widén-Wulff, 2007; Widén-Wulff and Ginman, 2004). Nevertheless a limited amount of research has

examined the relationship between knowledge sharing and social capital, that underscores the focus in this study on the essential characteristics that promote knowledge sharing online. Social capital theory provides insights into the structural, relational and cognitive dimensions that support knowledge sharing. The structural dimension relates to the structure of social interaction between network members, including access to other individual or organisational actors, who information is shared with and the motivation and frequency for sharing information (Hazleton and Kennan, 2000). The relational aspect of social capital denotes the nature of the relationship fostered between people through repeated interaction over time (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Relational social capital is associated with numerous elements: trust in relationship; relationship; social networks and interactions (linking, bridging, bonding); and social support (Acquaah et al., 2014). The cognitive dimension of shared vision allows members to evolve a shared mental model and lead teams in the correct direction. Shared vision has been argued to foster relative absorptive capacity, identified as the capability to absorb new knowledge and which is partly dependent on the possession of related prior knowledge (Yli-Renko et al., 2001). By applying a social capital perspective to IOKS it is possible to define and map knowledge flows in order to identify the actors, frequency and intensity of knowledge exchanges between the organisation and their respective stakeholders (Phelps et al, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The research stance for the study recognises both objective and subjective dimensions in relation to knowledge management. A cross-sectional case study strategy combining qualitative and quantitative methods was employed to investigate the use of social media in inter-organisational knowledge sharing (IOKS) in the context of airport security in the UAE. This enables investigation of the complex organisational and cultural context of knowledge management providing the opportunity to capture a holistic perspective using mixed methods centred on the research goals. A multiple case design is adopted with multiple units of analysis. Abu Dhabi International Airport and Dubai International Airport represent the two cases each with three key organisations (Police, Customs and private airport security). Evidence from three organisational units was gathered using semi-structured interviews and survey. In phase one an online survey questionnaire is adopted to gather primary quantitative data on inter-organisational knowledge and the structural characteristics of knowledge sharing in social media. Network analysis was completed in Gephi 0.9.2 to examine the basic overall structure of organisational and inter-organisation connections in each of the two case studies. Data was collected from the three organisations in the case of Abu Dhabi and the three organisations in the case of Dubai. Five measures were calculated: degree of centrality, diameter, density, closeness centrality and betweenness centrality. This was supported by semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth qualitative primary data.

RESULTS

Structural Characteristics

Network analysis was conducted to investigate the structure of organisational and inter-organisational connections in each of the two case studies of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Five measures were examined of degree of centrality, diameter, density, closeness centrality and betweenness centrality that identify the structure of social interaction between network members, their access to other actors and the channels for the flow of

resources and information (Hazleton and Kennan, 2000; Tsai and Ghoshal, 1998). The results from this study address knowledge sharing practices between organisations using social media. A social network analysis was conducted for the Abu Dhabi network (ADN) and for the Dubai network (DN). Social network visualisation is presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively. The figures represent the network connections between members in the ADN and the DN comprising police, customs and airport organisations in each network. Table 1 shows the average scores for six measures that indicate the characteristics of the network. The network scores for degree of centrality (3.3) for ADN indicate that on average individuals had 3 connections with other members in the network. The higher this figure the more connected individuals are, while a lower score indicates a reduced degree of connectedness. Some members held as many as 13 links, however the average score denotes that only a few individuals are relatively highly connected and have central positions. The results for diameter indicate that there can be as few as five connections or hops between the most distant members. Low density scores (0.07) signify a loosely-connected network in which members were linked only to a small proportion of the total possible network. Modularity scores showed that ADN had a total of five distinct communities within the network. For closeness centrality a low score of 0.02 (maximum 1) showed that most members are not central or connected to each other. Scores for betweenness centrality were low (17.3) although for some members this is was high as 180, indicating that a small number of members are highly influential and regularly act as intermediate links or brokers between members. For the DN degree centrality was low with members possessing on average 4 connections.

Figure 1 Abu Dhabi Airport Inter-organisational Network

9
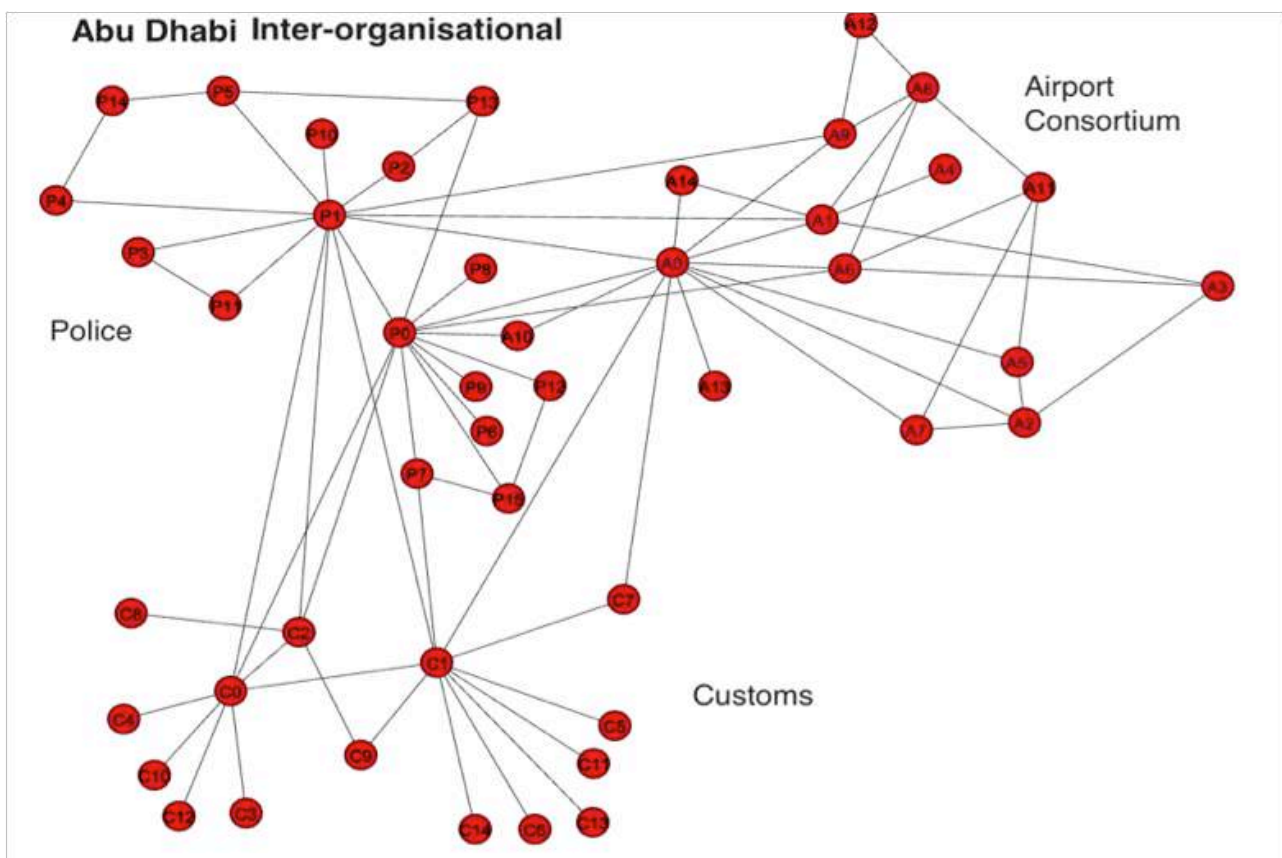
Dubai reflects a similar pattern to Abu Dhabi in that some individuals have a high number of links compared to the average indicating that centrality is concentrated on a few individuals. The diameter measure shows that there can be as few as six links between members. In terms of network density, members had actualised a low proportion of connections relative to the total number possible (0.10) reflecting that the network was loosely connected overall. For modularity the results indicated that Dubai had a total of four communities. Low scores for closeness centrality of 0.04 indicate that members are not highly connected or central in position to others. In regards to betweenness centrality average scores of 55.82 show that members act as intermediate links or brokers between a moderate number of network members. The highest individual score of 325.41 contrasts significantly with the total average indicating that only a small number of members exhibited high betweenness centrality. Comparison of the results for the networks show that for nearly all measures Dubai demonstrates higher scores than Abu Dhabi. As shown in Table 1 degree of centrality was nearly twice as high showing that Dubai members are relatively more connected to the rest of the network than those in Abu Dhabi. A major difference was indicated in scores for network density, with Dubai characterised by a more closely interconnected network. The closeness centrality and betweenness centrality scores for Dubai support these measures and are as much as three times higher than for Abu Dhabi.

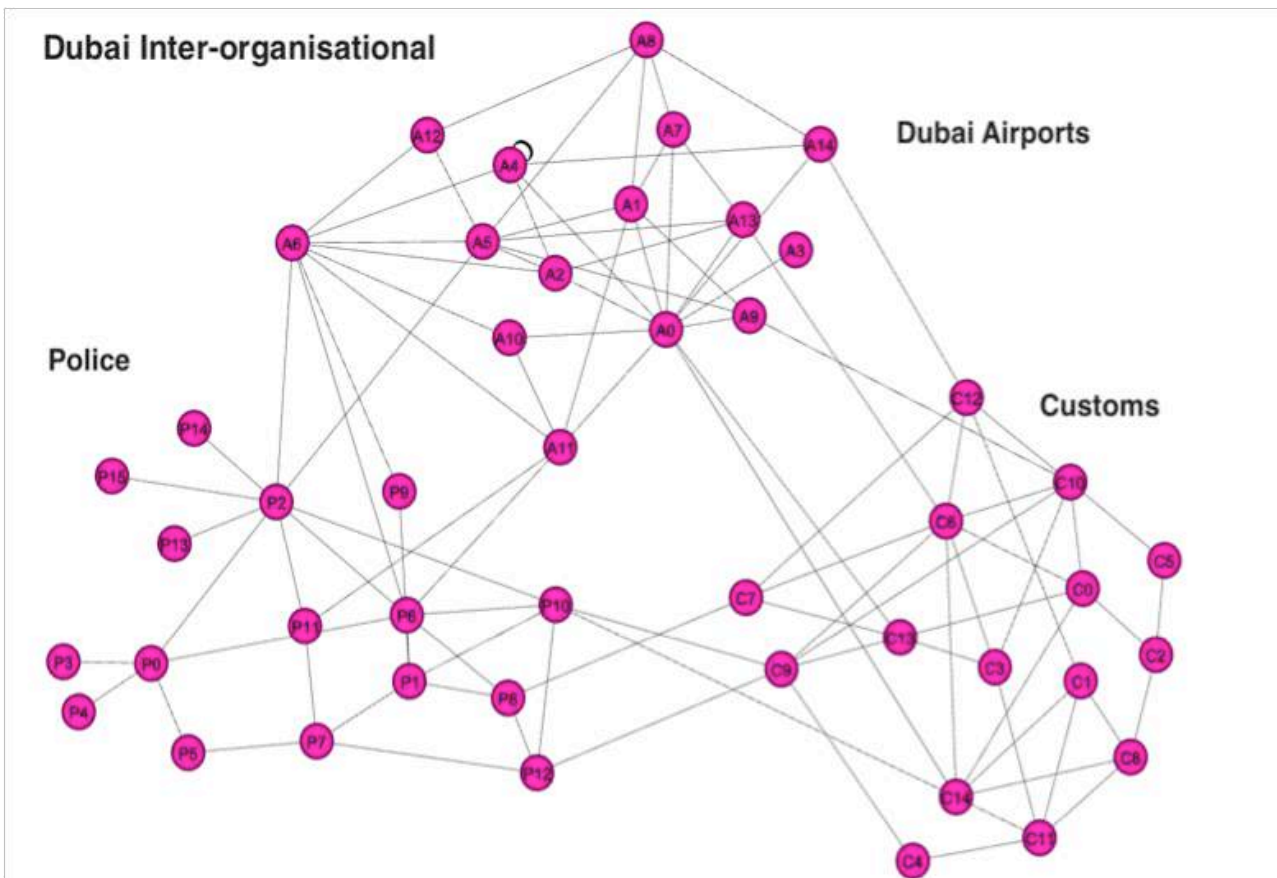Figure 2 Dubai Inter-organisational Network

Table 1 Network Analysis

Metrics	Abu Dhabi			Dubai		
	Average	High	Low	Average	High	Low
Degree Centrality	3.3	13	1	4.86	14	1
Modularity	0.469	5 *		0.503	4 *	
Closeness Centrality	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.06	0.02
Betweenness Centrality	17.30	180.8	0	55.82	325.4'	0
Diameter	5	6				
Density	0.07	0.10				

* Communities
*

Overall members of the Dubai network show a greater degree of centrality and connection to each other and assume mediator roles more frequently. Qualitative data from interviews provide further evidence of distinct roles within the network across different levels of the organisation. The density, closeness and betweenness measures were higher for senior members. This suggests that members with higher status and position in the organisation demonstrate greater interaction and knowledge sharing than lower status members. There appears to be a relationship between the degree and type of knowledge and social and organisational position of members. In contrast the results from lower-level employees indicate more passive roles. The network statistics show that the majority of members hold less central positions in the network. Many respondents at this level emphasised their role in terms of observing and learning.

The relational dimension captures the qualities and character of the connections between members of the different organisations in social media that literature shows are the foundation for inter-organisational knowledge sharing in social media. Distinct factors, characteristics and antecedents were identified that impacted the nature and quality of relationships between members of the different organisations in the network associated with: hierarchy, trust dependency, differentiated roles, closed culture, communities of practice and informal networks. The cultural emphasis on hierarchy was one of the most important factors to influence the formation, breadth and intensity of relationships in social media between the organisations. The effects of hierarchical control were linked to strong relations at the managerial level and managerial control of information flows and conversely weak peer ties. Tie strength appears to divide along hierarchical lines and senior managers pointed to strong ties with employees in the network based on the consistent dissemination of information they shared with them. At lower levels of the network, the results suggest weaker bonds between employees. At a cognitive level, findings showed that shared goals, ambiguity, interoperability, and inter-agency understanding either enhanced or undermined the effectiveness of cognitive social capital for facilitating inter-organisational knowledge sharing. Notably the strength of cognitive capital varied across dimensions of shared understanding and levels of the organisation.

DISCUSSION

Network analysis was conducted to investigate the structure of organisational and inter-organisational connections in each of the two case studies of Abu Dhabi and Dubai. A social capital approach was applied to analyse the structural, relational and cognitive dimensions of inter-organisational knowledge sharing within the social network.

Structural Characteristics

In terms of structural results key measures indicate that few members were highly connected or central in position to each other and even fewer occupied influential mediator positions. The degree of centrality shows that the majority of members had a small number of links in the network, on average between 3 to 5, indicating that few were highly connected to each other. According to Cross et al., (2002) this represents a source of untapped knowledge and information for other members. In both cases some individuals had a much higher number of connections or as few as 1 connection, therefore on balance only a few people occupy central positions. This has an implication for the effectiveness of the dissemination of knowledge. Social network theory suggests that the position of an individual in intra-organisational networks can impact their likelihood to engage and interact and ultimately transfer knowledge and other resource to other members (Coleman, 1988). Actors who are centrally positioned have a higher number of contacts, and as a result can more easily obtain and gather external knowledge (Monteiro et al., 2008). Moreover there may be impacts on the quality of shared knowledge, as there is a significant correlation between individual degree of centrality and knowledge quality (Sedighi and Hamedi, 2016). This is because for central individuals there is a greater quantity of knowledge links which facilitates easier access to valuable knowledge than for those located more on the periphery (Adali et al., 2014; Estrada, 2011).

Only a small number of members were highly influential in terms of acting as intermediate links or brokers between members. There is significant consensus on the overall importance of mediator and broker roles in knowledge communication processes (Muller-Prothmann, 2007). According to Tasselli (2015) those assuming gatekeeper or broker roles are more likely to have access to valuable knowledge and to be able to help the transfer of knowledge between different professional groups and divides in the network. The small number of members undertaking these roles in the case networks suggests that there is significant scope for supporting a wider number of members into mediator roles if the network is to be fully optimised. Based on these results members face challenges to locate needed knowledge or expertise (Arya and Lim, 2007). This is consistent with research that shows that a limited number of central connectors can result in bottlenecks building in the network so that both information dissemination and bridging activities for other members are slowed or diminished (Chan and Liebowitz, 2006; Cross et al., 2002). Inter-organisational networks with high closeness centrality are able to rapidly disseminate information within the network through their trust-based development of relationships, however networks with low closeness centralisation demonstrate better ability to generate new information and build on diversity (Yessis et al., 2013). This points to implications for the design of knowledge sharing networks in terms of achieving a moderate level of centralisation that is optimised for different facets and processes of knowledge sharing.

These findings indicate an overall lack of structural diversity that reflects a low level of cross-network connections. The density and centralisation statistics for both the Abu Dhabi and Dubai networks bear out this dependency and emphasise the influential role of senior managers. Managers are responsible for sourcing and disseminating knowledge that is consistent with the view of social media as an information channel. The direction of the relation is significant in emphasising a directed relation where information flows from senior members. This effectively limits the scope for feedback and sharing of knowledge creation based on the collective knowledge of the whole network. Research emphasises the importance of diverse cross-network connections and the role of boundary spanners and brokers in facilitating knowledge transfer (Hustad, 2007).

Thus the characterisation of the existing social network has significant scope for greater integration to facilitate increased access to different expertise between networks that would enhance security situational awareness across the network as a whole. This centralisation issue is noted as major in Arab contexts with low levels of delegation, and lack of power of autonomy of lower level employees (Al-Rasheed, 2001).

Relational Characteristics

In terms of relational capital, the findings point to low levels of relational processes that are characterised by hierarchy and managerially controlled. The relations between members are tentative and coalesce around a small number of senior level members who are mediators of knowledge flow between organisations. Lower levels of the organisation have considerably less influence in knowledge flow between the organisations and there is clear distinction in roles. At higher levels the findings suggest that managers are responsible for sourcing and dissemination of information internally and between organisations, while lower level personnel consume information in their role as passive observers. In countries with high power distance such as Arab cultures there is acceptance of this reliance and role between managers and subordinates (Obeidat et al., 2012). Based on this context, the evidence indicates a higher level of relational capital in the senior ranks among key actors or specialists and therefore social media enables greater interactions. However, tacit knowledge development requires a two-way interaction whereas the results suggest few opportunities or visibility of progression for passive observers to become active participants.

While aspects arguably also relate to intra-organisational knowledge, the organisational distance and differences between organisations creates greater challenge for members to connect beyond organisational boundaries in social media. The findings suggest that relational capital is limited due to the clandestine nature of knowledge-sharing practices that was identified as associated with a tendency for secrecy and closed culture between organisations and individuals that made it challenging to openly share information. This is consistent with research in other studies which have shown that Arab culture is intensely closed (Mohamed et al., 2008; Attiyah, 1996). The findings further point to low relational capital in respect of the level of organisational and individual trust between members across organisations. Research has shown that long-term trust is a critical factor in knowledge sharing (Al-Esia and Skok, 2015).

Social media was expected to provide strong bricolage rather than the distance and low level of socialisation identified in the two inter-organisational networks. However, the literature shows that trust in Arab cultures is a significant precondition for interaction

(Weir and Hutchings, 2005). Before feeling confident and secure Arabs need to develop a strong sense of security to share their knowledge (Weir and Hutchings, 2005). It is evident that social media presents a unique social space that provides a new dimension of complexity and challenge in building trust. Relational capital is focused on trust in kinship through family ties and close connections. This characteristic is consistent with collectivist cultures such as the UAE that are based on trust and loyalty in strong/close groups (Hofstede, 2001). This means inter-organisational knowledge sharing is only effective where members are able to identify and establish relationships with kin or close relations in the other organisations. Given that inter-organisational knowledge-sharing flows through a small number of key individuals then the issue is more constraining as it depends on individuals having kin ties. Thus these findings show that cultural factors create significant impediments for members to engage openly in social media. The uncertainty and perceived risks associated with more open dialogue limits the ability for members to establish connections, explore and communicate to develop ties and trust. This is consistent with evidence from the literature that identified significant uncertainty avoidance in respect of knowledge sharing between co-workers who generally evidenced a cautious approach (Al-Esia and Skok, 2015).

A key finding was the formation of informal connections as employees gave examples of establishing informal cross network connections. This can be argued as a backchannel for knowledge sharing that mitigates the constraints placed by cultural aspects. The literature shows that means of informal social activities and coordination and communication can be fostered while the aspect of reciprocity develops trust and in turn advances the flow of resources (Hsu, 2015). The tendency for members to explore informal opportunities suggests an important role for such informal mechanisms and the value and structure of informal networks in cross network knowledge sharing where formal procedures or culture may restrict communications. In this study, members pointed to security and trust in sharing information with colleagues in discussion groups.

Cognitive Characteristics

Perspectives and attitudes in relation to shared meanings and interpretations between organisations and members in the network were explored. The findings indicated the strength of cognitive capital varied across dimensions of shared understanding and levels of the organisation. The findings revealed a shared inter-organisational understanding of and commitment to the overall vision and goals of the network. The finding aligns with studies which highlight that professional social media networks are frequently characterised by a shared vision and common interests (Rathi et al., 2014; Panahi, 2014; Caldas and Candido, 2013). Panahi (2014) highlights that a key value of social media is the building of networks of professionals from different places with similar interests.

Further, the findings on cognitive capital suggest the potential for misunderstanding and less bonding around shared visions. Ambiguity surrounded knowledge sharing practices and the specific practices of interacting and communicating with members externally. This may be explained by the lack of protocols and guidelines that provide clarity and consistency in knowledge sharing in social media. The literature shows that this is key in stressing the relevance of shared goals that promotes the exchange of information and resources and a sense of solidarity (Atuahene-Gima and Murray, 2007). This lack of shared vision may also be one of the contributing factors that hampers the

development of trust. This is consistent with Chen et al., (2014) who finds that shared goals play a critical role in trust-building.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to investigate inter-organisational knowledge sharing in social media between key organisations in policing and airport security. The findings showed that social capital was constrained at a relational level due to cultural factors of trust, risk aversion and power distance that influenced a closed culture and reduced the scope for tacit knowledge practices. The relational dimension was characterised by a lower level of trust between organisations and between individuals in different organisations resulting in a low level of relational social capital across the network. Knowledge sharing activity is predominantly restricted to senior members and those relations with high levels of trust and is mostly exhibited within hierarchical and close circles of family, kin, and long-term personal ties. At a cognitive level the moderate level of shared understanding found in the study underlines the challenges in open participation between organisations in social media. The findings indicated the strength of cognitive capital varied across dimensions of shared understanding and levels of the organisation.

The study findings point to a number of implications for theory and practice for the development of inter-organisational knowledge sharing that positively impacts on intellectual capital, security awareness and threat intelligence. An overarching implication is the configuration and development of structural, relational and cognitive capital to strengthen knowledge sharing in social media. The strength of these social capital dimensions can be related to the quality and intensity of knowledge sharing. The research from this study supports the importance of a nuanced understanding of inter-organisational knowledge sharing and the role of culture on social capital and knowledge creation.

Further, these findings have implications for managerial practice. A central proposition is the development of strategies to promote bottom-up knowledge sharing within and between organisations. These should visibly emphasise the importance of knowledge sharing through actions such as scheduling regular time slots for employees to contribute to posts and share content and knowledge, and by incentivising knowledge sharing with rewards such as praise for contributions. This may depend to some extent on promoting and developing greater trust between upper and lower management.

The study suggests that managers should understand the best practices for building social capital dimensions that results in knowledge sharing. To enhance structural social capital managers should examine ways to facilitate and create a higher amount of linkages between network members that increases the connectedness and centrality of individuals within the network and results in both weak and strong ties. Structural dimensions of IOKS can further be enhanced within an Arabic context by strong leadership to proactively support the creation of communities of practice that includes members from different organisations. This could involve specific groupings so that knowledge sharing is more targeted within specific communities of interest and would support increased and specialised relations among participants. Top-down leadership would provide direction therefore leaders should be encouraged to join groups and publicise within social media while champions could be created for different topics and interest groups. Arab culture supports participative decision-making under certain

conditions. Officially sanctioned groups and communities of practice can be modelled according to the Diwan governance structure, which provides a forum for discussion that has respect for authority and status and participation.

Relational capital development can be enhanced by managerial training to enhance abilities to facilitate and lead dialogue and tacit knowledge sharing. Managers and organisations should seek to create openings for the creation of diverse and multiple connections across different contexts and promote relationships between organisations at different levels and across hierarchical and organisational boundaries. Establishing clear structures and mechanisms to promote the visibility and traceability of communication will reveal diverse possibilities for interaction and developing new ties. To promote stronger cognitive capital in the network measures can be introduced to enhance shared understanding, values, norms and goals between organisations and between different levels of the organisations. Managers should work with employees to create a positive organisational environment that encourages teamwork and collaboration within and between organisations and motivates employees to share knowledge.

A key limitation of these findings is the predominantly qualitative nature and self-reporting based on small samples in each organisation. Further research should explore large samples using social network analysis based on using quantitative data drawn from network interactions. Further, these findings suggest critical new avenues for research in the domains of inter-organisational knowledge sharing and social media. In particular the research points to the existence of cultural factors in the UAE and Arab context that can impact on knowledge-sharing across social media.

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Transforming Higher Education in Sudan: Challenges and Prospects

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Introduction

Today the role of higher education (HE) is viewed as pivotal in contributing to national development and the progress of low and middle-income countries and impact on production of knowledge and human capital (Ndibuuza and Langa, 2019; Bengtsson et al., 2018; Kruss et al., 2015). Consequently, the issue of quality in universities has increasingly over past decades become a primary policy issue for institutions around the world across all stakeholders. The environmental context has provided large impetus to rapidly advance quality assurance in higher education in response to numerous forces: financial austerity, technological and market advancement, competition, demands for greater accountability and the growing internationalisation of education (Altbach et al., 2019; Trines, 2018).

Low income countries and countries emerging from crisis place great value on reform and development of their educational system. In Sudan the new political transformation that is now underway has stimulated a national review across all areas and a national commitment to secure stability and growth for the nation. The reform and development of the educational system is a central pillar of this commitment and desire to provide opportunities for all citizens. The prevalent mood and aspirations in Sudan reflect the belief once expressed by the sociologist Émile Durkheim that education can promote social progress and enhance students' understanding of their country and their times, and assumption of collective responsibility and tasks (Durkheim, 1922; Wesselingh, 2002). Thus as Sudan after decades of authoritarian rule embarks on a new age of self-determination, its leaders attach great weight to the role of education to shape its political, economic and social development.

Higher Education in Africa

While contemporary education in Africa has been influenced by colonial models from Europe, education for all levels of society is a concept that dates back beyond the pre-colonial era (Assie-Lumumba, 2006; Lulat, 2005). The region witnessed a marked improvement in the education system as it gradually integrated itself into the global economy. Emphasis was placed on the role of higher education to provide highly qualified professionals in sustaining the region's growth and development.

African higher education has recently undergone significant expansion but as a region has the lowest level of participation globally. Over the past three decades universities in sub-Saharan Africa have increased significantly: public universities increased five-fold from 100 to 500; and private universities grew from 30 to more than 1,000. A further transformation before the turn of the century was the repositioning towards a market-orientated

system of higher education that was responsive to the requirements of the economy (World Bank, 2009). Thus universities restructured in order to provide diverse programmes capable of addressing the specific requirements of industry. This marked a shift from traditional models towards new structures comprising both private and non−university institutions such as colleges, training centres and vocational institutions. The private sector has expanded at a significantly faster rate than public universities since the 1990s (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2013).

Higher Education Challenges in Sudan

In Sudan, the political transformation with the National Salvation "revolution" that came to power in June 1989 marked a new turning point in higher education. The new government recognised the dire state of the education system across all areas and the need for urgent reform resulting in a number of key objectives:

- Increase student enrolment and broaden social access
- Widen geographical distribution of universities and ensure rural representation
- Create opportunities for private higher education and ensure locally responsive programmes
- Encourage domestic study over international study
- Adoption of Arabic language as the language of instruction and research.

Sudan therefore witnessed an expansion in the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) from 5 in 1989 to 30 by 2016, while private institutions reached 43 universities and colleges (MHESR, 2016). Nearly half are located in the capital Khartoum and many institutions are small, and private universities may have only a few hundred students each (Elhadary, 2010). Since 1990 the higher education system has undergone significant expansion both in terms of number of students and number of new public and private universities. It has an enrolment rate of 17% that is half the global average.

The rapid expansion of HEIs was not matched in terms of internal development and quality assurance. While HEIs experienced increases in the levels of enrolments, growth in female enrolments and reduced costs, there were major gaps in education provision and quality. Sudanese universities are absent from the two prestigious university rankings QS and the Times Higher Education. Table 1 indicates the global rankings of Sudanese HEIs overall. The leading university in Sudan, University of Khartoum has a global ranking of 2,936 and a regional ranking of 73.

Table 1 Ranking of Selected HEIs in Sudan 2019

National Rank	University	World Rank	Africa Rank	Arab Rank
1	University of Khartoum	2936	73	78
2	Sudan Uni. of Science & Technology	3527	107	112
3	Gezira University	4480	172	175
4	Neelain University	5139	195	206
20	University of Bahri	13939	483	425
36	Al Fashir University	21419	1041	772
40	University of Western Kordofan	22885	1154	837

Source: (Webometrics Rankings, 2019)

The country's HE sector is characterised by a number of issues including lack of qualified teachers; limited research and teaching infrastructure and resources; and high student numbers. Since the 1990 revolution the funding of education has shifted from the public sector to the private sector. HEIs in Sudan are therefore predominantly dependent on commercial sponsorship. The lack of government support resulted in increased student levels and introduction of student fees. Notably, the increase in student volumes did not result in a corresponding improvement in the quality of the academic provision. One impact is that teachers' time is significantly focused on teaching while research and administrative responsibilities are typically neglected. In addition, an average student-faculty ratio of 42 students to every teacher negatively impacts on quality of teaching. This situation in turn severely undermines universities' capacity to enhance quality.

