



**Assessing the Marketing Efforts of Nature Reserves and Their
Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of
Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve.**

By

Student Name: Bonginkosi Innocent Hlatshwayo

Student No: 220369933

SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF MPUMALANGA

SCHOOL OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS, DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF MPUMALANGA

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Konanani Thwala

Date of submission: 01 December 2025

DECLARATION

I, ***Bonginkosi Hlatshwayo***, hereby declare that this dissertation submitted to the University of Mpumalanga for the **Master of Tourism and Hospitality Management** has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university. This dissertation is my own work in design and execution, and all the materials contained therein have been duly acknowledged.

Student Name: ***B.I Hlatshwayo***

Date: 01 December 2025

DEDICATION

- I would like to dedicate this project to myself for being grounded, no matter what the circumstances I encountered during the project. The journey was not relatively easy since I did not have funding for the study, which made it more complex to travel for data collection and hire field workers.
- I would also dedicate it to my family for their undivided support during my studies, and allow me to further my studies the way I wished, without being pressured to look for employment

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all individuals who contributed to the journey of this study. It would not have been an easy path to walk alone, without their help. I do not think I would have gone so far alone. Thanks to my God for keeping my head up and blessing me with people who see potential in me and keep me going.

- I would love to give my sincere gratitude to my one and only supervisor, Dr KC. Thwala for seeing potential in me since we started the journey with my Honours degree. She taught me research from scratch, guiding, advising, supporting, and allowing me to make mistakes, so I could learn from them. I will forever be grateful for everything she did to ensure that this project reached its final stage. I thank her for always being there when I needed her and supporting me in taking risky decisions in challenging myself to become the first student in the School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, and to complete this qualification in one year.
- I thank my supportive family for their support and encouragement from the beginning of this academic journey. They have always been supportive of my studies. I really appreciate all the effort they put into helping me complete this study.
- I would love to thank Mr. Ntwanano Mtungwa, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), and Mr. Jimmy Thanyani for granting me permission to conduct my research on their Reserve, and all other MTPA and Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) officials who assisted in the data collection process.
- I would love to thank all the field workers who assisted me with my data collection, without expecting to be compensated, due to the fact that I did not have any funding for my studies. I thank Surprise Machacha, Samukelo Masilela, Pheletso Mokwena, Michael Mkhize, and Catherine Siteo for their time and support of my study. Without their assistance, my data collection process would have been significantly more difficult due to financial and time constraints.
- I would love to thank Mr. Washington Makuzva, Dr. R. Niyimbanira, and Ms. Cynthia Rakale for their professional assistance through this research journey.

ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this study is to assess the Marketing Efforts of MTPA-managed nature reserves and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals, a case study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR). The study was motivated by the growing global prominence of sustainable tourism and the crucial role of protected areas in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A mixed-method research approach was used to achieve the main objective of this study, which was conducted between February and November 2025. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, as it enables the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in addressing the research questions. The data collection consisted of 390 questionnaires distributed to tourists who visited the BRCNR during the data collection period in September 2025, as well as 10 in-depth interviews with key informants, including Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) and BRCNR management officials. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and descriptive statistics were used to analyse and present the findings of quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data analysis.

The findings indicate that the BRCNR's marketing strategies are generally effective, accessible, and informative, with consistent perceptions indicating reasonable alignment between marketing efforts and visitor expectations. The BRCNR's sustainability marketing and on-site environmental practices are generally effective in informing, educating, and raising conservation awareness among visitors. The findings also highlight that word of mouth is one of the key marketing strategies that BRCNR relies on to market the reserve. Research outcomes/results/findings revealed that spring and summer (festive programme) as the peak or the busiest season in the BRCNR. Furthermore, these marketing strategies and efforts encourage responsible sustainable travel as mentioned/supported by the Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11). The reserve makes a positive contribution to employment opportunities and inclusive economic development (SDG 8). The study recommends that BRCNR should upgrade the infrastructure around the reserve and add more entertainment

activities, which would allow tourists to stay for a longer period and spend more within the reserve.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sustainable tourism, Nature reserves, Marketing strategies/efforts, Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR), Tourism marketing, Services marketing mix.

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
DECLARATION.....	i
DEDICATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiv
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS	xv
LIST OF ADDENDUMS	xvi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT.....	1
1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY	1
1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT	7
1.3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	8
1.3.1. The Aim of the Study	8
1.3.2. Research Objectives	8
1.3.3. Research Questions	9
1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	9
1.5. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	10
1.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS SUMMARY	11
1.7. DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS.....	11
1.8. OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH	13
1.9. CHAPTER CONCLUSION	13
CHAPTER 2:.....	14
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	14
2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY	14
2.2.1. Services Marketing Theory (7Ps).....	14
2.2.2. AIDA Theory	15
2.2.3. Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework	16
2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK	17
2.4. UNDERSTANDING TOURISM MARKETING AND EFFORTS IN PROTECTED AREAS	18
2.4.1 Tourism Marketing and efforts	18
2.4.2 Role of Marketing in Tourism Protected Areas	19
2.5. DIGITAL MARKETING IN TOURISM PROTECTED AREAS	21
2.5.1. Social Media Marketing in Nature Reserve	23

2.5.2. Website Marketing	24
2.6. VISITOR BEHAVIOUR AND DESTINATION PERCEPTION	26
2.6.1 Tourist Decision-Making Process	26
2.6.2 Factors Influencing Visitor Perception	26
2.6.3 Visitor Satisfaction and Experience	27
2.7 DESTINATION MARKETING AND BRANDING	27
2.8 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND THE SDGS	31
2.8.1 Introduction to Sustainable Tourism.....	31
2.8.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Tourism	33
2.8.3 SDG 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15 in the Context of Nature Reserves	34
2.9. CHAPTER CONCLUSION	36
CHAPTER 3:	37
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	37
3.1. INTRODUCTION.....	37
3.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM.....	37
3.3 MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH APPROACH	38
3.4. RESEARCH DESIGN	40
3.5. STUDY AREA.....	41
3.6. TARGET POPULATION	41
3.7. SAMPLING METHODS	42
3.8. SAMPLE SIZE	44
3.8.1. Quantitative Sample Size	44
3.8.2. Qualitative Sample Size.....	45
3.9. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS	45
3.9.1. Quantitative Data Collection	45
3.9.2. Qualitative Data Collection	47
3.10. PILOT STUDY	48
3.11. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES	49
3.11.1. Quantitative Data Analysis.....	49
3.11.1.1. Descriptive Statistics	49
3.11.1.2. Factor Analysis (Principal Component Analysis)	50
3.11.1.3. Reliability and Sampling Adequacy	50
3.11.1.4. Inferential Analysis – Independent Samples T-Test	50
3.11.2. Qualitative Data Analysis	51
3.12. QUALITY CRITERIA.....	52

3.12.1. Quantitative: Validity and Reliability	52
Validity	52
Reliability	52
3.12.2 Qualitative: Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability ...	53
3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	54
3.13.1. Confidentiality	55
3.13.2. Informed Consent	55
3.14. CHAPTER CONCLUSION	56
CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS	57
4.1. Introduction	57
4.2. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS	58
4.2.1 Descriptive Results	58
4.2.1.1 Respondent's Socio-Demographic Characteristics	58
4.2.2. UNDERSTANDING MARKETING AWARENESS, SEASONALITY, AND TOURISM ACTIVITY	60
4.2.2.1 Sources of Awareness of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR)	60
4.2.2.2. Effectiveness of Marketing Content in influencing the Decision to visit BRCNR	61
4.2.2.3. Motivational Factors Influencing Visits to the BRCNR	62
4.2.2.4. Number of times respondents visited BRCNR.	63
4.2.2.5. Preferred Season for visiting the BRCNR.	64
4.2.3. ANALYSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING STRATEGIES APPLIED BY THE BLYDE RIVER CANYON NATURE RESERVE (BRCNR)	65
4.2.4. ELEMENTS RELATING TO SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING, PRACTICES, AND CONSERVATION AWARENESS	67
4.2.5. ELEMENTS INFLUENCING TOURISTS' SATISFACTION, EXPERIENCE, AND PERCEPTION	69
4.2.6. ELEMENTS RELATING TO BRCNR'S PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)	71
4.3 FACTOR ANALYSES	73
4.3.1. Factor 1: Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies Applied by BRCNR	76
4.3.2. Factor 2: Sustainability Marketing, Practices, and Conservation Awareness.	77
4.3.3. Factor 3: Tourists' Satisfaction, Experience, and Perception	77
4.3.4. Factor 4: BRCNR's Perceived Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	78
4.3.5.1 T-test for comparison of identified factors with Gender	80
4.3.5.2 T-test for comparison of identified factors with visit status	81

4.4. QUALITATIVE RESULTS	82
4.4.1. Participant’s Demographic Characteristics	82
4.4.1.1. Level of Responsibility or Position at the BRCNR/MTPA.....	82
4.4.1.2. Number of years at the BRCNR/MTPA.....	83
4.4.1.3. Areas of work involved at the BRCN/MTPA.....	83
4.4.1.4. Level of Formal Education.....	83
4.4.2. Marketing Efforts Applied by the BRCNR	84
4.4.2.1. Marketing Efforts used by the BRCNR.	84
4.4.2.2. Target Markets Aiming to Attract	85
4.4.2.3. The Effectiveness of the Marketing Efforts	86
4.4.2.4. Evaluation of the Marketing Efforts	87
4.4.3. Contribution to the SDGs	88
4.4.3.1. Contribution to SDG 1: No Poverty	88
4.4.3.2. Contribution to SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.....	89
4.4.3.3. Contribution to SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.....	89
4.4.3.4. Contribution to SDG 13: Climate Action	90
4.4.3.5. Contribution to SDG 15: Life on Land.....	91
4.4.3.6. BRCNR Partnerships that align with Sustainable Development.....	92
4.4.4. Conservation Awareness	93
4.4.4.1. Effectiveness of Environmental Awareness.....	93
4.4.4.2. Tracking Conservation Awareness	94
4.4.5. Tourism Seasons and Trends	95
4.4.5.1. The Peak Seasons on BRCNR.....	95
4.4.5.2. Marketing Strategies/Efforts that Target Peak Season.....	95
4.4.5.3. The Effectiveness of the Marketing Strategies/Efforts	96
4.4.6. Challenges and Opportunities at BRCNR	97
4.4.6.1. Challenges Encountered in Implementation of Marketing Strategies/Efforts.	97
4.4.6.2. Opportunities to Improve Marketing for the BRCNR.	98
4.4.6.3. Resources Needed to Better Market BRCNR Sustainably.....	99
4.4.6.4. Additional Suggestions	100
4.5. FINDINGS DISCUSSIONS	100
4.6. CHAPTER CONCLUSION	102
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	104
5.1. INTRODUCTION	104
5.2. CONCLUSIONS	105

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS	110
5.4. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS	112
6. REFERENCES	115
7. ADDENDUM	129
7.1. ADDENDUM A: Turnitin Report	129
7.2. ADDENDUM B: Academic Editing Certificate	130
7.3. ADDENDUM C: Interview Guide for MTPA/BRCNR Officials	131
7.4. ADDENDUM D: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TOURISTS	133
7.5. ADDENDUM E: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH	137
7.6. ADDENDUM F: UMP ETHICAL CLEARANCE	138
7.7. ADDENDUM G: UPDATED UMP ETHICAL CLEARANCE	139
7.8 ADDENDUM H: FRIC Proposal Letter	140
7.9. ADDENDUM I: MTPA APPROVAL LETTER	141
7.10. ADDENDUM J: INFORMATION LEAFLET	142
7.11. ADDENDUM K: CONSENT FORM	143

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURES	PAGES
Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).....	6
Figure 2: Theoretical Framework for the Study	17
Figure 3: Five-Staged Framework for Branding	28
Figure 4: Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Design.....	39
Figure 5: Discovering the BRCNR	60
Figure 6: The Level of Influence of the Marketing Efforts	61
Figure 7: Motivations for visiting BRCNR	62
Figure 8: Preferred Season to visit the BRCNR.....	64

LIST OF TABLES

TABLES	PAGES
Table 1: Advantages of mixed-methods research	39
Table 3: Number of times respondents have visited the BRCNR.....	63
Table 4: Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies Applied by BRCNR	65
Table 5: Sustainability Marketing and Conservation Awareness	67
Table 6: Tourists' Satisfaction and Experience.....	69
Table 7: BRCNR's Contribution to SDGs.....	71
Table 8: Factor Analyses	73
Table 9: T-test for Comparison of Identified Factors with Genders	80
Table 10: T-test for Comparison of Identified Factors with Visit Status	81

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

MTPA	–	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency
BRCNR	–	Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve
STD	–	Sustainable Tourism Development
SDGs	–	Sustainable Development Goals
NDT	–	National Department of Tourism
TBL	–	Triple Bottom Line
CPAs	–	Communal Property Associations
AIDA	–	Attention, Interest, Desire, Action
SLF	–	Sustainable Livelihood Framework
EMT	–	Ecological Modernisation Theory
UMP	–	University of Mpumalanga
SMEs	–	Small and Medium Enterprises
FAQs	-	Frequently Asked Questions
SPSS	-	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SD	–	Standard Deviation
KMO	–	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
MICE-		Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions
ITB	–	International Tourism Bourse Berlin
EPWP	–	Expanded Public Works Programme
GDP	–	Gross Domestic Product
SAFCOL	-	South African Forestry Company Limited
DFFE-		Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment
SANParks	–	South African National Parks
EFA	-	Exploratory Factor Analyses

LIST OF ADDENDUMS

ADDENDUM A: Turnitin Report.....	132
ADDENDUM B: Academic Editing Certificate.....	133
ADDENDUM C: Interview Guide for MTPA/BRCNR officials.....	134
ADDENDUM D: Questionnaire Survey for Tourists.....	136
ADDENDUM E: Request to Conduct Research.....	140
ADDENDUM F: UMP Ethical Clearance.....	141
ADDENDUM G: Updated UMP Ethical Clearance.....	142
ADDENDUM H: FRIC Proposal Letter.....	143
ADDENDUM I: MTPA Approval Letter.....	144
ADDENDUM J: Information Leaflet.....	145
ADDENDUM K: Consent Form.....	146

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The tourism industry contributes about 10.4% to the global gross domestic product (GDP) through international employment opportunities (Willaddara, 2024). This phenomenon is also evident in South Africa, where the tourism sector is the fastest growing sector (National Department of Tourism (NDT), 2025). The National Department of Tourism (NDT) (2025) states that South Africa aims to attract approximately 15 million visitors by 2030, aligning with the National Development Plan (NDP). South Africa remains an attractive and accessible destination for most international travellers who want to enjoy and explore the country's beauty, contributing to the tourism sector's performance. Moreover, the NDT (2025) suggests that maintaining the inbound tourist momentum will make a significant contribution to economic growth and create additional employment opportunities.

Tourism marketing is a very paramount aspect of the tourism sector globally, involving promoting tourist destinations such as, nature reserves, brands, and products or services to prospective consumers (Wulandari, Violin, Munizu & Iskandar, 2024). Tourism marketing can be explained as; the capacity of a tourism organisation to situate itself in the consumer's mind in order to generate profit from the sales made from the consumers (Thwala, 2022). This means that the tourism industry sells services to consumers, which in turn create experiences; therefore, tourism marketers need to be robust in promoting or selling these experiences.

Effective marketing in nature reserves is thus crucial for reaching prospective audiences at both national and international levels, as well as, influencing their perception and decision-making about the nature reserve (Balamurugan, Ramesh & Prabakaran, 2024). Additionally, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), research has shown that most tourists care about sustainability efforts which fall under the category of "a more sustainable travel", meaning that the tourism sector takes full accountability for its present and upcoming impacts on economic, social and environment, this notion addresses the importance of travellers, the sector, the

environment, and the host communities (Balamurugan et al., 2024). Thus, it is paramount for nature reserves and tourism organisations to obtain sustainability certification or a badge and include it in their marketing efforts, as this will attract tourists who are more sustainable travellers while, giving the reserve a superior competitive advantage over its competitors.

Digital marketing has become an essential tool for promoting tourism destinations, particularly nature-based attractions. Wulandari et al. (2024) suggest that digital marketing enables destinations such as nature reserves to enhance their visibility and reach prospective target markets more efficiently. Social media platforms, in particular, play a pivotal role in shaping tourism marketing trends by enabling destinations to communicate key information, showcase attractions, and engage with potential travellers (Nguyet & Wawrzyniec, 2022).

The emergence of Web 2.0 technologies, mobile internet, and smartphones has transformed how nature reserves interact with visitors, facilitating online bookings, digital engagement, and the ability to track tourist travel behaviour on a large scale (Davie, Ogbeide & Shafieizadeh, 2024). In addition, these digital platforms provide an opportunity for destinations to communicate sustainability messages that encourage responsible tourist behaviour. For example, simple sustainability messages can motivate visitors to adopt environmentally friendly practices such as reducing water consumption, using bicycles, and relying on public transport to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Evidence suggests that tourists are increasingly in supportive of sustainable travel, with more than 71% of travellers indicating that they are willing to leave destinations in a better state than they found them (Booking.com, 2025).

Within this context, services marketing provides an important framework for understanding how tourism destinations promote experiences rather than tangible products. Services marketing refers to the promotion and delivery of intangible offerings, where consumers purchase experiences rather than physical goods (Thwala, 2022; Zohriah, Mu'in, Rohimat & Faqih, 2025). In tourism, this is particularly relevant because destinations are experienced by visitors rather than owned. Adebayo (2021) explains that services marketing is characterised by four key features that distinguish it from traditional product marketing: intangibility, inseparability,

perishability, and heterogeneity. To effectively manage these characteristics and enhance visitor satisfaction, tourism marketers often apply the extended marketing mix, which provides a framework for improving service delivery and destination marketing strategies (Adebayo, 2021; Rindu, Hafizurrachman, Haryanto & Zakaria, 2025). While the traditional marketing mix initially consisted of four elements, namely, Product, Price, Place, and Promotion. It was later expanded to include People, Process, and Physical Evidence, resulting in the widely recognised seven Ps of services marketing (Adebayo, 2021). This framework is particularly relevant for tourism destinations, as it supports the effective marketing and management of visitor experiences while also enabling destinations to communicate sustainability initiatives.

In recent years, tourism marketing has increasingly incorporated sustainability narratives aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in nature-based destinations where environmental conservation and responsible tourism practices are central to destination management (Font & McCabe, 2017; UNWTO, 2020; Soliman & Mansour, 2021). Protected areas such as the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve play a substantial role in promoting sustainable tourism through biodiversity conservation, environmental education, and local economic development. As a result, destination marketing initiatives implemented by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency often emphasise sustainability initiatives aligned with global development priorities, particularly SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) (UN, 2015; UNWTO, 2020). However, the mounting use of sustainability messaging in tourism marketing has also raised concerns about greenwashing, where organisations may overstate or selectively communicate environmental achievements without fully reflecting their actual sustainability practices (Font, Elgammal & Lamond, 2017; Delmas & Burbano, 2011).

In the tourism sector, greenwashing can undermine the credibility of sustainability claims and mislead environmentally conscious travellers. Therefore, assessing the marketing efforts of nature reserves does not only requires analysing how sustainability and SDG contributions are communicated, but also assessing whether these claims accurately reflect the environmental management and conservation practices implemented at the destination (Font & McCabe, 2017).

The study is conducted at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, which is managed by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). Mpumalanga Province is one of the nine South African provinces, which is located in the eastern part of South Africa. The province falls within the grassland biome, dominated by natural attractions such as the scenic beauty landscapes, wildlife, and cultural heritages (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), 2025). The province is well known as “the place of the rising sun”, and it is dominated by three main economic contributors, namely: tourism, agriculture and mining, which enhance livelihoods through employment opportunities in the province (Sekole, Lethoko, Mautjana & Makombe, 2023).

The MTPA is a governmental organisation, with its headquarters in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga province, that oversees managing and conserving the province's biodiversity and ecosystem, as well as promoting it as a travel destination. MTPA was established following the 2006 merger of the Mpumalanga Parks Board and Mpumalanga Tourism Authority (MTPA, 2025). MTPA manages nature reserves and parks in the province, such as Manyeleti, Andover, Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) to mention but a few. BRCNR is on the northern side of the Drakensberg Mountain in Mpumalanga Province.

The growing concern about sustainability in tourism has led to several global trends and transformations in recent years (Sihombing, Suastini, & Puja, 2024). Sahu and Nema (2024) maintain that all countries globally focus on the concept of sustainable development, which is based on three pillars: Environmental, Social, and Economic. Sustainable development is defined as the process of development that allows the current generation to meet its needs on the available resources without jeopardising the needs of future generations to be fulfilled by the same resources (Ozili, 2025; Sihombing et al., 2024; Thuong, 2024). Similarly, Ozili and Lorembor (2024) maintain that sustainable development ensures that available resources are used responsibly so that future generations can also utilise them in good condition. Thus, sustainability is linked to various tourism activities such as natural heritage and environmental conservation, and benefits local communities by enhancing the quality of life and minimising poverty. This supports Sihombing et al. (2024), who asserted that

sustainability aims to convey civilisation through tourism by making resources accessible to humans.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprise 17 objective goals that were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 to solve international challenges (Dheere, 2025). The SDGs aim at making the world a more equitable, prosperous, and peaceful place by 2030 (Kuriakose & Jaleel, 2025). Mabibibi, Dube and Thwala (2021) suggest that the SDGs were established to enhance understanding of holistic development, which encompasses the triple bottom line challenges faced by the world. Furthermore, Mabibibi et al. (2021) maintain that SDGs were adopted to improve the standard that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) failed to reach in addressing fundamental development challenges.

Agenda 2030 for SDGs seeks to consider and execute policies that enhance sustainable and responsible tourism, creating employment opportunities and marketing local products and culture (Singh, Semwal & Semwal, 2024). Sustainable development guiding principles establish a framework for destination development, encompassing the responsible use of resources, reduced consumption of natural resources, and the preservation of both social and natural resources, among others (Thuong, 2024). Dheere (2025) reiterated that the SDGs are characterised by stakeholders' collaboration, including the government, local communities, and private sector organisations. This was seen as influential during the COVID-19 pandemic, where all stakeholders collaborated to combat the pandemic and complied with the policies implemented to minimise its spread. Therefore, Figure 1 below illustrates the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Source: Mabibibi et al. (2021)

Mabibibi et al. (2021) stated that out of all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, only three of them speak directly to tourism. Tourism is directly linked to SDG 8, which focuses on “decent jobs and economic growth,” followed by SDG 12, which emphasises “responsible consumption and production,” and lastly, SDG 14, which addresses “life below water.” However, Raihan (2024) maintains that tourism has the capacity to contribute indirectly to each of the SDGs. For instance, SDG 8 focuses on “decent jobs and economic growth”. SDG 8, on its own, covers other SDGs that a community can benefit from, such as 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7. The same thing applies to SDG 12, which in close linkage to SDGs 9, 11, and 15, and SDG 14 is linked to SDG 6. However, this study will focus on the SDGs (1, 8, 11, 13, and 15) due to their close relationship with tourism, as mentioned above. SDGs 1 (No Poverty), 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 13 (Climate Action), and 15 (Life On Land).

The tourism industry plays a very important role in sustainable development and ensuring a balance between social, economic, and environmental development. The SDGs (1, 8, 11, 13, and 15) are closely relevant to the tourism industry, as a cross-

cutting sector that touches other sectors in one way or another. As one of the leading sectors in creating jobs, stimulating local economies, and empowering marginalized communities, tourism directly contributes to poverty alleviation (SDG 1) while fostering inclusive and fair employment opportunities across diverse sectors (SDG 8). At the same time, tourism shapes urban growth and cultural preservation, making cities and communities more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable (SDG 11). Additionally, tourism carries environmental responsibilities, such as reducing its carbon footprint through eco-friendly practices and climate-conscious innovations and aligning with global climate action (SDG 13). Moreover, tourism thrives on healthy ecosystems and biodiversity, and protecting forests, wildlife, and landscapes. This is essential not only for conservation but also for sustaining the industry itself (SDG 15). Taken together, these SDGs highlight tourism's multiple roles as both an economic beneficiary and a catalyst of sustainable development. Well-managed responsible tourism is a transformative force that minimises poverty, enhances the economy, builds responsible citizens, reduces climate change, and safeguards life on land.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nature reserves are gaining momentum and slowly becoming one of the major sources of interest to ecotourists (Sihombing et al., 2024). Agenda 2030 shifts focus to sustainable development, preserving and conserving available resources for future generations, while fulfilling the needs and desires of the current generation and also generating economic means (Singh et al., 2024). Various studies have been conducted on sustainable behavior and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within ecotourism, examining different areas of focus, including market segmentation, travel behavior patterns, travel motivation, activities, experiences, and benefits (Al-Shahrani, Al-Ghamdi, & Aslam, 2024; Siregar, Selwendri & Nasution, 2024). Despite the growing global prominence of sustainable tourism and the critical role of protected areas in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), there is limited empirical research assessing how marketing strategies implemented by conservation authorities, such as the MTPA, contribute to these goals (Bahorka, Kurbatska & Kvasova, 2022). MTPA (2025) noted that the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve is one of the significant natural resources in Mpumalanga, presenting great opportunities for local development, preservation, ecotourism, and biodiversity.

Tourism can contribute directly and indirectly to all 17 SDGs, serving as a key player in sustainable development (Raihan, 2024). However, for the purpose of this study, the focus is on the SDGs (1, 8, 11, 13, and 15) to highlight the role of tourism in achieving these goals. Tourism plays a crucial role in reducing poverty by creating jobs (SDG 1), fostering inclusive economic growth (SDG 8), shaping resilient, culturally rich cities (SDG 11), promoting climate-conscious practices (SDG 13), and safeguarding biodiversity (SDG 15). The tourism industry intersects with various stakeholders to enhance ecosystems and foster responsible communities, thereby achieving global balance and a sustainable future.

While the BRCNR is a well-known eco-tourism destination with high biodiversity and cultural significance, the extent to which its marketing efforts align with and support local socio-economic development, environmental conservation, and broader SDG targets remains unclear (Brown, Marais, Henzi & Barrett, 2005; Mabibibi et al., 2021). This lack of thorough knowledge of the precise understanding of the relationships, opportunities for enhanced community benefits, sustainable tourism growth, and ecological awareness will be unlocked if the marketing efforts of BRCNR are optimised to their full potential (Hongshu & Min, 2024 & Wu & Hsu, 2018). Thus, this study aims to critically assess the effectiveness of the MTPA-managed nature reserve's marketing strategies and their contribution to selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators, based on the insights from tourists and the officials within Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve.

1.3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1. The Aim of the Study

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of the MTPA-managed nature reserves marketing efforts and their contribution to Sustainable Development Goals, specifically (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15), in a case study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve.

1.3.2. Research Objectives

The following objectives are set:

1. To examine the current marketing strategies that are applied by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) to promote the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR).

2. To determine the extent to which BRCNR's marketing efforts contribute to selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, 15).
3. To assess how the selected marketing strategies influence conservation awareness among tourists and the officials at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, and to identify the peak tourist season within the reserve.
4. To identify challenges and opportunities for enhancing marketing practices that support sustainable tourism within the Nature Reserve.

1.3.3. Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following questions:

Principal research question

How effective are the marketing efforts of MTPA-managed nature reserves in contributing to sustainable development goals, specifically in the context of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve?

Secondary research questions

1. What marketing strategies are currently employed by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) to promote the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR)?
2. To what extent do MTPA's marketing practices align with and support specific SDG indicators (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, 15)?
3. How do MTPA's marketing strategies influence conservation awareness among tourists and officials at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, and during which season is tourist visitation the highest?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities that come with enhancing marketing strategies that support sustainable tourism within the nature reserve?

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study fills the existing gap in the literature by examining how MTPA-managed nature reserves, particularly the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, conduct their marketing and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, 15) while upholding the 2030 global sustainability agenda. The study furthermore examines the effectiveness of the marketing strategies applied by MTPA in promoting their nature reserves and also improves marketing and conservation strategies to support the nature reserve's long-term sustainability.

1.5. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design, as it allows the researcher to capture emerging trends and behavioral patterns, providing an in-depth understanding of the marketing efforts applied by the BRCNR and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which influence decision-making procedures. This aligns with Adeniran and Tayoladega (2024), who suggest that a descriptive research design aims to accurately and methodically describe a scenario, challenge, phenomenon, or service, providing a deeper insight into understanding a specific attitude towards a problem. In alignment with this design, a pragmatism paradigm was adopted for this study, as it is one of the most suitable paradigms that complements both quantitative and qualitative research approaches without necessitating a comparison between the two. This supports the argument by Lyubiviy and Samchuk (2024) that the pragmatism paradigm seeks to understand or analyse practical individual experiences in real-life situations within societal space.

Methodologically, a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach was adopted for this study, as it enables the researcher to collect and analyse data for both quantitative and qualitative approaches simultaneously. Adeniran and Tayoladega (2024) assert that a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach enables the researcher to concurrently collect data through qualitative (exploratory) and quantitative (analytical) research methods, thereby achieving successful results and gaining a clearer understanding of the phenomenon being researched. This study employed two non-probability sampling methods: convenience and purposive sampling. The sample size of 390 surveys for the quantitative approach was determined by the population size of tourists visiting BRCNR per year, using the table of sample size determination by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The sample size of 10 face-to-face in-depth interviews for the qualitative approach was determined by data saturation. This is deeply discussed in Chapter 3. The collected data for the quantitative approach were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, which was used to identify recurring themes and patterns within the dataset.

1.6. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS SUMMARY

This study adheres to the ethical principles for both the University of Mpumalanga and the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). The ethical clearance or certificates were granted by the University of Mpumalanga (UMP), Ref: UMP/Hlatshwayo/08/2025 (see Addendum F), Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), and the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) (see Addendum G). For the quantitative approach, the first page of the questionnaire provided a brief introduction to the study, along with its intended objectives and an informed consent statement (see Addendum H). This was to give respondents the opportunity to decide whether to participate in the study or not (see Addendum I). The respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they no longer wished to continue, and their responses would be removed from the study. For the qualitative approach, the researcher requested permission from the interviewees to record the interview session. The participants were given the interview guide prior to brainstorming and had an idea of the types of questions to ask, as well as whether to participate, before the actual day of the interview. The participants were informed that the study's findings would be reported in clusters to maintain their anonymity and protect their identities. For both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the ethical principles, such as confidentiality, privacy, voluntary participation, and causing no harm, among others, were maintained by the researcher throughout the process of collecting and reporting the data.

1.7. DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

The purpose of these definitions is to establish a clear conceptual understanding of the main terms used throughout the research and to ensure that they are interpreted in relation to the study's objectives.

1.7.1. Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) – Is Mpumalanga's provincial public organisation that is tasked with managing and conserving the ecosystem and biodiversity, as well as marketing the province as one of the best tourist destinations (MTPA, 2025).

1.7.2. Nature Reserve – Is defined as a protected natural environment that aims to conserve and preserve natural fauna and flora for tourism purposes (Azizah & Firmansyah, 2025).

1.7.3. Tourism Marketing – Thwala (2022) maintains that tourism marketing refers to the ability or capability of tourism establishments to position themselves in consumers' minds to generate profit from the sales made to the customers.

1.5.4. Services Marketing – is defined as a form of marketing that focuses on promoting or selling services rather than tangible products (Zohriah et al., 2025).

1.7.5. Extended Marketing Mix - is defined as a framework or model for enhancing customer satisfaction and service delivery to destinations (Adebayo, 2021; Rindu et al., 2025).

1.7.6. Sustainable Tourism Development – Is defined as the development that considers meeting the demands of the current generation without jeopardising the capacity of the upcoming generations to meet their own demands (Ozili, 2025).

1.7.7. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Refers to a strategic plan that was adopted from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to solve pressing international issues, such as environmental preservation, economic, and social issues, as well as promoting inclusive societies with a better standard of living and poverty alleviation (Dheere, 2025).

1.7.8. Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve – This is a nature reserve with various fauna and flora species, making it one of the best Mpumalanga-based nature reserves managed by the MTPA (MTPA, 2025).

1.7.9. Marketing Efforts – Marketing Efforts refer to the different strategies that tourism establishments adopt to better position themselves in consumers' minds (Gallage, Tissera & Sanchez-Campos, 2025).

1.7.10. Tourist arrivals – Refers to the number of tourists who travel to or visit a certain tourism establishment at a time (Jikidze, 2025).

1.7.11. Tourist season – Refers to a particular time of the year that tourists prefer to travel during due to weather conditions and ecology that support tourism activities (Jikidze, 2025).

1.7.12. Marketing Strategies - Refers to marketing ideas that a tourism organisation uses to promote and position their tourism offering in the minds of consumers (Gallage et al., 2025).

1.8. OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides background information, including the research objectives and questions, as well as an overview of the nature reserve's marketing and the SDGs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The chapter provides the theoretical framework and conceptual framework that guide the development of the theoretical and empirical literature review of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the research methods and process adopted by this study, focusing on key aspects such as research paradigm and design, data collection procedure, sample size, ethical considerations, and data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This chapter presents the research findings, analysis, and discussions, including descriptive statistics that cover the marketing strategies adopted by nature reserves and their contributions to the SDGs. Discussing the main conclusions drawn from data analysis, highlighting how incorporating nature reserves' marketing with sustainability can contribute to SDGs.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter provides a concise summary of the main conclusions derived from the study's findings, highlighting the study's contributions and limitations, and offering recommendations for future research.

1.9. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The above chapter highlights the theoretical and conceptual frameworks used to guide the literature review in Chapter 2, while focusing on the introduction and background of the study, including the problem statement, research objectives, and questions, and the study's aim. This chapter provided a brief overview of the research methodology; Chapter 3 provides a more detailed discussion.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the study's literature review. The literature review is a paramount research chapter that examines, analyses, and synthesises previous studies of the related theme, to understand the roles of nature reserves in achieving the SDGs, such as, poverty alleviation, education, and community empowerment of the host communities, and the marketing efforts, as well as, their importance to market the nature reserve. The keywords utilised for this study are sustainable development, SDGs (entailing poverty alleviation, community empowerment, and development), conservation, and marketing. The literature review encompasses information from various databases, books, journal articles, and other relevant sources.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE STUDY

A theoretical framework is a rationally designed and interconnected gathering of various perspectives and assumptions that a researcher creates from various theories to support a study (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). There are various types of theoretical models of tourism, including the Services Marketing Theory (7Ps), AIDA Theory, Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), Triple Bottom Line (TBL), Stakeholder Theory, and Ecological Modernisation Theory (EMT), among others. The theoretical framework supports individual studies, coordinates, arranges, distributes, and promotes research, ultimately influencing the field of study. For this study, three theoretical frameworks were employed: the Services Marketing Theory (7Ps), AIDA Theory, and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theoretical framework.