Given this context there is a deterioration in the country's higher education system that is reflected in the international and regional rankings. The country's regulatory framework is in its relative infancy which was introduced in 2003 consisting of nine areas: institutional framework, governance and administration, infrastructure and services, human resources, students and graduates, teaching and learning resources, scientific research and graduate studies, community services, and quality management. Low adoption of the policies and procedures is a key issue, which potentially calls into question the self-evaluation of their own programs by universities. Of course Sudanese universities face major challenges linked to the lack of necessary resources to implement and operate quality assurance programmes.

Role of Higher Education and Research

The role and mission of universities is broadly distinguished by the higher education community in terms of three purposes of teaching and learning, research and community engagement (Sánchez-Barrioluengo 2013). Higher education research and innovation is the key axis as it is the prime source of knowledge and innovation. Research has assumed growing importance for

low-income countries as a means to maintain pace with knowledge and innovation (Dutta et al., 2019; Altbach, 2013).

An effective higher education strategy can enhance Sudan's research capacity and rapid development by realising important benefits of research: access to international research; development of local analysis and expertise; identification of relevant research agendas; enhancing critical thinking in higher education; promoting evidence-based debate and policy-making; development of human capital; and stimulation of national innovation systems. Notably, the significance of research in higher education is underlined by the constraints that low-income countries face in planning and policy-making due to a major knowledge gap (Kebede et al., 2014; Singh, 2009).

Scientific research focusing on Sudan's social need is clearly enshrined in the 1990 Act as a key objective. Nevertheless, there is a notable policy gap on research and a disconnect between government and HEIs. Research in Sudanese universities attracts no direct financial support. More widely, evidence shows the research situation has not progressed significantly in low-income countries (LICs) and remained largely underdeveloped or unbalanced. In one case research activity is highly concentrated where for instance in South America 80% of doctoral research is shared across only 4 countries (Ferreyra, 2017; Minsky, 2016). The Middle East exemplifies a funding issue where average government expenditure on research in the Arab countries is around 1.5 per cent and as low as 0.8% (Egypt), compared with 2.5 per cent in OECD Member countries and as high as 18% (Japan) (OECD, 2016).

In these contexts, today more than ever there is urgency for the poorest countries to establish stronger research capabilities and have access to research. For Sudan, a review of the higher education system represents a critical step in enhancing the quality and relevance of its universities and improving the overall effectiveness and efficiency of its educational system. Empirical evidence reinforces the view that knowledge production and exchange are strongly linked to the speed of economic growth in knowledge economies (OECD, 2000). In order to reverse this trend Sudan would need to address factors that undermine the country's research capacity: brain drain, gap between researchers and policy makers, lack of clear policy, lack of university autonomy and academic freedom.

Reforms in Higher Education

African countries recognised the need to enhance quality in higher education and have embarked on a programme of reform focusing on different areas: governance and management, academic domains, fiscal structures, and human resource management. New higher education policies reflect governments' commitment to provide greater operational freedom to higher education institutions and accountability.

The reforms were initiated to promote increased institutional autonomy in line with international standards. In Ethiopia, autonomy was granted to higher

education institutions over personnel, finances, and internal organisation, and an independent governance structure was defined (Saint, 2004). In Nigeria, public universities became autonomous and allowed greater freedom and control over appointment of key officers, curriculum design, generating income, student admissions, and finances. The strengthening of quality assurance and governance mechanisms was a major component of new policy (Varghese, 2013).

In Kenya, new public service policy led to the introduction of results-based management (RBM) as the basic approach to the governance and management of public institutions in which the performance contract was one of the main elements of reform (Nyangua, 2014). In South Africa, planning and funding reforms helped steer the higher education system towards greater responsiveness to national development needs. A new funding framework identified the mechanisms through which government grants would be distributed to HEIs, in alignment with: (i) national planning and policy priorities; (ii) the amount of funds made available in national HE budgets and (iii) the approved plans of individual institutions (Varghese, 2013).

The different attempts to reform higher education globally underscore the continuous challenged face by governments to enhance universities. In Italy, higher education reforms have been met with mixed reactions. In 2010 the government introduced a bill aiming to boost domestic competition by offering economic incentives to universities. The reform also initiated competitive and performance-based research funding, mergers between smaller institutions, and representation of the private sector on boards of directors (Katsomitros, 2012). In France reforms begun in 2007 initiated a paradigm shift resulting in fundamental restructuring of the highly decentralised sector and complete financial and administrative autonomy for universities. Different types of HE institutions with different specialisms were joined together into 25 higher education and research clusters that has encouraged greater regional harmonisation and increased research and innovation activities (Leroux, 2014). In Argentina, higher education reforms in recent years have aimed to address large regional disparities and uneven educational outcomes to create a more homogeneous system. Measures gave more autonomy to provincial governments to harmonise the different educational systems and standardise academic qualifications and systematise training standards and quality assurance mechanisms. Nevertheless consistency and decentralisation remain ongoing challenges and major differences in quality, funding and access remain (Monroy, 2018).

Conclusion

In many developing countries such as Sudan, higher education faces significant challenges which exist within a highly dynamic and competitive national, regional and global context.   This paper has shown the development of higher education over past decades and the impacts of a policy of rapid advancement on the quality of higher education in Africa and Sudan. The expansion of the university system and student enrolment has progressed without the necessary corresponding investment in infrastructure,

resources and quality assurance systems that has culminated in a severe deterioration in the academic quality status of Sudanese universities.

However, the country's political transformation and the new regime's recognition of the role of higher education may signal a new wave of measures to enhance the quality of institutions. This is paramount to develop the teaching and research capacity that will act as a major source of knowledge production that will help address the country's severe social issues and promote economic and social progression.

As the new government and policy makers consider the future of higher education in the Sudan, the agenda may focus on the overall structure of higher education, quality framework, the concentration of teaching, state of research, public and private sector funding, and innovation. A key goal should be the restructuring of the system to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of university provision and maximise scarce resources. This requires research to identify the key factors and conditions that enable or constrain universities' ability to make positive and sustainable contributions for Sudan's economic development. The lack of resources linked to funding is acknowledged as a major barrier and there is imperative to develop a short to long term funding strategy. In the short-term, government funding is critical to initiate the process of transformation to enable institutions to implement changes and develop their standards to make them responsive to local and market demands and to stimulate innovation. Long-term solutions should explore innovative financial solutions to enable higher education institutions to enhance their competitiveness and revenue-generating capacity in different areas: research funding, research services, industry sponsorships, private partnerships and tuition fees. Against this vision policy implications and recommendations should be focused on enabling Sudanese universities to adhere to national standards of quality and have the resources to strengthen internal implementation of quality and achieve a sustainable academic environment and robust research community. In summary, higher education is at a critical juncture and if the promise of modernisation is seized then it may assume a vital role in Sudan's development in providing high-level skills to its citizens to contribute solutions for the country's social, economic and environmental challenges.

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Post pandemic education – a look at the mature student enrolment at ITS

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Introduction

The enrolment of mature students in higher education has been increasing along the years. During the pandemic many people in the service industry where unable to go to work. This affected their morale and finances. Adult learners decide to apply at Higher Educational Institutions for various reasons some of which are: to change their career, increase their job opportunities, to gain knowledge, to achieve personal goals, increase their social circle or to have a sense of purpose or commitment (Tam, 2014; Swain & Hammond, 2011; Kember, et al., 2008; Leger, 1996). In order to use the time fruitful some adults decided to return to school to increase their knowledge. The aim of this study was to examine whether there was a change in the enrolment of mature students at the Institute of Tourism Studies in Malta (ITS) throughout the pandemic.

Literature review

The mature student

When looking at the mature student we find different definitions according to the country one chooses to study in. When applying for a higher educational programme in the United Kingdom, a mature student is an individual over the age of 21. In Fragoso et al (2013) it is stated that in Portugal, individuals who start their Higher Education over the age of 23 are considered as mature students while in Spain they need to be over 25. When looking at the University of Malta anyone applying for a course over the age of 23, may apply under the maturity clause. The Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) also has provisions for mature students over the age of 23. Throughout this study we will be considering the mature student to be an individual over the age of 23.

In a report released by the Tourism and Education Statistics Unit (2021) about post-secondary and tertiary education in Malta, one can see that there has been a consistent increase in the number of mature students.

Table 1: Tertiary level students by academic year (Tourism and Education Statistics Unit, 2021, p. 3)

Age group	Academic year			Change	Percentage change
	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2019-2020/2018-2019	
	Total				
Under 20	3,232	3,257	3,241	-16	-0.5
20-24	6,941	6,958	6,925	-33	-0.5
25-29	2,141	2,337	2,603	266	11.4
30-34	996	1,220	1,526	306	25.1
35-39	698	854	1,035	181	21.2
40-44	543	618	708	90	14.6
45-49	310	382	507	125	32.7
50-54	197	248	278	30	12.1
55-59	85	107	145	38	35.5
60-64	48	47	50	3	6.4
65+	29	40	35	-5	-12.5
Total	15,220	16,068	17,053	985	6.1

Thus, showing that mature students form a substantial number of the student cohort in higher education, and further analysis is needed to understand this group. This also points to the diversity in age of the mature student as some are seen as young adults, while others are older adults. Whatever the age these students have diverse characteristics to the traditional learner. (Kara, et al., 2019)

Reasons to continue studying

The older a person is the more they consider the time factor when applying for a course. When deciding to attend higher education they evaluate whether the learning is meaningful (Tam, 2014). Adult learners decide to apply at Higher Educational Institutions for various reasons some of which are: to change their career, increase their job opportunities, to gain knowledge, to achieve personal goals, increase their social circle or to have a sense of purpose or commitment (Tam, 2014; Swain & Hammond, 2011; Kember, et al., 2008; Leger, 1996). Duay and Bryan (2008) highlight the importance of considering the physical and cognitive abilities of mature students along with their life experiences, as these may affect their learning.

Therefore, Higher Educational institutions need to look at the potential and the benefits brought by mature students. Mature students bring experience and knowledge of the real world. They are motivated to learn and tend to provide more commitment to their studies than younger students (Fragoso et al, 2013; Duay & Bryan, 2008; Leger, 1996). Tam (2014) also points out that adult learners approach learning differently. This means that looking into the reasons for continuing their education will allow the institution to provide better tailored courses to reach the mature student since they have different strategies for learning, different motivations, and different learning needs.

Swain and Hammond (2011) divide these motivations and experiences of learning into four types of capital: "professional capital (certain skills that can be used in

professional life), economic capital (material and financial assets), personal capital (attitudes, aspirations and dispositions affecting identity) and social capital (resources gained through relationships/connections with a particular group)" (2011, p. 595). This demonstrates that the adult learner acquires different benefits according to why they are studying. In this study we will be looking into the capital gained by the adult learner and how this has affected them.

Challenges of mature students

A mature student brings with them experience and knowledge, but they also have more barriers and challenges to participate in Higher Education. These challenges may affect the student as well as the institution. How will the student manage the work, home and study life? Will they be able to adapt to the school environment? Will they have support from their family? Will technology effect their studies? Swain and Hammond (2011) found that if a mature student had a combination of these challenges, they had a narrower chance of completing their studies. Busher et al (2015) also recognised that the students felt the importance of being part of the student community in Higher Education, but it was difficult for them to participate fully due to home and work commitments. Students also pointed out that they had been away from formal education for a while, and they needed to make sure that their studies could fit with other aspects of their lives. Mature students also need to adapt and learn how to study again (Busher, et al., 2015).

COVID-19 pandemic and ITS

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected societies around the world, even students since schools had to close. UNESCO (2020) estimated that 1.6 billion learners (approximately 91 per cent of the student population) were affected. Governments and educational institutions tried their best to continue providing their learners with an education after the pandemic forced the schools to stop regular face-to-face teaching. This was mainly done through remote learning programmes, free online resources, and home-schooling programmes (UNESCO, UNICEF & World Bank, 2020).

At the Institute of Tourism Studies digital resources (such as virtual learning environments), digital lessons and learning materials for students and teachers to use in remote learning were already available, alongside paper-based resources. When the institute had to close their doors, professional development was also provided to support lecturers with the use of ICT in remote learning. Once ITS opened their doors again, health and safety measures were taken on to ensure the lecturer and student's safety. Measures included increased cleaning of the premises, social distancing between students and lecturers, remote learning options for some students and sanitizer dispensers freely available.

Face-to-face vs virtual learning

Meinck et al. (2022) found that when schools closed and students needed to continue their education through remote learning, more than half of the students agreed they felt anxious about the change (p. 131). Through virtual learning students needed to learn how to work independently; although this is an important skill when one is studying, this was all sudden and therefore many students might be

overwhelmed. On the other hand mature students in Marinoni et al. (2020) found that working and learning from a distance was in fact an opportunity for them, as this provided them with "more flexible learning possibilities, explore blended or hybrid learning and mixing synchronous learning with asynchronous learning" (p. 26). The learners believed that such opportunities would enhance their access to lifelong learning.

Meinck et al. (2022) also report that teaching and learning was able to continue throughout the pandemic thanks to the various delivery methods adopted and thanks to the adaptability, flexibility, and resilience of everyone involved. However, Marinoni et al. (2020) stressed that the mode of delivery of lectures all depend on the discipline of study. This means that even though theoretical lectures were able to continue, practical aspects of the modules were limited and could not be carried out through virtual learning. In fact, at ITS, the practical sessions were paused during the lockdown and were able to resume once the institute opened again.

Methodology

This research aimed to analyse whether the pandemic had influenced the intake of mature students at ITS. Therefore, the following research question was developed: Has the pandemic affected mature student enrolment at ITS and in what way is this evident?

The research was conducted through quantitative and qualitative research methodology. This was done through two data collection methods. The first was an analysis of the published statistics of student enrolment at ITS and the second was through an online questionnaire directed towards mature students. The target student population was defined as all students enrolled over the age of 23 (these are classified as mature students) following their studies at ITS.

Through the statistics published by ITS the researchers aim to compare the years 2018, 2019 (pre pandemic) to the years 2020, 2021 (during and post pandemic) to identify whether there was an increase or decrease in the enrolment of mature students at ITS.

The second method of data collection was done through a questionnaire (found in Appendix 1) which was designed using clear and understandable language. The questionnaire was made up of four parts. The first related to collecting data about the demographic of the respondents, age, gender and family status (Questions 1-3), the second focused on their educational background (Questions 4-9), the third focused on the type of learning received at ITS (Questions 10-16) and the fourth focused on the outcome, support system and barriers faced throughout the course (Question 17-22).

The questionnaire included both open-ended (which provided insight into the respondents' views and opinions) and closed-ended questions (which allows for quantifiable data which can be categorised). The questionnaire was designed to be completed within an 8-minute time frame. An information sheet together with a weblink with the online questionnaire was disseminated to all students at ITS. The information sheet assured the participants of anonymity, confidentiality and that participation is voluntary.

Limitations

The study carried out involved a small-scale sample therefore it cannot be assumed that the findings represent the experiences of all the mature students at ITS. Through this study we aim to portray the demographics, experiences and challenges of a selected group of participants. Despite the sample size, findings do show consistencies that could be further investigated in the future.

Results

The data collected will provide an overall representation of the experiences and challenges of mature students at ITS. Apart from the statistical data collected from ITS, a questionnaire was sent out to gather an overall picture of the mature student population at ITS.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was completed by 37 students out of a cohort of 151 mature students, which means that we had a response of 25%. The data collected will be divided under four headings: Demographics (Questions 1-3), Educational Background (Questions 4-9), Type of Learning at ITS (Questions 10-16), and Personal Experiences (Question 17-22, which include support system, barriers and outcomes).

•Demographics (Q1-3)
The first 3 questions focused on the demographics of the respondents.
Question 1: How old are?
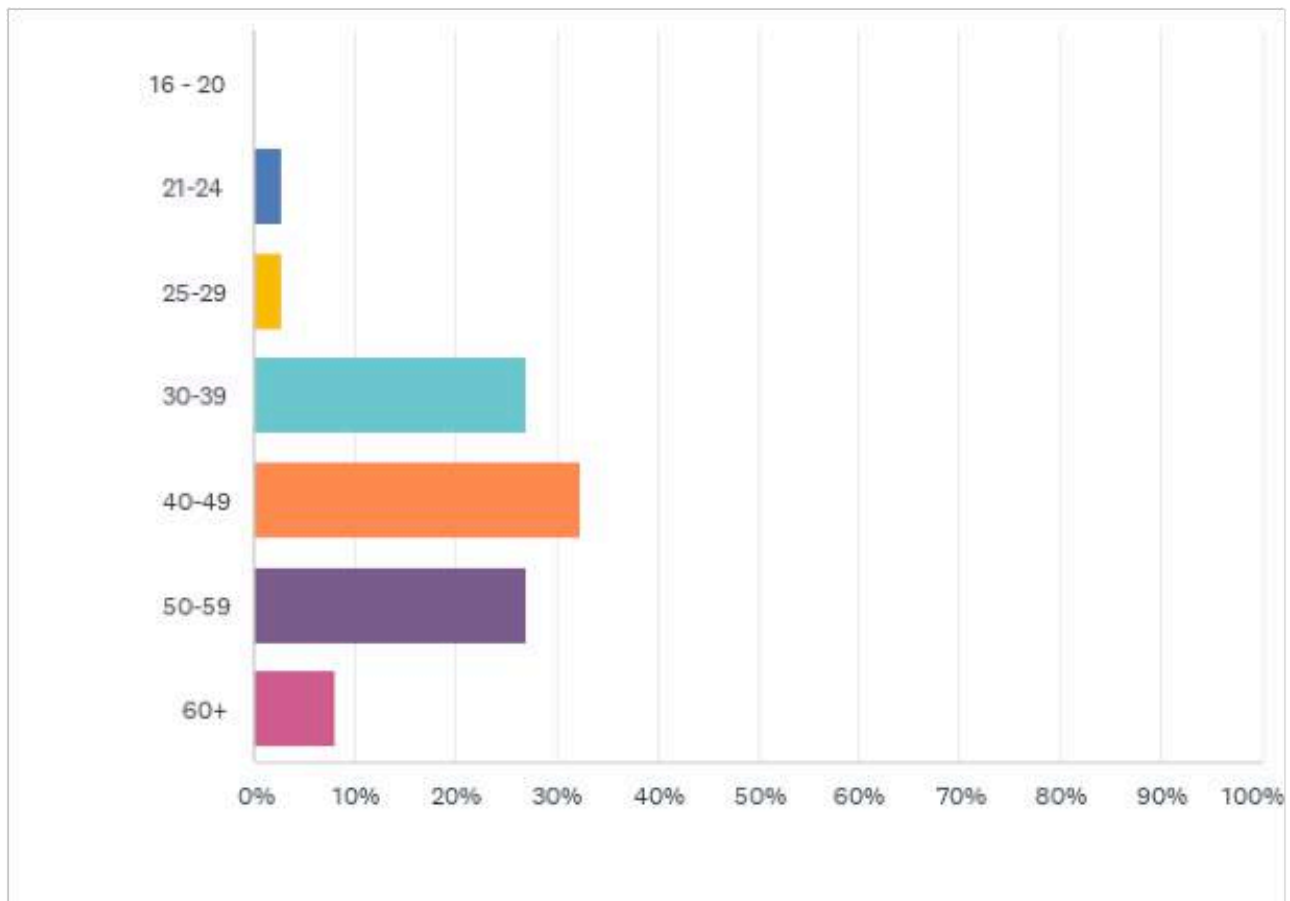
Here we see that most of the mature students are between the ages of 30 and 59.
Question 2: Gender

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	48.65%	18
Female	51.35%	19
Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
Prefer to self-describe: _____	0.00%	0
TOTAL		37

This question revealed that it is a relatively equal distribution. This is inline with the percentage distribution issued by the Tourism and Education Statistics Unit (2021) where more there are more female mature students than male.

Q 3 Family status

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Single with no dependents	24.32%	9
Single with dependents	13.51%	5
Married/Partnered with no dependents	18.92%	7
Married/Partnered with dependents	43.24%	16
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
TOTAL		37

Nine of the respondents were single with no dependents while five were single with dependents. Seven respondents were married with no dependents while sixteen were married with dependents. This means that sixteen respondents had no dependents whilst twenty-one had dependents. Therefore the latter (be it single or married) face more challenges while following their course.

•Educational Background (4-9)

Q 4 Educational qualifications:

Students had different levels of educational qualifications. Seventeen students had ISCED level 4 or lower educational qualifications, while twenty students had ISCED levels 5 to 7. The latter respondents have more of an academic background and therefore might face less challenges throughout the course.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
School leaving certificate	8.11%	3
O Levels	10.81%	4
A Levels	21.62%	8
Diploma	16.22%	6
Higher National Diploma	16.22%	6
Bachelors Degree	13.51%	5
Masters	18.92%	7
PHD	0.00%	0
None of the above	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	8.11%	3
Total Respondents: 37		

Q 5 Which course are you following

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Foundation	0.00%	0
Certificate	0.00%	0
Diploma	2.70%	1
Higher National Diploma	37.84%	14
Undergraduate	32.43%	12
Postgraduate	27.03%	10
TOTAL		37

Most respondents are following a Higher National Diploma (fourteen) while twelve respondents are reading for an undergraduate degree and ten respondents are following a Postgraduate Degree. Only one mature student is following the diploma course. This indicates that mature students tend to apply for higher level courses, which might indicate the reason they return to education. This also tallies with the Tourism and Education Statistics (2021) where the number of students decrease as the level of the course increases.

Q 6 Have you participated in Higher Education as a mature student

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, I am currently a mature student in Higher Education for the first time	59.46%	22
Yes, I was previously a mature student in Higher Education	40.54%	15
No, I'm not a Mature Student	0.00%	0
TOTAL		37

 Twenty two out of the thirty seven respondents were enrolled as mature students for the first time. Interestingly, fifteen students had already completed another course in higher education.

Q7: If you have in the past been, or are currently, a Mature Student in Higher Education is/was this:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Full-time	43.24%	16
Part-time	56.76%	21
N/A, I'm not a Mature Student	0.00%	0
TOTAL		37

The Tourism and Education Statistics (2021) found that students mostly followed courses as full-time students. The data shows that sixteen students were following a full-time course while twenty-one followed their course part-time.

Q8: If you have in the past been or are currently, a Mature Student in Higher Education did you pay a tuition fee?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes, I paid the full fee	24.32%	9
Yes, but my tuition fee was subsidised	21.62%	8
No, it was free of charge	54.05%	20
N/A, I'm not a Mature Student	0.00%	0
TOTAL		37

Nine students paid the tuition fee, eight students paid the tuition fee but it was subsidised and twenty students did not need to pay the tuition.

Q 9: If as a Mature Student you have paid for your tuition fee in part or in full, what is your view on the money spent on higher education?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
An investment in my future	59.46%	22
A necessity	0.00%	0
A gamble	5.41%	2
N/A	29.73%	11
Other (please specify)	5.41%	2
TOTAL		37

Twenty-two students agreed that the course was an investment for the future. Two students state that it was a gamble and eleven did not respond. Another student cited that it was done for self-enrichment while the last student stated that through the course he/she is able to impart their talent and gain academic knowledge related to their profession.

•Type of Learning at ITS

Q10: If you have in the past been or are currently, a Mature Student at ITS is/was this mainly:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
On campus	10.81%	4
Distance or online learning	54.05%	20
Hybrid	35.14%	13
N/A, I'm not a Mature Student	0.00%	0
TOTAL		37

Most students (twenty) stated that their learning was done through distance or online. Thirteen said that they had hybrid learning while four students followed their lectures on campus.

Q11: Which type of lectures do you prefer?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
On campus	21.62%	8
Distance or online learning	32.43%	12
Hybrid	45.95%	17
TOTAL		37

Most students (seventeen) stated they preferred hybrid type of learning experience, twelve preferred to follow their lectures online while eight preferred to be on campus. This supports Marinoni et al. (2020) where mature students preferred a mixed type of learning as they felt it offered them more opportunities.

Q13: On campus lectures: Did the institute enforce this?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	18.92%	7
No	81.08%	30
TOTAL		37

Only seven out of the thirty-seven respondents said that on campus lectures were enforced by the institution.

Q14: Distance or online lectures: Did the institute enforce this?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	59.46%	22
No	40.54%	15
TOTAL		37

On the other hand, twenty-two respondents stated that online lectures where enforced by the institute. In this question we also need to take into account the fact that the institution needed to abide by national protocals, when physical schools where closed for a certain time frame.

Q 15: Did you apply for an exemption to follow your lectures online?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	13.51%	5
No	86.49%	32
TOTAL		37

Only five participants applied for an exemption to follow the courses online. This suggests that the other participants (thirty-two) prefer on campus or hybrid type of learning.

Q16: Why did you apply or not for an exemption?

This question was open ended as we wanted to hear the students opinions. This question should've been more specific to the exemption to follow lectures online as some respondents (nine) thought it meant being exempted from the module, therefore not needing to follow it. The ones that answered it according to online exemptions revealed that most of them preferred the online format as it fit in well with their schedule, others commented that it saved them time and money, some preferred recorded lectures which allowed them more flexibility, one respondent said that if it wasn't online he/she wouldn't have enrolled and another stated that online was enforced due to COVID 19.

•Personal Experiences

Q17: What outcome did you expect from the course. You can choose more than one answer:

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Increase future employment options and opportunities	64.86%	24
To gain a recognised qualification	59.46%	22
To pursue interest in the subject	45.95%	17
Improvement of current job	40.54%	15
To enable further study	40.54%	15
To gain specific skills (either for employment or study)	35.14%	13
New job/career change	32.43%	12
Wanting to study and do something intellectual	27.03%	10
To be in a stimulating environment	24.32%	9
To do something different	18.92%	7
Proving to self- and/or to others	18.92%	7
Due to Covid-19 restrictions I wanted something to focus on	18.92%	7
Enjoyment/increase my social circle	16.22%	6
To gain opportunities to live abroad	8.11%	3
Due to Covid-19 pandemic I was made redundant and had more time to study	8.11%	3
Other (please specify) Responses	5.41%	2
Total Respondents: 37		

Following Swain and Hammond (2011) these motivations and experiences of learning were grouped into four types of capital: professional capital, economic capital, personal capital and social capital. Most of the respondents chose answers related to professional and economic capital:

•increase future employment options and opportunities (24),
•To gain a recognised qualification (22),
•Improvement of current job (15),
•to gain specific skills (13)
•new job/career change (12)
•to update my knowledge, improve my skills and theoretical knowledge (1).

This was followed closely by personal capital:
•To pursue interest in the subject (17),
•to enable further study (15),
•Wanting to study and do something intellectual (10),
•To be in a stimulating environment (9),
•Proving to self- and/or to others (7),
•To do something different (7),
•Added an air of confidence (1).

Social capital was also an important part of the outcome:

•Due to Covid-19 restrictions I wanted something to focus on (7),
•Enjoyment/increase my social circle (7),
•To gain opportunities to live abroad (3),
•Due to Covid-19 pandemic I was made redundant and had more time to study (3)

Q18: What did you gain from the course? You can choose more than one answer.

ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
▾	Gained Knowledge	94.59%	35
▾	Increased self-esteem and confidence	62.16%	23
▾	Improved job prospects	51.35%	19
▾	New Job opportunities	51.35%	19
▾	Broadened outlook of life	51.35%	19
▾	Useful network of friends	48.65%	18
▾	Sense of purpose and commitment	43.24%	16
▾	Increased social circle	35.14%	13
▾	A qualification to continue studying	27.03%	10
▾	Promotion at work	10.81%	4
▾	Other (please specify) Responses	2.70%	1
Total Respondents: 37			

Following the four types of capital (Swain & Hammond, 2011), answers related to personal capital had the most responses:
•Gained knowledge (35)
•Increased self-esteem and confidence (23)
•Broadened outlook of life (19)
•Sense of purpose and commitment (16)

Followed closely by professional and economic capital:
•Improve job prospects (19)
•New job opportunities (19)
•Qualification to continue studying (10)
•Promotion at work (4)

Social capital was also an important part of the outcome:
•Useful network of friends (18)
•Increased social circle (13)

Q19: What are/were the main issues, barriers, and challenges to participating in Higher Education? (1 = Not a barrier and 5 = A major barrier)

	NOT A BARRIER	A SLIGHT BARRIER	NEUTRAL	A MODERATE BARRIER	A MAJOR BARRIER	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Family responsibilities and commitments	14.29% 5	20.00% 7	14.29% 5	25.71% 9	25.71% 9	35	3.29
Job commitments	14.71% 5	14.71% 5	5.88% 2	32.35% 11	32.35% 11	34	3.53
Timing of study (day/evening)	3.13% 1	21.88% 7	3.13% 1	46.88% 15	25.00% 8	32	3.69
Insufficient support and advice	18.18% 6	21.21% 7	36.36% 12	12.12% 4	12.12% 4	33	2.79
Difficulties adapting to student life	50.00% 16	15.63% 5	18.75% 6	12.50% 4	3.13% 1	32	2.03
Tuition fees and/or expensive resources/materials needed	55.88% 19	8.82% 3	20.59% 7	11.76% 4	2.94% 1	34	1.97
Commuting	51.43% 18	14.29% 5	17.14% 6	11.43% 4	5.71% 2	35	2.06
Technology and the Internet	48.48% 16	18.18% 6	24.24% 8	9.09% 3	0.00% 0	33	1.94

When looking at the respondents' answers the challenges mostly faced related to family responsibilities and commitments, job commitments and timing of study. On the other hand, overall, the respondents didn't feel that they had difficulties adapting to student life, didn't feel that the tuition fees affected them, commuting was not an issue, they adapted well to technology, and they felt that they had enough support.

Q20: How have the restrictions put in place because of the COVID-19 crisis impacted on your ability to participate in higher education?

• Practice sessions were affected (either moved online or outside of scholastic year)
• Difficulty to socialise
• Able to listen to lectures at a convenient time
• Helped the students to focus and commit to their studies
• Managed to gain sponsorship for the MBA due to covid (training scheme offered due to covid)
• Job uncertainty made me feel insecure about the future
• Difficult to do some subject online (practice sessions)
• A challenge with technology at first, but with the support of colleagues and lecturers gained more confidence
• I was able to follow the course since it was online. Had it been onsite I would have never applied.

Q21 How would you rate the support provided during your studies?

	EXCELLENT	VERY GOOD	GOOD	NEITHER GOOD NOR POOR	POOR	VERY POOR	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Guidance and support by the Registrar, the Administration and Management	13.79% 4	37.93% 11	17.24% 5	13.79% 4	17.24% 5	0.00% 0	29	2.83
Guidance and support to complete the course by the Academic staff	29.63% 8	37.04% 10	22.22% 6	7.41% 2	0.00% 0	3.70% 1	27	2.22
Mental health and other support	12.90% 4	16.13% 5	41.94% 13	22.58% 7	6.45% 2	0.00% 0	31	2.94
Help with digital/ICT	22.22% 6	11.11% 3	29.63% 8	22.22% 6	7.41% 2	7.41% 2	27	3.04
Peer support	30.00% 9	33.33% 10	20.00% 6	13.33% 4	0.00% 0	3.33% 1	30	2.30
Community support	17.86% 5	14.29% 4	42.86% 12	21.43% 6	0.00% 0	3.57% 1	28	2.82

The students felt supported in the different aspects of student life while following the course.

Q 22 Are there any structures, support systems, learning or teaching approaches that would best suit mature students?

- Induction course
- One-to-one meeting with the lecturers at the beginning of the course to familiarize with each other.
- Help with ICT sector, how to use teams and VLE
- More recorded material
- Change in lecture times
- More help with writing academically, study skills.
- More practical and hands-on experience
- Ask for students' feedback to improve the course
- Get feedback after exam/assignment not just the mark
- Online learning due to family/work life
- Too much coursework for mature students
- More liaison between theory and practice

Discussion

In total 37 out of 151 mature students enrolled at ITS responded to the questionnaire, this meant that we collected 25% of the mature student cohort. Even

though this is not statistically significant, the information gathered still provides useful contribution to policy makers, lecturers and people who design and market the courses at ITS.

By looking at the demographic data we see that most respondents were between the ages of 30-59. The age profile aligns with the findings of Watson et al and international news articles such as The Guardian (England), Belfast Telegraph (Ireland), and The Globe and Mail (Canada), where there is an increase in the enrolment of mature students in higher education. In Malta you also find the Malta Government Scholarship Scheme which helps fund courses for adult learners studying at post-graduate level. In fact, one of the respondents mentioned using the scheme to further his studies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the Tourism and Education Statistics Unit (2021) there are usually more female mature students than their male counterparts in higher education. In our case the distribution was relatively equal. This could be related to the field of study, OECD (2021) found that more women tend to apply for courses related to education, health and welfare; the courses at ITS focus more on tourism and hospitality which might attract more male students. Infact the Tourism and Education Statistics Unit (2021) found that in the service industry there are more male students than female.

When looking at the educational background, twenty four out of thirty seven respondents were following a course at a higher level than the one they currently have. This shows us that the respondents wanted to continue to further their education and possibly upskill their knowledge. The latter also tallies with the findings that most of the respondents (twenty-one) were following a course part-time suggesting they had other commitments such as work.

Only four of the respondents followed the course on campus, twenty followed it online and thirteen had a hybrid mode of learning. The respondents were then asked which type of learning they preferred, unsurprisingly most of the respondents opted for the hybrid mode (46%), were they explained that theory lectures would be held online while practise sessions would be held on site. They felt that this enabled them to make better use of their time, something that mature students feel strongly about, the use of their time. 32% of the respondents preferred online learning as they stated this could be done from the comfort of their home, take notes on their computer, manage their family life better, save time going to and from lectures, and also if they have a gap between lectures they can use that time efficiently. 22% of respondents preferred on campus lectures, stating that they miss the interaction one gets in a classroom, they feel they can understand and learn better in class and they feel that discussions are more fruitful.

These findings are simiar to Marinoni et al, (2020) who found that hybrid lectures were more fruitful for mature students and provided them with more flexibility. Out of the the eight students who preferred to be on campus four of them were male with no dependents, therfore this might suggest that the social aspect of meeting people is an important part for them while following a course. Most of the people who preferred the hybrid or online had dependents, therefore they had family responsibilities to juggle along with the course modules. Students in Busher et al (2015) also stated that studying had to be fitted around their life. Therefore this mode of learning allows this to occur.

When looking at the outcome expected from the course, we followed Swain and Hammond (2011) and grouped them into four types of capital: professional capital, economic capital, personal capital, and social capital. The professional and economic capital were predominant in our study. This signifies that the respondents want to improve their skills and possibly have a better job. This could also mean that the participants did not feel safe in their current job and needed to further their studies in order to maintain their position. Respondents also felt the need to gain personal capital which helped them pursue interest in the subject, do something intellectual and be in a stimulating environment. Some respondents found that the social capital was important to them as it helped them focus on something during the COVID-19 restrictions while also increasing their social circle. Tam (2014) also highlights the diverse reasons mature students enter higher education. Therefore, it is important that when we are looking at this cohort, we do not see them as a homogenous group. On the contrary they are diverse, with background knowledge and experience which they bring to the classroom.

When looking at the gains of the course most students stated that they mainly received personal capital. This is true to mature students, they are motivated to learn and tend to provide more commitment to their studies than younger students (Fragoso et al, 2013; Duay & Bryan, 2008; Leger, 1996). It was also noted that they gained social capital. Tam (2014) also points this out, that older adults tend to start a course to increase their social circle. Even though the professional and economic capital were mentioned here they were not the capital mostly gained by the students. Which makes us think about what mature students mostly gain from their course and we can use that to attract more mature students.

When looking at the barriers faced by the students, more female students felt family responsibilities and commitments as a major barrier when compared to the male student. With regards to job commitments both female and male students felt this as a barrier. Most students thought that the timing of the lectures was a barrier. This links with their answers about hybrid or recorded lessons which would better suit their lifestyle.

When asked about the restrictions set by the government during their studies, the main theme that emerged was that the students felt that their practice sessions were affected the most. This ties in with Marinoni et al., (2020) where even though theory lectures were able to continue practice sessions did suffer. ITS focuses on the hospitality and tourism industry and provides students with practical experience to allow them to link theory to practice. Unfortunately, this was not possible when the schools were locked down, hence why the students felt this was a major indent on their educational journey. Students also stated that since they moved online, they had some difficulty with technology at first. This was resolved through the support of colleagues and lecturers. In fact, from the study, it was revealed that the respondents felt very supporting in most aspects of their course. Some students also mentioned that the job uncertainty affected their confidence since they were insecure about their future.

On the other hand, many students stated that COVID 19 impacted their studies in a positive way, they were able to listen to lectures at a convenient time, were able to focus more on their studies, gained a sponsorship and able to apply for the course

since it was online. Had it been onsite they would have never been able to follow the course.

As mentioned, mature students bring experience and knowledge. They attend a course because they want to gain more knowledge. They were asked on how they suggest the courses could improve and from the answers given certain themes emerged

1.Preparatory courses – it was suggested that an induction course be held to help students adapt. Possibly a meeting with the lecturers at the beginning of the course to familiarize with each other (this is not just the usual relationship of a lecturer imparting knowledge to a student, this is more than that). The student has more to give to the lecture which will provide further discussions of the subject. More help with writing academically and study skills. This was noted when students wouldn't have higher than a level 4 background in education.
2.Technology – students suggested upgrading the VLE and providing the students with information sessions on how to use it
3.Feedback – lecturers should ask for student's feedback at the end of a module, they also wanted feedback from the lecturer after an exam or assignment not just the mark as they wanted to know what they could've done to improve.
4.Mode of Learning – students asked for more recorded material and to continue with online learning due to family/work life. Students also asked for more practical and hands-on experience (this was disrupted due to the lockdown) and more liaison between theory and practice.

Conclusion

The results of this study show that there was an increase in the number of mature student enrolment during the pandemic. From the questionnaire, we were able to analyse and discuss the results and opinions of the mature students currently enrolled at ITS. These results also allow Institutions and Universities to take action from both an academic perspective and a marketing angle, as the aim is always to continue attracting and increasing the intake of mature students based on student satisfaction and reasons for participating in Higher Education. Therefore, the findings presented are considered valuable and also ones that can open a line of research to ensure mature student satisfaction and higher enrolment rates.

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Social Entrepreneurship and Crowdfunding Model: From Social Entrepreneurship Perspective

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Abstract

Many research studies have shown that social entrepreneurship plays a very significant role in supporting societies to move forward in the direction of sustainability. Social entrepreneurship provides sufficient and self-sustainable solutions for social purposes beyond personal wealth pursuit. In the Era of rising social entrepreneurs, the obstacle that arises is the funding for the social mission, its business needs, and financial sustainability. Crowdfunding plays a crucial role in this. The process of crowdfunding starts with peers, family, and acquaintances eventually leading to massive funds. The social entrepreneurs, a group of individuals who opt to pledge funds to support the initiative, and the platforms that intermediate between them are the major participants of the process. Hence, this paper first reviews the extant literature on social entrepreneurship, crowdfunding, and intermediaries. Based upon the findings, the author initiates the step towards building the framework of the social entrepreneurial and crowdfunding ecosystem. This study contributes to the literature by describing the initial holistic behavioral model of the social entrepreneurs and the funders that comes together to help a business sustain for resolving the sustainability issues of the societies. The theory of Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) is used to understand the participation of the crowd funders in sustainability initiatives. From this model, the most relevant future research agendas are derived and provided.

Keywords: Social Entrepreneurship, Social Entrepreneurs, Crowdfunding, Equity-based Funding, Lending-based Funding, Donation-based Funding, Reward-based Funding, Sustainable venture.

Introduction

Social entrepreneurs are the individuals who identify with the problems in society, find business opportunities and take huge financial risks to solve problems and make an impact on the social and environmental aspects. They are dedicated innovators, who systematically adds the value in the society through the focus on the social market failures also for-profit objective (Pahwa, 2021). This has gained a lot of attention because of the arising complex issues in modern society, that's where social entrepreneurs take effect. These people are often mistaken for charity, altruism, or philanthropist but they are the people who create the evolved business models capable of providing goods and services through an efficient and self-sufficient business solution to determine social and environmental problems (Boparikar, 2015). According to Ashoka (2010) cited in Kaufmann et al. (2014), happy people who are interested in politics, giving to charities, extroverted, and more liberal in their political

ideology operate as social entrepreneurs. The belief is to not escape or transfer the problem solution to government or business sectors but to take new steps and persuade the entire society (Kaufmann et al., 2014). Unfavourably, even with the increase in societal support, social entrepreneurs fail to acquire sufficient financial support from the capital market (Mosakowski & Calic, 2016). Hence, the shortage of funds from the investors becomes the main disadvantage as social motivation takes the backseat when compared with the financial considerations (Boparikar, 2015; Lehner, 2013). The social and environmental aspects of the social enterprise in unattractive to the traditional investors and lenders (Mosakowski & Calic, 2016). Considering traditional investing institutions being incompatible with the enterprise that seeks to rise above their self-interest, it is obvious to anticipate the emergence of new financial intuitions that corresponds to the societal support for social entrepreneurship (Mosakowski & Calic, 2016). As per the existing literature and the statistics projected from around the world, it is no mistake to suggest that crowdfunding is the source of finance to aid the shortage of funds for social entrepreneurship (Mosakowski & Calic, 2016; Bosma et al., 2016). Consequently, crowdfunding models' types spread in form of donation, reward, lending, and equity, are expected to project an annual growth of 29% between 2018 and 2022 (Statisca, 2018). The ongoing discussion has been going for a while on the success of social enterprises in sustaining themselves through various types of funding models. Consequently, this research aims to address the most recent suggestion by Testa et al. (2019, pp. 14) for future research on not so far prevailing research on "How the various models of crowdfunding can be best leveraged to support social entrepreneurship and innovation?". The following existing literature was tested through a qualitative study as it constitutes another research gap (Abramson & Billings, 2019; Bergamini et al., 2017). Respectively, the aim is to bridge the two gaps. Also, lays a foundation in preparing a holistic model from existing scattered models. To address behavioral changes of the project creators and backers towards the success of sustainable entrepreneurship via different funding models. Later, the synthesized model prepared with the support of existing literature will be combined with the findings from the qualitative research analysis. Clearly, in this paper, the aim is to create an ecosystem from the perspective of social entrepreneurs in the form of social entrepreneurship model.

Literature review

Social Entrepreneurship and Crowdfunding

Social entrepreneurship comes into existence with the identification of the logjams in society and recognition of the ways to free them. William Drayton, founder of "Ashoka" is deemed to be engineered the phrase "social entrepreneur" (Boparikar, 2015). According to Mair and Naoba (2003), cited in Chipeta & Surujlal. (2017) since the concept of social entrepreneurship is rising as incubators of social change, it is very important to understand the zeal of the entrepreneur, who ripe the business to resolve the social and environmental issues. Furthermore, it is very important to understand that sustainability is a big issue faced by contemporary societies and is expected to cause more trouble in the future (Maehle et al., 2020). Hence, an increase in the number of sustainable projects which provide an impact on social and environmental

dimensions is demanded (Maehle et al., 2020; Boparikar, 2015). Presently, the most important objective is the development of sustainable projects to attain the position of a sustainable future (Chen, 2016). Hence, it is announced, that social entrepreneurs have the solutions to solve the issues and level up the benefits, but most of them have the very confined business knowledge and management skills. As a result, it is difficult for the social entrepreneur to raise funding from bank institutions or business angels (Maehle et al., 2020; Horisch, 2015). To overcome the requirement of finances for sustainable purposes, sustainability crowdfunding usage as a method has been witnessed. For sustainable projects to sustain, investment by the funders is made for the sustainability of the organization (Kim & hall, 2021; Simeoni & Crescenzo, 2018). Although it is evident that social entrepreneurship is facing major financial challenges (Simeoni & Crescenzo, 2018). Non-profits social enterprises face issues in acquiring funds as no sufficient consideration is given to the financial aspects because the focal point lies with the social impact of their enterprise (Boparikar, 2015; Horisch, 2015). On contrary, the social enterprise that decides to take a for-profit form struggles with its primary mission of social or environmental impact (Brakman Reiser, 2013). In practice, the entrepreneurs face the dilemma of keeping their shareholders' interests aside as they possess the power to remove/sue the directors who do not work in their best interest (Abramson & Billings, 2019). Hence, the directors give a propensity to the stakeholder's fiduciary duty. Although, the positive co-relation of sustainability-orientation has been identified with the success of crowdfunding. Especially with the partial mediation of project creation and third-party platforms endorsements (Mosakowski & Calic, 2016; Kim & hall, 2021). Crowdfunding fits the objective of social entrepreneurs as they seek social as well as financial returns (Mollick, 2014; Lehner, 2013). It enables the funder to invest in various types of projects in small amounts using various internet platforms (Agrawal et al., 2014). Crowdfunding comes with different forms of funding as well (Bento et al., 2019; Jovanovic, 2017). Moreover, the following consists of four funding based forms: Donation, where the funder does not receive any monetary benefits, reward, where small rewards are received in the form of honorary recognition, final product, or service, etc. equity, where the shares are allotted in the capital of the company equivalent to the amount funder has planned to invest and lending, where the investment is in the form of a loan by the funder (Bergamini et al., 2017; Jovanovic, 2017; Horisch, 2015). In the literature, the distinction will be made between the two models, the donation and reward based model i.e non monetary compensations received by funders, and the equity and lending based model i.e monetary compensation received by the funders for their support (Horisch, 2015; Mollick, 2014). For the process of crowdfunding to initiate with the four forms of funding models, the process requires three participants: project creator, platform, and funder. (Jovanovic, 2017; Mosakowski & Calic, 2016). The project creator raises funds for its innovation, the innovation is initiated by the platform and funded by the funder (Jovanovic, 2017).

In the MLP model, the author identified the large shifts in the "Socio-technical" regime in the form of disruptive products or services that were overruled by the
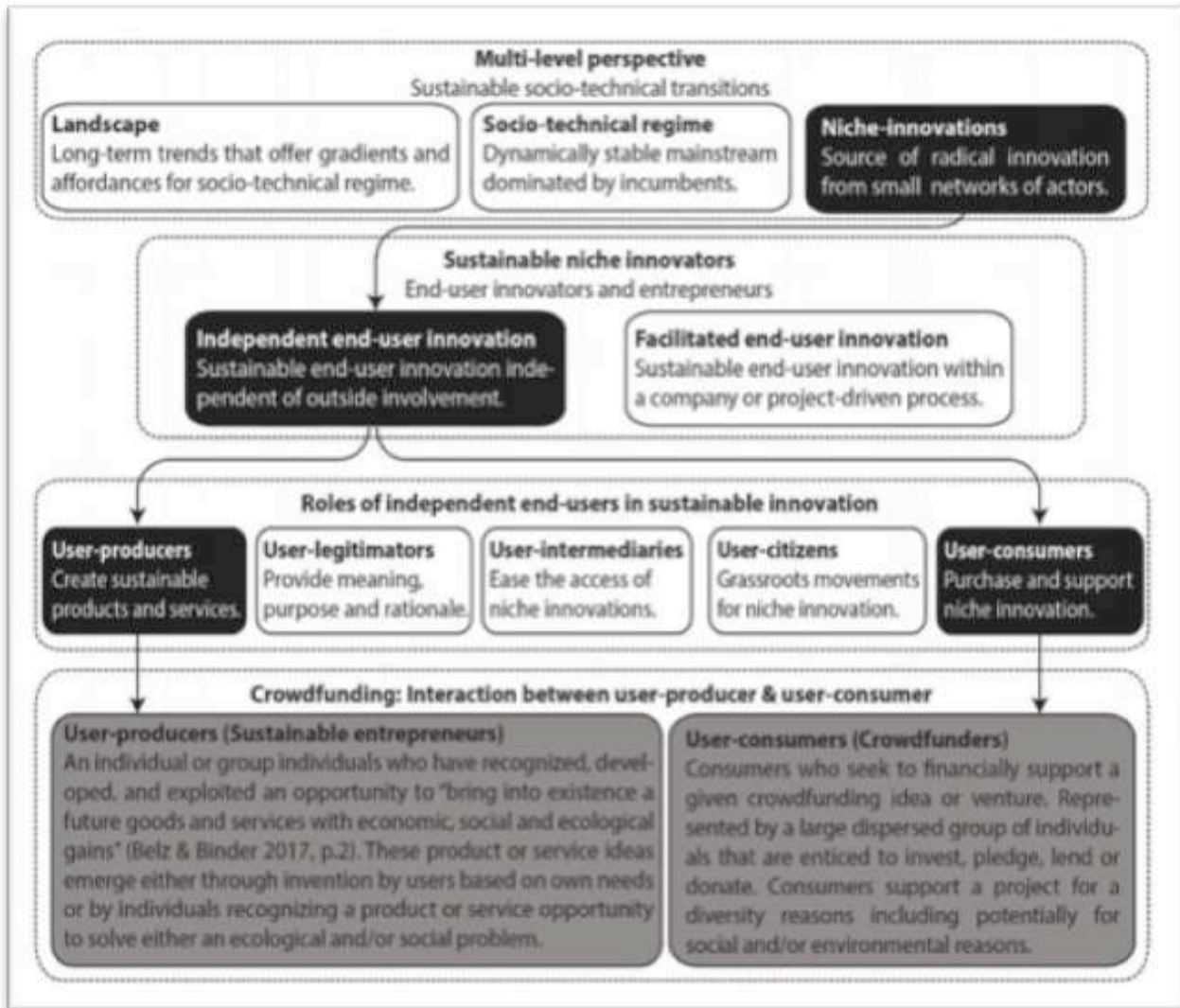
niche innovators (Nielsen, 2017). Further, individuals or the group of individuals who led to the creation of niche innovation in sustainability-orientation are also termed as social entrepreneurs (Mair & Marti 2005). The journey of social entrepreneurship starts with the transformation of these user-producers to user-entrepreneurs (Schot et al., 2016). Whereas user-consumer or crowd funder plays a mainstream role of not only purchasing the product but actively engaging in enabling the innovation of the product or service (Nielsen 2017). Hence, from the perspective of the business cycle, the user-consumer or crowd funder supports the development of the fundamentals of the product or service (Nielsen et al., 2016). Besides, it is to be noted while investing in a project, "Crowd funder typically do not look much at collaterals or business plans, but at the ideas and core values of the innovators firm" (Horisch 2015, p.4). As a result, the crowd funder also fails to evaluate the ecological benefits, or the social impact accomplished (Hörisch, 2019). It is observed by the authors that communication and proximity between the project creator and backer have a positive correlation with crowdfunding success (Maehle et al., 2020). These factors help the project creators to share their story behind the project with the backers, which helps them to evaluate the project (Rey-Marti et al., 2019). Bird, (1998) cited in Chipeta & Surujlal, (2017) states that the state of mind of the backers is controlled by the intentions of the project creator. Hence, the actions

directed helps the project creator to achieve their specific goals. Consequently, intention also helps to understand the degree of motivation in social entrepreneurs, individuals risk taking, inclination, and committed personalities (Chipeta & Surujlal, 2017). Therefore, even though monetary funding models require investment returns unlike non-monetary funding models, the core idea of making a social impact can be prioritized as the backer's investment decisions are influenced by the social and environmental impact of the project (Petruzzellia et al., 2019). Hence, guarantees given in the monetary form can be parallelly achieved. Intermediaries or platforms can act as a facilitator that offers the effective introduction of the project creator and backer into the prevailing framework (Nielsen, 2017). Therefore, online platforms help the innovator to overcome the barriers of geographic, social, and economic boundaries of crowdfunding markets (Maehle et al., 2020). Most studies confirm the success of crowdfunding can be achieved by the effective working of the platform and building legitimacy (Ahlstrom & Bruton, 2002). Legitimacy is acquired by the platforms when its behavior is aligned with the norms and the values of the society (Mollick 2014). Hence in platforms, the project's legitimacy plays a significant role for the crowd funders to make their decisions on funding the project. The pursuit is to find co-creation than just sticking to financial returns (Rey-Marti et al., 2019). In addition, various authors have confirmed that lack of trust is the main reason for the disadvantage in acquiring finances through crowdfunding (Rey-Marti et al., 2019). Therefore, ample efforts are being devoted to increasing the transparency of the process that takes place during crowdfunding. Furthermore, the comprehensive information of the projects, its details, and disclaimer of the risks are displayed to the potential funder investing through the platform (Rey-Marti et al., 2019). In Germany, Ecocrowd.de came into existence in 2014. Thus, to guarantee the legitimacy of the platform, the projects pitching on the platforms were checked and consulted by the German Federal Environmental Foundation to verify their evident link with sustainable development (Horisch, 2015). However, legitimacy is the key metric that guarantees the survival of the organization. As a result, the bulletproof method for the crowdfunding intermediaries was used to catalyst social entrepreneurship. Hence, build and preserve legitimacy (Rey-Marti et al., 2019).

Figure 2: Value-Attitude-Behaviour Theory (Kim & hall, 2021)

Fig. 1. Proposed research model.

Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB) theory suggests "that the influence of value on specific behaviour is mediated by attitude toward the behaviour, revealing that influence should theoretically flow from abstract values to midrange attitudes to specific behaviours" (Kim & hall 2021, p.4). Further, Chipeta (2015, p. 29) states the definition of attitude is "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive and dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related". Whereas, values determine individuals' self and personality, and they act as motivators for their actions (Tenner & Horisch, 2021). Hence, the values outline the attitude of the individual and provide standards against which the sustainability behavior of the individuals and societies gets measured. Hence the similarities in the ethics and values of the group of individuals framework shape up the social norms (Kim & hall, 2021). Also, the shaping up of the values based on individual experiences is referred to as personal values. Therefore, personal values are found to be in relation with the consumer conduct, where the conduct would be identified to be driven by the principles (McCarty & Shrum, 1994). The crowdfunding projects could see an increase in the funding of the projects if the specific characteristics and the set of values of an individual who supports sustainability-oriented crowdfunding projects are recognized. To target the potential funding sources, the identification of these values of an individual becomes important for the team manager (Tenner & Horisch, 2021). The theory of basic human values can be applied by which the latter can be identified. These values form personal and social norms. The value clusters are influences by the norms.

Figure 3: Model source: (Kim & hall, 2021; Testa et al., 2019; Chipeta & Surujlal, 2017)
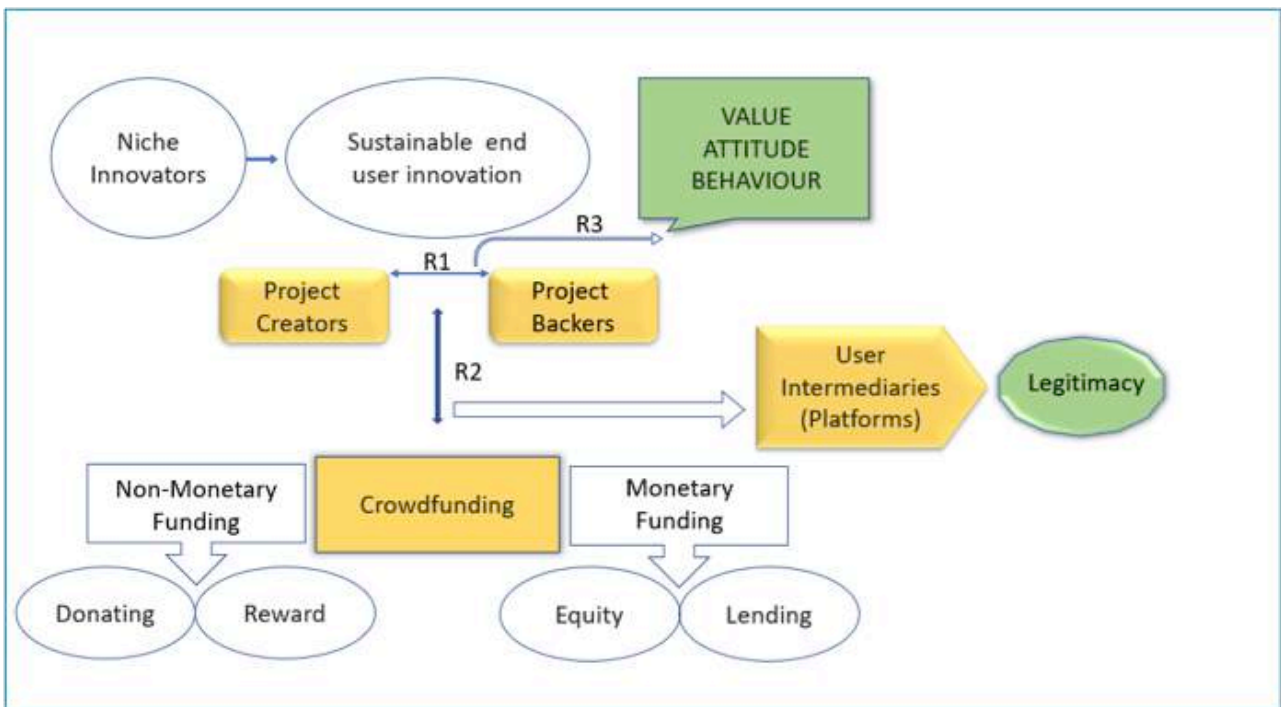
In figure 3, to find the working of the three participants (project creators, backers, and platforms), a graphical representation of the three research

questions has been mentioned above. Now, as mentioned before, the aim of the study is to know "how the various models of crowdfunding can be best leveraged to support sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation" (Testa et al. 2019, p.14) and the factors affecting the behavioural changes of the project creators and backers with the help of Value-Attitude-Behavior (VAB).

Methodology

The case study method is estimated to be well suited to answer all the why and how questions for which real-life context and observations are derived from the individuals living the phenomena. Due to the explorative nature of this study, a qualitative design analysis has been conducted to find the results. Since the knowledge of the topic is very limited, the study is descriptive. The three research questions for this research are framed after the review of many former pieces of research. All eight interviewees are social entrepreneurs with experience of finance acquisition through crowdfunding models. A set of semi-structured questions were prepared because of the open-ended nature of the questions. For enriched data collection, purposive sampling (nonprobability) is selected. In addition, snowballing sampling is also applied. The interviews conducted were transcribed with Microsoft speech-to-text built-in software. At last, collected data has been investigated through qualitative data analysis. This analysis focuses on the categories and coding framework (Kukartz, 2019). Hence, the combination of the two categories helps to reach the findings and conclusion of the research. MAXQDA software is used for coding the data. As a sample document, one full interview is provided in the appendix. The respondents are referred to as "R" following with the respondent's number with the perspective to keep anonymity and privacy in consideration (Kaufmann et al., 2014).

Presentation of Findings

Social Entrepreneurs' Intentions

1) Motivation, Purpose, and Commitment
    To challenge the socio technical regime of the society, motivation is one of the key aspects, but the definition of motivation varies (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). "As social entrepreneurship, when you are working on the problem while trying to understand or create a solution that fits the issue, you need to have the motivation to be able to surpass all the challenges that arise" (R5). A slight change can be identified while raising funds through equity/lending models by observing the degree of the shift from 'motivation towards solving a social issue' to balancing out between 'motivation to make a social impact and wealth maximization of the shareholder' (R1, R2, R3, R4, R7, R8). Motivation is an internal process, and no external factors divert or influence any shift (R1, R5). Nevertheless, the success of the social entrepreneur is achievable with persistent motivation while raising donating/reward funding (R1, R2). Most respondents confirmed the definition of motivation is individualistic, and to understand the shift of motivation from donation or reward funding models to equity or lending funding models, we need to understand the "purpose" of motivation of the social entrepreneur (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R7, R8).