2.2.1. Services Marketing Theory (7Ps)

The Services Marketing Theory is defined as a framework or model for enhancing customer satisfaction and service delivery to destinations (Adebayo, 2021; Rindu et al., 2025; Thwala, 2022). Anitha and Hemanathan (2023) maintain that the 7Ps is primarily used by organisations to track their level of competence or customer satisfaction with their product offerings. Adebayo (2021) further stated that the

traditional marketing mix originally consisted of only four Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion), and later, three additional key Ps (People, Process, and Physical Evidence) were added, resulting in a total of seven Ps. Thus, this theory enables a destination or organisation to identify its shortcomings and the ways to address them, thereby enhancing customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Rindu et al. (2025) maintain that the services marketing mix plays a crucial role in identifying a specific target market, ensuring affordability, and selecting a suitable location for the product offering, which will maintain competitiveness, enhance service delivery, and balance profit with satisfaction. Ramli et al. (2025) stated that the 7Ps marketing mix framework provides a crucial framework for assessing how marketing strategies influence customer retention and acquisition.

2.2.2. AIDA Theory

The AIDA model is defined as a theoretical framework that focuses on the behavioural theory in terms of decision-making, stimulating response, cognitive processing, and motivation theory (Chakrabarty & Pandey, 2025). AIDA is the word that stands for Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, which explains how marketing communication influences tourist behaviour through a sequential psychological process (Chakrabarty & Pandey, 2025; Chakrabarty & Sinha, 2025; Hu, 2025). Each letter incorporated in the AIDA model has its own meaning, representing the stages through which marketing communication pursues travellers' decision-making and motivations to travel. Attention involves raising awareness and understanding through imagery, as well as engagement with the target market (Chakrabarty & Sinha, 2025). Interest includes making the target market interested in traveling through thorough engagements, explaining the relevant and new information (Yahelska & Vasylyshyna, 2024). Hu (2025) described Desire as creating anticipation that the product offering would satisfy customer demand by creating curiosity in the minds of consumers (Chakrabarty & Pandey, 2025). Action involves consumers deciding to purchase after engaging with the information from the first three previous stages, and a call to act based on the provided information (Hu, 2025; Yahelska & Vasylyshyna, 2024). Thus, this theory provides marketers with the ability to determine various structures of marketing strategies and efforts.

2.2.3. Triple Bottom Line (TBL) Framework

The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory, proposed by John Elkington in 1997, aims to ensure sustainable development (Silva et al., 2024). According to Chin and Yong (2024), TBL ensures that the sustainable development of natural reserves is integrated through environmental quality, economic prosperity, and social equity. Thus, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework offers an inclusive model for assessing economic, social, and environmental sustainability in the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. Krithika et al. (2023) maintain that the TBL approach emphasises the importance of balanced social, economic, and environmental preservation that enables the management system to meet sustainability demands for the nature reserve. Moreover, TBL theory provides a holistic assessment approach to sustainability. Additionally, TBL offers a helpful framework to analyse the ways in which nature reserves contribute to economic prosperity, job creation, and efforts to combat poverty (SDGs 1 and 8) in the host communities. TBL emphasises the importance of institutions and policies, as well as, the impact of external shocks and pressures, such as, climate change, and highlights the need for adaptive strategies and environmentally friendly practices (Atieno et al., 2024). Therefore, the application of this framework to this study aimed to integrate the Triple Bottom Line indicators to measure the MTPA's performance in sustainable tourism and to provide a balanced analysis of the economic, social, and environmental contributions of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Based on the literature reviewed, three theoretical frameworks guide this study. The Services Marketing Theory (7Ps) provides a lens for understanding how marketing strategies and service delivery influence customer satisfaction and competitiveness within a tourism context (Adebayo, 2021; Anitha & Hemanathan, 2023; Rindu, Thwala, & Zohriah, 2025). The AIDA Theory offers insight into the psychological stages through which marketing communication affects tourist decision-making, from attention to action, highlighting the behavioural dimensions of effective promotion (Chakrabarty & Pandey, 2025; Chakrabarty & Sinha, 2025; Hu, 2025). Finally, the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework integrates economic, social, and environmental considerations, enabling an assessment of how BRCNR contributes to sustainable development goals while balancing conservation and community benefits (Silva, Chin, & Yong, 2024; Krithika, Atieno, & Chin, 2023; Atieno, Chin, & Yong, 2024). Together, these

frameworks inform the conceptual model for this study, linking marketing efforts, visitor experiences, and sustainability outcomes in a coherent analytical structure.

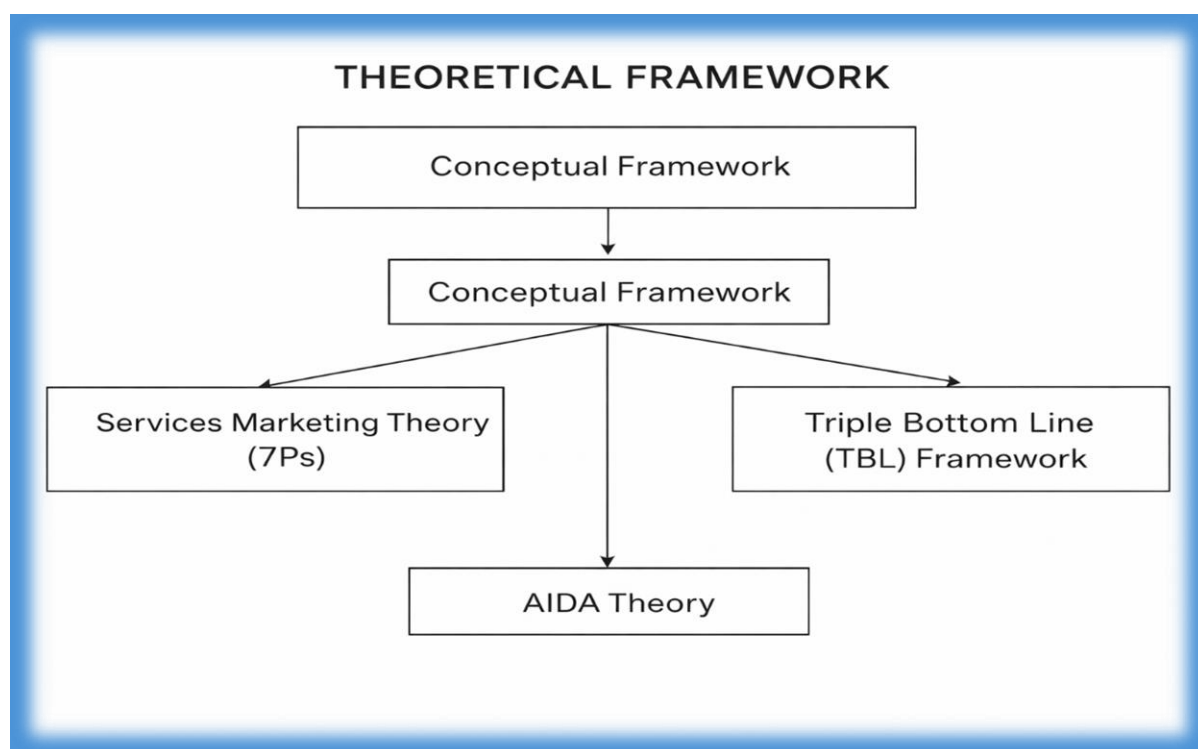


Figure 2: Theoretical Framework for the Study

Source: Researcher's own compilation

2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study integrates tourism services marketing theory with sustainable development principles to assess both the effectiveness of marketing efforts implemented by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) and their contribution to broader sustainability outcomes within the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR). The framework draws primarily on the Tourism Marketing Mix (7Ps): Product, Price, Place, Promotion, People, Process, and Physical Evidence as a comprehensive model for evaluating how tourism services are designed, delivered, and communicated (Ramli et al., 2025). This model allows for a structured assessment of the nature reserve's tourism offerings, operational strategies, and marketing activities.

To complement the 7Ps, the framework incorporates the Attention–Interest–Desire–Action (AIDA) Model, which explains how marketing communication influences tourist behaviour through a sequential psychological process (Chakrabarty & Sinha, 2025;

Anitha & Hemanathan, 2023). This combination provides a robust lens for evaluating both the strategic and communicative dimensions of MTPA's marketing efforts. It also supports the examination of how these marketing activities shape visitor awareness, perceptions, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions.

The second dimension of the conceptual framework aligns the marketing evaluation with the chosen SDGs: SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 15 (Life on Land). These goals were chosen because they directly relate to tourism development, community benefits, responsible visitor behaviour, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation, key themes in the management of protected areas (Atieno et al., 2024; Krithika et al., 2023). By linking marketing outcomes to SDG-related impacts, the framework enables an assessment of how effective sustainable marketing can support sustainable tourism development within the reserve.

Together, these theoretical components position marketing efforts as the inputs, visitor responses as intermediate outcomes, and sustainability contributions as the ultimate impacts. This integrated framework offers a coherent pathway for understanding how marketing strategies impact both tourism performance and sustainable development within a protected area context.

2.4. UNDERSTANDING TOURISM MARKETING AND EFFORTS IN PROTECTED AREAS

2.4.1 Tourism Marketing and efforts

Thwala (2022) maintains that tourism marketing refers to the ability or capability of tourism establishments to position themselves in consumers' minds, generating profit from sales made to customers. Marketing efforts are defined as all the strategies and activities that a destination adopts to improve the visibility of its offerings to prospective customers, which involve advertisements, promotions, and market research to understand the target audience and their preferences (Isnaeni, Khulasoh, Ashiyam & Efendi, 2025). The tourism industry is a competitive sector that shows steady growth; positioning product offerings is the key aspect in attracting more consumers (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025). The shift from traditional ways of marketing was to

expand the target audience through adopting digital marketing to be globally competitive and be able to focus on more than just one segment, as well as the usage of the 4 Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion) in marketing (Gallage et al, 2025). Digital marketing creates opportunities for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to enhance their sales, reach out to a large audience at a lower cost, while generating more profit (Isnaeni et al., 2025). Marketing efforts focus on the work and activities put in place to enhance the product's visibility and build trust in the product, enabling it to remain competitive and generate greater economic profits.

Marketing efforts encompass various aspects, from the initial stage of product development to the final phase of acquiring returning customers (Gamage et al., 2025). The main aim of marketing efforts is to enhance the sales volume by reaching more customers and positioning the product as one of the best and most reliable products or brands (Girisaran, Khanna & Gopal, 2025). The second aim is that the most relevant product on social media fosters a good reputation and generates curiosity in potential customers to purchase it (Adler, Joxe, John, & Daniel, 2025; Isnaeni et al., 2025).

Continuous advertisements get the brand to the top as customers are aware of the brand and position it in the mind of the customers to remember it when they want to make purchases (Gallage et al., 2025). Maintaining the same record of advertising keeps customers aware of the product or brand and reminds them that it still exists, especially when the product reaches its sales equilibrium. Educating potential customers about the product to make them aware and see the need to consume the product or the brand, and also open doors for the brand to grow in order to generate more profits that could enable the brand to be one of the best brands in the world, started as an SME to the world through encompassing different marketing efforts to reach global audience (Adler et al., 2025; Girisaran et al., 2025).

2.4.2 Role of Marketing in Tourism Protected Areas

Marketing plays a crucial role in tourism protected areas by shaping how destinations attract, satisfy, and retain visitors while supporting long-term sustainability. Using the extended marketing mix (7Ps), destinations can design compelling nature-based products, price them appropriately, and ensure they are accessible to targeted

markets (Adebayo, 2021; Carrera, 2025; Thwala, 2022). Effective promotional strategies, such as social media campaigns, packaged deals, and website communication, strengthen visibility and drive tourist interest (Anitha & Hemanathan, 2023). The involvement of well-trained staff enhances service quality and visitor engagement, while streamlined processes ensure smooth service delivery from product development to consumption (Carrera, 2025; Ramli et al., 2025). Conclusively, strong physical evidence, including tangible experiences, online presentation, and overall value for money, reinforces a positive brand image and encourages repeat visitation (Adebayo, 2021; Carrera, 2025). When all seven elements are integrated, marketing becomes a powerful tool for improving competitiveness and delivering meaningful, sustainable visitor experiences in protected areas.

An extended marketing mix is thus defined as a framework or model for enhancing customer satisfaction and service delivery to destinations (Adebayo, 2021; Rindu et al., 2025; Thwala, 2022). Adebayo (2021) further stated that originally comprising four Ps (Product, Price, Place, and Promotion), the classic marketing mix gradually added three more crucial Ps (People, Process, and Physical Evidence), resulting in a total of seven Ps that are briefly discussed below:

- **Product:** Is the offering that a destination offers or sells to the customers, and proper management of it plays a key role in the success of the destination (Carrera, 2025). A product must be uniquely designed to meet the demands of consumers and create an emotional attachment, ensuring brand loyalty, competitiveness, and sustainable development.
- **Price:** Is the amount that consumers are willing to offer for a product. Thus, a product should provide value for money, and customers must be charged based on the quality of the product (Thwala, 2022).
- **Place:** Is the channel through which consumers of the product access the product, including the distribution channels and logistics that make the product accessible to the customers (Gamba, 2025; Ramli et al., 2025). The location of the product must be easily accessible and affordable to the targeted market.
- **Promotion:** It refers to the various marketing strategies/efforts that are being incorporated to promote the product and reach a high volume of potential consumers, which include social media advertisements, package sales, and

websites, to mention a few (Anitha & Hemanathan, 2023). A well-planned product promotion attracts more consumers, fostering brand loyalty and generating profit.

- **People:** Anitha and Hemanathan (2023) maintain that the people (employees) involved in the product play a crucial role as the face of the product by engaging with potential consumers to provide the best services to clients. Carrera (2025) further stated that staff training is a key aspect in fostering better customer service.
- **Process:** Includes all the activities and procedures starting from the development of the product, pricing, location, promotion of the product, until it gets to the consumers (Carrera, 2025; Ramli et al., 2025). An effective process can enhance customer satisfaction and brand loyalty, ultimately leading to increased profit for the destination.
- **Physical Evidence:** The quality of the product and the experience that consumers received all adds up to the tangible elements that would make consumers return to purchase the product, as it is proven to be worth repeating (Adebayo, 2021; Carrera, 2025). The evidence can involve online interaction on social media platforms, product packaging, and value for money, which leads to a concrete brand image.

These 7Ps of the extended marketing mix are the key aspects that contribute to an effective marketing strategy or effort. According to Carrera (2025:4), “a successful marketing strategy must integrate all the elements of the marketing mix to create a clear and compelling value proposition.”

2.5. DIGITAL MARKETING IN TOURISM PROTECTED AREAS

Digital marketing plays a paramount role in positioning the destination in the minds of potential travellers (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025). The tourism industry is a rapidly growing sector that compels tourism stakeholders to adopt technological innovations in their marketing strategies to reach a large potential audience and remain competitive (Mai & Chen, 2025). Digital marketing is defined as the utilisation of the internet or online technologies or applications, such as social media, e-commerce, and digital channels, to enhance the product’s visibility to potential audiences and increase sales for the organisation to generate profits (Gamage et al., 2025; Mai & Chen, 2025). The shift from tradition forms of marketing to digital marketing not only benefits the

organisation to make profit but also contribute to sustainable practices. The rapid shift to the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) has transformed tourism organisations' practices to be more conservative through digital adoption (Gamage et al., 2025). Traditional marketing, which includes brochures, newspapers, and other printed material, was not accessible to everyone and required a long process from printing out newspapers and brochures to distributing them, which was a cost for small and newly established enterprises to compete (Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2021).

Adoption of digital marketing by nature reserves contributes to environmental conservation and sustainable practices. Marketing's purpose in nature reserves is to create unique content that attracts potential traveller/s. Traditional marketing favours only well-established tourism organisations that have a marketing budget, restricting competitiveness for newly developed organisations (Kumar, Tripti, Kaur & Sood, 2025), while, digital marketing enables both well-established tourism organisations and newly established tourism organisations to equally compete for the same potential audience and reaches global market at ease (Kumar et al., 2025; Mai & Chen, 2025). Therefore, digital marketing is advantageous in developing destination brand and raising awareness to potential travellers about sustainability practices the nature reserves offers.

Digital marketing enhances sustainable practices in nature reserves. Incorporating digital marketing and sustainability play a critical role in promoting nature reserves to attract more potential travellers that are more sustainable (Booking.com, 2025). Similarly, Mai and Chen (2025) maintain that travellers seek insight into the destination's practices before booking a holiday. Based on the above authors, digital marketing has a crucial impact in attracting the correct travellers to nature reserves that are interested in sustainable practices. Digital marketing platforms such as, social media and digital marketing channels, develop a strong relationship between nature reserves and travellers through ease channels to communicate directly, creating sense of trust and satisfactory to consumer demands (Mpotaringa & Tichaawa, 2022; Suresh & Shanthi, 2025). Furthermore, Hlatshwayo and Thwala (2025) and Suresh and Shanthi (2025) affirm that digital marketing increases the parameters that were only achieved by traditional marketing, enhances profit generation with limited marketing expenses, and satisfies travellers' expectations about the nature reserve.

2.5.1. Social Media Marketing in Nature Reserve

Social media is becoming a key platform for reaching a large audience (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025). Social media marketing is commonly defined as strategies for digital advertising on social media platforms to promote a brand to potential consumers and to share information across the globe (Loitongbam, Sorokhaibam & Singh, 2023). Social media marketing breaks the boundaries that previously limited a product promotion to a certain parameter without getting enough exposure to the global level (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025; Naskar, Digar, Ghosh & Kundu, 2025). Due to its user friendliness, social media makes it easy for consumers and sellers to interact directly, building trust in the product through availing all possible information (Naskar et al., 2025; Silambarasan, Selvadurgadevi & Jayanthan, 2024). Sustainability logo and small sustainable messages in nature reserve's marketing process create a healthy relationship with sustainable supporters/travellers to trust that the destination will satisfy their expectations (Booking.com, 2025).