Similarly, R3 outlines, "I think its purpose in terms of what keeps you going is what is important, so I think (…) it's important (...) regardless of any funding models" (R3). Commitment catalyst success in raising funds regardless of any model, the funder wants to get acquainted and build trust with the people working behind the project (R1, R2, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). Therefore, motivation, purpose, and commitment are the characteristics needed regardless of any crowdfunding model used.

Table 1: Research Table: (Own Illustration)

Research Objectives	Research Questions	Interview Questions	Sources
To investigate the factors that help project creators to entice project backer's behavior	What are the factors in the mission of the social entrepreneur that trigger the funding activity of the backers?	1. How important is motivation of the social entrepreneur for gaining funding by equity/lending compared to donation/reward? 2. Do ecological success factors increase the propensity for donation/reward funding more than economic success factors? 3. How does the management skill set required for investment via equity/lending differs from that for donation/reward funding? 4. How does the commitment of the social entrepreneur help for applying the funding models?	(Maehle et al., 2020) (Mosakowski & Calic, 2016) (Grimadli, 2015-16) (Chen, 2016) (Horisch, 2015) (Boparikar, 2015) (Kaufmann et al., 2014)
To know the role of the platforms in shaping the behavior of crowdfunders	To what extent do the platforms influence the perception of legitimacy and trust of the crowd funders?	5. How important is it for the platforms to disclose the actions of the top-level management in the funding models? 6. What precautions should be taken by the platforms to avoid the perception of risks of the funders? 7. Does the monitoring of the social impact differ for the funding models? If yes how? 8. How important is it to show the ideas and core values behind the project for reward/donation funding compared to equity/lending funding?	(Abramson & Billings, 2019) (Bento et al., 2019) (Jovanovic, 2017) (Bergamini et al., 2017) (Horisch, 2015)
To validate the applicability of the value attitude behavior concept for crowd funding.	To what extent do the personality traits affect the value attitude behavior of crowd funders. How do they differ as to the models of crowdfunding?	9. How do funders 'values on societal and environmental purposes change the attitude of participation in the donation/reward-based model compared to the lending/equity model? 10. How does the Crowdfunder's belief in the project change as to the different funding models? How do their expectations differ when rewarding/donating compared to providing equity/lending? 11. Does the social norm purpose motivate funders in donating/rewarding more than providing equity/ lending?	(Kim & Hall, 2021) Chipeta & Surujlal, 2017) (Chen, 2016)

2) Ecological Factors

While raising funds, the social entrepreneurs require to conduct impact assessments for all the awareness activities (R2). R5 clearly states donation funding has more attention on ecological success factors. As a result, it is safe

to state that social impact through a good product or service can trigger an emotion that indeed can help the entrepreneur to raise funds through donation (R6, R7). R8 articulated the use of "key results areas" in their enterprise as funder acquires confidence while donating. Here R1 indicates. "Impact and ecological metrics will act as a story or a base where financial sustainability is a niche" (R1). R5 drew attention to the monetary funding model and emphasized "In case of equity funding model, it is more focused on economic factors because those economic factors are going to determine how. How profitable?" (R5). Hence, it is derived that ecological success factors attract more donation-based funding than equity-based funding.

3) Management Skill Set

The management skill set is required to yield returns for shareholders as compared to donation funding models, until the model is creating and duplicating the social impact (R1, R4, R7, R8). In monetary funding models, R4 explains the investor is always looking for leadership qualities and other team-orientated qualities to measure the efficiency of the work. The funder is keen to know the areas of utilisation of funds and how the social impact and investment compound in the enterprise (R5, R6, R7, R8). Although in non-monetary funding models: A generally low management skillset is observed and the story behind the project is indicated to be important (R1, R3, R6). If a donor is not satisfied with the impact creation, the possibility is to see no recurring donations (R6, R7). Hence, to keep the donations intact the enterprise may want to change and make the efficient working of its management but there is still no direct influence of the donation funders over the management (R2, R5, R4). As a result, the management skill set holds more importance in monetary funding than in the non-monetary funding model.

Intermediaries' Legitimacy

1) Transparency
    The representations of the social entrepreneurship are the ideation, mission, vision, goals, and objectives (R1, R2, R3, R7). R4 stretched. "What is the code of conduct? because if you have a long-term approach you will investigate the core value of a business and how it makes changes" (R4). The investment is trusted with the social entrepreneur because the platforms are trusted and verified. Hence the duty of the platform is to verify all the documents, proofs and conduct background check is to avoid frauds in their name (R5, R7). The progress, the actions of the team, and their credibility should be projected by the platforms, to make it crystal clear for the funders about their fund's procurement (R4, R6, R8). Consequently, for recurring donations, transparency is maintained in showcasing the social impact updates on their platforms (R3, R7). R4 suggested, the donation funder always funds the "idea" of solving the issue. Whereas in an equity-based model, the identification of the target market, founding team, and financials for return in investment are done by the funder (R3, R4). Here, the ideas and core values of the project are important regardless of any crowdfunding model used.

2) Risk Avoidance

While analyzing, the author recognized the adaptation of "due diligence" by the platforms to secure the funder's investment especially in the case of the equity-based funding (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R7). The background check of the organization and the continuous process check through multi reviews or partly reviews, and internal audit assessment is required (R2, R4, R7). R1 suggests. "there should be a tracking mechanism (…) when the funder is putting their money, a certain percentage is utilized by the platform for the increase in their wealth because there is no clear audit strategy or any kind of regulations by the government" (R1). Proper audits and interactions between the entrepreneur and funder are conducted to mitigate the risks (R2). "Proper round of screening, especially for equity" (R3) and for transactional processes "third party billing (…)" (R4). Further, R5 and R6 enumerate that proper documentation starting with the step process involving verification for the authentic accounts and certification processes should be seriously considered by all platforms. Hence, the respondents mentioned more procedures for non-monetary funding than monetary funding.

3) Social Impact

Monitoring of social impact is necessary for any business regardless of the use of any funding model. Hence, the processes may differ but the outcome to showcase the impact remains constant (R1, R2, R3, R5, R6, R7, R8). R4 provides the technique of "know your investors" and presents the result in the "understandable form". "For example, KYC? (…) we follow know your investor or investment, how the funder is willing to fund because the purpose matters" (R4). R1 stated the priority of setting the "key metrics" in respect to monitoring the financial impact and the process of funds utilization and sustainability of the social impact captures the same leverage. In accordance, R7 and R8 mentioned, 'Key Performing Indicators' and 'Key Result Areas', and the tracking of the process with the timeline provided is necessary to get the overall picture. Hence, it is relatively evident that the key metrics in the case of social impact for donation-based funding hold more significance than that of an equity-based funding model (R1, R3, R7, R8).

Value-Attitude-Behaviour

1) Attitude: The respondents associate the attitude to be influenced either by personal or social norms.

Personal Norm

The massive agreement was witnessed on the change of the belief of the funder while pledging through any crowdfunding model. The investor seeks ROI in monetary terms with monetary funding models (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). R2 stated. "If somebody is looking for investing 100 and getting 115 then he will invest in an equity model" (R2). A social entrepreneur must take care of the fiduciary duty as ROI is the expectation if not higher ROI for shareholders (R3, R4, R5). Most donation funding is received as the act of philanthropy (R1, R2), the expectation differs in the form of impact or rewards (R3, R6, R7, R8).

The chances can be that donation funders have no expectations, and the process ends with the action of funding for a social cause (R4, R5, R7). Nevertheless, all the respondents identified the personal norm to have an equivalent effect on both the funding models.

Social Norm

All the respondents believed that societal norms trigger the emotions for donation funding. In that case, the sole purpose of the donor is to see upliftment in the community through resolving a social issue (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). R7 explicates, "Equity and lending are investment and donation, it's sheer giving, it is most influenced by the social norms" (R7). Social norms play a very significant role in deciding for the funder to recognize which prospect or core value of the organization makes more sense than others (R4, R5). R8 explicated. "Certain donors donate with their heart, and they donate primarily on how impactful or direct the impact will be to the beneficiaries" (R8). R5 brings attention to the behavior of developed societies in terms of donation funding. "citizens of developed societies tend to give back more (…) they are able to think in value (…) participation in making a positive impact to the environment" (R5). Once again, all the respondents identified the personal norm to have an equivalent effect on both the funding models.

2) Corporate Social Responsibility

As an act of philanthropy, the donation-based funding is pledged by the organization with the expectation of no returns (R1, R4) or to abide by the rules of CSR (R2, R6). R2 explained about the enterprise receiving funds. "Big organizations are doing for Clean to Green marrying the SDG's (…) have adopted for Clean to Green" (R2). Another view by R5, the concept of "greenwashing". "Greenwash is something that some organizations and some investors to appear to the public that they are greener, not necessarily they are focusing on the impact, but they are more focus on building their image" (R5). Henceforth, the respondents acclaimed CSR to be more inclined towards the equity-based funding model as the businesses do the follow-up of the financials.

3) Seed Capital

Donation equity funding is used for the short term, and short-term gains (R1, R2, R4, R7, R8). R4 believed "If you are in one year or two-year-old organization, that time donation is important to stand on your own feet, but not always" (R4). Hence, raising initial funds for niche innovation through non-monetary funding can help social entrepreneurs in starting to resolve social issues (R1, R4). However, the equity-based funder's attitude will be different towards the enterprise in terms of finances (R2, R4). R3 added. "Donors will donate to an unsustainable model as a charity as compared to an equity-based funder, he will not do it. He will look at where the market is growing (…) cost that resonates with them". (R3) Therefore, with growing enterprises, funders want their share to give returns too (R7). Hence, seed capital can be raised for the idea of the social entrepreneur with non-monetary funding is easier than a monetary funding model.

Discussion

In research question 1, motivation and commitment are some of the major metrics for social entrepreneurs to raise funds through any funding model (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). However, respondents emphasised on "purpose" of the social entrepreneur to be the deciding factor in raising funds through different funding models. As the sustainability of the enterprise can be achieved by non-monetary funding models but the continuous scalability would require monetary funding models (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). The respondents focus on the need for the skill sets to be more efficient in monetary funding models than non-monetary funding models. As already mentioned, the motivation of the project backer can be philanthropic, but the chances of financial returns are expected in monetary funding models (Vismara, 2019). In addition, more inclination towards the social-impact success than economics success factors are found in the case of non-monetary funding models. In research question 2, it is suggested that the legitimacy and trust formation through the platform influences the funding raised by social entrepreneurs from crowd funders (Rey-Marti et al., 2019). The built of legitimacy can be achieved when the transparency is showcased with the ideation, mission, vision, goals, and objective of the social enterprise (R1, R2, R3, R7). An entrepreneur's objectives, values, beliefs associated with its niche innovation need to be presented by the intermediaries to influence the success of the project (Mosakowski & Calic, 2016). The code of conduct and the ideas and core values of the top-level management or team leading the social enterprise should be displayed (R4, R6, R8). Monetary or Non-monetary funding model, 'Due Diligence' is a must ((R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R7). In the research question objective 3, ambiguous results could be found. The Value-Attitude-Behaviour theory supports finding the individual's beliefs, norms, and actions towards social entrepreneurship (Kim & hall, 2021). Personal norms can make a lot of difference, an individual's attitude towards the social issue can help to raise the funds to resolve the issue (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8). Non-monetary funding is triggered by altruistic motivation and emotions related to an issue (Jovanovic, 2017). In monetary funding, the individual's attitude changes. The expectation of returns is present, even though they can be immediately or after a certain period (R1, R3, R4, R7). Social norms can trigger the funder to pledge non-monetary based funding with the mission to achieve sustainability orientation. However, in the monetary funding model, the funders still perceive the returns expected to be the same as any traditional business (Boparikar, 2015). In addition, social norms also help in identifying the market opportunities with the raising sustainability issues and can trigger the funders to invest in the social entrepreneurship seeking investment for the future (R1, R2, R5, R7). Here the respondents stated the attitude to be affected by the personal norms or social norms of the funders. In return, the deductive categories created separately as per the proposed model by Kim & hall (2021), were collaborated into the subcategories of the personal norm and social norm in the category of attitude. Although CSR was mentioned to be one of the factors for funding through crowdfunding models. The reasons specified were either to abide by the CSR or greenwashing. Hence it is still unclear to conclude if CSR is triggered majorly by personal norms or social norms. Similarly, in the case of non-monetary funding models to be more successful in the seed capital stage. Hence, the attitude of the funder regarding the seed capital stage is still unclear.

In figure 4, the consolidated results are presented as the final model. The process of crowdfunding is integrated with the factors influencing the three actors to conduct successful funding. Once again, the model presented is from the perspective of social entrepreneurs. The factor's degree emphasis has been shown using the donut chart. The donut chart information is given in figure 5.

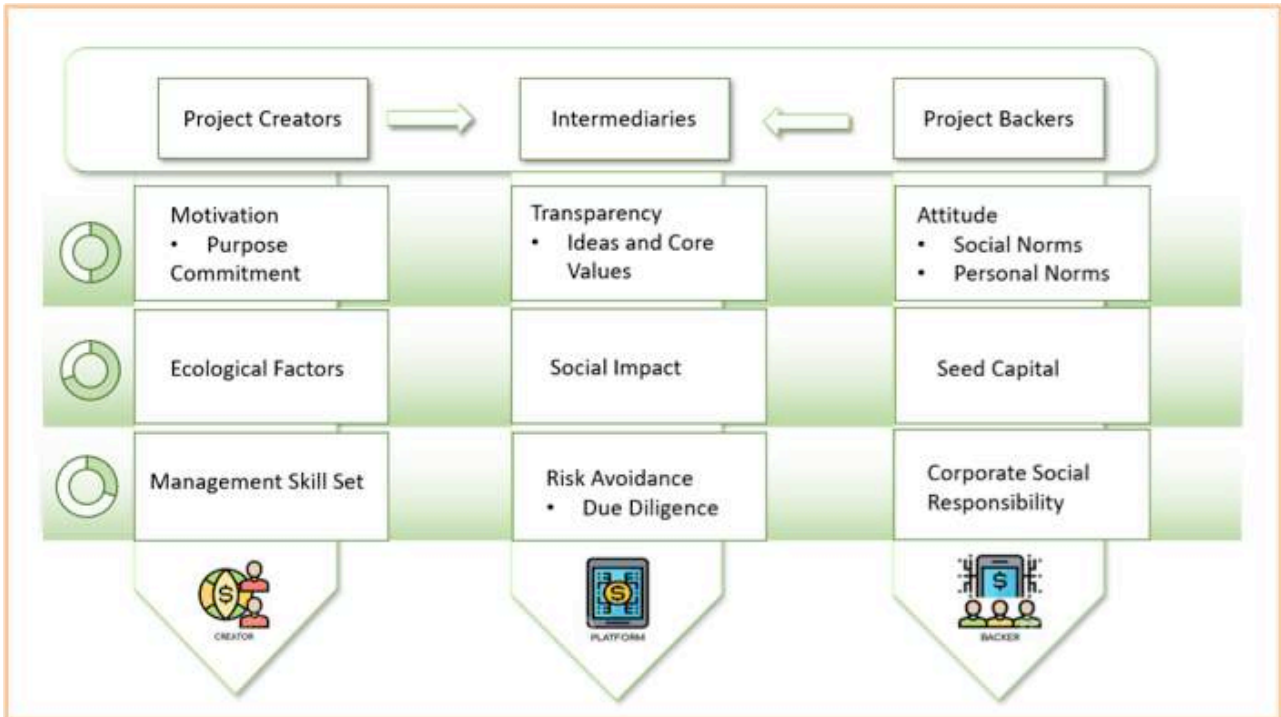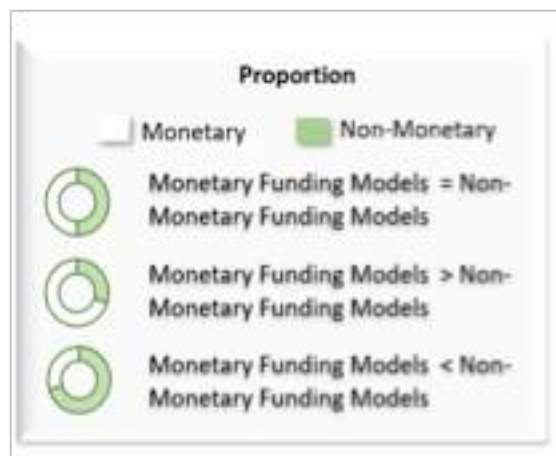Figure 4: Social Entrepreneurship and Crowdfunding Behavioral Model

Figure 5

Conclusion

This study aimed to close the gap on "How the various models of crowdfunding can be best leveraged to support social entrepreneurship and innovation?" (Testa et al., 2019, pp. 14). Further, perform qualitative analysis to collect empirical evidence and prepare a social entrepreneurial model to understand behavioral changes of project creators and backers from the perspective of social entrepreneurs. Hence, the gap has been closed. Also,

academic research is still emerging in the form of the crowdfunding ecosystem. Given the results of the study, it has been concluded that crowdfunding is an efficient alternative to financing. However, Monetary funding models and Non-Monetary funding models have the same factors affecting the behavior of the crowd funder but to different degrees. The major success link is found through the platforms, hence keeping up with the extraordinary legitimacy and trust with the funders. In non-monetary funding, the emotional connection with the social issue of the funder has been found with no or very less expectation of getting returns. Another emerging section of funders has been observed, where the funder invests after identifying the purpose, motivation, and commitment of the social entrepreneur to make an impact and then become a part of it. In monetary funding, there is a shift found where funders are interested to invest in the social enterprise's ideas and core values. This funding diverts the social entrepreneur's sole purpose of social impact to also maintain the fiduciary duty of the funders. The main advantage of this model is the sustainable acquirement of funds and effective management working. Hence, the growth of the social impact leads to financial growth and the growth in funders' shares. As a result, the funding models offer growth and scalability encouraging other niche innovators to enter the market and funders to make the investment building a sustainable ecosystem for sustainable development.

Limitations and Future Research

Social entrepreneurship raising funds through crowdfunding is relatively a new process. Hence, the qualitative dataset used for this study was very limited in number, resulting in lesser empirical evidence. Nevertheless, future research should overcome this limitation and use larger data for qualitative analysis. Also, time plays a significant role in the process of the data collection and investigating the interviews, Hence, this restricts from taking multi-dimensional interviews. Another limitation of this paper is that the factors stimulating the interactions between social entrepreneurs and crowd funders are solely from the perspective of a social entrepreneur. Hence, future research can be conducted from the perspective of the intermediaries and the investors. In addition, the data set used has a very high share of social entrepreneurs from India. Hence the research could be conducted with other locations. As the study did not have enough resources to conduct any specialized intermediary study, the generalization of the results should be avoided. One must also keep in mind that raising investment or topics related to finances are very sensitive and accordantly the communication on that is done very cautiously. As mentioned earlier the equity and lending-based funding models were considered as monetary funding models and donation and reward funding models as non-monetary funding models. Hence, this constitutes another research gap, the future study can be conducted treating donation and lending funding as separate models. Same in the case of equity and lending funding models.

Appendix

The category system

Social Entrepreneur's intentions			
Categories	Procedure	Definition	Anchor Examples
Motivation	Deductive	All text passages mentioning the need for motivation in the equity and donation funding model	"When you are working on the problem while trying to understand or create a solution that really fits the issue, you need to have the motivation to be able to surpass all the challenges that arise" (R5).
SC_Purpose	Inductive	All text passages stating the involvement of purpose in selecting different funding models.	"I think it's a purpose in terms of what keeps you going is what is important, so I think (…) it's important (…) regardless of what funding models you are using (…)" (R3).
Ecological Factors	Deductive	All text passages referring to ecological success factors help in raising funds through the donation funding model	"For example, one of my neighbors bought organic soil and fertilizers from me. After using the product, my neighbor was so satisfied with the product that with the word-of-mouth unintentional advertisement, I didn't just get many customers but also a donation funder" (R6).
Management Skill Set	Deductive	All text passages considering management skillset to be mandatory in the equity funding model	"People will buy your shares only when they see some profits or when they see some dividends in the coming future. So, management would require you to focus on your bright future as well. And align it with the bright future accomplishment of your social goals. So, you have ten responsibilities, and your management duties increase". (R7)

Commitment	Deductive	All passages referring the degree of commitment to be high in both the funding model	"You know how hard the road becomes, you are going to keep in track, and you are going to be there. That is something that makes more than 70% of all the decision making" (R5).
Platforms Legtimacy			
Transparency	Deductive	All text passages indicating disclosing the actions of top-level management to be important in both the funding models	"What are the standard operating processes for businesses to be conducted that has to be checked, and whether the employees are happy, whether they have all those because you can't get an ISO certificate till all your processes are certified and audited." (R2).
SC_ Ideas and core values	Inductive	All text passages suggesting proper disclosure of ideas and core values of the team	"Say we are consumers then we tend to identify more with the organization that has core values that aligned with us" (R5)
Risk Avoidance	Deductive	All text passages indicating equal measures taken to avoid risk in both the models	"Confidence needs to be built into him or her as to his money will be wisely spent or his money will directly go to the beneficiary and once the connection is there, seminars and interaction events should be organized" (R8).
SC_ Due-Diligence	Inductive	All text passages referring to due diligence by the platforms in both models.	"Proper round of screening" (R3) and for transactional processes "third party billing (…)" (R1).
Social Impact	Deductive	All text passages identify the monitoring of social impact to be the same in both the funding model	"Monitoring methodologies could differ (…) the result remains the same (R2).
Values			

Attitude	Deductive	All passages refer to the inclination of high values towards the donation funding model.	"Donation funding is through an emotion (…) emotion to help people (…) reason why donations are anonymous too" (R6)
SC_ Personal Norm	Deductive	All passages refer to a high degree change of belief from donation funding to equity funding.	"For example, I have seen when certain someone lost their parents in certain aliment then that person that's contributing to that (…) like say affected by cancer, the person will start contributing to the organization working in the same domain (…) because they went through the same pain" (R2).
SC_ Social Norm	Deductive	All text passages indicating the high degree of donation funding triggered by social norms.	"Citizens of developed societies tend to give back more (…) they are able to think in value (…) participation in making a positive impact to the environment" (R5).
Corporate Social Responsibility	Inductive	All text passages referring to raising donation funding because the big corporates abide by CSR.	"Big organizations are doing for Clean to Green marrying the SDG's (…) have adopted for Clean to Green" (R2).
Seed Capital	Inductive	All text passages referred to donation-based funding as the seed capital.	If you are in one year or two-year-old organization, that time donation is important to stand on your own feet, but not always"

Source: Own Illustration

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The role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in repositioning sustainable development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainable Development have increasingly become an issue of concern globally since the early 1990s. This study intends to investigate how CSR initiatives can reposition sustainable development in the Nigerian business environment with the growing peculiar social challenges of banditry in the North, uprising in the South and increasing poverty in the other parts of the country (Egbuta, 2018; Oli et al, 2018). The study further examined the potential paradigm shift of CSR from the philanthropic gestures to a more sustainable business models that would create opportunities for long term development in the Nigerian Society. Anchored on Social Exchange theory, data for this study was obtained from secondary sources through the review of related literatures using content analysis and inter- disciplinary methodology to draw inference. The study highlighted the role of the shared value and shared responsibility concept in enhancing potential of CSR as a means to sustainability development. The paper found a peculiarity in the geo- political and socio- political system of Nigeria termed "the Nigerian Factor" that plays a huge role in the current development of CSR across Nigeria. The study recommends the need for an extensive further research on shared values and shared responsibilities of key stakeholders in every business sectors of Nigeria to enhance uniformity in directing and driving the contributory role of CSR as a sustainability development tool.

Key words: Corporate Social Responsibility, Sustainable development, Environment, Nigeria.

Introduction

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has gained attention in both academic and professional fields. It has numerous perspective and forms from different regions of the world. For instance, in Nigeria, philanthropic initiative and corporate donations are common CSR practices (Raimi, 2018). Philanthropy dominates the initiatives, motives, direction and the approach which organizations engage in to represent CSR in Nigeria (Amaechi et al, 2016, Idowu, 2014). However, there is a growing call for a shift of narrative and mind-set in the definition of CSR from philanthropy based to a more sustainable business model with the aim for long term development (Albasu, 2020; Nwoke, 2017). Nigeria in recent times has experienced extreme socio-political challenges from banditry, herder farmer crisis that has led to increase in the level of poverty and tremendous rise in inflation across the country (Egbuta, 2018; Oli et al, 2018). In some cases, it seem the government is overwhelmed with the challenges it faces. CSR presents an opportunity to be utilized as an agenda to enhance sustainable development in Nigeria.

The idea of integrating CSR and sustainability development is not new. Brundtland (1987) mentioned sustainability development as one that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. Elkington (1998) extended this definition to encompass an approach

that emphasizes economic prosperity, social development and environmental quality as an integrated method of doing business. They added that organizations aiming for sustainability need to perform not against a single, financial bottom line but against the triple bottom line that takes into consideration economic, environmental as well as finance. Soyka (2012) added sustainability is not just interest in the environment, corporate CSR or strategic philanthropy, but it is the awareness of the interest of stakeholders, which is ensuring economic viability, while maintaining a sustainable environment that is socially reasonable.

The role of corporation in supporting CSR agenda of society cannot be overstated. However, there is the idea that for sustainability to be achieved there needs to be more involvement from a wider stakeholder group. Albasu (2018) mentioned the need for a shared responsibility between the institutions that governs industry, the government, regulators, labor unions, NGOs and the society at large. This position is based on the notion that the responsibility of promoting CSR should not be the sole responsibility of any given industry or stakeholder but one that is shared amongst key stakeholders. This idea contributes to the need for a sustainable approach that integrates the long term need of key stakeholders in collaboration with developing the society at large. Therefore, it is worthy to state that CSR as a sustainability tools that integrates the shared values and responsibilities of key stakeholders could be a critical weapon to fighting socio-economic vulnerability and poverty in Nigeria. This study will investigate the role of CSR in sustainable development. It will utilize the Social Exchange theory and analyse previous studies to identify approaches that have been adopted to promote sustainable development using CSR as a tool for development. The paper will conduct a secondary based analysis, through the review of related literatures using content analysis and inter- disciplinary methodology to draw inference. It will focus on analyzing the role of key stakeholders and their shared responsibilities in influencing the change of CSR narratives from a philanthropy mind-set to one that is a sustainable business model in Nigeria.

Methodology

Anchored on Social Exchange theory, the data used for this study was obtained from secondary sources through the review of related literatures. The databases used for the literature search included: Google Scholar, ProQuest, EBSCO host, Science Direct, ABI/INFORM Complete and SAGE Premier. These databases were used to obtain peer-reviewed journal articles that were appropriate for the study. To improve the search, parentheses were used to prioritize search terms and/ or keywords as well as specific phrases of more interest to the research. Content analysis and inter-disciplinary methodology were used to draw inference in the study. The main limitation of the study is the assumption of generalization, because the issue of CSR in Nigeria remains region specific.

Theoretical Framework

CSR has enjoyed vast range of perspectives in literature. For instance, from a Nigerian socio-political perspective, CSR has been described as a corporation's contribution towards the attainment of national development, even though these actions has been from a philanthropic initiatives (Albasu et al, 2018). In support, Amaeshi et al, (2006) mentioned that the motives for CSR in Nigeria are to address socio-economic development challenges of poverty, healthcare, infrastructure and education. Various

studies (Bocken and Bogaert, 2016; Rudnicka, 2016; Aguinis and Glavas, 2012) have presented arguments for and against the implementation of CSR from both a private sector initiative and a public sector driven perspective. Different perspectives has been developed ranging from how CSR should be defined to the activities that guides the approaches (Mabula & Ping, 2019; Carroll & Shabana, 2010). Others have presented CSR from a strategic perspective that seeks to achieve long term goals and create shared values (Porter and Krammer, 2016). To contribute to this knowledge base, in this study CSR will be investigated in ways it can be used as a tool to promote sustainability development in Nigeria.

CSR Perspective

According to Orji (2007) CSR as a topic is context based, with different world regions, industries and companies understanding and practicing it from numerous perspective. However, numerous perspectives have shaped the development of CSR over time. For instance, the fundamentalist proponent championed by economist Milton Friedman and Theodore Levitt have viewed organizations as fully private and economic institution with the singular objective of profit maximization. They both argued that organizations' exist in a society with free market conditions and will work effectively as one of the `functional groups` within the society where each group is focused on its own function. The further buttressed that it was the function of the government to provide for the general welfare of society and the function of business is to carter for its resources and labor. Ward & Smith (2015) brought to the fore scenarios where CSR could be bad for business in society. The highlighted there was a risk of companies using CSR to their advantage by gaining credibility for their application of CSR tools whilst carrying out business that many would considered fundamentally harmful to society. The examples used to buttress this point are the tobacco producing companies. Ward and Smith (2015) noted that although tobacco companies core product caused harm to the society, their social and environmental reporting are considered technically perfect. Although, the fundamentalist views were popular and somewhat relevant. It represented an era in economic development where profits were seen as the only main goal of businesses. However, more recent times have seen increased complexity in doing business and the need to compete in ways that stakeholders' involvement and the need to balance many different priorities is deemed necessary. The current times has seen a rise in businesses across the world adopting socially responsible approaches to businesses and investing has refocused the priorities of both corporate leadership and many investors, whether they truly believe in broader social aims for businesses or not. The definition of CSR has been shaped by the numerous perspectives that has been debated over time by literature.

There is also the social institution perspective of CSR. This perspective are of the opinion that organizations are, and should be socially responsible. However, what socially responsible is supposed to mean remains vast. The key theories that directs the perspective of CSR includes the legitimacy and stakeholder theory. The highlight of the legitimacy and stakeholder theory is the social exchange theory which orates that, the survival and success of the organization is dependent on the societal consent. However, there remains a tension that exists between the ideologies of neoliberal shareholder value and that of effective CSR (Nwoke, 2017). Nwoke (2017) further identified inter-connected but distinguishable barriers (ideological, practical and political) that militate against the realization of effective definition of CSR. Definitions of CSR has generally been derived from the expectation of organizations extending their

operations and contributions. For instance, The European Union Commission (EUC) (2002) mentioned CSR is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operation and their interactions with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis.