Social media is not only beneficial in terms of marketing but also in attracting sponsors from business to business, creating partnerships to sell travel packages that involve accommodation, game drives, and so forth (Venugopal, 2023). Some reputable brands also have partnerships with social media influencers to build trust in their products. Social media influencers are individuals with substantial followers on their social media accounts and are considered public figures (Saria, Firdausb, & Irfansyahc, 2024; Venugopal, 2023). Thus, due to social media influencers' relevance, it makes it easy for nature reserves to showcase their sustainability practices and offerings, such as game drives, bird watching, as a form of pursuing potential travellers. Influencers make it easy for brands to be trusted, because they have the impression that public figures cannot associate themselves with illegitimate brands (Venugopal, 2023).

Nature reserves partner with influencers to create content within the premises of the reserve showcasing all the facilities and sustainability practices that are found in the reserve will create desire to potential travellers to visit the nature reserve (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025; Saria et al., 2024). Partnership with influencers to market the product, bridge the gap of trust and confidence between potential buyers and sellers that was not easy to fill before digital marketing. Thus, nature reserves would be able to position

themselves in the minds of the potential travellers to be their next stop of destination to visit so as to experience what was promoted by the influencers on behalf of reserves.

Social media platforms pave a crucial path in empowering small and medium enterprises to compete amongst established organisations. Nature reserves can tailor their product offering based on what the target market seeks to suit their expectations. This comes after allowing travellers to share their experience within the reserve and areas to improve on through direct interaction on social media pages of the reserves (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025; Silambarasan et al., 2024). Meanwhile, social media is the fastest way of spreading information across the globe, making it more efficient to communicate in the event of unforeseen occurrences that can put the lives of the travellers in danger.

Social media not only contribute on marketing but also maintains a robust image of the brand in the minds of travellers to keep the brand well-known through constant advertisement and attract new travellers to the nature reserves (Venugopal, 2023; Silambarasan, 2024). Additionally, Social media marketing is affordable and digitalises everything, making it an ideal marketing strategy for nature reserves due to its environmental friendliness without printing out brochures that harm the environment, leading to climate change during the production of paper (Naskar et al., 2025; Venugopal, 2023). Thus, this makes social media marketing a very crucial platform for marketing sustainable destinations such as nature reserves that conserve the environment and its well-being.

2.5.2. Website Marketing

Websites are one of the key marketing and influential platforms that are being used by tourism organisations to promote the nature reserves and the brand image to the global market (Syachfitria & Qastharin, 2024). Website is seen as one of the best replacements of traditional marketing that relied more on word of mouth, brochures, and newspaper advertisements effectively (Saleh & Nugraha, 2024; Venugopal, 2023). Likewise, website marketing plays a vital role in enabling tourism organisations to build their digital portfolio, including all the critical information that must be available about the product offering (Chandel & Kamble, 2024). Although websites can be seen

as a game changer for marketing, there is a need for integration with other forms of marketing, such as, social media platforms, such as, Facebook and X (Twitter), as the most used applications across the globe (Chandel & Kamble, 2024; Saria et al., 2024). Thus, highlight the crucial role that a website can play in enhancing the brand image in the public and also provide relevant information about the product offering.

A well-developed website with clear information and pictures can catch attention, attract potential travellers, and influence them to make a purchase. Nugraha and Sarinah (2024) proclaim that keeping the website so simple to read and having a clear understanding of the product promoted can positively impact the sales of the product. Thus, at some point, over-summarising the context of the post on a website may lead to omitting important information. Furthermore, Saleh and Nugraha (2024) asserts that website is very useful in selling personalised products, package sales and build collaborations amongst various tourism organisations such as, accommodations, tourist attractions through tour operators.

The adoption of digital marketing such as website expands target market to the global sphere while enhancing the level of work efficiency (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025; Syachfitria & Qastharin, 2024). However, Korongo, Ikoha and Nambiro (2024) indicate that even though website improves marketing and efficiency in a tourism organisation, but it is very expensive to develop a proper functioning website especially for the newly established tourism destinations and businesses with no or less function muscles to compete with well-established tourism destinations.

To keep up with the technological advancements' tourism organisation must train staff to remain knowledgeable of any developments. Inadequate knowledge about the new digital marketing platforms can cause threat to the brand image and lack exposure to global market (Matahati & Qastharin, 2024). Constant update on the website about the product offering makes potential travellers to develop trust about the product leading to more sales and thus remain relevant and competitive (Ferdinand & Permana, 2024). Furthermore, Nugraha and Sarinah (2024) mention that website can also be used to engage potential travellers directly with the tourism organisation management. Thus, a website can cover all the critical aspects of the product offering, such as frequently asked questions (FAQs), which are meant to assist potential travellers who encounter

any challenges in purchasing the product online (Nugraha & Sarinah, 2024; Saleh & Nugraha, 2024). Moreover, the website makes it easier for potential travellers to identify important information communicated through the website as valid and reliable, because other digital marketing platforms can be hacked and used for scamming people in the name of the organisation.

2.6. VISITOR BEHAVIOUR AND DESTINATION PERCEPTION

2.6.1 Tourist Decision-Making Process

Digital marketing plays a paramount role in positioning the destination in the minds of potential travellers. Destination branding is one of the crucial factors that tourists consider when deciding on a destination to visit (Randrianirina, Yuliana, Fatimah, & Hermansyah, 2025). The quality experience that tourists receive in a destination significantly contributes to its distinction (Sharma, Buranadechachai, & Doungsri, 2024). Based on the previous research, it is evident that destination branding encompasses almost everything that happens within the destination and can influence travellers to visit or not visit the destination (Sharma et al., 2024).

A good destination reputation also contributes to the curiosity of tourists to visit the destination, through referrals or recommendations (word of mouth), stimulating the desire to visit the destination to experience it first-hand. The successful development of destination branding increases the likelihood of destination marketing, effectively enhancing its ability to attract more tourists (Chao, 2024). However, a negative destination image demotivates tourists from visiting the destination, as no one would want to be associated with a bad image, resulting in lost customers and profits. Muhammad, Hidayanti, Haji, and Sabuhari (2025) maintain that the relationship tourists create with the destinations they visit also plays a key role in their decision to revisit.

2.6.2 Factors Influencing Visitor Perception

The tourism sector is a fast-growing industry that compels tourism stakeholders to adopt technological innovations in their marketing strategies to reach a large potential audience and remain competitive (Mai & Chen, 2025). According to Pan and Sutunyarak (2025), marketing plays a key role in influencing visitors to travel, particularly through word-of-mouth and social media platforms, which shape

consumers' decisions on travelling. Muhammad et al. (2025) stated that the experience tourists receive acts as a mediator, encouraging them to revisit the destination. Based on the study by Randrianirina et al. (2025), there are two core factors that influence tourists to visit a destination, including internal factors, which speak about the novelty and relaxation of the destination, and external factors, which include the physical appearance of the destination, services and amenities, accessibility, just to mention a few. Meanwhile, Muhammad et al. (2025) asserted that tourist satisfaction is also a determining factor for re-visitation and the success of the nature reserve destinations. Therefore, the marketing of the destination plays an important role in positioning it in the minds of potential tourists.

2.6.3 Visitor Satisfaction and Experience

Muhammad et al. (2025) maintain that tourists' experience has a significant and imperative role in tourist satisfaction. Nature reserves can tailor their product offering based on what the target market seeks, to suit their expectations. This initiative follows the introduction of a platform that allows travellers to share their experiences within the reserve and identify areas for improvement through direct interaction on the reserve's social media pages (Silambarasan et al., 2024). The study by Muhammad et al. (2025) reveals that positive tourist experiences are associated with increased tourist satisfaction, which in turn influences future decision-making intentions to revisit the destination. Similarly, visitors' experiences influence the level of satisfaction with a destination's product offerings or vice versa. Tourists' satisfaction reflects whether their demands are met by the destination, based on its facilities, services, and emotional experience, which later stimulates the need to revisit the same destination (Randrianirina et al., 2025).

2.7 DESTINATION MARKETING AND BRANDING

Destination branding is a critical aspect of enhancing competitiveness amongst tourist destinations. Destination branding is defined as a method of building or managing a unique identity of a destination that would be easily remembered by customers with its unique characteristics from other destinations (Ezzatian, Toghraee & Farsani, 2025). In 2009, Stephens Balakrishnan developed a five-staged framework that makes it easier to create an effective brand: (1) vision, (2) stakeholder management, (3) customer alignment, (4) positioning, and lastly (5) communication process and

response management (Ezzatian et al., 2025). This framework enables the tracking of brand consistency both internally and externally by auditing its effectiveness in relation to the target market. Destination branding shapes a specific customer's perception of a location, leading them to prefer that destination over others (Za & Tricahyadinata, 2025). Additionally, the above authors maintained that destination branding is more than just designing a logo and slogan for a destination; it rather involves marketing strategies, culture, attributes, and values. Figure 3 illustrates the Five-Staged Framework for Branding.

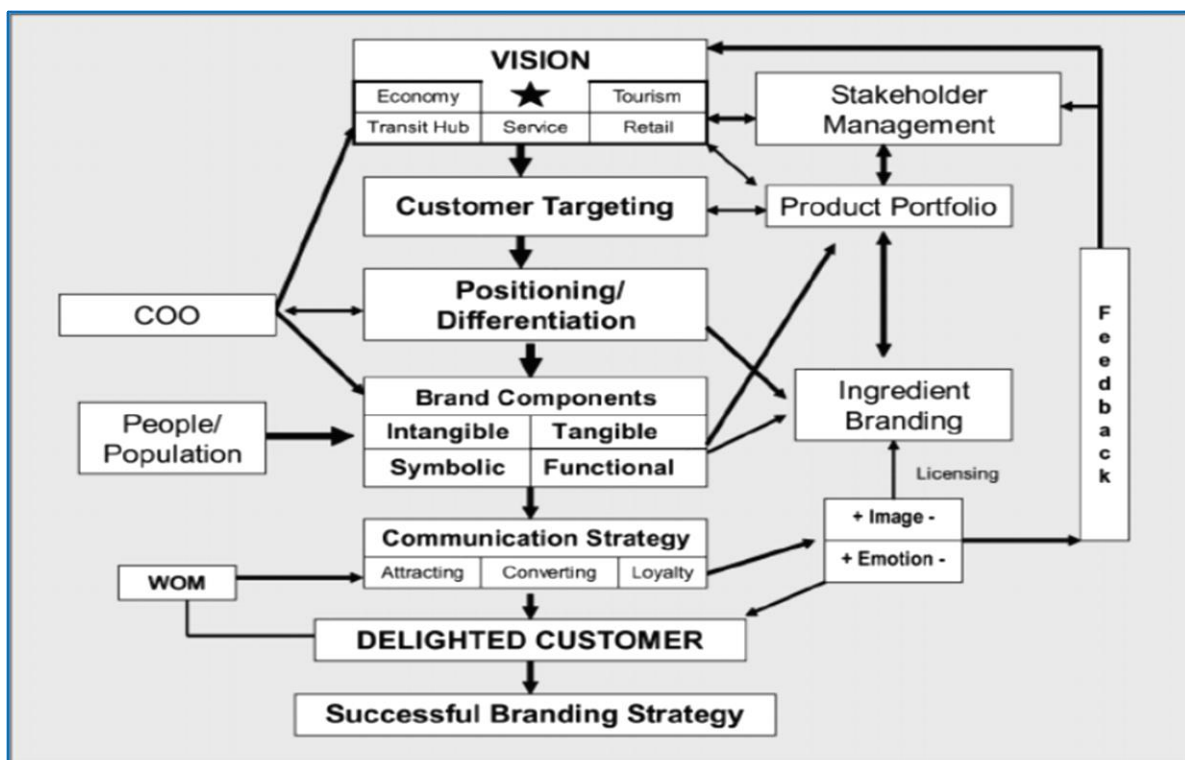


Figure 3: Five-Staged Framework for Branding

Source: Balakrishnan (2009).

Stage 1: Vision

Having well-planned and clear long-term goals makes it easier to achieve destination branding through quality tourism practices, business establishment, and societal welfare (Balakrishnan, 2009). Vision serves as a mother board or a drawing board where everything begins and can result in better performance, meeting the customer's expectations.

Stage 2: Stakeholder Management

Vision goes a long way in understanding the brand that is being developed, the type of stakeholders to associate with, and the ways in which to deal with the differences in desires and needs (Balakrishnan, 2009; Ezzatian et al., 2025). It is essential to be aware of the types of stakeholders the brand associates with and the strategies to address conflicting goals for each stakeholder, as unfair or unbalanced stakeholder involvement can negatively impact the brand's image.

Stage 3: Customer Targeting and Alignment

Understanding the target market in place plays a crucial role in developing a personalised tourism offering that perfectly meets the demands and expectations of consumers (Za & Tricahyadinata, 2025). Furthermore, this enhances the image of the brand by always meeting the demands of the customers by understanding their market and matching their psychographic profile.

Stage 4: Positioning/Differentiation

A good brand identity relies on the ability to differentiate from competitors offering the same products while still standing out to customers (Ezzatian et al., 2025). A well-positioned brand helps customers in the decision-making process by basing their experience on both tangible and intangible attributes of that particular destination, which can lead them to consistently prefer that destination over others (Balakrishnan, 2009).

Stage 5: Communication Strategy and Response Management

Traditional methods of communication and information distribution, such as newspapers, brochures, and radio advertisements, have proven to be costly and less effective than they were in the 1980s (Tran & Rudolf, 2022). Digital marketing platforms bridge the gap between environmentally friendly practices and affordable marketing that reaches a global audience in a short period, making it effective for attracting more customers (Hlatshwayo & Thwala, 2025; Tran & Rudolf, 2022; Venugopal, 2023). Digital marketing eliminates the third party or middlemen between a destination and its customers by enabling direct interaction in a minimal amount of time, making it possible for potential customers to inquire about product offerings and receive responses more quickly (Nugraha & Sarinah, 2024; Saleh & Nugraha, 2024).

Therefore, this enables customers to build trust in the product, which contributes to the enhancement of the brand image.

Nature reserves make sustainable practices revived as nature-based tourism destinations. Destination branding is one of the crucial aspects that influence visiting decisions to a specific nature reserve (Za & Tricahyadinata, 2025). Nature reserves have their own unique qualities that differentiate them from one another. In Mpumalanga Province, Kruger National Park is known for its big five and is one of the largest wildlife reserves in South Africa (MTPA, 2025), while Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve is classified by its Bourke's Luck Potholes, God's Window, and the Three Rondavels, which are found within the reserve, making it different from other nature reserves. Destination branding simplifies the lives of potential travellers by ensuring that they travel to a destination that aligns with their demands (Chao, 2024). This makes it easier for destinations to be differentiated and be competitive with their different characteristics.

Destination branding also enables a destination to market its products. The development of destination branding involves determining the target audience and understanding their preferences (Chao, 2024). This makes it easier for destinations to live up to the standard expectations of the customers by focusing on a specific product offering. The successful development of destination branding increases the likelihood of destination marketing success (Chao, 2024; Riaz, Aslam & Hussain, 2024). This highlights the importance of branding a destination to maintain competitiveness in the tourism industry. The quality experience that tourists receive in the destination contributes a lot to the distinction of the destination (Sharma et al, 2024). It can therefore be presumed that destination branding encompasses almost everything happening within the destination and can influence travellers to visit or not to visit.

Incorporating sustainability in the marketing strategies of nature reserves can influence potential travellers to visit the nature reserve. It is therefore imperative for nature reserves to have sustainability certificates and include them in their marketing strategies to attract more sustainable travellers while maintaining the competitiveness of the reserve against its competitors (Booking.com, 2025), as the tourism industry is heavily dependent on destination branding for long-term success in attracting tourists

and economic growth (Sharma et al., 2024). Booking.com (2025) further asserted that including a sustainability logo in the marketing strategies of nature reserves inspires tourists to adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives, and over 71% of the tourists want to leave the place in a good state than what they arrived to. Furthermore, the above-mentioned online booking platform upholds that little sustainable practice that each tourist does can contribute to a big difference in society, such as empowering messages to reduce resource usage like water and enhance public transportation over private transport.

2.8 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND THE SDGS

2.8.1 Introduction to Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable Tourism development is defined as, the process of meeting the demands of the current generation without jeopardising the capacity of future generations to meet their own demands (Ozili, 2025). The integration of development and environment (sustainable development) has drawn considerable interest in how to balance development with sustainability. Elisha, Nzali, and Philipo (2023) uphold that limited community involvement in tourism development can result in poor sustainability of the nature reserves, because private stakeholders only focus on profit generation. This perspective is supported by various studies that local communities represent the interest of the community in ensuring that culture and the environments are well preserved for the upcoming generation, as they hold a sacred identity of who they are (Elisha et al., 2023; Trisic, Privitera, Štetić, Petrović, Maksin, Jovanović & Lukić, 2022). Moreover, cultural values play an important role in protecting the environment and in the responsible use of resources by local communities, while nature reserves pose a threat as tourism destinations that attract more travellers for excursions (Elisha et al., 2023; Mammadova, May, Tomita & Harada, 2025). Thus, it is critical to establish a responsible committee that will balance the interests of all relevant stakeholders in the nature reserve to develop strategies that ensure a balance between cultural and natural heritage and profit generation.

Nature reserves are crucial for preserving ecosystem stability, biodiversity, and ecological balance, as well as fostering an eco-friendly environment (Rao, Ouyang, Pan, Huang, Li & Ye, 2024). According to Silva, Benini, and Godoy (2024), adopting the TBL helps maintain a healthy ecosystem that is linked to sustainability aspects,

including social and economic considerations. However, environmental degradation compromises the feasibility of both economic development and sustainable social development. Climate change poses an even greater threat to regional development because it affects economic stability, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion (Kalogiannidis, Kalfas, Papaevaggelou, Chatzitheodoridis, Katsetsiadou & Lekkas, 2024). This is in line with the notion that there is a crucial need for sustainable development to ensure that minimal effects that can lead to climate change happen, causing a fear for life for the potential tourists (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). Kalogiannidis et al. (2024) uphold that forming effective climate change strategies requires strong collaboration among different tourism-related stakeholders, involving host communities, government, civil society, and the private sector. Thus, adopting a holistic approach that enables equal participation by different stakeholders creates a sense of ownership and support for the implementation of the strategies.

The economic dimension of TBL in nature reserves highlights the importance of developing models that are financially feasible and contribute to community development, reducing poverty without jeopardising natural resources or the rights of host communities (Silva et al., 2024). Consequently, TBL promotes the inclusive development of nature reserves, involving host communities in the management decision-making procedure to minimise conflict among relevant stakeholders.

Tourism has the capacity to ensure that SDGs are attained, provided its contribution of resources to the host communities, and ensuring that the needs of the upcoming generations are not jeopardised (Raihan, 2024). Host communities are important stakeholders in TBL and must be considered in every aspect of nature reserve development, improving the standard of living by creating employment opportunities, promoting social justice, and respecting native cultures (Silva et al., 2024). This aligns with the notion that before nature reserves implement any form of development, they must consult with the host communities to ensure inclusive development and foster a sense of belonging (Sun, Zhou, Ali, & Khan, 2024). However, Mammadova et al. (2025) assert that utilising local community cultural events and storytelling to convey sustainability messages can be effective in educating the host community about the importance of sustainable behavior, thereby fostering interest and a sense of belonging. It is therefore paramount to keep cultural heritage revived to market its pride

and generate profit in educating travellers about it. A study by Sun et al. (2024) affirms that nature reserves play an important role in ensuring cultural preservation in local communities by adopting or collaborating with the local communities to use their culture as one of the marketing strategies to attract more tourists to the nature reserve. In addition, Soeswoyo, Arafah, Oktadiana, and Budiman (2025) suggest that culture can be seen as an attraction and entertainment to tourists, while at the same time, it raises awareness or educates visitors about the local culture. Hence, it is important to keep cultural authenticity and to remain sacred to the host communities. Moreover, Soeswoyo et al. (2025) maintain that culture defines the uniqueness of a destination, enhances visitors' attraction to it, and promotes sustainable tourism practices.

2.8.2 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Tourism

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) refer to a strategic plan and form a global framework adopted after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address urgent environmental, economic, and social challenges while promoting inclusivity, improved living standards, and poverty reduction (Dheere, 2025). Nature reserves contribute significantly to these goals by fostering environmental conservation among both local communities and tourists. Local residents, who engage closely with natural environments and visitors, help reinforce conservation practices that support long-term sustainable economic growth (Stojanovic, Milic, Obradovic, Vanovac & Radisic, 2021). Their environmentally responsible behaviour, influenced by social capital, underpins community-based ecotourism and responsible resource use, strengthening community development (Davie, Ogbeide & Shafieizadeh, 2024). Likewise, community participation in tourism encourages the adoption of sustainable local practices (Mabibibi et al., 2021).

Tourism-driven economic benefits such as employment creation and infrastructure development, further motivate host communities to support tourism initiatives, improving overall living standards (Nnajiето & Nnajiето, 2025; Venugopal, 2023). Nature reserves also promote cultural preservation and environmental conservation, aligning with SDG 11. Strong cultural heritage protection enhances economic stability, while international tourist arrivals generate substantial revenue that uplifts local economies (Sinaga et al., 2025). This revenue, in turn, supports job creation, improved infrastructure, and a higher quality of life (Kazzara, 2024). However, tourism can also

introduce challenges such as overcrowding, cultural commodification, and environmental degradation (Sinaga et al., 2025; Masengu, Chawuruka, & Muchenje, 2025). Addressing these issues requires strong community engagement and sustainable development approaches (Sinaga et al., 2025), underscoring the importance of nature reserves in balancing tourism growth with responsible environmental stewardship. Globally, tourism plays a vital role within nature reserves, attracting over 8 billion visitors annually and generating approximately USD 600 billion in domestic expenditure (Chen, Ping, Pan, Ye & Wang, 2024). These trends support the view that ecotourism can provide long-term sustainable economic development through job creation, improved infrastructure, and enhanced livelihoods (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). Ecotourism also makes positive contributions to the environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Chen et al., 2024). However, if poorly managed, it may result in negative outcomes such as mass tourism pressures and habitat destruction (Akbar, 2024). Overall, the literature demonstrates that ecotourism's effects depend heavily on effective management and sustainable development practices within protected areas.

2.8.3 SDG 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15 in the Context of Nature Reserves

Tourism has the potential to support all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indirectly, as it is a major global sector that generates income, creates employment, and contributes to poverty reduction, improved livelihoods, and environmental protection (Raihan, 2024). Sustainable behaviour within tourism settings is shaped by social norms, cultural values, and individual attitudes, all of which significantly influence how consumers engage with sustainability and environmental preservation (Masengu et al., 2025). Social sustainability addresses key human-focused concerns such as equity, democracy, education, and social capital (Dahlstrom, 2025). The author further highlights nine SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 16 that are directly related to this dimension. Understanding these goals enables nature reserves to better align their contributions with the needs of host communities.

Nature reserves support a wide range of sustainability functions, including environmental conservation, biodiversity protection, cultural heritage preservation, and ecotourism (Mabibibi et al., 2021). Ecotourism plays an important role in poverty alleviation (SDG 1) while maintaining natural and cultural resources (Nguyen &

Nguyen, 2022). This interconnectedness between people and the environment is further emphasised by Tang, Wu, Ye, Lv, Sun, and Huang (2022). Ecotourism and responsible tourism encourage the sustainable use of natural resources and promote conservation-based learning opportunities for visitors (Sihombing et al., 2024). Similarly, Jaini, Anuar, and Daim (2012) argue that ecotourism supports conservation while delivering social and economic advantages to host communities. When properly implemented, ecotourism minimises negative destination impacts and fosters community benefits such as, economic empowerment, infrastructure development, and improved livelihoods.

Ecotourism also contributes significantly to economic growth within nature reserves. Akbar (2024) notes that it enhances local livelihoods through job creation (SDG 8), including roles such as, tour guiding and wildlife protection. However, concerns from local communities often centre on preserving both cultural heritage and natural resources (Tang et al., 2022). These authors caution that governments must carefully balance economic gains with cultural and environmental protection. Akbar (2024) emphasises that local communities should participate in decision-making and receive a fair share of tourism benefits, highlighting how well-managed nature reserves can strongly advance SDG 8.

A nature reserve is defined as a protected area that safeguards important species, landscapes, and ecosystems from harm or extinction (Lopes & Hiray, 2024). Such reserves improve the living standards of host communities by providing jobs and infrastructure that promote self-reliance rather than dependency on government support (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2022). By conserving rare species and maintaining ecological integrity, nature reserves secure long-term environmental benefits aligned with SDG 11, while ensuring that biodiversity remains accessible to future generations (Tang et al., 2022). Their contributions, both direct and indirect, play an essential role in uplifting communities and promoting sustainable living.

Human interactions with nature inevitably affect ecosystem functioning, making nature reserves central to environmental sustainability. These protected areas help regulate the balance between human needs and ecosystem capacity, allowing communities to benefit from natural resources without causing irreversible damage (Sen, 2020). In

doing so, nature reserves support climate action and resource conservation (SDG 13) while contributing to local GDP through tourism-related employment and infrastructure improvements (Sun et al., 2024). Increasing environmental awareness is therefore crucial for addressing climate change and its impacts on both ecosystems and economies. Environmental education also plays an important role in promoting sustainable development. Dahlstrom (2025) reports that education for Sustainable Development Goals seeks to instil sustainability principles from an early age, fostering responsible citizenship and environmental awareness. Empowering local communities with knowledge about environmental protection promotes responsible behaviour and reduces harmful practices such as illegal dumping (Grangxabe, Maphanga & Chidi, 2024). Freund, Achmad, Kanisius, Naruri, Tang, and Knott (2019) similarly emphasise that environmental education bridges the knowledge gap regarding nature reserve conservation, helping to prevent species loss and ensuring ongoing community benefits through job creation and sustainable economic activity.

2.9. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The above chapter highlighted the literature gaps that this study seeks to address. It unpacks the main concepts of the study, including theoretical frameworks, conceptual frameworks, and marketing efforts, as well as, the contributions that nature reserves make to the host communities, among others. The primary purpose of this chapter was to address the research questions and break down the objectives into practical, real-life projects.

CHAPTER 3:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

Research Methodology is a scientific framework that guides how a study should be conducted, and the theoretical or scientific analysis of the process used in a field of study (Shiva, 2025). Similarly, research methodology is a fundamental component of scientific investigation that provides organised methods for examining matters, confirming hypotheses, and expanding knowledge in various fields (Gamage, 2025). The methodology encompasses a range of models and approaches, including systematic or theoretical frameworks that can be employed to ensure the research findings are well-organised, consistent, dependable, and valid for subsequent or future studies (Bahishti, 2023). Methodology plays a crucial role in understanding other sciences systematically by diagnosing their current state and guiding their future direction (Slater & Hasson, 2024). Furthermore, the methodology guides the study step by step to ensure that the findings are valid and reliable, allowing future researchers to build upon them in emerging studies. This chapter focuses on the research paradigm, Research design and approach, study demarcation, target population, sampling methods, sample size, data collection instruments, pilot study, data analysis, ethical considerations, informed consent, and quality criteria.

3.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM

Research philosophy or paradigm refers to a set of beliefs, attitudes, presumptions, and expectations from researchers in related or similar fields share (Mohammed, 2023). Ontology, epistemology, and axiology are among the key ideas, values, and presumptions that comprise a research paradigm (Kamal, 2019). Mastering research paradigms enables researchers to identify and mitigate personal biases, while also ensuring that the most suitable strategy is chosen (Chafe, 2024). There are different paradigms, such as positivism, transformationalism, interpretivism, and pragmatism, to name a few (Zaman et al., 2024).

This study adopted the pragmatism paradigm. Migiro and Magangi (2011) and Chafe (2024) maintain that the pragmatism paradigm is one of the most suitable paradigms

that complement both quantitative and qualitative research designs without comparing the two research designs. The pragmatism paradigm seeks to understand or analyse practical individual experience in real-life activities in a societal sphere (Lyubiviy & Samchuk, 2024). In terms of methodology, pragmatism is one of the compatible paradigms for a mixed-methods approach (Mabibibi et al., 2021). Some of the characteristics of pragmatism are that information is perceived in both constructed and reality-based terms, and it also recognises the historical and emergent social and psychological aspects of society (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Pragmatism enables the researcher to refer back to the data from both quantitative and qualitative to find the common connections between the two data sets (Mabibibi et al., 2021). Therefore, the pragmatism paradigm was adopted for this study due to its capacity to correspond to the research questions and objectives.

3.3 MIXED-METHOD RESEARCH APPROACH

A research approach refers to the overall plan or logic that shapes data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It explains how the researcher will move from data to conclusions. According to Maree (2012a), a mixed-methods approach involves the collection, analysis, and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data at different stages of the research process. This approach, often referred to as a multi-method mode of inquiry, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Maree, 2012b). George (2019:149) noted that mixed-method research, also known as triangulation, entails combining multiple research methods to investigate a single phenomenon. Although this approach is more complex and resource-intensive, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques allows the methods to complement one another, thereby offering deeper insights into the research problem.

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods. In this design, the researcher collects qualitative (exploratory) and quantitative (analytical) data simultaneously, allowing the two datasets to complement one another (Gamage, 2025). The quantitative results help support and enhance the qualitative insights, enabling a more comprehensive and clearer understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Adeniran & Tayo-Ladega, 2024). Aligned with the principles guiding both research approaches, this

study employed a qualitative approach to conduct interviews with officials from the MTPA and the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. This allowed the researcher to gain deeper insight into the Reserve’s marketing efforts and its contributions to the specific SDGs outlined earlier. In addition, a quantitative approach was employed to gather data from tourists regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of the Reserve’s marketing strategies (Mabibibi et al., 2021). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected simultaneously and analysed separately. The purpose of this approach is to merge the findings from both strands to develop a more complete, credible, and valid understanding of the research problem (Maree, 2016:318) (see Figure 4).

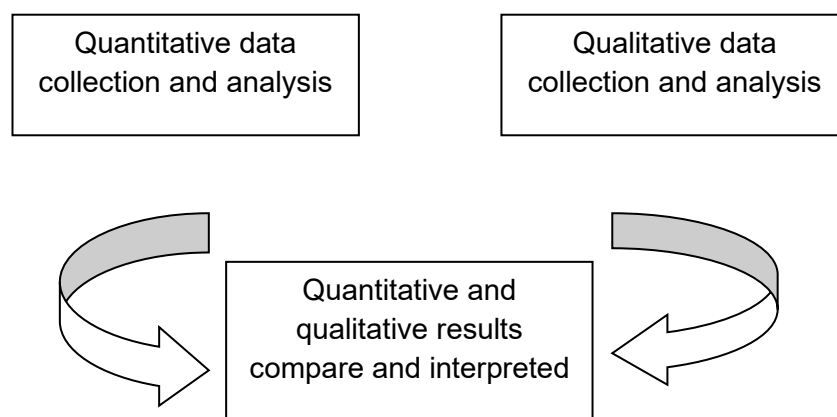


Figure 4: Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods Design

Source: Thwala (2022:140)

Caruth (2013:113) presented the following advantages of mixed-methods research, as shown in Table 1. It was decided that, for the main advantage of completeness, this study will apply a mixed-methods research approach.

Table 1: Advantages of mixed-methods research

<i>Complementarity</i>	By employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the researcher was able to capture multiple perspectives, thereby enriching the information obtained from each side.
------------------------	---

<i>Completeness</i>	To ensure that every event or relationship is well represented.
<i>Developmental</i>	This process involves generating questions from one method based on the implications of a primary approach or using one technique to propose hypotheses that can be examined through a subsequent method.
<i>Expansion</i>	This process involves elaborating on or clarifying knowledge gained from a previous method.
<i>Corroboration/Confirmation</i>	This process is used to evaluate the credibility of findings from a single method. In this study, quantitative data analysis results were used to validate and reinforce conclusions drawn from the qualitative approach.
<i>Compensation</i>	This approach involves using one method to offset the limitations of another. By combining qualitative and quantitative techniques, the researcher effectively addressed the inherent weaknesses of each method.
<i>Diversity</i>	This process involves gathering differing viewpoints on the same experiences or relationships. In the mixed-methods study, the researcher obtained diverse insights through the various data collection techniques employed.

Source: Thwala (2022:140)

3.4. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is defined as, the elements and procedures that are used for planning and creating systematic maps and patterns to be followed when conducting research (Slater & Hasson, 2024). Similarly, Ayanwale (2024) maintains that a study design is categorised as a potential set of rules or a process that can be applied to gather and analyse data related to the study problem. There are various types of research designs, including experimental design, descriptive design, case study design, correlational design, longitudinal design, and cross-sectional design, among others. This study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analysed independently, and integrated during the interpretation stage. A descriptive research design was applied to the quantitative component to describe tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, marketing awareness, sustainability perceptions, and satisfaction levels. Simultaneously, qualitative data were collected through interviews to provide complementary insights into these variables. Both qualitative and quantitative data

were collected during overlapping periods, analysed independently, and integrated during the interpretation stage to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

3.5. STUDY AREA

The study was conducted at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve in Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, which is managed by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). The study area was chosen on a convenience basis, in terms of physical accessibility for the researcher and availability of data. BRCNR is an MTPA-based nature reserve that covers up to 29,000 hectares, stretching near Kruger National Park (KNP) from the misty highlands to the hotter and drier Lowveld (Blyde Dam) (MTPA, 2025). The Blyde River Canyon Reserve is situated along the greater Drakensberg Mountain in the escarpment area of the Mpumalanga Province. Included in the Blyde River Canyon Reserve are natural wonders such as the Bourke's Luck Potholes, the Three Rondavels, the Pinnacle Rock, and God's Window (MTPA, 2025). All these natural wonders enable the BRCNR to offer tourists the best natural wonders experiences.

BRCNR grassland comprises approximately 1,000 plant species that are not found anywhere in the world except within the reserve, including endangered species (MTPA, 2025). Most travellers to BRCNR enjoy the experience of merging the Panorama Route together with a game drive at the KNP, which offers a great variety of adventure activities, including abseiling, quieter pursuits, and white-water rafting (MTPA, 2025). The source's report furthermore states that the Blyde River Canyon was formed "when Gondwanaland was split by these earth-shaping forces, left behind layer upon layer of dolomite and sandstone laid down as sediments over millions of years." Thus, this demonstrates the canyon's rich history, which can attract more travellers to visit the reserve.