The EUC (2017) later extended their CSR definition to include that an enterprise is responsible or accountable for its impact on all relevant stakeholder (Matuszak & Rozanska, 2017). This insight highlights the need for corporations to take responsibility for their actions and decisions, shaping how the treat and react to stakeholders. It is worth mentioning this narrative contributes to the need for a strategic CSR approach to be adopted in the way corporations exchange interactions with their stakeholders on a shared values basis. According to Weiss, (2008) social contracts theory are the assumptions based on the notion that parties assumes an expected level of treatment that takes all parties into consideration and in exchange the corporation enjoys peace as well as favourable treatments from their host communities. The theory is deeply rooted in the traditions of the society adopting a combination of organisation responsiveness with stakeholder management. Weiss (2008) mentioned that the success of an organization is dependent on the ability to establish and maintain favourable exchangeable relationships with customers, public, government and all necessary stakeholders.

In extension, Donaldson & Preston, (1995) mentioned stakeholder management is found within the concept of social contract. The stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman, 1984). Therefore, the stakeholder theory implies that there is a relationship between an organization and its stakeholders. Freeman (1984) categorised stakeholders into internal and external groups, with the internal group consisting of employees, managers and owners, while the external group is made up of society, government, suppliers, customers and shareholders. The value of each stakeholder to a business is deep-rooted and as such, no stakeholder should be sacrificed for profit maximization (Neville & Megnuc, 2006).

The change in societal values and the evolution of CSR brought about widespread calls for organizations to become socially responsible, doing so by increasing their efforts in consumer and societal involvement, investing in advancement and enhancing capacity for communities, environment, society and government. Sethi (1975), cited in Carroll (1999 p 277), described CSR perspective based on three dimensions- as a social obligation (the adaptation of corporate behaviour to market forces and legislation), social responsibility (businesses must perform at a level congruent with the dominant social norms and expectations of society in order to be seen as socially responsible) and social responsiveness (the long-term role which businesses should play in the social system). This idea of organizations having social obligations, being socially responsible and socially responsive highlights the nature of CSR, however, this study is advocating the need for a more sustainable business model approach that gives the opportunity for CSR to be a tool that could contribute to the long term development of the country.

Amaeshi et al, (2006) mentioned that the motives for CSR in Nigeria from a socio-political perspective has been described as a corporations contribution towards the attainment of national development, even though these actions has been from a philanthropic initiatives are to address socio-economic development challenges of

poverty, healthcare, infrastructure and education. Various theories have presented arguments for and against the implementation of CSR from both a private sector initiative and a public sector driven perspective. Different perspectives has been developed ranging from how CSR should be defined to the activities that guides the approaches. Others have presented CSR from a strategic perspective that seeks to achieve long term goals and create shared values. There is a new thinking that aims to extend CSR in Nigeria from a philanthropic activity to a more sustainable business model narrative. This study will contribute to knowledge by investigating ways CSR can be used as a tool to extend the promotion of sustainable development in Nigeria.

CSR in Nigeria

Over the years, CSR in Nigeria has always been attributed to the need to support host community of various organizations that have their operations across the country. For instance, Amaeshi et al., (2006) work found that indigenous firms' perspective and practice CSR corporate philanthropy aimed at addressing socio-economic development challenges in Nigeria. In more recent times, the global pandemic of COVID-19 has triggered support and donations of many companies in Nigeria, both local indigenous companies and Multi-Nationals donating monies, medical equipment, time and ideas to government in joint efforts to combat the recent pandemic of the corona virus. A joint donation of over $50 million dollars equivalent have been donated by the private sector including the banks. These actions have been categorized as CSR activities and the show of care that these private organizations have for the society. However, previous sources of the definition of CSR that has contributed to the popularity of CSR in Nigeria could be argued to be in the 1990s. The Royal Dutch Shell and other oil producing companies in Nigeria, experienced a backlash from their host community, leading to the rise of militancy. This highlights that CSR engagements are from the need to respond to pressures from external sources. However, the peculiarity of Nigeria as a country from a socio-political and geographical perspective it is arguable that different regions will be presented with issues that are peculiar to their specific regions.

For instance, there is a shift of focus in the regions with the most level of impacts of insurgency. The Northern part of the country is suffering from the rise in the numbers of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). This has consequently refocused the energy of the government to address these vices and the harm it creates in the country. This regional segments of the country makes Nigeria, as a business environment, have different government policies, pieces of legislation and political settings that make it distinctive from other parts of the world (Amaeshi et al., 2006; Eweje 2007; Terungwa, 2011; Mordi et al., 2012; Adeyanju 2012). This presents unique challenges that makes it difficult for a one fit all approach to CSR in Nigeria. This diversity in approaches contributes to the issues of ethnicity, corruption, bad social conditions and poor political and economic governance. These factors present challenges to business operations thereby contributing to the difference in CSR practices in Nigeria when compared to other countries (Frynas, 2005). Thus, the distinctive features of Nigerian society being embedded in the broad socio-economic needs has considerable implications for CSR in Nigeria

Role of Government in the Development of CSR in Nigeria

According to Matten and Moon (2020) CSR is not just a feature of the new worldwide corporation but is also gradually a feature of a new societal governance. The role of government in every society is of great importance because it ensures the peace,

security and regulation of its citizens. However, the Nigerian society remains diverse with unique challenges that differs from regions to regions. Nigeria comprises diverse cultures, religions, traditions and languages with a population of over 170 million people. The current state of affairs with high inflation, the current global COVID pandemic, and rise in poverty, insurgencies, and many other social and economic vices may suggest that government is overwhelmed with the challenges, hence making CSR a lesser issue to consider. However, the role of government in promoting CSR in Nigeria remains commendable. It was usually a case where CSR was mainly clamored in the South-South region because of the uprising as a result of oil production and militancy. In recent times however, the Northern part of the country has seen rise in insurgent groups and a wider spread of the acts of violence and loss of business activities and properties worth billions of Naira. This widespread of poverty and adverse effects of insurgency have hampered governance and economic activities in Nigeria, with the north currently the most affected region.

Mordi et al, (2012) mentioned that government could utilize legislative frameworks as a means that provides expectations that directly regulate the observance or practice of CSR. This provides an opportunity for CSR to be treated as a strategic process that could contribute to the overall development of society at large. However, a universal regulatory framework for CSR in Nigeria has been a tall order, arguably as a result of the design of the political system in Nigeria into 6 geo-political zones with power centralized through a federalism structure. The peculiarity of the Nigerian political system makes it challenging to have a one size fits all legislation to be passed. The different regions in Nigeria have different development commissions that focuses on the development of that specific region. There is a trend that has shaped how the development commission across the country is being formulated. For instance, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was developed as a means to provide legislative support that focuses on the development of the region as a means to mitigate the ills caused by the oil productions in those regions. The mission of NDDC is to offer lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region and to facilitate the rapid sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful (nddc.gov.ng).

Furthermore, the northern region of the country has experienced rise in insurgencies, terrorist attacks, and banditry. Poverty has been identified as a significant causative factor compelling individuals to become members of these insurgent groups. These challenges are not limited to the incidence of poverty alone as there are widespread incidences of lack of social welfare, water and environmental pollution and degradation, income inequality and uneven distribution of wealth and productive capital as previous studies (Shehu, 2004; Adegbite and Nakajima, 2011) has indicated. Consequentially, the North East Development Commission (NEDC) has also been formulated as a regional entity. The NEDC is the focal organization charged with the responsibility to assess, coordinate, harmonize and report on all intervention programs, and initiatives by the Federal Government or any of its ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), states, and other development partners and for the implementation of all programs and initiatives for the North East states respectively (nedc.gov.ng. These commissions arguably forms a level of activities which the Federal Government has adopted to tackle the menace of poverty, illiteracy level, ecological problems and any other related environmental or developmental challenges.

The government have established these Act to mandate the various development commissions to coordinate the resettlement, rehabilitation, integration and reconstruction of infrastructure for victims and terrorism as well as tackling the menace of poverty, illiteracy, ecological challenges and other related matters across the varied regions.   However, the government still falls short in tackling socio-economic challenges. This insufficiency is largely dependent on the fact that Nigeria has a vast population which is increasing and in need of limitless societal needs. Some (Margolis & Walsh, 2003 and Olanrewaju, 2007) have argued that the failure of the centralized government and controlled economy to effectively address these challenges have contributed to the issues of ethnicity, corruption, bad social conditions, and poor political and economic governance. These factors present challenges to business operations thereby contributing to the difference in CSR practices in the country from regions to regions as a result of the peculiar challenges the regions face.

Albasu et al (2018) mentioned the need for the Nigerian government to meet up with its responsibilities of providing security for citizens, issues of legislative framework that addresses the necessities of CSR. They also highlighted the need for the promotion of economic good of CSR and provision of enabling environment for the integration of CSR to be intensified. It is worth noting that the government has made efforts to create legislative framework of CSR in Nigeria on a federal basis. For instance, the CSR Bill which seeks to establish the Corporate Social Responsibility Commission remains the main effort of the government in achieving a centralized policy framework for CSR. The aim of the Commission when established is to among other things oversee the formation, implementation, supervision and provision of policies and reliefs to host communities for the physical, material, environmental or other forms of degradation suffered as a result of the activities of companies and organizations operating in these communities.

In line with this, Guarini and Nidasio (2002) investigated how government can facilitate effective integration of corporate practice with special interest on policy formulation, performance measurement and reporting.   The role of government in stipulating the minimum standards for corporate practices cannot be over emphasized.   However, there is a need for more involvement of government agencies and structures to improve the compliance levels of laws and regulations that deal with the engagement of CSR practices. The role of the government in directing CSR expectations of organizations could be strategic in ways that takes the long term benefits into consideration.   In support, Ojo (2009) was also of the view that CSR could be a potent vehicle for economic development in Nigeria, suggesting that the Nigerian government should encourage corporate entities to be more involved in CSR activities through appropriate legal and regulatory framework that could help entities in Nigeria take advantage of partnerships with the government in the development of the country's economy.

CSR as a Sustainable Development Business Model an African Perspective

The term sustainable development has been investigated in literature, however, many advocates differ in their opinions Korhonen (2003) mentioned that sustainable development has become the base for CSR and corporate environmental management. The concept of sustainability development and CSR is arguably not new in literature. However, how CSR practices should promote sustainable development remains vague in terms of value, principles and norms that should guide operations of business activities. World Business Council for Sustainability Development (2012) mentioned the

realization of a sustainable development agenda hinges on realizing concrete values in the economic, political, technological and cultural spheres.

The United Nations through the 2030 'Transforming the World' Agenda has developed a list of expected Sustainable Development Goals to be adopted by all UN member states. The lists of the SDGs includes: no poverty, zero hunger, good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, industry innovation and infrastructure, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, life on land, peace justice and strong institutions and partnerships for the goals. The SDGs provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. The SDGs recognizes that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand in hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests (sdgs.un.org).

Studies (Abdelhalim and Eldin, 2019; Moon, 2014; Oginni and Omojowo, 2016) have adopted numerous approaches to understand socio-technical transitions, business model changes towards sustainability, economic, social and environmental components of sustainability and CSR. In Abdelhalim and Eldin (2019) the study adopted a theoretical perspective of the transition theory and the concept of strong sustainability for understanding socio-technical transition and business model changes towards sustainability. The argued that companies could focus on dualistic role pursuing sustainable development targets- both contributing to sustainability within the business dimensions and assisting the broader systemic change through the new sustainable business model. Abdelhalim and Eldin (2019) developed a framework combining the approaches of transition management, sustainable value creation and corporate sustainability level. The framework presented an opportunity to view CSR and sustainability from a lens that could potentially benefit societal social development in the long term. The works of Moon (2014) highlighted the need for an integrative lens that captures and synthesizes accurately some of the distinctive elements and insights that are peculiar to developing countries. This integrative lens sparks the need for the study to view CSR from a perspective that takes into consideration the long term value creation for the firm, physical and human capital creation in the community.

Oginni and Omojowo (2016) work addressed the practical concerns on how industries in Sub-Saharan Africa promote sustainability in their CSR models using Cameroon as a case study. The study examined the economic, social, and environmental components of sustainable development and CSR and found that industries in Cameroon prioritize social and environmental dimensions over economic dimensions. It found industries in Cameroon implement environmental dimensions of CSR as a safe buffer and a social dimension as philanthropy. The study also found no concrete evidence that industries promote sustainable development via CSR in Cameroon. Carroll & Shabana (2010) added that there is a need to expand the contracted philanthropic conception and practice of CSR prevailing across much of the developing world, to a more sophisticated and elaborate conception. The idea here could be an approach that integrates the three dimensions of sustainability –social, environmental, and economic into the ideas and practices of CSR at all levels and through all activities.

In Bangladesh, Rahman and Islam (2019) investigated the practices of CSR by commercial banks and the achievement of sustainable development through this practice. The paper found a positive relationship between CSR and sustainable development. The paper also attributed the positive relationship to the precise guideline by the government about CSR expenditure, the timely involvement of CSR activities by large corporations and CSR disclosure in the bank's annual statements. There is a need for synergy that provides the possibility for some level of collaboration between key economic and social development drivers. Rendtorff (2019), mentioned the need for partnerships between key contributors of development. In the analysis the highlighted the need for critical analysis of the possibilities of sustainable development goals (SDG) developed by the United Nations to function as the vision and strategic tool for management and governance. The argument here is that SDGs combined with political aims with visions of economic development and social justice are key driving forces of CSR from a sustainable development perspective. In support, (Albasu et al, 2018) argues that there is a need for shared value responsibilities among key stakeholders in the varied spheres of operation. For instance, in the political sphere, the government has a pivotal role to play in ensuing legislations and policy frameworks are favourable to business activities. In the economic sphere, business enterprises have the role of redirecting policies on economic production and consumption activities. There is also a need for a broad sustainable business model, capable of improving socio-economic well-being, mitigating environmental risks and sustaining natural assets capital.

Integrating CSR and Sustainability; a Nigerian Perspective

Studies have presented broad structures and system thinking that highlights key factors that could possibly improve the development of CSR and extend both economic and social developments. The works of Sinthupundaja & Kohda, (2019), Reyes & Scholz, (2019) and Lopez & Montfort (2017) mentioned Creating Shared Value (CSV) is arguably the leading approach for articulating the business case for corporate sustainability. Sinthupundaja and Kohda, (2019) presented the CSV concept as a means to re-conceptualize the role of business in the society and guide the thinking about the relationship between firm and society. The idea of a shared value concept elaborates the need for some level of shared responsibilities among key stakeholders that plays a key role in the success of the implementation of CSR. CSV emphasizes on co-created value with cross-sector collaboration that leads to sustainability. It further highlighted the need for togetherness in working with organizations, government, institutions, as well as local people to enable deep understand of local context and the real social and environmental issues. In the case of Nigeria, the stakeholders are broad because CSR policies are formulated in tandem with current trends in demand, international standards and global best practice, coupled with the peculiarities, cultural and socio-political dynamics of the Nigerian society. This idea of creating shared value remains a potential which needs one sense of direction in leading expected outcomes from the varied programs. However, there remains the challenge of who or which part of the system should responsible to direct this charge of a single point of direction in enabling CSR and sustainability.

For instance, the banking sector of Nigeria introduced the Nigerian Sustainable Banking Principle (NSBP) through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in 2012 to encourage more banks to embrace the concept and practices of CSR. The NSBP is directed towards developing a management approach that aims to balance both environmental and

social risks identified through the operational activities of financial institutions (CBN, 2012). This initiative by a major regulator in the banking sector of Nigeria can be highlighted as a major step to encourage CSR from a sustainability perspective. However, Albasu et al (2018) found that adherence to principles and guidelines of the NSBP is insufficient in ensuring effective CSR and promoting sustainability. The further found that CSR is merely seen as moral obligations and as such the CSR initiatives and programmes implemented by the companies are products of their discretion with no legal backing. There is a need for national CSR policy that endeavors to capture specific expectations and practices that categorise the responsibilities of CSR.

The works of Albasu et al, 2018) mentioned an integrated shared responsibility framework that takes into consideration the potential roles that key actors of varied industries in Nigeria including government, regulators, institutional bodies, labour unions and NGOs will contribute to ensuring that CSR practices directed and practiced in ways that promoted sustainability effectively and efficiently. The further argued that each key actor could synergize to ensure that a common goal of sustainable CSR is achieved. The study further identified potential roles each key players could play to include, the government providing enabling environment for businesses to strive and do business; the regulatory framework to provide workable policies that shows political will to support and promote business success; institutional frameworks that provides compliance mechanism that are workable with both business and society at large and businesses creating operations structures that supports the need to engage in CSR in sustainable ways through strategic planning and adhering to agreed directions in terms of development.

Discussion

The potential of CSR as a sustainable development tool remains of relevance in Nigeria. However, the role of government in the development of CSR in Nigeria remain a key factor in achieving the desired outcomes. The study highlights the peculiarity in the geo- political and socio- political system of Nigeria couple with the challenges of bureaucracy, which makes it challenging to have a one size fits all legislation to be passed. The design of the political system in Nigeria into 6 geo-political zones with power centralized through a federalism structure has contributed to bottlenecks as well as lengthy bureaucratic processes that influences how CSR has developed in Nigeria. In addition, the study highlighted a trend in the way CSR efforts are focused and developed in the different regions. It can be argued the crisis in the Niger Delta with militancy increased the popularity of CSR in that region with a lot of efforts by the government to achieve normalcy and calm through investments and numerous activities encouraged by independent organizations that use CSR as a tool for development. The same can be said of the North East region which is also facing insurgencies and banditry. CSR is now popular in this region as a result of the crisis and need for normalcy in the region. This paper terms these factors that present unique challenges to business operations 'the Nigerian Factor' thereby contributing to the difference in CSR practices in the country from regions to regions as a result of the peculiar challenges the regions face.

The Nigerian factor has further played an influential role in the level of involvement of government in the decision making levels of CSR activities. However, the government alone should not be responsible for the CSR development of Nigeria. Albasu and Nyameh (2017) argued that a joint action by the government, industry institutions,

citizenry and corporate entities could lead to the development of a more sustainable CSR in the nation. They developed an Integrated Shared Responsibility (ISR) model that argued that all stakeholders in industries across the economy should all have some level of shared directed responsibilities. These responsibilities should be identified and agreed upon so as to ensure the shared responsibilities equates to shared common goals. The framework elaborates four components, namely policy framework, institutional framework, regulatory framework and critical success factors. However, the main challenge remains the bureaucratic process as well as the political structures that will manage as well as guide the direction of the development. There are other factors such as the influence of international bodies such as the need to align with the UN SDGs.

For instance, majority of African countries are UN member states therefore, this shared blueprint of the UN SDGs is one that shapes the desires of development in those countries and CSR has its place in contributing. However, there remains peculiar challenges that hinders the level of integration of this agendas across Africa. For instance, in Nigeria there is poor funding of education in the budgets, high rate of out-of-school children, and prolonged neglect of learning environments and facilities among many other issues that hinders the quality education SDGs (Lawrence et al, 2020). Allen et al, (2018) also recognized the issue of inter linkages and synergies of key stakeholders as problems that could potentially undermine the collective efforts of achieving sustainability. In this paper we included these challenges among the sources of challenges attributed to the 'Nigerian Factor'. Allen et al, (2018) recommended an integrated and system approach that allows countries to isolate and focus on high impact and high leverage points as the struggle to implement the SDGs and ensure communications and feedbacks are understood and managed. Martinuzzi et al (2017) added that the selective implementation of SDGs, green washing, the lack of integration of the stakeholders, the lack of incorporation of SMEs, and the difference in CSR practices among countries accounted for the limitations of CSR in addressing SDGs. The role of the government, businesses, institutions and regulators in aligning sustainable development through CSR remains an area that needs to be addressed in further researches more details and industry focused to understand the role shared responsibilities can play in creating the desired value and ultimately sustainable CSR development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study highlights the peculiarity in the geo- political and socio- political system of Nigeria, which makes it challenging to have a one size fits all CSR legislation to be passed. It also showed that 'the Nigerian factor' has played an influential role in the development of CSR in Nigeria and the level of involvement of government in the decision making of CSR activities. The role of government in the development of CSR in Nigeria remains a key factor in achieving the desired outcomes of CSR as a sustainable development tool. The study highlighted that the government should not have to sole responsibility of sustainable development, but an Integrated Shared Responsibility (ISR) approach that involves all stakeholders in industries across the economy to have some level of shared directed responsibilities. The study is recommending a combination of efforts from key stakeholders across industries to identify shared goals that are peculiar to that specific industry and develop systems that allows for sustainable development thinking to be applied in achieving CSR goals. The study recommends further research to elaborate on the role of key stakeholders using

the ISR model on a variety of industries in Nigeria to develop precise guidelines about sustainable CSR programs that could shape and contribute to the overall development of the society at large.

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Post-pandemic challenges and recommendations: What is the future of Tourism Studies in Malta?

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Abstract

In 2020-21, the tourism industry was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and led to policy and logistical changes in various sectors. Amongst the sectors that were affected by the pandemic, some that are directly associated with tourism include global flights, guest numbers in various countries and employment in services and retail, accommodation and food services. This has led some researchers in the field to call for the need to reconsider the entire global tourism sector and not return to pre-pandemic practices once the crisis is over (Gőssling, Scott & Hall, 2020). The United Nations (2020) have proposed a roadmap for the transformation of the tourism industry in the near future, in order to foster more sustainable growth, advance innovation, mitigate the impact on livelihoods and coordinate the transformation of the sector. National authorities, including the Government of Malta (2021), have also published post-pandemic strategies to counteract current challenges associated with the crisis.

This paper will focus on three areas of research associated with the pandemic, tourism and the field of higher education (HE), combining a literature review with recommendations for the local HE sector in Tourism Studies. The first part of the paper will analyse key texts in recent literature that highlight challenges that the tourism sector is facing due to the pandemic. It will also seek to understand how perceptions about the impact of the pandemic changed from early 2020 to 2021/2. The second part will focus on literature that studies how the pandemic has affected HE, especially Tourism Studies, in different contexts (for instance, Schmitt, 2020; Sigala, 2021). The last part of the paper will turn to the local HE sector in Tourism Studies, highlighting challenges as well as proposals for positive change during the pandemic, such as Malta Tourism Authority's scheme to offer online courses to persons working in the tourism industry. The paper will finally elicit recommendations for the Institute of Tourism Studies in Malta, reflecting about the institute's need to reinvent itself in the context of the pandemic.

Keywords: higher education, tourism studies, sustainable tourism, post-pandemic strategies.

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on tourism, one of the main economic sectors in the world. International and domestic travel were affected as well as cruises, accommodation, cafes and restaurants. While pandemics are especially problematic because they are often linked to the mobility of tourists and other travellers, they are not the only cause of travel disruptions. Terrorist attacks have also affected tourism globally, especially the September 11 attacks in New York. As the world began to open up to tourists due to an easing of mitigating measures in late 2021, the war in Ukraine in 2022 has sent new shock waves across the tourism industry and is likely to disrupt travel in various

parts of the world. It has now become more crucial than ever for all those who work in Higher Education Institutions related to the tourism sector to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on teaching and learning as well as the very existence of the tourism industry.

The COVID-19 virus affected various sectors of the hospitality value chain. Many smaller companies switched to delivery and take away. In just a few weeks, populations in Malta and elsewhere experienced a move from overtourism to non-tourism (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020). It is important to note that "tourism revenue is permanently lost because unsold capacity – for instance in accommodation – cannot be marketed in subsequent years" (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020, p.2).   While the pandemic was catastrophic and proved to be fatal for some companies in the hospitality industry, Higher Education Institutions still had to find new ways of delivering their courses to students. This paper will evaluate the field by first analysing recent literature that highlights challenges that the tourism sector has encountered since the pandemic broke out in 2020. The second part of the paper will focus on literature that studies how the pandemic has affected HE in different contexts. The last part of the paper will turn to the local HE sector in Tourism Studies, highlighting challenges as well as proposals for change at the Institute for Tourism Studies in Malta.

The impact of COVID-19 on tourism

Apart from its obvious impact on health care and economies around the world, the pandemic showed how fragile the tourism industry can be. The number of nights spent at international tourist accommodation establishments fluctuates depending on factors like national travel restrictions: for example, while the numbers of nights decreased substantially from 2019 to 2020, in 2021 they increased again as the effects of the different vaccines began to leave an impact on perceptions related to the tourism industry (Eurostat, 2022). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Secretary General's Policy brief outlined the effects that the pandemic has had on at-risk categories like women, youths and workers and small island states (UNWTO, n.d.). The brief describes the impact of the pandemic on biodiversity and ecosystems, the increased pressure on heritage conservation and the effects that lockdowns have had on cultural events in many countries, which has also negatively impacted sales of indigenous handicrafts and revenue from cultural centres like museums. Dwindling audiences and lockdowns stifled the arts sector in virtually every country in the world.

Some of the negative effects described in the brief and in other research have also been felt in the Maltese islands. The National Statistics Office in Malta (NSO, 2021) has shown how the tourism industry in the country was affected in 2020 by travel restrictions and a reduction in demand. While statistics prior to the outbreak showed a positive increase in numbers of tourists on a yearly basis, inbound tourism in 2020 was badly hit by the pandemic, with a decline of 76% from 2019. This was made worse by a suspension of flights into the country for a number of months. The reopening of the airport in July did not lead to a substantial increase in the total of inbound tourists.

Apart from the direct impact that the pandemic has had on the hospitality industry, it has also affected perceptions about modes of travel and destinations that may last a

long time, perhaps even longer than the virus itself. Cruise ships, for instance, are a known risk due to the relatively high possibility of transmission in close quarters, and this may make people avoid this type of tourism for years to come. Covid-19 has increased tourists' health anxiety and are much more aware of the need to avoid overpopulated areas and health and safety measures (Rahman et al., 2021). Many authors have warned about quick solutions to the current tourism crisis that are not carefully planned and could put whole populations in jeopardy (Singh, 2021). It is clear that governments still need to be cautious even though vaccines have been readily available in many countries for around a year now.

At the same time, solutions must be found due to the negative effects the pandemic has had on the sector and on Higher Education institutions dedicated to tourism. In Malta, a National Post-Pandemic Strategy (NPPS) was launched in June, 2021 and focused on improving the quality of life and wellbeing, sustaining business and employment and driving a strong recovery and finding ways to remain resilient and competitive (Ministry for Research, Innovation and the Co-ordination of Post Covid-19 Strategy, 2021). The strategy stressed the importance of learning from the pandemic so that similar crises in the future can be met with a more robust response. and take action to increase Malta's ability to respond to future crises.

In Malta and elsewhere, tourism institutes like ITS can be at the forefront of change that is both safe and sustainable. Many researchers and other stakeholders have been suggesting for some time that new travel markets are likely to develop as a result of the pandemic. These markets could include areas that are ultimately beneficial to tourists' health, such as holidays involving physical outdoor activities like cycling or trekking. The UNWTO Secretary General's Policy Brief on Tourism and COVID-19 (UNWTO, n.d.) also refers to the importance of a shift towards other forms of travel like green tourism, sustainable tourism as well and the digitalisation of tourism. Needless to say, these indications of alternative modes of travel are crucial in times like these and it is necessary for researchers and policy-makers in different countries to come together to think about tourism recovery in a post-pandemic world. Babii and Nadeem (2021) have referred to examples of government financial support and online training for workers in the tourism industry in countries like Thailand and Jamaica. Shifting to niche markets like ecotourism, adventure travel and health and wellness tours can also help to mitigate the negative impact that the pandemic has had on tourism. A more radical shift for some countries whose economies rely heavily on tourism could be located in a diversification of their economies. However, this kind of transformation is probably inconceivable in most countries.

The negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic on global tourism obviously has implications for tourism-related courses in higher education as well as employment opportunities. The relatively inactive period that the tourism industry has experienced over the last couple of years could be used profitably to explore new avenues that have been suggested by various researchers and tourism industry leaders. Like others, Abbas et al. (2021) suggest that the time could be used to make the industry more sustainable.

The tourism industry should consider starting renovations of hotels, improving staff quality, simplifying the sale of tour groups and customer registration, and moving to digital technology. Particular attention should be paid to family entertainment: special

programs for children and adolescents, the development of appropriate menus, entertainment systems, etc. (p. 9)

Some of the measures suggested by Abbas et al. and other researchers, such as better sanitation measures and less crowding in restaurants, have already been implemented in many hotels around the world. Beyond the hospitality sector, stakeholders need to find ways of developing tourism initiatives that are linked to natural or cultural heritage, in order to support markets that genuinely work to strengthen valuable sectors that are the backbone of different countries' identities. The measurement of 'success' in the industry may need to move away from the traditional importance that the sector grants to numbers of tourists. This would entail a complete change in outlook that people have towards this sector of the economy.

This change may also mean that we need to objectively measure possible benefits of the pandemic too. Gössling, Scott & Hall (2020, p.14) have summed up some of these benefits: the phasing out of old aircraft and the shift of non-essential business travel from face-to-face meetings to videoconferencing. References to an expansion of online meetings and workshops have evident connections to the field of education, especially Higher Education, and any discussion about a post-pandemic recovery in the educational sphere cannot avoid discussing the pros and cons of online learning. Some authors have outlined a three-tier recovery process for tourism based on a pre-recovery period (during which social media are leveraged to address current challenges), a recovery period (during which domestic tourism and relief initiatives are strengthened) and a final period of transformation, during which tourism products are diversified and hospitality and tourism education and training are re-imagined (Mensah & Boakye, 2021). Tourism education definitely needs to be at the centre of any proposal for change in our times, and we will now turn to this field.

COVID-19 and Hospitality and Tourism Education

The pandemic has put enormous pressure on every sector of education, from the primary sector to Higher Education, including Tourism Education. First of all, it introduced a measure of anxiety related to the fact that lecturing staff, administration and students may have felt unsafe in environments like schools that are typically crowded with people. Transmissions in educational institutions would also have an obvious impact on the further spread of the virus, so schools were closed down in many countries around the world to safeguard the health of the general population.

Secondly, the shift towards virtual learning and teaching changed the way that lecturing staff interact with students and also changed modes of assessment. Lecturers are now making use of software that allows them or invigilators to monitor students during examinations and facilitate the marking of papers but this also means that teachers will need to upgrade their knowledge of online assessment methods (Montenegro-Rueda et al., 2021).

The effects of the pandemic on curricula and teaching modes varied, depending on the specific disciplines that were affected. For instance, the teaching of practical workshops in sectors like Food & Beverage became more problematic and it was not as easy to shift to the online mode in these areas. International placements for students became very difficult, if not impossible, to implement. Higher Education institutions that previously relied on income from international students suddenly

became vulnerable and aware of the need to develop more collaborative models (Mok & Montgomery, 2021).

Nevertheless, research has shown that drastic pedagogical changes were quickly implemented by academics in Higher Education: changes related to course content, tools and methods of delivery and much more. Unfortunately, some of these changes were complicated by disparities in students' access to technology and the Internet as well as government restrictions affecting social interactions (Pandya, Patterson & Cho, 2021).

On the other hand, the educational sector has fortunately been very resilient over the last two years but we may still need to evaluate the effects that these changes have had on students' learning, attitudes towards certain subjects, motivation and social and emotional development. Some challenges, for instance, have surfaced in foreign language learning in Higher Education, especially among low-achieving students. Negative emotions have been reported due to lack of interaction with other students and difficulties associated with self-perceived language proficiency and pronunciation (Maican & Cocorada, 2021).

Schmitt (n.d.) has explained that this time of crisis should be seen as a time for strong decisions and new insights about Hospitality and Tourism Education. He outlines ways how a more creative mindset can help to transform the educational portfolio of Higher Educational institutions dedicated to the field of tourism. In particular, he shows that online modes of delivery cannot possibly cater for every need of students in the sector:

Overall, the pandemic has triggered a great opportunity to reinvent not only curricula but how we deliver them. Here, the mix of online and physical components becomes critical. While there are multiple ideas and possibilities for online education, it also has its limitations. Social exchanges, networking and certain vocational training components can only be transferred into the virtual world in part. Future success models will be based on a well-balanced and identified portfolio of physical and online components. These blended models can and will reap the benefits of both worlds. (para. 7)

Essentially, Schmitt is recommending greater flexibility in Higher Education, something he believes that a sector that evolved so quickly during the last two years is certainly capable of. Others argue for a similarly flexible and personalised approach to educational services that would not be based on a one-size-fits-all mentality but would require schools "to revisit and reform their entire business model" (Sigala, 2021, p. 922). At this point, we can turn to the Institute of Tourism Studies in Malta and try to draw some conclusions about how the institute has coped during the pandemic and how it can redirect itself in the coming years.

ITS in pandemic and post-pandemic times

This is our third academic year in the pandemic so far. ITS closed its doors for the first time in March 2020 and lectures were shifted to online mode from day one of the lockdown. Training was provided on how to use Teams. Lecturers were also asked to change the mode of assessment of a number of modules – a shift from campus exams to either 100% coursework or online examinations. Practical sessions in

kitchens and restaurants were cancelled during the lockdown. Tourism was at a standstill during the first lockdown and no international placements or local placements took place. Take-home assignments replaced the local placements in the summer of 2020. In September 2020, recovery practical sessions were held in the restaurants and kitchens.

Lecturers were informed about the hybrid system coming into force in October 2020. Groups would be automatically divided into two with half of the students present in class while the second half following the lectures online on Teams. Most of the classrooms were now equipped with the new dual learning technology.

Guidelines to Hybrid Learning were issued in September 2021. Students who were certified sick, living in Gozo, falling under the maturity clause or international paying students could follow the courses online. In March 2022, we started allowing students to follow lectures online if they only have one lecture on campus. Also, students who claim that they are sick but provide no medical evidence can still follow online. This decision was taken for practical reasons but the disadvantage is that we now seem to have an empty campus, almost like during lockdown. The only activity that seems to be taking place is in the kitchens and restaurants.

I have to say that lecturers showed great cooperation with the academic management of the Institute throughout the pandemic and educational programmes were not impacted at all by the pandemic. Lectures progressed smoothly and continue to progress smoothly and this is something that everyone at ITS should be proud of. The overall performance of students remained similar to previous years except for foreign languages. The DOS report of 2021 in fact states that students seemed to struggle with languages during that year.

However, lecturers are now feeling the strain. Classrooms do not have proper equipment for the hybrid system and lecturers are using Teams and their own laptop. They need to sit at their laptop and remain seated otherwise students following online wouldn't be able to hear them. Moreover, they cannot use the whiteboard since this cannot be seen by online learners. It is difficult for lecturers to deal simultaneously with an online audience and another group in class. Students who normally follow online are complaining that they cannot follow the classes properly since the sound is not always good and the lecturer is giving priority to the students in class. Because of this, many classes have been shifted online. Tests are also being conducted online with no guarantees that cheating is not taking place. We also need to keep in mind that technology is only a tool and nothing more. Have we forgotten the real meaning of teaching here? Are we so obsessed with technology that it has become the central focus of our teachings?

And what about special needs students? We have almost 100 special needs students at ITS. We have 6 learning coaches who assist these students during lectures. Are these students getting the help they require when they are online?

Where do we go from here? Technology could offer a solution for those who absolutely cannot be present in class, but in this case, ITS needs to invest in proper resources so that we can run a proper hybrid system. Given that the institution is preparing for a move to Smartcity, this is highly unlikely.

We could learn from our relationship with Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences in Finland. ITS has partnered with this university on three types of courses – synchronous, in class or virtual (asynchronous). The latter system means that students study the whole module on their own, with no direct contact with lecturers. ITS students following courses at Haaga Helia are finding the virtual system extremely hard to follow but this may simply be due to the fact that new systems being implemented need to be supported by lecturers who guide students through them at all times. A way forward for ITS could be to have a dual system which offers students modules that are completely online and others that are face-to-face. The possibility of offering face-to-face lectures on specific days of the week helps to engage students in more direct forms of learning and to retain a sense of community that is essential in Higher Education environments.

We have seen earlier that policy-makers in the field are recommending changes in the kinds of packages that are being offered to tourists: changes related to green tourism, outdoor activities for tourists and the digitalisation of tourism. Perhaps, ITS is at a point in its history when it needs to find alternative solutions to the current situation created by the pandemic. Instead of trying to use new, online modes to present 'old' content to its students, ITS could begin to explore ways of transforming its content to adapt it to the new online modes of delivery. Students can be taught how to use online modes of communication (email, websites, chatting apps, social media, etc.) to develop tailor-made tours for individual tourists, keep potential tourists informed about health-related issues or hotels in real time, and so on. Online presentations offered by ITS lecturers can replicate digital, personalised services offered by the tourism industry, which always strive for improved customer experiences. Asynchronous presentations can be linked to online fora, in which students participate and bounce ideas off each other and also receive feedback from their lecturers.

Finally, ITS stands to gain from the current pandemic if it conceives of it as a possibility for greater connectivity with other institutions and the rest of the world. Once courses move into the online domain, they do not need to exist solely for ITS students but can be shared in an open access mode with other institutions, including institutions based in other countries. The transdisciplinary and transnational possibilities of such innovative platforms could offer ITS staff and students exciting avenues for the development of new courses, degrees, connections with a variety of disciplines, and course content. Exchanges of this sort can take place asynchronously or in real time, and ITS and collaborating institutions can learn from each other's expertise and experiences. Maybe we should stop trying to fit an old body into new clothes. Instead, we should take this opportunity to reinvent what we teach, not only how it is taught.

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The Covid-19 Pandemic and its' Impact on the Meal Experience in Casual Dining Restaurants

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Abstract

This research-oriented paper draws from the author's studies related to the quality of the service given in Maltese restaurants. The main objective of this study is to empirically examine the present situation and quality of the meal experience given in casual dining restaurants in Malta and the aftermath which the pandemic is leaving on one of the country's most important economic pillars.

The literature review is broken down into four parts. The first- and second-part deal with customer experience as well as the various facets and forms pertaining to the restaurant experience; whilst the third part focuses on the service quality and customer satisfaction. Lastly, the fourth and last part analyse the impact which the pandemic has on the catering sector during its different phases, the new consumer needs, and parallelism between the evolution of supply and demand.

For this research paper, two research methodologies are used for data collection. A total of 23 casual dining restaurants around Malta were chosen for the participative observation, whilst the survey questionnaire had a total response from 763 participants. This exercise, which was focused on the meal experience was carried out prior to the pandemic, and the data gathered from the two research methodologies was amalgamated for interpretation and conclusions.

The author started his first research on the restaurant sector in 2016, when he was writing his bachelors' thesis on the food and beverage service in Malta; this research paper is a summary of the work carried out for his Masters' thesis, and it gives a glimpse of information of what is happening in the Maltese casual dining restaurants. Therefore, it would be of significant value to this industry if further studies are conducted; not only in the catering sector, but also in other vital sectors which form part of the tourism and hospitality industry.

Key Words: Meal Experience, Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Consumer Needs, Foodservice Sector

The Meal

The importance of practices related to the consumption of food, and specifically those related to commensality, are widely discussed in sociological and anthropological literature. Classical sociology has already studied this topic extensively and underlined its importance. The concept of commensality suggests a type of practice linked to the idea that all those who sit at the same table are served the same foods. But historical literature teaches us that this is not the only model of commensal practice. Various types of commensalism practices can be distinguished, which change from one society to another and over time. Guests at a banquet can all sit at the same table and eat the same foods, as normally happens in Europe from

the seventeenth century onwards; or people sitting at the same table may be served different foods according to their position on the social scale (Sasha Gora, 2018).

Beyond its specific historical forms, the functionalist and evolutionary approaches, however, underline the universal spread of commensalism, and the presence of some recurring traits. It is the belief system that allows the meal to be shared with certain people, according to certain rules of behaviour and clear modalities, or with other people according to other certain modalities, or that it cannot be shared with other people at all. French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep points out that the practices that involve the exchange or consumption of food often underlie the social rites of most of the civilizations he studied. He also emphasises that the commensality or ritual of eating and drinking together is evidently a custom of aggregation, of properly material union which has been so-called as a ritual of communion (Rothem & Shlomo, 2018).

Pierre Van den Berghe (1984) instead starts from an evolutionist perspective to underline the universality of commensalism. He researched the origin of the practice of commensalism by conducting a comparative analysis between human social habits and those of other animals. The fact that appears immediately important is that the practice of sharing food is common to most carnivorous animals. In particular, Van den Berghe notes that some species - such as chimpanzees and canids (canine) - use food exchanges to create and maintain social ties that go beyond natural blood ties (Van den Berghe, 1984).

According to Van den Berghe's analysis, the fact that the practice of sharing food is common to most carnivorous animals, demonstrates how ancient and profound the roots of this human behaviour are and can serve to explain its centrality and universality. Van den Berghe also states that food is not only the most excellent gift, but it is also a gift that cannot be refused without offending. More generally, the sharing of food seems to play an appeasing and socializing function (Van den Berghe, 1984).

Meal-related behaviours and practices perform an important structuring function within the group participating in it. This would include: the ways in which the tables are laid up, the principles with which the diners decide the seating around the table as well as the ways of conversation. The meal therefore converts itself into an essential social performance to the extent that diners are given the opportunity to experiment, to make a kind of test of what social relationships are within the group, or, within the society to which they belong (Maffesoli, 1991).

Acceptance of the rules imposed during the meal denotes recognition of the social relationships and social hierarchy between the diners even when the meal is finished. As in classical Greece, when for meat banquets the "sacrificed" animal was then cut into pieces and eaten during a ritual banquet, in which individuals received a part of meat in accordance with their status in the City. The part of meat that the citizen receives during the sacrificial banquet is literally the embodiment of his political and social status (Maffesoli, 1991).

Jean-Pierre Poulain (2002), referring to modern societies, underlined the fact that in advanced industrial society, there has been a rapid transformation of those commensalism practices that had long been considered an example of extremely

stable and change resistant practices. The sense of belonging to the group, especially to the family, is affirmed through some ritual of commensality that no longer necessarily presupposes the meeting around the table.

Poulain speaks of a practice of "food nomadism" observable on two distinct levels. The first level is related to "the habit"; which is related to the increasing trends, of having meals outside one's home and family group, due to changes in working hours and to a different management of free time. The second level refers instead to the "private space", where the meal is no longer necessarily eaten in the dining room or kitchen, in the presence of all family members. But rather in front of the television or computer, perhaps at different times according to the different needs of family members. This change is an expression of the growing individualization given by the neoliberal system, and which in this sense carries with it the risk of de-structuring the oldest social practices related to commensality (Poulain, 2002).

Although food is a primary determinant in the choice of restaurant consumption, as well as in the choice of the restaurant itself, we can affirm how the consumer's desire goes in search of other key factors. Such factors do not just enrich the experience but are able to determine its success and therefore its memorability (Wall & Berry, 2007). These elements can be traced mainly to two macro areas:

-the service, intended as the performance of the dining room staff;
- the physical atmosphere, or that set of elements that defines the environment in which the consumer is immersed. In this set we include not only the physical space, i.e., the walls, the floors and ceilings that delimit the restaurant (in addition to a series of elements such as temperature, humidity, light, background music), but also other holistic objects and tools that will guide the consumer throughout the experience: tables and tablecloths, cutlery and glasses, etc. Beyond the presence / absence of these spaces and objects, their organization (such as the layout and furnishings of the room, and the mise en place of the table) is also decisive.

The service and the environment are therefore placed as significant syntagmatic elements. For example, the plate or dish, are useful tools for the construction and delivery of the experience itself by the chef and / or patron to the guest. The sensory and motor processes deriving from these elements are not independent or detached from each other, but their activation is characterized by a strong intermodality translatable into different degrees of synaesthesia (Garg & Amelia, 2016).

The way in which these elements are combined with each other, constitutes the unique margin from which each restaurant starts to define itself. The success of the equation however remains in the hands of the guest. Although not aware of the regulations and professional standards, the client is placed however, in the condition of being able to enjoy and above all appreciate the quality offered along the entire sensory journey without being overwhelmed or astonished. The planning of the consumer experience, in fact, is built around the guest, which however implies a certain knowledge of the consumer and his/her expectations, so that he/she can benefit from the experience through the recovery and mobilization of sensitive patterns already produced in the process itself (Norman, 2013).

Experience as an economic offer and marketing lever

In the context of consumer studies, the first appearances of the term "experiential" occurred in the eighties with the work of Hirschman and Holbrook (1982). They defined the experiential views as an approach that focuses on symbolic, hedonistic nature and consumer aesthetics; and which is based on the concept of consumption experience as an activity carried out in search of fantasies, sensations, and entertainment. This theory was followed by several studies and which we can divide into three main groups:

A first group of authors analyse the experience of purchasing and using products and suggest managerial tools to make these products experiential. This means enriching them with emotional contents and meanings to make them a source of experience for the consumer. The second group focuses more on the shopping experience and tries to understand the determinants of experience in the store to derive managerial implications in order to make the physical place an experiential place. A third strand of studies focuses on experience as an object of exchange, that is, as a product in its own right.

In the 90s Pine and Gilmore (1998) noted how the economy, and subsequently marketing, was also shifting from what was offered to consumers and how these offers should have a strong added value in order to be appreciated. The authors state that in buying a service, a person buys a series of intangible assets that are carried out on his/her behalf. However, when a customer buys an experience, he/she is paying to be able to spend time enjoying a string of unforgettable events, staged by an establishment as in a theatrical performance, to involve him/her on an individual level (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). With this theory, it is important to clarify, that the famous 4Ps of marketing theorized by Kotler (2003) are not eliminated but must be revisited in an experiential scenario.

The customer experience is a mixture of the four key components, product, price, place and promotion, so that the customer experiences a feeling that he/she perceives as added value with respect to the product itself. This should occur at any point of contact with the brand and allows the company to offer the good at a higher price thanks to this experiential component. To better understand what type of experience is best suited to the product or service that the company wants to promote, or to understand what experience is being staged, it is important to know its characteristics (Pine & Gilmore, 1999).

The two American scholars have proposed a schematized model called the "experience economy" to group the possible types of experience that allow customer involvement. This model is articulated along two axes or dimensions. The areas and dimensions of the experiences are represented by the author in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Four Realms of an Experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998)
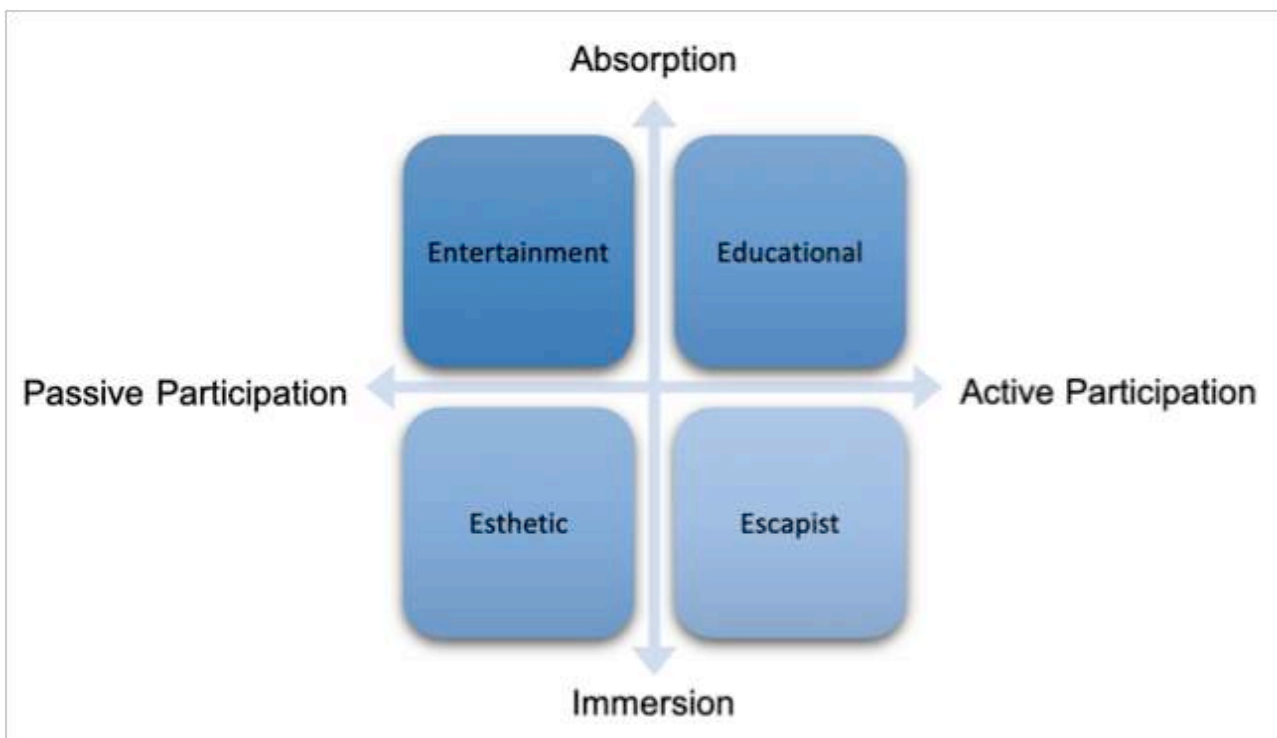
The first axis, which in the representation is placed horizontally, is linked to the participation of the customer in the experience itself, that is, whether it is active or passive in living the memorable moment. We therefore find passive participation in one extreme where the consumer is simply a spectator of what is happening around him. The main examples of passive participation experiences are the observation of a show or listening to music at a concert. On the other side of the axis we place the active participation of the customer, who acts personally on the performance or event he/she is participating in. The simplest example to understand this dimension is sports practice, in which the person actively acts to create the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

The second dimension describes the involvement of the person with the external environment in which the event or performance takes place. Represented in the vertical axis, this dimension has absorption on one side and immersion on the other. Absorption means when an experience penetrates the person through the mind, such as watching a movie in the cinema or listening to a university lesson. With Immersion, on the other hand, the individual finds him/herself within the experience itself, taking part physically or virtually in what is happening around him/her (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

From the possible combinations of these two dimensions emerge what the authors Pine and Gilmore (1999) call the four realms of an experience. These four types of experiences, which can also be seen in Figure 4., are obtained by combining different degrees of participation and involvement of the person.

The first area is that of Entertainment: it is generated in all those cases in which patrons passively absorb the experience that surrounds them through their senses.

This type of experience is the one that is currently most easily implemented by companies, because it requires minimal effort in terms of engagement strategies and all creativity is concentrated in the creation of captivating events or performances (Flambé or Gueridon dishes prepared in front of patrons). The field of Education is instead the second; in this case the degree of involvement of the person remains the same but implies an active participation in what is happening in the surrounding environment. The most obvious example is that of students who must engage personally to increase their knowledge and skills in an educational experience, in our case cooking or wine tasting sessions (Scicluna, 2017).

The third is the area of Esthetic experience in which consumers immerse themselves in the event or in the surrounding environment in a mostly passive way and without having influence on it. For instance, patrons who partake in cultural and heritage culinary events where they are in natural places or in artificial scenarios or events with virtual realities. The last part of the experience that is identified by the interweaving of the dimensions of participation and involvement is that of Escapist. In this case there is a deep immersion and participation of the customer in what is happening. The guest in this type of experience becomes the main protagonist and creator of the performance. Banquets with medieval re-enactments in which patrons are fully dressed up for the event as well as dining together in this context is a typical example (Scicluna, 2017). The most valuable experiences for people, and consequently that create positive memories, will be those that manage to combine the different areas and graphically position themselves in the central point of the figure.

In another theory, experience is linked to marketing, rather than to the economy in general. Such theory is provided by Bernd H. Schmitt (1999), who based the concept of his "experiential marketing" model on four key concepts: focus on customer experience, attention of the consumer situation, recognition of rational and emotional consumption drivers and use of diverse management strategies.

The change in the experiential marketing paradigm entails a shift of focus on the consumer and on the purchasing dynamics which brings out some differences with respect to the traditional scheme. This does not mean, however, that they are alternative theories or that the focus on the consumer abolishes traditional theories. However, it is appropriate to adapt marketing theories to the experiential objective to which companies aspire.

The differences of experiential marketing compared to traditional marketing according to Schmitt (1999) are summarized in Figure 2. It is important that if an establishment wants to undertake a marketing campaign that adds value for the customer, and that has the consumer rather than the sale at the centre of the strategy, then the focus must shift from the left to the right column.

Figure 2. Traditional Marketing vs Experiential Marketing. Adapted from (Schmitt, 1999)
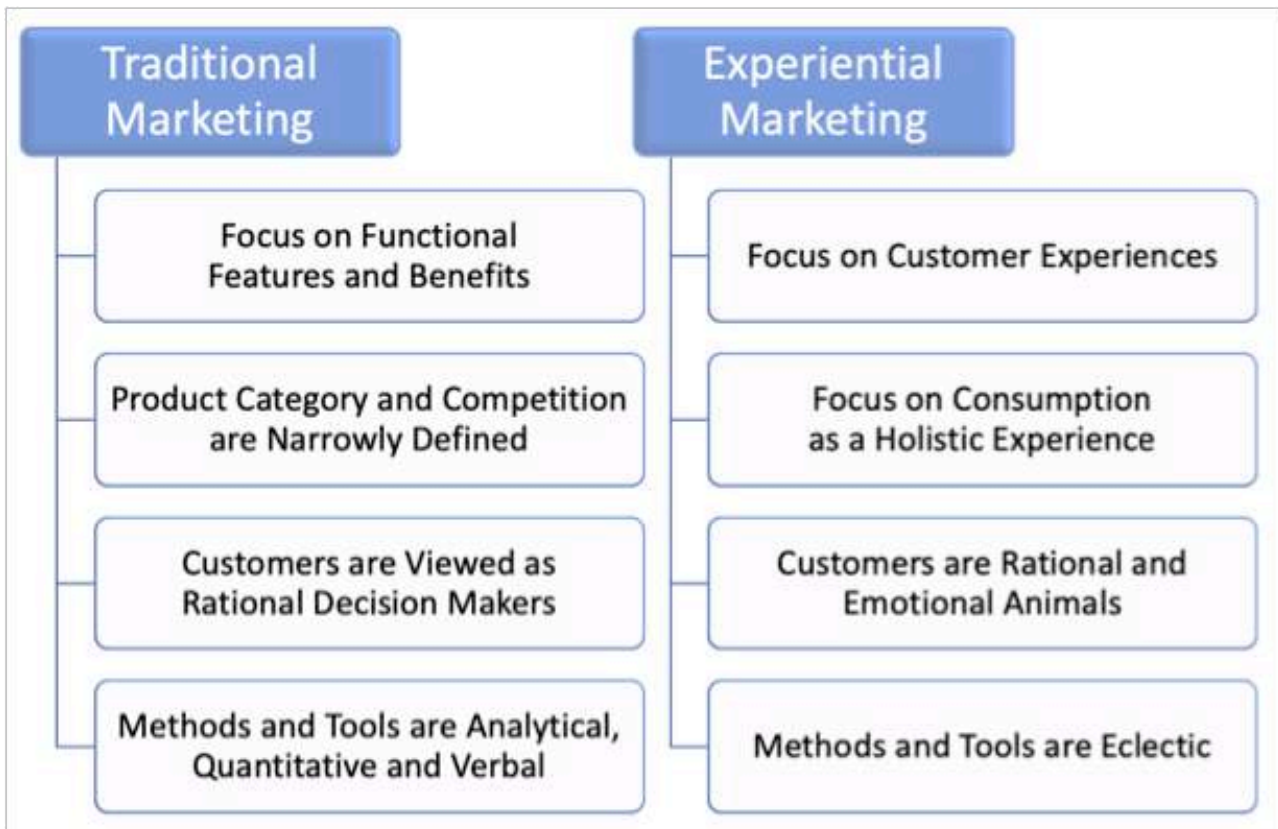
From the key assumptions of this latter theory, five types of experiences are identified called SEM, the acronym of strategic experiential modules. In these experiential modules all those sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and relational experiences are to be considered. The ultimate goal of this marketing approach is the search for holistic experience in which the various modules coexist for a full, memorable proposal to the consumer.

The principles of the experience economy and experiential marketing, create a managerial line of company administration, in which the conception of the customer experience is associated with the idea that: in order to create value, the experience must be, as repeatedly mentioned by the scholars themselves, "memorable", "holistic" and "extraordinary" (Scicluna, 2017). As a final consideration, it should be remembered that the most important change must be made in the minds of marketing companies. As stated by most of the scholars mentioned above; the fundamental factor for a company to be able to evolve in a consumer environment that has profoundly changed, is to adapt the mental approach to these new ways of interacting, information, evaluation, and purchase of products.

Schmitt's Experiential Marketing

A catering establishment needs to concentrate most of its resources towards the market segment to whom its offer is addressed, trying to make it unique in the eyes of customers. In this case, the so-called Experiential Marketing that was theorized by BH Schmitt (1999) comes to our aid and is based on a very simple and intuitive

concept, which however requires a holistic coordination and commitment in order to be effectively put into practice.

Experiential marketing, also called "emotional", has the aim of involving each individual customer thus offering them a memorable experience and, very importantly, exceeding their expectations by anticipating, for example, their unconscious needs. An experience is memorable when it is able to go deep into the customer's feelings and remain there for a long time. Through this particular branch of marketing, a restaurant can therefore focus more on creating the consumer experience rather than focusing on the product itself (Scicluna, 2017).

The main objective of the experiential marketing strategy will then be to identify what type of experience will best enhance the product. In this regard according to Schmitt there are 5 different types of Strategic Experiential Modules (SEM's). SEM's are used by experience designers and strategists to create and provide experiences to different types of customers. The word "module" is used because it refers to well-defined functional domains of mind and behaviour. There are five categories of modules theorized by Schmitt: SENSE, FEEL, THINK, ACT, RELATE. Each SEM has its purpose and internal structure (Schmitt, 1999).

SENSE: refers to the five senses and aims to generate sensory experiences through sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. The SENSE module is usually used by companies to differentiate the offer, incentivise customers and to increase the value of their products and services. The most supported method for this module is to take a concept already clear and present in the mind of consumers and make it new, fresh, cool thanks to the variety of sensory stimulations (Scicluna, 2017).

FEEL: this module communicates with the deepest feelings and emotions of individuals. The aim is to create brand-related sensations in the consumer: from moderate positivity to strong positivity (such as feelings of euphoria or belonging). The key to turning on this type of marketing lies in understanding which stimuli can lead to certain sensations and in addition, how much customers feel part of the company and what is their level of empathy. Since much depends on an individual's "internal" response, it is difficult to create mass campaigns with the FEEL method, given that the stimulus-response or stimulus-emotion connection could vary from country to country or from culture to culture (Schmitt, 1999). It is also not at all an easy mission to carry out, since we know that the majority of emotion stimuli are triggered during the consumption phase.

THINK: This SEM plays on the intellect and tries to attract customers through experiences that stimulate their mind; for example: experiences in which a problem must be faced and solved, or that lead individuals to ask questions, etc. With the THINK module we try to reach individuals through tools such as surprise, intrigue and provocation. Such experiences involve customers by pushing them to interact cognitively and creatively with the company and the product (Scicluna, 2017). This method is widespread in high-tech companies.

ACT: the ACT module is different from the other modules because it acts on the physical experiences of consumers. This is done by encouraging them and showing them distinctive ways of doing things, distinctive lifestyles as well as different ways of relating. It is effective because through ACT marketing it is possible to provide a

source of motivation and inspiration to individuals; sometimes thanks to figures who act as influencers leading consumers to imitate them. The most famous example of ACT marketing is Nike's famous motto, "Just Do It" (Scicluna, 2017).