3.6. TARGET POPULATION

Mitang and Kiha (2023) and Willie (2024) both define a population as a large group of people or objects with similar features within a specific context that a researcher is interested in studying. Thus, the population is defined as everything that can be examined within the study area. In contrast, the target population comprises a

specified subgroup within the wider population, defined by an established criteria that correspond with the research objectives (Willie, 2022; Willie, 2024). Consequently, poor clarity of the population and target populations can lead to biased sampling, with one group of the population being overrepresented or underrepresented, thereby limiting the generalisability of the research findings. The target population for the quantitative approach was the tourists who visited the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve during the months of September and October 2025. On the other hand, the target population for the qualitative research approach consisted of BRCNR/MTPA management officials, including managers, supervisors, administrators, marketing managers, and marketing personnel.

3.7. SAMPLING METHODS

Sampling method is defined as the scientific process or method of selecting a group of individuals or objects with which to conduct a study and estimate the characteristics of the entire population (Hossan & Al-hasnawi, 2023). Sampling methods are generally divided into two categories: probability and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling ensures that each individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected, thereby minimising selection bias (Mukti, 2025). This category includes techniques such as simple random, systematic, stratified, and cluster sampling. In contrast, non-probability sampling does not provide equal selection opportunities, often involving bias and subjective judgment (Mukti, 2025). Methods under this approach include convenience, purposive, quota, and snowball sampling, among others.

This study employed a non-probability sampling method to enable the researcher to target a specific population for data collection, while considering factors such as accessibility, budget, and time frame, as well as the vulnerable participants who play an influential role in selecting the sampling method. Therefore, this study employs two sampling methods: purposive sampling and convenience sampling.

Purposive sampling is most used in qualitative studies. Memon et al. (2024) defined purposive sampling as a process of intentionally targeting certain individual/s who are well-informed about a particular phenomenon of interest. Similarly, Ting et al. (2025) note that purposive sampling is valued in various fields due to its clarity in selecting

respondents, ensuring that participants are selected based on their ability to provide rich and relevant information. Furthermore, the concern with using purposive sampling is that it can lead to biased selection, which can be beneficial by providing the researcher with the required data or limiting the researcher's ability to obtain the required information due to the exclusion of pertinent individuals from the study (Ting et al., 2025). However, this sampling enables the researcher to focus on specific individuals with certain characteristics, which can better assist in gathering the required information (Memon et al., 2024). As mentioned above, the inclusion criteria for respondents are that they must be marketing and conservation officials from the MTPA and the BRCNR.

Convenience sampling was adopted for the quantitative approach. Convenience sampling is defined as, the process of data collection based on the accessibility of the research target population (Memon et al., 2024; Golzar et al., 2022). Moreover, Golzar et al. (2022) note that convenience sampling is disadvantageous when the researcher cannot easily reach or access the population, which can lead to biases and systematic errors. In addition, Memon et al. (2024) note that convenience sampling is more cost-effective because the researcher works with what is available and accessible at the time. Therefore, the survey questionnaires were developed and designed for tourists visiting BRCNR (respondents) to share their insights on the marketing and nature conservation efforts of the nature reserve.

Convenience sampling was applied by approaching tourists who were readily available and willing to participate in the research, within the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. The selection of participants was conducted in several strategic points within the reserve to ensure diversity of responses while maintaining practicality. Specifically, tourists were approached at:

- 1. Designated rest areas and viewpoints** – where tourists were more likely to pause and therefore have time to respond to the questionnaire without disrupting their experience.
- 2. During organised tours and activities** – with prior permission from the tour guides, tourists were invited to participate either before or after the activity.
- 3. Entrance and exit points of the reserve** – where visitors often wait for processing, allowing the researcher to conveniently distribute and collect responses.

4. Accommodation facilities within the nature reserve – guests staying overnight were approached in communal areas (for instance, reception or dining areas), where they may be more relaxed and willing to engage. The researcher did not go to their rooms to avoid invasion of privacy.

The usage of convenience sampling was preferred because it allows for efficient access to tourists who were present within the reserve during the data collection period, ensuring practicality given time and resource limitations. While the method does not aim for full representativeness, its application across multiple settings within the reserve (rest points, tours, entry/exit areas, and accommodation sites) enhanced the likelihood of capturing a comprehensive variety of tourist perspectives.

3.8. SAMPLE SIZE

A sample is defined as, a part or a certain portion of the entire population of interest to be studied (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Divakara, 2021). Thus, the population sample is taken from the main population and narrowed down into focus groups, as examining the entire population can require more time and resources. However, in order to have a sample population for a particular study, a sampling method must be implemented.

3.8.1. Quantitative Sample Size

The number of individuals or objects that form part of the observations examined by the study is referred to as, the sample size (Tiwari & Tripathi, 2024). Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve expects more than 500,000 tourists visiting the reserve per year (MTPA, 2025). The sampling procedure followed the guidelines of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for general research, which recommends a sample size of 384 for a population of 1,000,000. Accordingly, 390 questionnaires were administered, ensuring that the sample was representative of the population (Hossan & Al-Hanami, 2023), as recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), who stated that for any population size above 75,000, a sample size of 384 is suitable. Therefore, for this study, a population of 500,000 was used or identified, which is the recommended sample size at 95% confidence and a 5% margin of error, yielding approximately 384 respondents.

3.8.2. Qualitative Sample Size

The sample size for the qualitative phase. Moser and Korstjens (2018) recommend that ethnographic studies should have a minimum of 25-50 interviews, 10 interviews for phenomenological studies, and 20-30 interviews for grounded theory studies. In addition, Guest et al. (2020) maintain that data saturation can be reached in a qualitative study between 10 and 20 interviews. Therefore, the sample size for the qualitative approach of this study was decided to be 10 interviews with BRCNR management/MTPA officials. This decision followed the researcher's attainment of data saturation, at which point they chose to cease data collection at the 10th interview, as no new themes emerged, only the recurrence of existing themes.

3.9. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

Data collection is a very important aspect of research and decision-making in a variety of fields, such as the social sciences, healthcare, and technology (Blessing et al., 2024). Furthermore, Blessing et al. (2024) defined data collection as a methodical procedure for obtaining information from multiple sources to address specific research questions or guide decision-making. This study employed a Convergent parallel mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods within a single study. Adeniran and Tayo-Ladega (2024) maintain that a mixed-methods research design enables the researcher to obtain effective results by merging both qualitative (exploratory) and quantitative (analytical) research approaches. Techniques for gathering data are methods that researchers apply to obtain relevant information for their research (Blessing et al., 2024). The data were collected between September and October 2025. This was due to the spring season during these months, which served as a peak season for the nature reserves, receiving a high number of travellers from different geographical areas. The high number of travellers visiting the nature reserves during the spring season makes it more feasible to collect the relevant data due to the increased availability of tourists in the nature reserves.

3.9.1. Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative section employed a self-administered survey questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The self-administered survey is defined as, a data collection instrument that is distributed by the researcher either through online devices or manual distribution to respondents, who complete the questionnaire themselves under the researcher's supervision or independently at their own time (Adeniran &

Tayo-Ladega, 2024; Revel-Vilk et al., 2025). Self-administered surveys are mostly used to gather information from people who are knowledgeable about specific phenomena (Blessing et al., 2024). Typically, questionnaires consist of closed-ended question formats that require a direct response. Moreover, it is advantageous to use the questionnaire with closed-ended questions, especially during the analysis and interpretation stage. Therefore, the questionnaires were developed to capture all the critical aspects seeking to achieve the research objectives.

The survey questionnaires were manually distributed to the tourists visiting the BRCNR. The questionnaires were designed to capture the forms of marketing that influenced tourists' travel decisions to visit the BRCNR, the season of travel, as well as the programs adopted by the reserve to ensure long-term sustainability. The questionnaire consisted of four sections, and the literature sources were used in the development: **Section A: Demographic Profiles**- this section included questions on age, gender, race, education, and province/country of residence, which were adapted from standard socio-demographic items commonly used in tourism research (Creswell, 2014; Veal, 2017). These items ensured the collection of essential background information for descriptive analysis. **Section B: Marketing Awareness, Seasonality, and Tourism Activity**. Questions on how visitors learned about BRCNR, marketing effectiveness, motivations to visit, and preferred seasons were adapted and customised from previous tourism marketing studies (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Hudson & Ritchie, 2009). And lastly, **Sections C–F: Likert Scales** on the effectiveness of marketing strategies (Section C), sustainability marketing and conservation awareness (Section D), tourists' satisfaction and experience (Section E), and BRCNR's perceived contribution to SDGs (Section F) were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree). This reversed coding from the traditional Likert scale was intentional to align with the positive phrasing of the survey items. Statements were adapted and refined from validated scales in tourism marketing and sustainable tourism literature (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Font et al., 2016; Weaver, 2006). This ensured that items were contextually relevant to the nature reserve setting while maintaining construct validity.

A total of 500 surveys were distributed manually to tourists who visited the flagship scenic attractions of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR), namely: God's

Window, Bourke's Luck Potholes, and the Three Rondavels during the month of September. Only 390 surveys were fully completed and used for the data analysis of this study. Thus, the completion rate was 78% across all distributed surveys, which was higher than usual, considering that the surveys were self-administered. The sample size was notably accepted because it surpassed the proposed sample size of 384 for any population above 75,000 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The surveys were designed to uncover the motivations that led tourists to visit the BRCNR, the marketing efforts that influenced their decision to visit, and their preferred season for visiting. In addition, to uncover the level of environmental awareness that was raised through the marketing efforts and during their visit to the reserve, and the level of perception of BRCNR's contribution to the SDGs.

3.9.2. Qualitative Data Collection

The qualitative component of the study employed a semi-structured interview guide, a data collection method that allows participants to express their perspectives freely rather than being restricted to predetermined responses (Katulski, 2024). Semi-structured interviews primarily consist of open-ended questions, enabling interviewees to share in-depth insights, thoughts, and experiences. This approach was particularly suitable for engaging key informants, including management and officials from the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) and Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR), to gain a comprehensive understanding of marketing strategies and their contributions to specific Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15).

Following ethical clearance from the University of Mpumalanga, a formal request was sent to the relevant officials to participate in the study. Participants included marketing managers, environmental conservation officers, field rangers, supervisors, administrators, and senior management. Purposive sampling, including referrals to appropriate personnel, ensured that each participant could provide relevant data. Interviews were conducted in October 2025 at the BRCNR main offices and the MTPA head office, each lasting between 35 and 45 minutes. Permission to record responses was obtained at the beginning of each interview.

A total of 10 interviews were conducted (6 MTPA officials and 4 BRCNR management). All interviews were included in the analysis, as data saturation was observed, with no new themes emerging (Guest et al., 2020; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The interviews aimed to explore challenges and opportunities in marketing implementation, peak visitation periods, and targeted marketing efforts. The interview guide was developed specifically for this study, based on the research objectives, questions, and a review of relevant literature on tourism marketing, sustainable tourism, and conservation practices (Creswell, 2014; Veal, 2017; Weaver, 2006). It addressed six key areas: (1) Marketing personnel information capturing roles, responsibilities, qualifications, and work experience of marketing officials, (2) Marketing strategies and efforts understanding current marketing approaches, target markets, and evaluation of effectiveness, (3) Contribution to SDGs exploring alignment of marketing initiatives with community empowerment, economic growth, sustainable tourism, and conservation, (4) Conservation awareness assessing how marketing strategies enhance tourist awareness of environmental conservation and sustainability principles, (5) Tourism Seasons and Trends investigating peak visitor periods and marketing efforts targeting seasonal tourism, and lastly (7) Challenges and Opportunities identifying constraints and potential improvements for sustainable tourism marketing at BRCNR. The guide was not adapted from previous sources but was tailored to the BRCNR and MTPA context, ensuring all questions were relevant to the study's aim of evaluating marketing effectiveness, sustainability practices, and visitor perceptions in a protected natural area.

3.10. PILOT STUDY

The pilot study was conducted prior to the actual commencement of data collection to test whether the questionnaire and interview guide were feasible enough to gather the intended data. The pilot study was done in two separate sections: (1) to test the feasibility of the questionnaire, and (2) to test the interview guide. Ten staff members from the University of Mpumalanga's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management were invited to participate in the pilot study.

For the quantitative approach, five staff members from the ten completed the questionnaire surveys, and all suggestions raised during the pilot survey were addressed to improve the survey instrument and capture the required data. For the

qualitative approach, the other five staff members from the ten conducted interviews to assess the feasibility of the interview guide to capture the required data and make any necessary amendments. All responses from the pilot study were not included in the actual study. After applying the amendments that were suggested during the pilot study, the actual research data collection began.

3.11. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Data analysis was conducted concurrently for both qualitative and quantitative datasets; however, the findings are presented separately for clarity.

3.11.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

After collecting the completed questionnaires, the researcher then captured the data into Excel and then into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. After capturing the data, the researcher cleaned the data. Samuels (2020) suggests that it is crucial to assess the data for quality before analysing it; this was achieved by checking for duplications, tracing missing or unanswered questions, and eliminating outliers in the data. A total of 390 completed surveys were used to conduct the statistical analysis of the quantitative phase. The data were captured and coded using an Excel spreadsheet and then uploaded to SPSS for further statistical analysis. In this study, a collaboration of descriptive, multivariate, and inferential quantitative techniques was applied to the survey data, ensuring that the analyses were logically justified and aligned with the study's objectives.

3.11.1.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed for all survey items presented in Sections 4.2.3 to 4.2.6 (Tables 4–7). These measures provided a clear overview of visitors' perceptions regarding marketing effectiveness, sustainability practices, tourist satisfaction, and BRCNR's contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By summarising patterns and trends, descriptive statistics allowed the identification of general tendencies in visitor responses, ensuring that the analysis aligned with the study's scope of evaluating marketing and sustainability impacts at BRCNR. Graphs, figures, and tables were additionally used to visually present the data, enhancing clarity and interpretability.

3.11.1.2. Factor Analysis (Principal Component Analysis)

The study utilised Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as the factor analytic method to reduce the data and identify underlying components, enabling the grouping of related variables into meaningful constructs. Factor analysis was applied to group related survey items into underlying latent constructs, reducing complexity and confirming that survey items measured the intended dimensions. Four distinct factors were extracted, namely: (1) Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies, (2) Sustainability Marketing, Practices, and Conservation Awareness, (3) Tourists' Satisfaction, Experience, and Perception, and lastly (4) BRCNR's Perceived Contribution to SDGs. The eigenvalues for these factors were 5.21, 5.92, 5.23, and 3.08, respectively, with variances of 40.07%, 42.32%, 43.59%, and 44.02%, respectively, indicating that each factor accounted for a substantial proportion of the variance and confirming statistical significance. The factor loadings and extracted components are detailed in Table 8, showing how survey items cluster into conceptually coherent constructs. This technique ensured the study accurately captured key dimensions of marketing effectiveness, sustainability initiatives, and visitor outcomes.

3.11.1.3. Reliability and Sampling Adequacy

To confirm internal consistency and to assess the suitability for factor analysis, Cronbach's Alpha, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measures, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The Cronbach's Alpha values, which ranged between 0.772 and 0.886 across the four factors, surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby demonstrating strong reliability. KMO values (0.730–0.862) and significant Bartlett's tests ($p < 0.001$) demonstrated that the sample was adequate and correlations among items were strong enough to justify factor extraction.

3.11.1.4. Inferential Analysis – Independent Samples T-Test

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences in perceptions across gender and visit status (first-time vs. repeat visitors). This analysis, summarised in Tables 9–10, identified areas where demographic or behavioural factors influenced perceptions of marketing effectiveness, sustainability initiatives, and overall visitor satisfaction. Significant differences were observed between first-time

and repeat visitors for marketing effectiveness ($p = .005$) and tourist satisfaction ($p = .013$), highlighting the role of repeated exposure in shaping perceptions.

The combined use of descriptive statistics, factor analysis, reliability tests, and t-tests provided a comprehensive and methodologically sound framework for analysing the survey data. Each technique was selected based on its ability to answer the research questions, ensure statistical validity, and provide insights directly related to the study's scope, namely the evaluation of BRCNR's marketing strategies, sustainability practices, and visitor perceptions.

3.11.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted on 10 semi-structured interviews, comprising 4 management officials from the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) and 6 officials from the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). The interviews were conducted at the BRCNR head offices and MTPA offices. Prior to each interview, the researcher obtained permission to record the session, and the audio recordings were later transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word documents. Key information was then captured in an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate organisation, coding, and reference during the analysis.

A deductive thematic analysis approach was employed to uncover recurring themes and patterns within the qualitative data. Recurring themes were manually coded, merged where appropriate, and interpreted in relation to the study objectives, with a focus on marketing strategies, sustainability practices, and organisational perspectives. This manual approach was chosen due to the manageable size of the dataset, which allowed for in-depth engagement with the data and accurate interpretation of nuanced responses.

Although qualitative data analysis software can support efficiency and visualisation in larger datasets, manual thematic analysis in this study was rigorous, systematic, and methodologically sound due to the sample size. Reliability was ensured through careful transcription, consistent coding, and verification of themes against the original audio recordings. This approach provided valid, transparent, and contextually rich

insights, fully aligned with the research objectives and appropriate for the level of this research.

3.12. QUALITY CRITERIA

3.12.1. Quantitative: Validity and Reliability

Validity

Data collection instruments are considered valid if they accurately measure what they are intended to measure (Mitang & Kiha, 2023). In quantitative research, validity encompasses various types, including internal validity, external validity, and content validity (Karnia, 2024). Validity ensures that a study's findings are accurate and can be used confidently in future research.