RELATE: This last module includes different elements from all the previously mentioned SEM's. It aims to motivate the customer to reflect not on his/her personal beliefs or feelings, but to communicate with other clients and diverse cultures (Schmitt, 1999). Marketing campaigns conducted in this manner, are for instance: making use of desires for personal improvement, or being viewed by others with positivity or desires for integration in a given social context (Scicluna, 2017). Actually, every individual shape his/her own personality in the relationship with society as well as with clustered social groups, which in return effect one's actions and attitudes.

Mehrabian & Russel Model

From the time when the phrase "Atmosphere" had been initiated, the results of physical "stimuli" on customer behaviour was of constant importance for professionals and scholars in the marketing filed. During the empirical studies, the influence of the atmosphere was recognized in the various contexts of services as a tangible stimulus for customer assessments of service quality and ultimately for repeated purchases (Jang & Namkung, 2009).

The study on environmental psychology which was carried out by Mehrabian and Russel in 1974 which was based on their S-O-R (stimulus – organism – response) paradigm implies that environmental stimuli lead to emotional reactions which, subsequently, guide consumer behavioural response (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974). This theory assumes that customers have three emotional states in reaction to environmental stimuli: pleasure, arousal and dominance. These emotional reactions trigger two divergent behaviours: approach or avoidance. Approaching behaviour implies a desire to stay, discover and acquaint with other people in the environment; whilst the behaviour of avoidance implies wanting to "escape" from the environment and ignore attempts by others to communicate.

Notwithstanding the huge influence that the Mehrabian-Russel model has made to literature, one could easily debate that environmental stimuli simply provide partial data regarding client assessments of perceived quality; since such spurs are merely a subgroup of the stimuli in relation to the holistic context of the actual meal experience. In other words, in addition to environmental stimuli, there are other stimuli that may have different but still important roles in the restaurant experience perspective.

For example, inside a restaurant, stimuli relating to the product (such as palate, use of fresh ingredients and appearance of food and beverage) can also act as predictors of emotional responses and future behaviour. The level of service offered by personnel can also be another crucial factor vis a vis the quality of restaurant service. From this perspective, all stimuli should be considered in such a way as to better understand the customer experience in the restaurant. In addition to this, to improve this understanding it is also necessary to consider the cognitive, as well as emotional, reactions aroused by the environment and other stimuli present in the restaurant.

Figure 3.   The SOR Model - adapted from (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974)
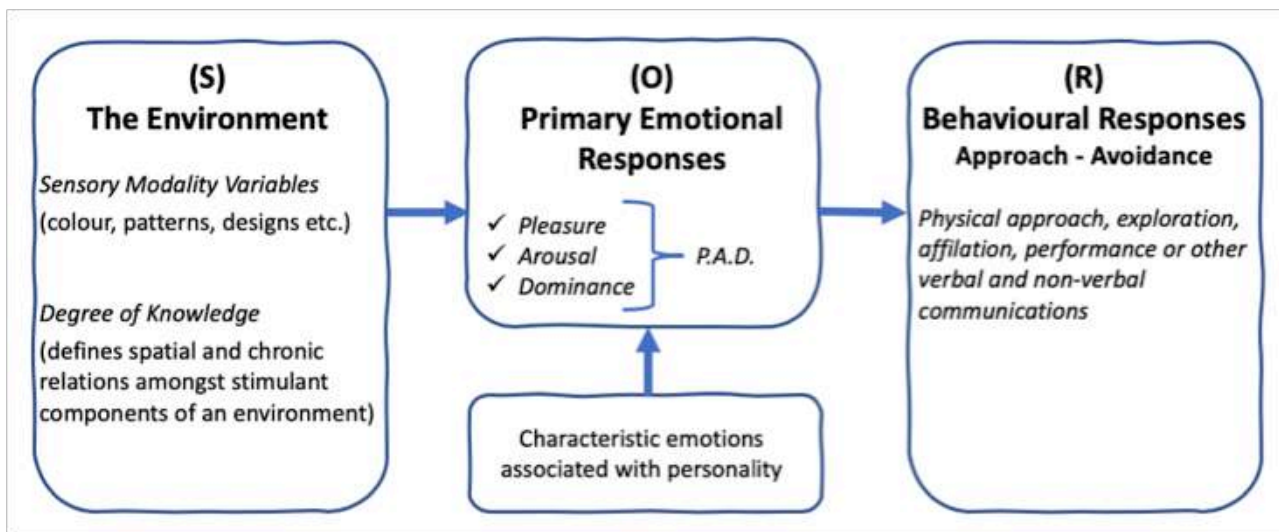
As shown in Figure 3, the SOR scheme takes into consideration that the atmosphere holds certain stimuli which can trigger changes in the inner states (organism) of people, which subsequently produce behavioural responses. By means of this environmental theory model, M-R tries to rationalise the emotional responses which follow once individuals are exposed to the spurs of a specific atmosphere or ambience (Teller & Dennis, 2012).

The fluctuations in the stimuli which exist in the environment are called information rates. Therefore, the authors propose that the physical aspects within the environment, the information rate of the ambience and the emotional experience of individual personalities can affect ones' reactions to the environment. All of this suggests that, in our case, restaurateurs can efficiently plan the restaurant's stimuli in order to achieve distinctive emotional reactions (Teller & Dennis, 2012).

Organism is the next step of this model; where it denotes the emotive responses of individuals to the environment. Such responses differ in strength, degree of pleasure and level of motivation; also referred to as P.A.D.. Figure 3 also shows us how the physical atmosphere interrelates with the distinctive emotions associated with every customer's personality. Hence, an environment which triggers a particular reaction in a customer or part of the society at a certain occasion, can trigger a completely different reaction to another consumer or cluster. For instance, an ambience that gives a positive reaction to millennials can trigger a negative reaction to older generations. The environment and ambience of a restaurant does not only effect patrons but also the staff of the establishment itself, who subsequently through their collaborations will end up influencing each other (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

To complete the model, the responses (the component indicated with R) classify the behaviour of the buyers into those of approach or avoidance. According to this theory, the level of desire (Pleasure) and excitement (Arousal) that an individual experiences, defines whether the response will be an Approach or Avoidance one. The will to immerse oneself in a specific environment involves three fundamental characteristics: the longing to discover and interact, to practice various forms of

communication with others, as well as a holistic gratification with the surrounding environment (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

Therefore, clients who find a pleasant and exciting environment will feel the need to discover, interrelate and affiliate with other customers in that same environment; bringing a larger appreciation for the catering establishment. Therefore, the study of emotional responses is needed in order to understand the patrons' response towards the restaurant's ambience (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

From the Primary Emotional Responses, we can also derive the PAD model. It identifies three dimensions at the emotional level, three variables which synthesize the emotional states of response to environmental stimuli:

Pleasure: pleasantness – Whether a customer feels fulfilled, cheerful, content or accomplished in a particular ambient setting.

Arousal: involvement - Whether a customer feels enthusiastic, motivated, attentive, or dynamic.

Dominance: control - How much a person perceives to be in control of the situation or to feel free to take any action he/she deems necessary within a particular ambient setting.

The PAD model is used to have a holistic portrayal of one's behaviour. For instance, an amalgamation of pleasurableness, enjoyment and dominant characteristics denotes relationship and socialness. Whilst traits of pleasurableness, enjoyment and submissiveness represents addiction. The dominance factor is often the weakest segment of the model which has led to the proposition of its removal, based on the fact that it necessitates a rational rather than emotional evaluation by the individual (Wirtz, et al., 2000).

On the contrarily, the level of enjoyment aroused by an environment is derived from the level of innovation and difficulty of the situation, which is altered by the distinctive way each individual reacts to external spurs. The pleasure factor, however, has been shown that it directly guides the "Approach-Avoidance" behaviour, whilst the arousal boosts the pleasure-behaviour relationship (Wirtz, et al., 2000).

Synthesis of stimuli in restaurants

Although the S.O.R. model was not initially developed for the context of food and beverage, it proved itself quite adequate to explain the influence of the atmosphere on customer behaviour in various settings of this type (Liu & Jang, 2009). In particular in the restaurant environment, several stimuli can have an impact on the client's emotional state. These stimuli include both tangible and intangible characteristics of the restaurant, such as the material environment, the quality of the product and the aspects of the service.

In principle, food, atmosphere and service are the vital components in which restaurateurs can expand their clienteles' interest in the dining experience. In this regard, food and services offered in casual dining restaurants can be considered as

the most crucial factors for clients to establish their satisfaction and forthcoming behaviour towards the chosen restaurants (Ha & Jang, 2012).

It has been found that, in general, individuals' perceptions of the quality of the goods can influence both their state of excitement (Arousal) and their state of desire (Pleasure) (Walsh, et al., 2011). In relation to the culinary services offered in restaurants, various findings have focused on several quality characteristics such as the food plating and presentation, freshness, healthy dishes, ingredients as well as the captivating taste. All of these elements ultimately characterize the essential part of the experience in the restaurant and contribute in determining customer satisfaction (Jang & Namkung, 2009).

The other important stimulus present during the consumer experience in a catering establishment is the physical environment or atmosphere. This concept includes audio-visual stimuli such as functionality, space, design, colour, décor, and entertainment. The exterior of the room has also been proposed in literature (for example the architectural style, parking facilities, structure's upkeep) and the human factor (staff grooming and appearance, customer interaction, crowding of the premises) as elements to be included in the concept of the atmosphere (Lin & Mattila, 2010).

The human factor can be further classified into two distinct areas: the influence of other buyers and the influence of employees. As for the issue of other buyers, the literature has focused mainly on the subject of crowding which consists of two components: the actual and the perceived crowding. For the employee issue, the personnel aspect is fundamental as it allows to communicate the ideals and characteristics of a company to consumers (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

In general, frontline servers like bar mixologists play a fundamental role in influencing moods and subsequently consumer satisfaction (Baker, et al., 2002). Within the human factor, some researchers also include social stimuli and soft skills (like kind and helpful employees). This, however, makes it difficult to distinguish the effect of the quality of service from the effect of the atmosphere (Liu & Jang, 2009).

The atmosphere (as a series of stimuli) is recognized to be of fundamental importance for attracting customer sales, as well as a crucial fulcrum of consumer behaviour in such environments. It should be remembered that, in the case of shopping malls and even "fast food" restaurants, the atmosphere is built according to a standardization criterion (Teller & Dennis, 2012). Even in casual dining restaurants, patrons use the stimuli to form assessments about the premises. For example, the design of the environment can have an impact on the satisfaction levels related to service; the internal design and décor can also affect how long clientele might stay in the room (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

In addition, the perception of space can assist clients create a perceptual image which precedes the emotional response and judgment of the service environment. Colour has also proven to be a strong visual component of an environment, which attracts the attention of customers and stimulates multiple emotional responses. Brightness instead influences ones' perception of structure, shape and shades, and its fusion with colour and decor creates a much more pleasing customers' meal experience. Furthermore, the style of lighting can alter the physical aspects of the

restaurant and hence influencing the customer perception of the actual size and space of the dining room (Ryu & Jang, 2007).

Several findings in environmental psychology have shown that the perceived quality of the physical environment influences customer satisfaction and specifically its behaviour (e.g. the intention of purchase). It also showed how, in the sales environment, the atmosphere plays a vital role in defining the consumers' wish to prolong their visit in the store. The type of music or any form of entertainment is also an important stimulus for inducing emotions and behaviours, particularly in the restaurant scenarios (Turley & Milliman, 2000).

In particular, it has been found that music influences behavioural intentions: for example, the will to do purchases and consequently word of mouth recommendation. Even the style of the music has been discovered to be influent in lengthening the period of stay in bars and restaurants. In a larger extent, it has been proved that environmental stimuli are positively interrelated with the level of pleasure experienced in the restaurant. Which subsequently, prompts favourable purchasing behaviours in restaurants and bars such as the wish to prolong their stay, the desire to spend more and the need to "discover" the food and beverage establishment (Ryu & Jang, 2007).

The stimulus of "quality of service" is another element of the restaurant's consumer experience. In the marketing of services, this aspect has been studied extensively and it is known that in our case, the interaction between the patron and the food and beverage server can have a significant influence on the consumer evaluation in relation to the services offered. The reliability and friendliness of the server, the trust and sympathy shown by the service staff can be considered as intangible stimuli that produce assessments of quality and customer satisfaction (Jang & Namkung, 2009).

In a restaurant service, but in general in all services, the performances of employees in contact with customers are fundamental for the perceptions of the service offered. For this reason, it can be argued that the quality of the service is an important prerequisite for the evaluation of the consumer (Scicluna, 2017).

In addition to the correlation between the physical environment and behavioural intentions, the importance of food in restaurants was observed not only in explaining satisfaction, but also in predicting the return of the customer. Thus, the quality of the food is also an important predictive factor for consumer satisfaction and behavioural intentions. It also appears that both dimensions of food quality and quality of service significantly influence client behaviour in the context of restaurants. In conclusion, the quality received can be an important element in consumer behaviour, like using the services once more or even recommendation intentions, and therefore it positively affects intentional behaviour even in the more general context of services (Ha & Jang, 2012).

The Restaurant Experience

The forerunners of today's restaurants date back to ancient times as a support to travellers who, along the main communication routes, needed food and accommodation. These had the form of taverns or inns, and could also include additional services, such as overnight stays. Modern dining formulas can be traced

back to the times of the French revolution. Such "primitive restaurants" date back to before the eighteenth century and were widespread in the main European commercial cities. At the beginning, they worked on menus and timings, the food was not of great quality and the customers were usually regulars who met in these places and almost always had the same place at the table (Spang, 2001).

With economic development, the performance of these taverns also improved, and the offer began to change through the development of the first strategies to contest in the new competitive context. The tables became individual, and no longer collective; it was now possible to note the application of some marketing principles, such as a greater degree of assortment, albeit limited, and the use of differentiation elements based on the quality of the food and the prices charged. Paying a surplus for these new services, a principle that we can almost consider modern, finds its basic motivation in three elements: greater availability of money, increase in population and economic development (Kiefer, 2002).

The opening hours also ceased to be fixed and the possibility of booking took hold. Already these remarkable changes are at the origin of the modern restaurant concept. This development was not homogeneous everywhere, but it privileged the areas where business was better and essentially there was a greater availability of purchasing power. The principle that the customer paid more for the services he/she received, was first affirmed in cafés, which had arisen numerously around Europe after the arrival of coffee from the Middle East. Eventually, also the restaurants started to meet the consumers by differentiating their offer (Kiefer, 2002).

The restaurant today is much more than just a place to eat; it is an environment where more complex experiences are lived, made of conviviality, emotions, discoveries of new tastes and new flavours, also achieved by opening up towards different cultures and cuisines. With the growth of economic well-being, the demand for catering has become increasingly demanding and more complex. The restaurant sector has responded with an offer that is increasingly rich and varied in its many forms. Customers in the sector are no longer exclusively food consumers, but ask for much more, often with specific needs, strictly connected with their personality and the social strata they belong to. The consumption of a lunch or dinner has become a time when the physiological need for nourishment takes second place, and emotional and hedonistic needs become of primary importance (Scicluna, 2017).

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), for some time had pointed out that the moment of purchase of a good or service, as well as that of its consumption, were strongly characterized by elements that were not strictly rational, but rather emotional, actually pleasurable, so much so that the authors describe it as hedonistic consumption. The empirical interest of these authors was actually more focused to sectors such as those of culture and art. This emotional component in these sectors could have seemed obvious, given the peculiarity of the sector, but soon it was realized that the same phenomenon, with greater or lower intensity was also used for other types of consumption.

This is how marketing began to introduce other psychological, sociological, and anthropological factors into the evaluation of the offer system. Scholars spoke of Emotional Marketing, stating that emotion sometimes appears decisive in the

purchasing process. Then the topic found a more organic definition in Schmitt (1999) with the introduction of Experiential Marketing and its first cardinal principles.

In principle it is somewhat obvious that individual behaviour is quite subjective by the physical context in which it happens. Until the early 70's, in the attempt to foresee and rationalise human comportment, such phenomena was somehow ignored by psychologists. Since then, environmental psychology has achieved huge advancements in relation to how individuals relate with the surrounding environments they have built. Nevertheless, the study of the environment built by man is just a mere fraction of environmental psychology. As a matter of fact, such studies also deal with how individuals interact and relate with different forms of social and natural surroundings. What differentiates such area of study from others, is the relation between the individual's behavior and thoughts vis a vis the environmental surroundings in which the same individual is positioned at any point in time (Bitner, 1992).

Kotler (1973) defined the term "Atmosphere" as that sentient design of space aimed at producing positive effects in the buyer. The atmosphere is perceived throughout ones' senses and, consequently, the sensory stimuli within the atmosphere can be grouped in relation the five human senses: that is, sound, sight, smell, taste and touch. Through "Servicescape" Bitner subcategorised the atmosphere in three dimensions: the ambience, space layout and functionality, and finally signage, symbols and artefacts (Hightower, et al., 2002).

According to Bitner, the ambience refers to the basic characteristics of the environment such as music, sound, ambient lighting, temperature and smells. In our case, the space layout denotes to the ways in which tables, chairs, sideboards and other furnishings are organised, the shape and size of these elements and the thematic connections amongst them. On the other hand, with functionality we are referring to the way how these elements will help the caterer to perform well and hence achieve the pre-set objectives. The third dimension: signage, symbols and artefacts include logos, objects, decorations insignia and other physical elements that are used to communicate with patrons and guests (Heung & Gu, 2012).

Restaurateurs consider creating and most importantly preserving a unique atmosphere as a key factor not only as one of the focal points of customer satisfaction but also to attract new clientele as well as improving financial performance. Customer response to the surrounding environment (atmosphere) can be extremely significant, particularly once the hedonistic component of consumption is heavily involved. The aspects of consumer behaviour focus on the customer experience and reflect the need for fun and emotional value: the store. In our case the restaurant, is perceived as a place in which to participate in culinary experiences for the enjoyment and to satisfy ones' needs. On the contrary, utilitarian consumption is mainly of a functional nature: the individual recognizes the store as a place to acquire basic needs or a particular product, in a fast and effective way. (Rayburn & Voss, 2013).

The fact that consumption has more of a hedonistic or utilitarian component, depends on the customer's perspective and the environment in which such consumption has taken place. A child's perspective in relation to fast food restaurants can provide both a utilitarian function (i.e. nourishment) and a hedonistic function

(i.e. having fun playing in the play area). Whilst an adult can perceive the same fast food in strictly utilitarian terms. Therefore, the ambience in which such product or service is consumed, either for entertainment purposes or when consumers spend a reasonable or long time periods in a specific environment becomes a crucial element of consumer psychology and its behaviour. For instance, in the case of casual dining restaurants, customers can stay inside the room for a considerable amount of time and "have to endure" the restaurant environment throughout the whole meal (Ryu & Han, 2011; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1999).

Research

Studies like the one conducted in this paper, which concern the opinions, expectations, and perception of individuals towards the casual dining experience, fall within the field of investigations on social phenomena that are based on the acquisition of empirical data. This data can be obtained fundamentally either through direct observation of noticeable behaviour or through questions, based on the research problem that must be investigated.

In order to achieve the aims and objectives, two research methodologies were implemented. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods can enrich a study by making sure that the restrictions of one type of data collection is counterbalanced by the advantages of the other (Scicluna, 2017).

A sequential data collection was implemented; firstly, through participative observation, the qualitative information was collected, and successively quantitative data was gathered by means of a structured questionnaire. The data collected from the participative observation helped out in the design and development of the survey questionnaire. This was achieved by mainly mapping out and defining the primary and the secondary data which eventually was needed for evaluation purposes.

For the benefit of this study, the author opted for a complete participant role (covert observation) and the true purpose of such exercise and dining experience was not disclosed to the chosen restaurateurs. A total of 23 casual dining restaurants around Malta were chosen, out of which 12 from the southern area, 6 central and 5 from the northern part of the island. 65% of the meal experiences were carried out during dinner sessions whilst the remaining 35% were conducted during lunch sessions. Moreover, to have a more realistic approach, the chosen days varied between weekdays and weekends. All the casual dining restaurants were chosen in relation to specific criteria; including location, services and amenities offered, franchise, and hotel restaurants.

As previously explained, for the purpose of this study a structured questionnaire which comprised close-ended and matrix questions was implemented. The questionnaire was formulated on a similar survey research which was carried out in 2012 by MTA and MHRA on the dining habits and experience of Maltese residents (Sultana, 2019). The March 2012 MTA & MHRA Survey, which was based on a national level, had a total of 1000 respondents; in the case of this research study, the total amount of respondents was of 763. The data collected from the participative observation was also important in the design and development of the survey questionnaire. Another important aspect during the formulation stage was mapping

out and defining the primary and the secondary data which eventually was needed for evaluation purposes (Brace, 2008).

Discussion of Main Results

Observation findings indicate that the assessed casual dining restaurants in Malta, with a few exceptions, performed rather well in all the evaluated areas. The outcomes also sustain how crucial customer relation and communication is for the service industry (Schmitt, 1999). Something which sustains Schmitt's pervious theories, is the fact that, according to the gathered information and the annotations taken, criteria related to direct contact and customer interaction obtained the highest scores.

Nevertheless, it is rather interesting the fact that these high ratings are mostly during the early stages of the meal experience within the restaurant itself; mainly upon arrival, acknowledgement and greeting. To be more precise, through participant observation it transpired that at the later stages of the meal experience especially at the end, restaurant personnel had the tendency to be less attentive to customer's needs.

On the other hand, efficient payment procedures had one of the highest ratings; making it the only "departure from the restaurant" criteria to achieve the highest score. From a client's perspective, such actions and finding can be portrayed as "the restaurant" being more concerned with enticing customers and get paid for the product and service offered rather than having a comprehensive customer experience approach.

Throughout the participative observation method, apart from using a 5-point Likert Scale system, field notes were also annotated. In the majority of the restaurants, the research findings highlight three main shortcomings which happened repetitively during the meal. Firstly, even though most of the wine lists were quite basic, still the service personnel were unable to recommend or distinguish the different wines they had in their selection. Secondly, no distinction was made when it came to serving customers; often, female guests were served last after males or hosts were served. Lastly, guest satisfaction checks, either in written form or verbally was almost non-existent.

In the observation process, it emerged that from all the assessed criterion, portion size performed really well with a score of 4.7 out of 5. According to the footnotes taken, portion size was very abundant when it came to pasta and pizza dishes as well as the vegetables and potatoes which were served with main courses. The author also noticed that in relation to the menu offer, the majority of the casual restaurants which were evaluated, had a wide range of dishes and a variety of courses to choose from.

However, it is interesting to point out that, even though the variety and selection was a bonus added value, the healthy/dietary option within the same criteria resulted in one of the lowest scores. From a customer's perspective, this could indicate that the menu variety is much more oriented towards having various different dishes available but not in relation to healthy/dietary options.

Throughout his observations, the author also noticed that in relation to Appearance and Comfort, when it came to Entertainment, unless specific event was advertised, almost all the assessed restaurants limited themselves to background music. According to the annotations taken, Noise levels also rated low due to having crowded places, clattering of plates and tableware as well as loud conversations from adjacent customers.

Other interesting facts which emerged are the scores are related to accessibility for disabled, child and pet friendly criteria. In a world were issues linked to inclusiveness, equality and empathy are increasingly being sought, the author felt that much more needs to be done in relation to the above-mentioned criteria. It is also true that some customers might be reluctant in having animals around them whilst having their dining experience, and that might be a plausible excuse from the restaurateurs' not to accept any pets. However, there is still a lot of room for improvement when it comes to facilities for disabled, and child friendly issues.

From the data collected, it also emerged that the best meal experience offered was in franchised/chain restaurants or those who have obtained the Quality Assured Seal from the Malta Tourism Authority. Such outcome can be accredited to the fact that when it comes to service quality and customer experience management, the tendency is that most of these type of casual dining restaurants have a set of operational criteria and procedures which they rigorously adhere to.

According to the statistical information collected through the questionnaire, except for a few issues, casual dining restaurants performed relatively well in all the evaluated areas. As a matter of fact, we can say that four out of every five respondents were satisfied with the overall restaurant experience in Malta. It has to be remarked that almost 60% of those who responded to the survey eat out on a weekly basis. Data also indicates that one out of every five respondents frequent casual dining restaurants twice a week. Moreover, such eating activities are mainly consumed during weekends' lunches and dinners.

The survey's outcome indicate that the respondents' most favoured type of casual restaurants are trattorias, pizzerias, bistros and catering outlets which offer continental foods. Cafes, snack bars and ethnic restaurants are also amongst those preferred by the participants. Such results can be interpreted in various ways.

Now a days, clients are being constantly exposed to new innovative culinary tendencies and different styles of restaurant scenarios. When it comes to choosing a restaurant, such trends have changed the traditional customers' behaviour into a more elaborate selection process. Gustafsson, et al., (2006), states that: "Eating out is not just a meal experience but it is also a sensory experience".

All our senses are involved and intertwined when we are immersed in a dining experience – not just taste. People go to restaurants not just to satisfy their physiological needs but for a complete memorable meal experience. Ethnic and speciality restaurants focus their catering offer not only on their culinary worlds, but in holistic way where the restaurant setting, music, ambience and décor are also linked together to give the ultimate experience to their clientele.

Some of these catering establishments they go even further than that by employing natives (Asians for Asian restaurants) to work as front liners and servers. Such research findings can be related to Schmitt's model of experiential marketing. According to his theory, Schmitt believes that besides a product or a service offer, customers want something that encourage their thoughts and strikes through their inner feelings; hence companies should direct their efforts in order to generate a holistic and unforgettable experience for their customers (Schmitt, 2010).

Based on the survey results, respondents have a stronger preference for restaurants which are accessible for disabled, restaurants that serve healthy options as well as those who cater for dietary requirements. It is important to point out that when compared with the research which was carried out by MTA and MHRA way back in 2012, the results are quite similar.

As a matter of fact, both the author's findings and the 2012 research also indicate that restaurants taking advanced reservation, serving local specialities and which are child friendly are similarly valued by the survey's participants. When comparing both studies, the only difference in relation to restaurant preferences is that in 2012, restaurants with designated smoking areas were the least preferred; whilst in this current study, offering buffet, entertainment and having pet-friendly services where the least favoured.

When it comes to the actual meal experience, survey respondents are extremely satisfied with the taste, portion size and consistency of food quality. If we had to compare these results with the 2012 survey, there are some variances in the criteria related to the food offer. As a matter of fact, the only criteria which kept the same evaluation in these last eight years is "taste", where it retained the same positive response rating.

This time round, portion size and consistency of food received a higher positive response, whilst presentation dropped from the second to fourth place in respondents' perceptions and expectations. These results can be interpreted in various ways. Like previously mentioned, with the technological advancements and everchanging food trends, customers are exposed to a multitude of options from where they can get information of what's happening in the culinary world. Clients are becoming more of foodie "experts" with younger generations and Millennials fixated with food and posting photos of dishes on their social media accounts (Pinsker, 2015).

From the numerical data, we can conclude that in relation to the menu offer, Beverages, Variety and Selection as well as Price range and value got the highest scores. On the other hand, the respondents are the least satisfied with the availability of local specialities and healthy/dietary foods. This could indicate that the menu variety is much more oriented towards having various different dishes available, but not in relation to local specialities and healthy/dietary options. In this context, nothing much changed in the last eight years, with the 2012 survey results showing the same statistical data. It is also good to mention that even the author's observations reflect the same opinion as that of the respondents who took part in both surveys.

Staff friendliness and their appearance vis a vis uniformity and grooming received the highest ratings from the survey's respondents. According to the collected data, we can say that the participants are mostly satisfied with the service offer in casual dining restaurants. The criteria which scored the least was the knowledge of wines and beverages, something which was also noted during the author's participative observations. However, when comparing the service offer to the 2012 survey, we can find various fluctuations in most of the criteria.

Whilst staff friendliness kept its high rating; through this study we found that staff language and communication skills achieved the lowest scores when compared with the high scores obtained in the MTA and MHRA survey. This could be attributed to the fact that in the last years an influx of foreign citizens was employed in the service industry in order to cope with the high labour force demand. Nevertheless, we can see an improvement in relation to menu knowledge, quality of service and staff uniformity and grooming. In fact, in 2012, one out of three respondents were not pleased with these three criteria, whilst in this study almost 4 out of every 5 respondents were.

With a few exceptions, respondents are generally pleased with the appearance and comfort of casual dining restaurants in Malta. As a matter of fact, Cleanliness and Hygiene, Room Lighting and Atmosphere received the highest ratings. On the contrary, respondents are least satisfied with noise levels, entertainment and pet friendly services. The same positive and negative influences were also highlighted in the author's observations.

If we had once again to compare these results with the 2012 survey, we can conclude that there was not too much change in the numerical data. It can be said that even if there was a positive marginal increase from the 2012 survey in relation to accessibility for disabled and child friendly services; it seems that according to the general public, much more is expected in these service areas.

Participants were also asked how much they agree with statements related to expectations and perceptions, quality and consumer preferences. From the information gathered, the statement which resulted with the lowest score relates to whether Maltese restaurants meets the customer's expectations. This could be attributed to the fact that 30% of the respondents gave a "neutral" response to this criterion.

As a matter of fact, the first two statements can be considered as one's personal opinion on the service received, and hence in particular scenarios they could be quite subjective. On the other hand, the last two statements were formulated from peer reviewed journals. Subsequently, according to the survey's feedback we can confirm that the respondents are in agreement with the statements related to customers' choice and means of measuring quality (Parasuraman, et al., 1985).

The research outcomes in a post pandemic context

The reopening of the activities had to coexist for almost the entire duration of the year 2020 with the new mandatory safety measures. This had a significant effect on the way the catering establishment had to operate. Hence, to continue striving in the hospitality market it was necessary to rethink the business model, reorganize the

layout and spaces, the service and to modify the activities to meet the new consumer needs and demands (Madeira, et al., 2021) (Song, et al., 2021). The return of customers has been slow and gradual, mostly worried about a feeling of fear for their own health. So how has the sector reacted to such market changes?