The questionnaire was developed to gather information that would help achieve the study objectives and address the research questions. Through a thorough review of recent literature on the contribution of nature reserves to tourism, the researcher ensured the theoretical validity of the study. According to Kakar et al. (2023), content validity assesses how well the items in a research instrument represent the construct being measured. In this study, content validity was ensured through an in-depth literature review, which allowed the researcher to include all relevant concepts. Additionally, the questionnaire items were informed by previous empirical studies, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the research variables. Internal validity was enhanced by the survey questionnaire's structured design, ensuring the instrument consistently measured the intended constructs without bias.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of research instruments, ensuring that similar results are obtained when the study is repeated under the same conditions (Karnia, 2024; Christou, 2025). In quantitative research, reliability reflects the repeatability and consistency of measurements across multiple applications. In this study, reliability was enhanced through careful questionnaire design and pilot testing to identify and correct potential ambiguities. Statistical techniques were applied to assess reliability, including descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and Cronbach's Alpha to measure internal consistency. These measures ensured the instrument produced stable, consistent results. The researcher also ensured that data collection

procedures were standardised, thereby reducing measurement error and enhancing the study's replicability. Continuous review of the data analysis process ensured alignment with the study objectives and theoretical framework, further strengthening the reliability of the findings.

3.12.2 Qualitative: Credibility, Dependability, Confirmability, and Transferability

It is essential for researchers to follow specific procedures to obtain high-quality findings, which is a primary principle for promoting trustworthiness. Qualitative studies must satisfy four quality criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Blessing et al., 2024).

Credibility represents the level of confidence that can be placed in the study findings (Mitang & Kiha, 2023). It enables researchers and readers to verify the data gathered from participants and to determine whether the information accurately reflects participants' perspectives (Kakar et al., 2023). In this study, credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement during interviews and an in-depth literature review that covered all key aspects of the study.

Dependability is one of the crucial components of quality criteria. According to Santos et al. (2021), dependability refers to the consistency of the study results over time. This highlights the need for the research process to be logical, traceable, and clearly documented. According to Cohen et al. (2018), dependability ensures that all interpretations and explanations are consistent with participants' data.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings are shaped by participants rather than by the researcher's bias, motivation, or interest (Maree, 2016). It ensures that the results are grounded in the data rather than the researcher's assumptions. This was ensured by acknowledging potential researcher bias and research limitations. Diaz et al. (2025) maintain that confirmability concerns establishing that data and interpretations are clearly derived from the data and not imagined by the researcher. In this study, confirmability was achieved by referencing interview recordings and transcripts as the basis for data interpretation.

Transferability signifies the extent to which the study findings can be applied to other contexts. "Researchers facilitate transferability judgments through 'thick description' and purposive sampling" (Subedi, 2025). Thus, if a study is described in sufficient detail and participants are purposefully selected, transferability is enhanced. In this

study, transferability was ensured through in-depth descriptions provided in the literature review (Chapter 2) and the methodology (Chapter 3).

Triangulation was employed to enhance the overall rigour of this study. It refers to the use of multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives to corroborate findings and strengthen the robustness of conclusions (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). In this study, triangulation was achieved through a mixed-methods approach that integrated qualitative and quantitative data. Data triangulation involved multiple sources of information, including semi-structured interviews, archival records, open-ended survey responses, and insights from diverse stakeholders across different time periods. This approach enhanced the depth and credibility of the findings. Member checking was conducted where possible to ensure that participants' perspectives were accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Methodological triangulation was achieved through the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews and self-administered questionnaires. The integration of these methods enabled cross-validation of findings, thereby strengthening both the validity of quantitative results and the trustworthiness of qualitative insights.

3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study ensured compliance with ethical matters. Ethical considerations were satisfied by ensuring that all the participants and respondents who took part in this study were informed about the aim and objectives of the study, and assurance was given to them that their data would be kept anonymous, their privacy would be maintained, informed consent would be obtained, confidentiality would be maintained, and they would be protected against any harm. The ethical clearance or certificate was granted by the University of Mpumalanga (UMP), Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), and the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR). Ref: UMP/Hlatshwayo/08/2025

For the quantitative approach, the first page of the questionnaire provided a brief introduction to the study, along with its intended objectives and an informed consent statement. This was to give respondents the opportunity to decide whether to partake in the study or not. The respondents were informed that they could withdraw from the

study at any time if they no longer wished to continue, and their responses would be removed from the study.

For the qualitative approach, the researcher requested permission from the interviewees to record the interview session. The participants were given the interview guide prior to brainstorming and had an idea of the types of questions to expect, as well as whether to participate or not, before the actual day of the interview. The participants were informed that the study's findings were reported in clusters to maintain their anonymity and protect their identities.

3.13.1. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is defined as, a consensus process between the researcher and the study participants to maintain the anonymity of participants and institutions, ensuring their privacy, and restricting access to their information to a select few (Subedi, 2025). Participants were assured by the researcher that their responses would be handled with utmost care and strict confidentiality, and their identities would not be disclosed in any part of the study. Participation in either the survey or the interview was permitted by those who agreed to be part of the study, and it was voluntary. If participants were no longer interested in participating in the study, their responses and participation would be withdrawn immediately, and their data would be discarded and excluded from any analysis or interpretation.

3.13.2. Informed Consent

Informed consent is a crucial factor in the ethical conduct of research, as it promotes participants' well-being and rights, and prevents illegal practices and abuse during the study (Díaz et al., 2025). Thus, informed consent was obtained prior to the participant's agreement to participate in the study, and full details of the study, including a brief introduction and the objectives the study aims to achieve, were provided. Ethical clearance or certificate was granted by the University of Mpumalanga (UMP), Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), and the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) to enable the researcher to proceed with data collection on their premises.

3.14. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an in-depth description of the research methodology and the various techniques adopted in this study. This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach and provided a detailed explanation of the research paradigm, approach, design, population, sample size, data collection instruments, execution process, and data analysis procedures. It also addresses the ethical concerns and the quality criteria of the study. The study included both domestic and international tourists to ensure representation of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve's (BRCNR) actual visitor profile. Respondents were drawn from all tourists who visited the nature reserve during the data collection period, whether domestic or international. This mix was important for the study, as it allowed for a comprehensive understanding of visitor perceptions, satisfaction, and responses to marketing and sustainability practices across diverse tourist segments. Including both groups ensured that the analysis reflected the experiences of the broader visitor population and aligned with the study's scope.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an analysis and discussion of the study's empirical findings, which are derived from data gathered using both quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments. This chapter consists of the reporting of quantitative data followed by qualitative. In the quantitative research, a total of 500 questionnaires were distributed equally among the visitors to the flagship scenic attractions of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR), namely: God's Window, Bourke's Luck Potholes, and the Three Rondavels. A total of 390 completed questionnaires were used for the quantitative analysis of the data. The qualitative study had a total of 10 interviewees: 4 management officials from BRCNR and 6 officials from MTPA.

The results were captured in Excel and Word and then analysed in SPSS 20. SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative results of the study. Then, a thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative results. The descriptive statistics were used to present the data, including percentages, graphs, bar charts, pie charts, and tables, among other visual aids. This is done by firstly discussing the quantitative data, followed by the qualitative data. In these sections, the descriptive results of the study focus on the profiles of respondents and participants, presented through frequency tables and discussions. For the quantitative data, the descriptive results are followed by the factor analysis, which analyses the underlying elements of elements that contribute to the effectiveness of marketing efforts for the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR), and the underlying factors of factors influence their contribution to the specific SDGs (1, 8, 11, 13, and 15).

The exploratory analysis focused on the relationships between variables using appropriate descriptive and inferential techniques aligned with the study objectives. For the qualitative results, a thematic analysis was conducted. The data presented and interpreted, as indicated in previous chapters, demonstrate the effectiveness of MTPA-managed nature reserve marketing efforts and their contribution to the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15), in the case study of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. This is achieved by first unpacking the first research question, which sought to understand the marketing strategies used by MTPA to promote the BRCNR and assess their effectiveness in reaching a large potential audience. The role that MTPA plays in aligning with and supporting the sustainability triple bottom line, including social involvement, economic growth, and environmental conservation. The following section addresses the influential MTPA's marketing in enhancing conservation awareness at the BRCNR, as well as, the most visited season. The final section addresses the challenges and opportunities encountered while enhancing marketing strategies to support sustainable tourism within the nature reserve, contributing to the specific SDGs (1, 8, 11, 13, and 15).

4.2. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

4.2.1 Descriptive Results

Five hundred questionnaires were distributed to the three participating flagship scenic attractions of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR), with a total of 390 completed questionnaires used for data analysis. The data below were analysed using descriptive statistics. The first section of the results demonstrates an overview of the responses to the questions asked. The first part provides the demographic characteristics of the respondents. This is followed by a thorough analysis of the marketing efforts' results and their contribution to the SDGs.

4.2.1.1 Respondent's Socio-Demographic Characteristics

It is important to understand the profiles of the tourists visiting the reserve. This helps to create more personalised marketing strategies that speak directly to the expectations of the tourists.

Table 2: Respondents' Socio-Demographic Characteristics (Frequencies and Percentages)

A total of 390 respondents participated in the study. Presenting both frequencies and percentages provides a clearer understanding of the distribution of domestic and international tourists, enabling meaningful comparisons across categories. Reporting frequencies offers a concrete count of respondents in each group, enhancing transparency and clarity in the analysis.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS			
CHARACTERISTIC	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
AGE	Below 18 years	15	4%
	18-20 years	5	1%
	21-30 years	123	32%
	31-40 years	134	34%
	41-50 years	73	19%
	51-60 years	31	8%
	61 + years	9	2%
		Total=390	
GENDER	Female	258	66%
	Male	132	34%
		Total=390	
RACIAL GROUP	Africans	254	65%
	White	104	27%
	Coloured	28	7%
	Indian	4	1%
		Total=390	
LEVEL OF EDUCATION	High School	92	24%
	Diploma	85	22%
	Degree	162	41%
	Postgraduate	51	13%
		Total=390	
PROVINCE OF RESIDENCE (domestic	Mpumalanga	81	21%
	Gauteng	77	20%
	Limpopo	56	14%
	North-West	34	9%
	Western Cape	30	8%
	Free State	29	7%
	Eastern Cape	25	6%
	Kwa-Zulu Natal	19	5%
	Northern Cape	11	3%
		Total=362	
INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS (n=28) =7%	Germany	18	65%
	Switzerland	2	7%
	Belgium	2	7%
	France	2	7%
	USA	2	7%
	Netherlands	2	7%
		Total=28	

The above table illustrates that the majority of the respondents were between the ages of 31- 40 (34%). This was followed by those respondents aged between 21-30 (32%),

and those aged 40-50 (19%). Most respondents were female (66%), compared to males (34%), with the majority residing in Mpumalanga (21%), followed by Gauteng (20%), Limpopo (14%), North-West (9%), and Western Cape (8%). The Free State (7%) is one of the lowest provinces to visit the reserve, followed by the Eastern Cape (6%), and lastly Kwa-Zulu Natal (5%). There were only 7% international respondents, coming from various countries, including Germany (65%), followed by Switzerland (7%), Belgium (7%), France (7%), the USA (7%), and the Netherlands (7%). Most respondents who participated in the survey hold a degree qualification (41%), followed by those with a high school certificate/NSC qualification (24%), and those with a diploma qualification (22%). Most respondents are coming from an African ethnic group (65%), closely followed by the White ethnic group (27%).

4.2.2. UNDERSTANDING MARKETING AWARENESS, SEASONALITY, AND TOURISM ACTIVITY.

4.2.2.1 Sources of Awareness of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR)

It is essential to understand the various types of marketing efforts employed by the BRCNR. This helps identify which marketing efforts are the most effective in attracting potential tourists.

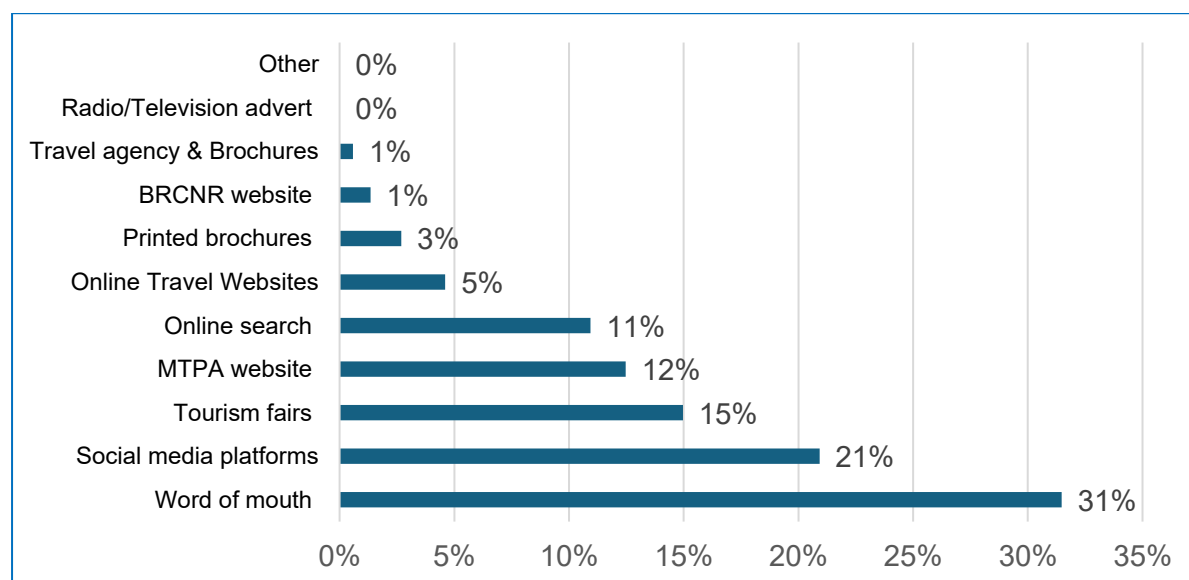


Figure 5: Discovering the BRCNR

Figure 5 illustrates how the respondents heard about the BRCNR. In this question, respondents were allowed to select more than one choice from which they heard about BRCNR. Based on the above figure, most respondents indicated that they heard about

BRCNR through word of mouth (31%), followed by social media platforms (21%) and tourism fairs (15%). The lowest marketing efforts where the respondents have heard about the reserve are through the BRCNR website, and the travel agency & brochures at (1%) each. This highlights that word of mouth is one of the influential marketing efforts that the BRCNR relies on. This supports the statement by Mai and Chen (2025), who asserted that word of mouth is one of the most effective marketing efforts, as it allows visitors to spread the word based on their experiences of the destination. Thus, this indicates that something worth experiencing is happening in the destination, which builds trust in visitors to the extent that they even refer other people to visit.

4.2.2.2. Effectiveness of Marketing Content in influencing the Decision to visit BRCNR

This question was crucial for assessing the effectiveness of marketing efforts in influencing tourists' decisions to visit the reserve. This helps identify areas for improvement in the marketing content being shared as part of the marketing efforts.

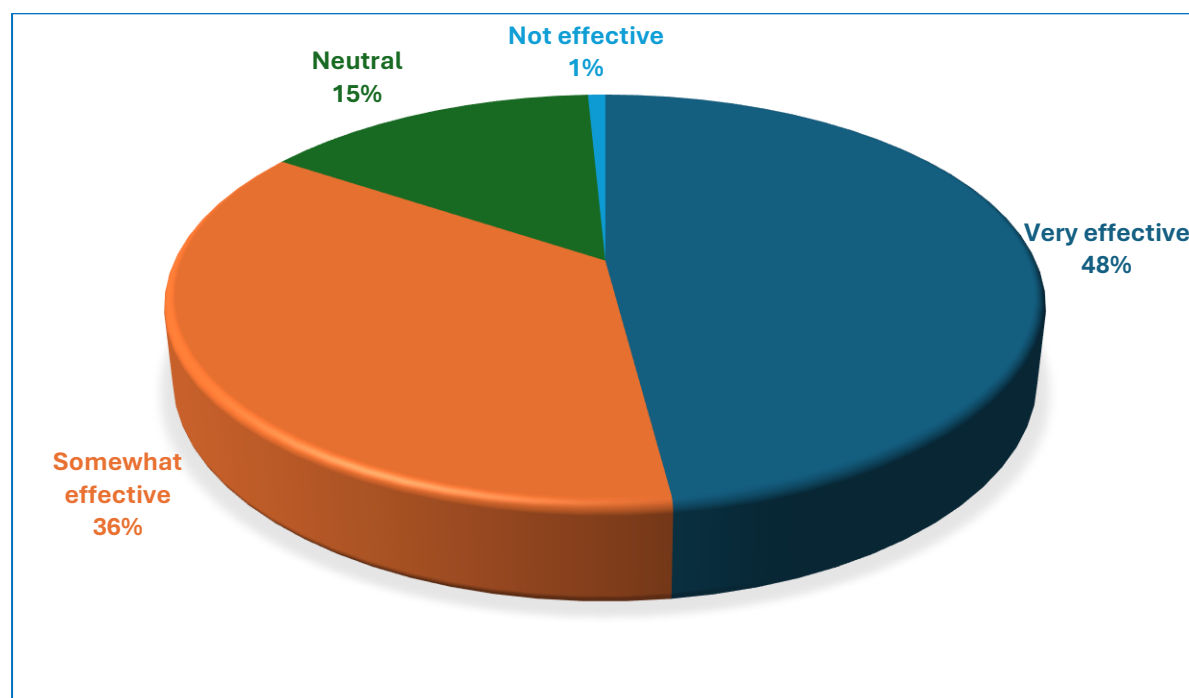


Figure 6: The Level of Influence of the Marketing Efforts

Figure 6 shows the level of influence of the marketing efforts that BRCNR uses to promote the reserve. This figure indicates that most respondents find the marketing efforts mentioned in Figure 5 to be very effective (48%) in influencing their decision to visit BRCNR. Some indicated that the marketing efforts were somewhat effective (36%), while others found them neutral (15%), and a small percentage (1%) found

them not effective but still decided to visit the reserve. Research by Saria et al. (2024) noted that partnerships with social media influencers (public figures) and the type of content used during the reserve's marketing play a crucial role in influencing tourists' decisions to visit the reserve, which supports these findings.