As for the restaurant business, during the periods in which the government allowed the opening to the public with table service, it was necessary to reorganize the design of the premises to optimize spaces. In some cases, restaurateurs have had to deal with maximum capacity limits which have therefore inevitably reduced possible revenues. In other cases, forced customer replacement systems were opted for over several shifts, adjusting access times in order to maximize customer turnover. As a matter of fact, the new covid legislations encouraged the use of outdoor spaces; which is why many restaurateurs, where possible, have placed outdoor tables outside their premises.

An important new attribute of the restaurant experience emerged: safety (Luo & Xu, 2021). Therefore, it became crucial for restaurateurs to convey to their customers that their establishment was a safe place for their health; thus, encouraging the return to consumption outside the home in strict compliance with anti-contagion measures (Byrd, et al., 2021). This had to be done through the ones' infrastructure and architecture, to be able to appear as tidy and clean, and at the same time ensuring the social distancing of at least two meters between each seat to avoid the transmission of the virus during the consumption of the meal. Signage also helped venues to make explicit the application of the protocols required by the legislation. General cleaning of the environment and the presence in several points of sanitizing hydroalcoholic solution dispensers became indispensable. The custom of ventilating rooms more often to facilitate air circulation also became vital (Yost & Cheng, 2021).

Now restaurants are also evaluated for their level of sanitisation and for the approach in reassuring the consumer of such good hygienic practices. Furthermore, in addition to an effective sanitization of the surfaces after each table service, new activities had to be rigorously carried out; registration and traceability of the customers' entrances to the premises, advancing the booking systems in order to avoid gatherings outside the premises, and the monitoring of body temperatures of those entering catering establishments (Wang, et al., 2021).

The aspect of service safety had also to be adequate, so the use of any digital solution that is able to minimize contact between the customer seated at the table and the dining room staff had to be implemented. The experience became "touchless". The use of digital menus that can be viewed from one's smartphone through a QR code, or through the dissemination of contactless payment solutions and methods, even via mobile phones are all ways in which restaurants started to operate.

An alternative was to distribute disposable leaflet menus to customers that they could keep as an additional marketing tool. Although at a safe distance, the service element still had to be able to convey the quality of the experience through personalisation and attention to customer needs and demands. Clearly, in this scenario, customers were also called primarily to contribute to safety by respecting the rules imposed by the new protocols. Thus, reducing the liability of restaurateurs,

who are called to respond with heavy fines in the event of non-compliance resulting from any checks made by health authorities (Health Authorities, 2020).

During the periods of total closure, only home delivery and take-away activity was allowed by the new legislative rules. In fact, delivery and take-away have experienced a very strong surge, especially during the lockdown, and have up to a certain extent eased the establishments' losses. There was also a sharp increase in the use of food delivery apps, and during these periods, communication activities were specifically aimed at making customers aware of the fact that their premises were available for the delivery service.

All this was being achieved through the website designs, sponsored ads on social media, creation of e-commerce and registration in food delivery apps. The creation and management of community chats also kept the relationship with customers and brand engagement alive, compensating for the loss of sociality imposed by the distancing measures. In some cases, the price lever has been moved, downwards to encourage purchases, or upwards, to try to somehow overcome the problem of losses. A plausible strategy was to focus on the already established loyal customers, mainly by introducing new business propositions.

Finally, attention must be paid to costs by restaurateurs. In particular, it becomes important to carefully plan procurements based on the prospects of customer frequency, in order to avoid and reduce any possible waste.

Among the very few winners in the now long time of the Coronavirus, we can certainly include the Food Delivery distribution chains, the food ordered online that in these two years have seen their earnings significantly increase.

The obvious reason for the increase in Online Food Delivery has been the closure of many restaurants, hotels, and company canteens during lockdowns, but the delivery of ready-to-eat food has taken on new meanings compared to mere necessity and utility. A study conducted by researchers from the Business & Marketing school of the Complutense University of Madrid has shown that for the new consumers of Food Delivery the concept of the "ready to eat" has taken on a broader meaning, that of the "ready to enjoy". If until recently the purchase of ready-to-eat food online was linked to the mere need to easily "resolve" lunch or dinner; today this type of purchase is linked to wanting to live a playful, joyful moment, to experiment with dishes that we do not know how to prepare at home (Gavilan, et al., 2021).

Hence, the convenience of food delivery, appreciated by many during the pandemic, is certainly not a passing fad. It is essential to take note of this and organise one's business accordingly. This new trend will continue unabated in the future and only restaurants that update to this need will be able to survive. Above all, catering, and food companies, in fact, must try to keep up in terms of service and offers, satisfying their customers.

Being able to make menus more modern, making them available through apps, provision of with electric means of transport that can be easily moved anywhere ... all this will allow these businesses to make their way into the new expanding market and not be left behind.

This is the right way to be able to renew a market that is always booming. The pandemic has forever changed the habits of people worldwide, one must take this into account and take advantage of all the opportunities that this can offer.

The catering market has evolved profoundly in recent times and the Covid-19 pandemic have structurally altered the Foodservice sector. To obtain a competitive advantage over other establishments offering the same product or service, restaurants started to shift their market strategies and target audience. The ability to attract and maintain customers is essential to the success of a restaurant. In addition, creating a marketing message is key to making your marketing effective. Knowledge about diners' top motivations for dining out (special occasions, indulgence, social reason and relaxation and comfort) is important for restaurant owners to tailor their offer and communicate more effectively with their clients.

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The effect of branding on consumer purchasing behaviour: A study of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

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Abstract

Branding has a critical part in improving the performance of any organization, and it is an implied tool that has the potential to influence people's purchasing decisions in a good way. The study of Consumer Behavior has grown increasingly important in today's marketing environment. Consumers are the undisputed rulers of the market. Consumers are essential to the operation of every commercial organization. Consumers and consumer satisfaction are at the heart of all commercial enterprises' actions. In addition to product, distribution, pricing, and location, branding is possibly the most significant aspect of any company's operations. A company's brand has a definition in the world, and it is the term that distinguishes it from its competitors and the general public. An organization's brand serves as a concrete description for customers and competitors alike, serving as a moniker for a product or service that distinguishes it from anything else in the market. The primary goal of this study is to determine the impact of brand recognition on customer purchase behavior in the context of Cadbury Nigeria Plc. A questionnaire was utilized to collect primary data from 169 Cadbury Nigeria Plc. Distributors. Findings show that brand awareness affects the consumer buying behavior of Cadbury Nigeria Plc, Brand association affects the consistency of customer patronage of Cadbury Nigeria Plc. and brand loyalty affects consumer purchasing behavior of Cadbury Nigeria Plc. The study recommends that customer relationship management be given the highest priority. Their brand must significantly impact their behavior to develop a strong relationship between their brand and consumer buying behavior. It also recommends that continuous improvement be maintained at all times on brand awareness, brand loyalty, brand association, product quality that meets consumer buying behavior, and that Cadbury Nigeria Plc. Managers are moved devoted to this issue.

Keyword: Branding, Consumer Purchasing Behavior, Brand Equity

Introduction

It is becoming tougher to establish successful brands. To distinguish itself from the competition, a firm must go beyond intuition and conduct a more scientific, fact-based study of the success of its brands. Marketers must learn new skills and enlist the assistance of other departments, such as product development, operations, and customer support, to successfully provide them. Generally speaking, a brand is a name or trademark associated with a product or a manufacturer. According to the New York Times, brands are increasingly essential components of society and the economy; brands are now regarded as "cultural accessories and personal beliefs" (Klein, 2014).

People engaged in branding are concerned with developing or aligning the brand experience's expectations to create the perception that a brand connected with a product or service has particular features or attributes that distinguish it from the competition.

Thus, in an advertising theme, one of the essential parts is a brand, representing what the brand owner can provide in the marketplace (Ghodeswar, 2017).

Choosing a brand is a significant decision since the name impacts the image and attitude of consumers toward the product and the company. So, it has a role in determining whether it will emerge victoriously or defeated in the competitive market. While picking a brand name, which is the most challenging job faced by marketing management, firms should consider a range of factors; branding should increase the company's image while simultaneously increasing sales and profits. As a result, it is feasible to conclude that there is a substantial (positive) association between the launch of new brands and consumer purchasing behavior and a considerable impact on the profitability of businesses. Conscious brand management aims at increasing the relevance of a product or service to its target audience. Brands should thus be seen as more than just a distinction between the actual cost of a product and its selling price. They total all the essential characteristics of a product that the customer appreciates.

Some businesses provide excellent goods but fail to gain widespread acceptance among the general public due to a lack of branding. Several other companies have developed good products that, as a result of insufficient branding, cannot compete favorably in today's more competitive business climate on the market. Furthermore, businesses must contend with a broader spectrum of rivals that provide a comparable product to the same clientele (Keller, 2013). Companies are seeking to acquire a stronger position in a more competitive market by being more customer-oriented (Hsieh, Story & Setiono, 2016). One intriguing fact is that when it comes to making a purchase, buyers are just reacting to the consequence of their perception, which is a function of features such as brand name, mark, packaging and the product to manufacture. One thing to keep in mind is that most manufacturers firmly feel that branding has a very significant effect on consumers' decisions (Ecklund, 2015).

Competition among large corporations, such as Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Dulfi Prima, Nestle Nigeria, Dangote Group, Cadbury, and other significant companies, is becoming fiercer to retain and recruit consumers. As a result, organizations are using a variety of methods in order to acquire a large portion of the market, improve customer satisfaction levels, consumer buying behavior, and brand image in a highly competitive market environment. When it comes to Nigerian businesses, the strength and marketing power of an institution's brand quickly become one of the most critical differentiators and success factors to consider. Customers must have a consistent brand experience from one company to the next in order for the enterprises to avoid losing them to a competitor. As a result, the area of market service is currently stressing the significance of customer-centric marketing by developing strategies that boost brand image among consumers to increase customers' buying behavior while also promoting performance. Customers are those who purchase a product. In general, a brand has an enormous influence on customer purchasing behavior than price. However, the behavior of consumers at the local level has also altered as a result of the introduction of branded products and services. It is the study of consumer activities toward planning, purchasing, and consuming products and services known as consumer buying behavior (Okpara, 2018).

There are seven phases to a consumer's purchasing decision: recognizing a need; searching for information; pre-purchase assessment; choosing an alternative; purchasing; consuming; and providing feedback and feedback. Despite this, several studies have been conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of an organization's branding strategy

as well as the impact it has on client buying behavior, according to Grönholdt et al. (2015), who investigated the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty across industries and discovered that brand image has a significant impact on customer purchasing behavior, particularly in E-banking, manufacturing, and fast-moving consumer goods industries. Store image, customer satisfaction, and loyalty relationships in the Taiwanese hypermarket industry by Chaudhary (2014). The findings revealed that the four components of store image are store infrastructure, convenience, store service, and sales activities. They all have a direct impact on customer purchasing behavior.

Although research has attempted to answer the question of branding and customer purchasing behavior, it is clear from the studies listed above that no attention has been paid to the effect of branding on customer purchasing behavior in major corporations, which is becoming an increasingly important issue in the competitive industry and for which only a few studies are available in this field. As a result, motivate the researcher to investigate the influence of customer buying behavior concerning Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

Literature Review

Brands have grown in importance as components of culture and the economy and are now being regarded as cultural accessories and personal beliefs, among other things. The notion of branding has a long and complicated history in economic theory. Any effort to distill it into a single term would unavoidably leave out a valuable part of that history, which is unfortunate (Bygrave & Hofer, 2017). As a result, branding is expressed in a universally understood common language. The definitions of various authors, institutions, and organizations will fluctuate depending on the circumstances and fundamental concerns surrounding the person or entity in question. According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2014), a brand is a name or trademark associated with a product or manufacturer.

Mohammadian and Ronaghi (2014) also define brand as the distinguishing proprietary name, symbol, or trademark that differentiates a particular product, or service, from others of a similar nature. Similarly, American Marketing Association (2018) sees branding as a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from another.

Branding is likely the most significant aspect of any firm, surpassing the importance of products, distribution, price, and geographic position in the marketplace. According to Ghodeswar (2017), a company's brand has a meaning globally and is the moniker that distinguishes it from its competitors and the market. A model may be beautiful, but she is just known as "that girl in that image if she does not have a name." An organization's brand serves as a tangible description for consumers and rivals alike, serving as a label for a product or service that distinguishes it from anything else (Chaudhary, 2014).

More than just picking an attractive name and running ads in the newspaper to develop a brand is required. A brand is more than just an identifiable string of letters denoting a specific product; a successful brand is a memory trigger that prompts a consumer to feel certain emotions when the brand is mentioned. Coca-Cola has spent more than a century perfecting its specific brand of cola-flavored soda as a delightful beverage and an important symbol of a market sector, and it is still going strong today (Feloni, 2015). To achieve maximum brand recognition and exposure, direct marketing, give-away techniques, and multi-product cross-branding has been used in its core competitive market

and markets as diverse as Coca-Cola branded race cars and home furnishings (Chaudhary, 2014).

Brand Equity

When it comes to a brand, its name, and its symbol, brand equity is a collection of assets and liabilities that contribute to or deduct from the value supplied by a product or service to a company and its clients. Brand equity is measured in dollars. It is possible that some or all of the assets or liabilities of the company may be harmed and even lost if the brand's name or symbol is changed. However, particular assets and liabilities may be relocated to a new name and logo. Depending on the situation, the assets and liabilities on which brand equity is built will change from one context to the next (Nzuki, 2014).

Brand equity is a broad term that may be further broken into four primary areas: brand loyalty, name recognition, perceived quality and brand connections, and property brand asset. Brand equity can be measured in various ways, the most common of which are financial. Brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association are critical in establishing and maintaining brand equity. Substantial brand equity is one of the most significant assets in developing a successful business. It also helps to increase brand recognition in the marketplace. The perceived quality of the product and its link with the brand name may impact the customer's pleasure and provide him with a cause to make a purchasing decision.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a long-term commitment to repurchase or support a chosen product over the long term, notwithstanding the presence of competing brands (Soltanzade, 2017). According to Aaker (2014), customers prefer to stick with the same brand despite the demonstrable advantages (such as better features, lower prices, or more convenience) offered by rivals' goods. Brand loyalty measures the level of connection to a specific brand. According to Aaker (2014), there are four types of brand loyalty:

Switchers: - They do not look at the brand name, and they tend to purchase brands in the sales. They have no loyalty to any brand.

Habitual buyers: - These are the consumers that buy a brand since they are used to doing so and do not perceive a need to switch brands. On the other hand, these purchasers may switch brands if they encounter difficulties. The consumer should acquire a different brand rather than address extra problems by discontinuing a regular brand.

Satisfied buyers: - These consumers are happy customers who are more likely to move to another company when the thresholds for satisfaction rise (i.e., distance, additional costs and time consumption). Marketers are urged to develop a strategy to boost perceived quality to keep existing customers and attract new ones to their businesses.

Committed buyers: Customers that commit to a product or service are the most loyal. They consider the brand to be very significant in their life and do not question whether or not they should switch brands. Committed purchasers acquire the brand because of the vital linkages between the brand and their own beliefs.

Brand Awareness

It is often recognized that brand awareness is one of the most important topics to consider when evaluating brand equity. Customers' brand awareness is the first and most important dimension of the entire brand knowledge system in their minds, reflecting their ability to identify the brand under a variety of circumstances: The ease with which a brand name comes to mind and the probability that it will do so are both markers of brand awareness. (Churchill & Brown, 2012). In marketing, brand awareness refers to the capacity of a prospective consumer to identify a brand while classifying the brand into a particular class of products or services (Aaker, 2014). Consumer awareness of a brand refers to the capacity to remember and recognize the brand in various situations and the ability to relate the brand name, logo, jingles, and other identifying characteristics to specific memories in memory (Aaker, 2014).

According to Riaz and Tanveer (2011), brand awareness may be increased by consistently exposing consumers to the brand. The achievement of brand awareness is dependent on the completion of two tasks: enhancing the brand name identification and linking it with the product category. Advertising and celebrity endorsements might be effective techniques for increasing company recognition, according to Urde (2014). According to research, even in the absence of any brand connections in consumers' brains, awareness impacts their judgments regarding the brands in their consideration set. In low-involvement decision-making situations, a minimal amount of brand knowledge may be required to ensure that the ultimate decision is made. Increased awareness may also impact consumer decision-making by affecting the brand associations that help shape the brand image (Sweeney & Soutar, 2017).

Perceived Quality

Perceived quality is how consumers see a brand's quality. It is one of the critical dimensions in Aaker's brand equity model. According to Ballester and Aleman (2015), perceived quality is the customer's perception of the overall quality of the product. The perception about the product quality is subjective, and it is constructed by different knowledge of the exact product specification. There is a connection between price and professional quality. Price is one of the necessary cues to evaluate perceived quality. A strong brand always has a higher price. The higher price becomes a sign of high quality to the consumers. The quality is highly associated with other reasons for buying a unique brand.

Brand Association

Anything that has a connection to a brand's preference is referred to as brand association (Aaker, 2014; Keller, 2013). This component in brand association contributes to developing the brand's image (Kinra, 2016). Brand connections may take on a variety of shapes and forms. It includes everything from the tangible to the abstract, from the conscious to the unconscious, and from the immediate to the indirect. There is no requirement for or presence of a third, intermediary element indirect associations between two components. Indirect associations are responsible for forming associative chains, created when linked together elements employ one or more intermediary elements. Brand associations can be divided into three major categories: attributes (product-related or non-product-related), benefits (which aid in the decision-making process of the consumer), and attitudes (which refer to the affective responses of the consumer to a brand) (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

Consumer behavior is the study of how individuals choose, buy, use, and discard goods and services to suit their needs and preferences. Individuals or groups pick, buy, use, and dispose of goods and services to meet their needs and wants. Consumers' feelings, considerations, and actions are influenced by their environment, which includes their surroundings. Some examples of environmental characteristics include consumer feedback, advertising, product packaging and presentation, and product look, among others (Nzuki, 2014).

To Assael (2016), consumer buying behavior is defined as the tendency to act on an object. According to him, marketers are constantly testing elements of the marketing mix that may influence buying behavior, for example, by testing product concepts and advertising strategies and packaging and brand identity.

Consumer behavior is primarily concerned with how customers decide to allocate their different resources, such as time, money, and other resources, to various items in order to satisfy their wants and requirements. Consumer behavior involves investigating what, when, why, and where customers will purchase a company's goods. It also considers how often the users use the items. Also revealed is how customers rate things after they have purchased them and the impact of these evaluations on their future purchasing decisions, according to the study (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2014).

Effect of Branding on Customer purchasing behaviour.

Batra and Ahtola (2016) noted that brands serve various functions for consumers who regularly use a product or service. When it comes to brands, they can represent a person's identity as well as his or her personality, beliefs, social connections, culture, and history; people frequently use brands to communicate to others who they are and how they glimpse themselves; or, people may only use brands as experience-based thinking to help guide choice in a world that is becoming overrun with options. People frequently determine the worth, amount, or quality of something they purchase for money and consume their favored brands without considering the purpose of their purchase or having anything to do with it.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a collection of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories supporting and guiding the research project's design. It is essential to understand that the conceptual framework represents a model of what is already known but has not been thoroughly investigated; as a result, relevant theories are selected for the conceptual framework model to best suit the problem and objective of this research.
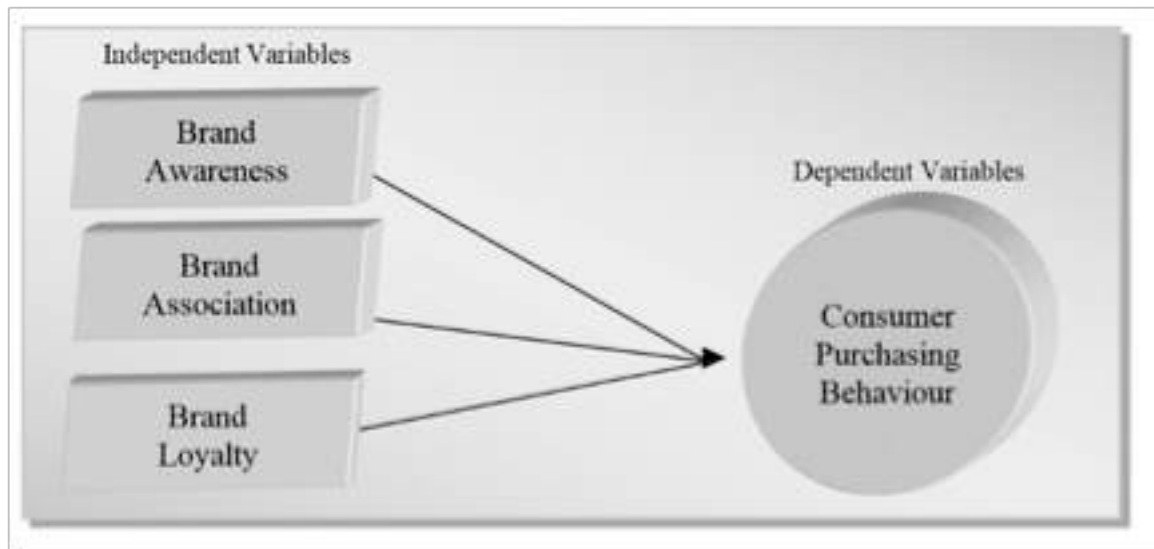
Source: Author's Construction.

Methodology

Methodology is an overall plan that spells out the sources, types of data required and the strategies for obtaining such as well as the appropriate tools for analyzing them (Adeleye, 2003; Ajagbe et al., 2014; Assael, 2016). The survey research design was used to source desired information about the effect of branding on the consumer purchasing behavior of Cadbury Nigeria Plc, where most of the distributors are concentrated in Kano State. The study population consists of 305 distributors of Cadbury Nigeria Plc. products in Kano metropolis. The sample consist of 162 distributor which was derived from Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Table for determining sample size The study employed the use of a multi-stage sampling technique and systematic random sampling method was adopted to obtain the number of distributors. Questionnaire was designed in such a way that information from the respondents will be adequate to provide answers to the research questions and research hypotheses.   Data were analyzed by the use of descriptive statistics to summarize and relate variables that were collected from the administered questionnaires. The data was classified, tabulated, and summarized using descriptive measures, mean, percentages, and frequency distribution tables, while tables were used to present findings. However, before the final analysis was performed, data was cleaned to eliminate discrepancies, classified based on similarity, and then tabulated. The regression analysis was performed to determine the relationship between brand image and consumer purchasing behavior and brand image and customer loyalty.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and Demographic Data

Out of one hundred and sixty-nine (169) questionnaires distributed, a total of 162 questionnaires representing 95.8 percent were returned. However, three (3) questionnaires representing 1.8 were rejected due to incomplete filling. Finally, a total of one hundred and fifty-nine (159) questionnaires representing 94.1 were retained for this study's analysis. The descriptive analysis reveals that most respondents were males, with 72.3% followed by females, constituting 27.7%. Furthermore, respondents between the ages of 20-30 years were the highest with 29.9%, and, hence, outnumbered any other age

group; followed by the age range of 31-40 years, which was 24.5%; followed by the age bracket of 41-50years with 22.6%; the age bracket of 51-60 with 13.8%, and, finally, the age bracket of above 60 years with 10.0%. For the marital status of the respondents, the analysis shows that those with single status were more than the remaining groups constituting 55.9% of the total respondents, followed by married respondents 44.1%. None of the respondents were divorced or widowed.

Hypothesis Testing and Result

Hypothesis One: Brand awareness does not affect consumer buying behaviour of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

Model Summary[a]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.702[a]	0.797	.773`	1.05582

a. Predictors: (constant), Brand Awareness

ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 . Regression Residual Total	52.012 53.508 105.520	1 48 49	52.012 1.115	46.658	.000[a]

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Awareness
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Buying Behaviour

Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std.Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 . (Constant) B r a n d Awareness	6,489 . 874	.312 .128	0.702	20.797 6.831	.000 .000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Buying Behaviour

the R-square value of Hypothesis one is 0.493 (49.3%). The R-Square, also known as the coefficient of determination, measures the variability in brand awareness that has been explained by consumer buying behavior. The higher the R-Square, the more adequate the fitted model.

ANOVA tests for significance or otherwise of the fitted model. The f – calculated is 46.658 with 1 and 48 degrees of freedom from the table. The f – tabulated obtained from the statistical table at 0.05 level of significance of 4.08. Since the f – calculated (46.658) is greater than the f – tabulated (4.08), the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, and we, therefore, accept (H1) that brand awareness affects the consumer buying behavior of Cadbury Nigeria Plc

The table of coefficients gives the nature of the relationship between brand awareness and consumer buying behavior. From the table, the coefficient of brand awareness is 0.874. Since the coefficient is positive, this implies that brand awareness affects the consumer buying behavior of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

Hypothesis Two: Brand association does not affect the consistent of customer patronage of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

Model summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.893[b]	0.086	0.067	1.41754

a. Predictors: (contact),   Brand Association

ANOVA[b]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 . Regression	9.068	1	9.068	4.513	.039[b]
Residual	96.452	48	2.009		
Total	105.520	49			

a. Predictors: (constant), Brand Association
b. Dependent variable: Customer Patronage

Coefficients [b]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients			
	B	Std.Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1 . (Constant) B r a n d Association	7.033 .439	.656 .207	0.293	10.722 2.124	.000 .039

a. Dependent variable: Customer Patronage

Hypotheses one gave the R-Square value of 0.086 (8.6%). The R-Square, also known as the coefficient of determination, measures the variability in the brand association has been explained by consistent customer patronage. The higher the R-Square, the more adequate the fitted model.

The ANOVA tests for significance or otherwise of the fitted model. The f – calculated is 4.513 with 1 and 48 degrees of freedom from the table. The f – tabulated obtained from the statistical table at 0.05 level is 4.08. Since the f – calculated (4.513) is greater than the f – tabulated (4.08), the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, and we, therefore, conclude that brand association affects the consistency of customer patronage of Cadbury Nigeria Plc. The table of coefficients gives the nature of the relationship between the brand association and consistent customer patronage. From the table, the coefficient of brand association is 0.439 since the coefficient is positive; this implies that Brand association affects the consistency of customer patronage of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

Hypothesis Three: Brand loyalty does not affect consumer purchasing behaviour of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

Model Summary[c]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.648[c]	0.200	0.184	1.32583

a. Predictors: (constant) Brand Loyalty

ANOVA[c]

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Means Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	21.144	1	21.144	12.028	.001[c]
Residual	84.376	48	1.758		
Total	105.520	49			

a. Predictors (constant), Brand Loyalty
b. Dependent variable: Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

Coefficients [c]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std.Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1 (Constant)	7.842	.756		7.791	.000
Brand Loyalty	.782	.225	0.448	3.468	.001

Dependent Variables: Consumer Purchasing Behaviour

Hypothesis Three gave the R-Square value of 0.200 (20%). The R-Square, also known as the coefficient of determination, measures the variability in brand loyalty that has been

explained by purchasing behavior. The higher the R-Square, the more adequate the fitted model.

The ANOVA tests for analysis for significance or otherwise of the fitted model. The f – calculated is 12.028 with 1 and 48 degrees of freedom from the table. The f – tabulated obtained from the statistical table at 0.05 level is 4.08. Since the f – calculated (12.028) is greater than the f – tabulated (4.08), the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected, and we, therefore, conclude that brand loyalty affects the consumer purchasing behavior of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

The table of coefficients gives the nature of the relationship between brand loyalty and consumer purchasing behavior is 0.782 since the coefficient is positive; this implies that brand loyalty affects the consumer purchasing behavior of Cadbury Nigeria Plc.

Discussion of Result

the value of R in brand awareness (0.702), brand association (0.893) and brand loyalty (0.648) shows that there is a solid relationship between the independent variables and dependent variables.

By testing the R square (Coefficient of Determination), as the proportion of the total variation or dispersion in the brand buying behavior (dependent variable) that explained by the various independent variables in the regression is 0.797; meaning, 79.7% of customer buying behavior is explained by the linear relationship with all the independent variables (branding). The adjusted R square is 0.773, which indicates the variation in one variable that is accounted for by another variable. In other words, through the survey with 240 target respondents, their perception of branding accounts for 77.3 percent of the total variation in consumer buying behavior. It indicates that the level of relationship between branding and is high.

Generally speaking, the regression model developed under the study can be considered a good predictor of customer satisfaction of the corporation. The personal effects of the independent variables can be explained by their respective beta coefficients. By looking at its standardized coefficients (beta), the brand association has the highest standardized coefficient, which means it is the best predictor. Furthermore, perceived quality, brand awareness, and brand loyalty are the predictor of branding.

Conclusion and Further Implication

This study examined how Cadbury Nigeria Plc's branding affected customers' purchasing decisions. This research is evaluated based on brand dimensions, which include brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand association, among other things. An extensive consumer buying behavior survey was done using these four branding characteristics to gather information on all areas of customer purchasing behavior. The study also discovered that branding had a significant association with customer purchasing behavior. Moreover, it was shown that favorable and substantial associations were found between customer buying behavior and brand association, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. The findings show a relationship between Cadbury Nigeria Plc. products and customer buying behavior using Pearson correlation analysis among customers. It was discovered that the brand's dimensions are critical in determining

customers' purchasing behavior. Branding is a method of clearly showing what distinguishes your product or service and makes it more appealing than your competition. Successful branding is all about highlighting your unique selling points. In order to maintain their brand values, businesses must consistently deliver on their promises based on their strengths.

The study was on the effect of branding on consumer purchasing behavior in Cadbury Nigeria Plc. Future research could be carried out on the impact of branding on service products in other sectors such as the banking industry, telecommunication industry and the hospitality industry, which has in the recent past witnessed high competition. Also, in future researches with a comparative approach, researchers can measure the role of other determining factors in industrial customers' loyalty (such as personal sales methods and relational sales) or evaluate customers' satisfaction and loyalty in a specific industry.

The majority of customers prefer to purchase a well-known brand product. Therefore customers do not want to take any risk to purchase unknown brands. Even if the study shows that people's first preference is to purchase branded products, I cannot apply this result to other studies. Further research can be conducted in this area to find the broad answers that can be used for all studies.

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