4.2.2.3. Motivational Factors Influencing Visits to the BRCNR

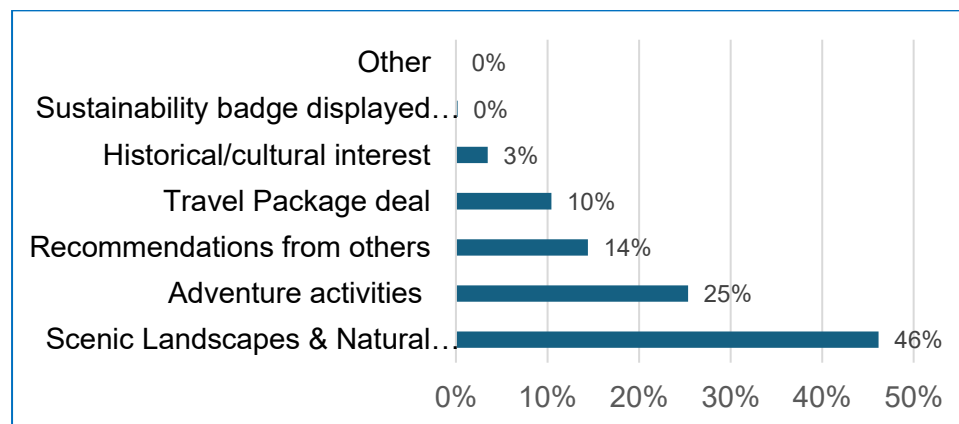


Figure 7: Motivations for visiting BRCNR

According to the above figure, it is clear that tourists visiting the BRCNR are motivated by different factors. In this question, respondents were allowed to have more than one response. Most respondents who visited the BRCNR during the data collection period indicated that their primary reason for visiting was to witness the scenic landscapes and natural beauty of the reserve (46%). This suggests that the BRCNR plays a role in promoting sustainable development growth. The second most common reason for visiting the reserve was to participate in adventure activities (25%), which attracts more ecotourists and adventure tourists to hike and experience the great view from the top of the hill at 1829m/6000ft above sea level. Another group of respondents (14%) highlighted that they were motivated to visit BRCNR based on what others had experienced at the reserve (word-of-mouth recommendation), which highly supports the findings in Figure 5, which revealed that word of mouth is the most effective marketing effort that BRCNR relies on. Travel package deals (10%) show that some of the respondents visited the reserve because it was included in their packages, followed by the respondents who visited the reserve due to its historical/cultural interest (3%), and there were no respondents who were motivated by the sustainability badge displayed on the marketing messages (0%).

BRCNR plays a huge role in ensuring that SDG 15 (Life on Land) is maintained in the reserve through the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity. SDG 15 focuses on restoration, the promotion of land habitats, and forest conservation, as well as the prevention of deforestation and land erosion, alongside the reversal of biodiversity loss (Mabibibi et al., 2021). These measures include the information planted around the reserve to educate tourists about the conservation programme and the various plant species found within the nature reserve. Maintaining the reserve's natural environment makes it one of the best reserves in environmental conservation, as evidenced by its infrastructure, which includes natural resources such as stones that form the walking path around the reserve and waste bins. This is how the reserve ensures that SDG 13 (Climate Action) is met by being responsible for all activities that take place within the reserve, thereby maintaining its natural state and mitigating carbon emissions that could contribute to climate change.

4.2.2.4. Number of times respondents visited BRCNR.

This question was important to understand whether the tourists visiting the reserve are first-time visitors or returning tourists. This helps identify whether the reserve is doing well in keeping tourists returning, based on the experience they receive.

Table 2: Number of times respondents have visited the BRCNR

NUMBER OF TIMES VISITING BRCNR.			
First time visiting BRCNR		Number of times respondents have visited the reserve (Only those who answered No)	
Category	Percentage	Category	Percentage
Yes	75%	2 times	43%
No	25%	3 times	13%
		4 times	4%
		5-9 times	31%
		10-14 times	4%
		15-25 times	4%

It is clear from Table 3 that the majority of respondents (75%) visited BRCNR for the first time during the survey period, compared to those who had visited before (25%). Furthermore, the respondents who indicated that it was not their first visit were then

asked to indicate how many times they had been to the reserve. Most respondents highlighted that it was their second visit (43%), followed by the second most frequent visit to the reserve, 5-9 times (31%). Followed by respondents who came to the reserve for the third time (13%). The least number of times respondents visited the reserve was 4 times, with a rate of 4%. The next least frequent rates were 10-14 times and 15-25 times, both with a rate of 4%. Girisaran et al. (2025) maintained that marketing efforts aim to increase sales volume by reaching a larger customer base; however, after receiving more customers, it then has to build a relationship and trust with the customers through offering the best services and experience that would position the destination in their mind whenever thinking about traveling.

4.2.2.5. Preferred Season for visiting the BRCNR.

Tourists prefer to visit places of attraction during different seasons. The purpose of this question was to determine the most preferred season to visit the BRCNR.

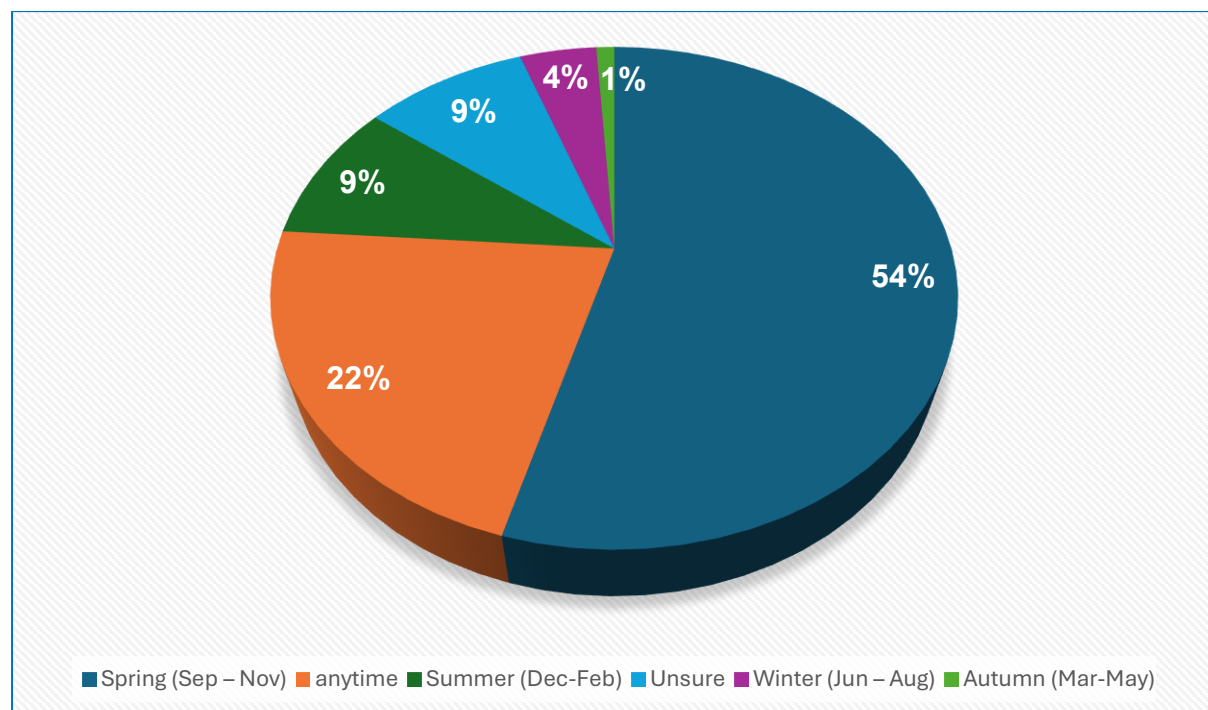


Figure 8: Preferred Season to visit the BRCNR

According to Figure 8, most respondents highlighted that they preferred to visit the reserve during the spring season (Sep-Nov) (54%), because they believe that during this season, they would be able to have a good view of the site, such as God's Window, and good warm weather conditions. The second most respondents indicated that they prefer to visit the reserve at any time, regardless of the season (22%). Followed by the

respondents who preferred to visit the reserve during the Summer season (Dec-Feb) (9%), because of the clear view and warm weather, also the respondents who indicated that they are unsure (9%) which season to choose from, because they are first time visitors to the reserve they are not aware of the best season to visit the reserve, this was mostly indicated by international tourists who are not familiar with South African weather and seasons. The winter season (Jun-Aug) (4%) was one of the lowest seasons, with respondents preferring to visit the reserve due to the cold weather. The least season was autumn (March-May), with only 1% respondents preferring to visit the reserve. Research by Jikidze (2025) suggests that the motivation behind seasonality is driven by the type of weather conditions and holidays in a particular season, which enable tourists to travel in large numbers to a destination. Furthermore, Jikidze (2025) also stated that seasonal tourism creates a significant amount of temporary employment (SDG 8) for local people; however, it also leads to over tourism and social tensions due to rising prices, environmental degradation, and the commercialisation of cultural heritage.

4.2.3. ANALYSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING STRATEGIES APPLIED BY THE BLYDE RIVER CANYON NATURE RESERVE (BRCNR)

Table 3: Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies Applied by BRCNR

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
The marketing strategies effectively communicate the unique features of the nature reserve.	12%	52%	30%	5%	1%	2.30	0.8
Marketing platforms (e.g., websites, social media) were easy to access and use.	27%	66%	5%	1%	1%	1.83	0.6
Social media and digital platforms are effectively used to promote BRCNR to reach potential tourists.	21%	61%	15%	2%	1%	2.02	0.7
The marketing content is regularly updated and relevant.	13%	45%	41%	1%	0%	2.30	0.7
The marketing efforts made me interested in visiting BRCNR.	11%	50%	35%	4%	1%	2.34	0.7
I found it easy to access information about BRCNR online.	13%	61%	25%	1%	0%	2.14	0.6
Communication platforms such as the MTPA & website, or tourism brochures, were informative.	14%	68%	15%	2%	1%	2.06	0.7
Information about local culture and heritage was clearly communicated.	9%	56%	29%	6%	0%	2.32	0.7

I received timely and accurate information before and during my visit.	12%	73%	10%	4%	1%	2.09	0.7
BRCNR's marketing strategies reflect values of environmental conservation and sustainability.	16%	47%	34%	2%	1%	2.23	0.8
BRCNR marketing influenced my decision to choose them over other destinations	13%	27%	52%	7%	1%	2.55	0.8
MTPA's marketing materials provided enough information for me to plan my visit.	8%	71%	17%	3%	1%	2.18	0.7
The marketing materials promoted conservation awareness effectively and increased my understanding of the importance of conservation.	11%	68%	16%	3%	2%	2.18	0.7

Note: A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' agreement with the statements, where **1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Disagree, and 5 = Strongly disagree**. This reversed coding from the conventional Likert scale was intentional to align with the positive phrasing of the survey items. Consequently, lower mean scores indicate stronger agreement, reflecting more favourable perceptions of marketing effectiveness, while higher mean scores indicate disagreement. Standard deviations represent the variability of responses among participants, allowing for meaningful interpretation of the results.

Respondents indicated that, on average, the effectiveness of the marketing strategies applied by the BRCNR is reflected across several key dimensions. Generally, the results show all in all positive perceptions, with most Mean values ranging between the percentages of 1.83 and 2.55, and the Standard Deviations below 1.0, which indicates acceptable levels of response consistency. Respondents agreed that the marketing strategies effectively communicate the unique features of the Nature Reserve (M = 2.30; SD = 0.8), while marketing platforms such as, websites and social media were reported as easy to access and use (M = 1.83; SD = 0.6). Social media and digital platforms were also viewed as effective tools for promoting the BRCNR to potential tourists (M = 2.02; SD = 0.7). Respondents further indicated that the marketing content is regularly updated and relevant (M = 2.30; SD = 0.7), and that marketing efforts successfully stimulated their interest in visiting the reserve (M = 2.34; SD = 0.7). Access to online information about BRCNR was perceived as easy (M = 2.14; SD = 0.6), and communication platforms such as the MTPA website and tourism brochures were also regarded as informative (M = 2.06; SD = 0.7).

Information relating to local culture and heritage was viewed as clearly communicated ($M = 2.32$; $SD = 0.7$), and respondents felt that they received timely and accurate information before and during their visit ($M = 2.09$; $SD = 0.7$). Participants also agreed that BRCNR's marketing strategies reflect values of environmental conservation and sustainability ($M = 2.23$; $SD = 0.8$). However, the statement assessing whether BRCNR's marketing influenced respondents' decision to choose the reserve over other destinations showed relatively more neutral responses ($M = 2.55$; $SD = 0.8$), suggesting that competitive positioning may require improvement. Nonetheless, the marketing materials provided by MTPA were perceived as adequate for planning purposes ($M = 2.18$; $SD = 0.7$) and were found to promote conservation awareness effectively ($M = 2.18$; $SD = 0.7$).

Overall, these findings highlight that the BRCNR's marketing strategies are generally effective, accessible, and informative, with consistent perceptions indicating reasonable alignment between marketing efforts and visitor expectations.

4.2.4. ELEMENTS RELATING TO SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING, PRACTICES, AND CONSERVATION AWARENESS

Table 4: Sustainability Marketing and Conservation Awareness

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
Marketing messages emphasised environmental conservation and sustainability.	11%	44%	42%	2%	1%	2.37	0.74
I noticed efforts to promote responsible tourism during my visit.	23%	66%	9%	2%	0%	1.90	0.63
There are eco-friendly practices such as recycling bins, educational signage, and guided nature walking paths.	45%	45%	9%	1%	0%	1.66	0.68
Waste management and cleanliness at the reserve reflected sustainable practices.	41%	48%	9%	2%	1%	1.73	0.73
Marketing materials helped me understand the importance of conserving nature.	20%	47%	28%	4%	1%	2.19	0.82
Signage and guides highlighted sustainability principles within the reserve.	40%	49%	8%	1%	2%	1.75	0.78
My visit increased my awareness of conservation issues.	18%	61%	20%	1%	1%	2.05	0.68

Tourism activities in the BRCNR are designed to enhance environmental conservation.	28%	53%	17%	1%	1%	1.93	0.74
I learned about the biodiversity and ecological importance of BRCNR	14%	50%	31%	4%	1%	2.26	0.76
I am more environmentally aware after visiting BRCNR.	12%	61%	23%	3%	1%	2.19	0.71
Educational or awareness materials were available during my visit	11%	56%	28%	4%	2%	2.31	0.78
The reserve promotes awareness about conservation	13%	68%	13%	5%	1%	2.13	0.71
I feel more aware of environmental protection after this visit.	34%	53%	11%	3%	0%	1.84	0.75
Marketing on sustainability influenced my visit.	5%	58%	24%	11%	2%	2.45	0.81

Respondents indicated that, on average, sustainability marketing, environmental practices, and conservation awareness efforts within the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) were perceived positively. Mean values ranged from 1.66 to 2.45, with all standard deviations below 1.0, indicating acceptable response consistency and relatively stable perceptions across the sample.

Overall, respondents somewhat agreed that the marketing messages of the reserve emphasised environmental conservation and sustainability ($M = 2.37$; $SD = 0.74$). A strong majority also noticed visible efforts to promote responsible tourism during their visit ($M = 1.90$; $SD = 0.63$). Respondents widely recognised eco-friendly practices such as, recycling bins, educational signage, and nature walking paths ($M = 1.66$; $SD = 0.68$), and agreed that waste management and cleanliness reflected sustainable practices ($M = 1.73$; $SD = 0.73$).

Marketing materials also played a moderate role in helping visitors understand the importance of conserving nature ($M = 2.19$; $SD = 0.82$). Additionally, signage and guides were perceived as effectively highlighting sustainability principles ($M = 1.75$; $SD = 0.78$). Respondents reported an increase in their awareness of conservation issues following their visit ($M = 2.05$; $SD = 0.68$), while tourism activities within the reserve were viewed as designed to enhance environmental conservation ($M = 1.93$; $SD = 0.74$).

Respondents also noted that they learned about biodiversity and the ecological significance of the BRCNR during their visit ($M = 2.26$; $SD = 0.76$), and many felt more environmentally aware afterward ($M = 2.19$; $SD = 0.71$). Educational and awareness materials were available to some extent ($M = 2.31$; $SD = 0.78$), and respondents agreed that the reserve promotes conservation awareness ($M = 2.13$; $SD = 0.71$). Visitors also felt more aware of environmental protection as a result of the experience ($M = 1.84$; $SD = 0.75$).

The only item reflecting a more neutral trend related to whether sustainability marketing specifically influenced their decision to visit the reserve ($M = 2.45$; $SD = 0.81$), suggesting that although visitors recognised sustainability efforts, these messages may not be the primary driver of visitation. Taken together, the results demonstrate that BRCNR's sustainability marketing and on-site environmental practices are generally effective in informing, educating, and raising conservation awareness among visitors.

4.2.5. ELEMENTS INFLUENCING TOURISTS' SATISFACTION, EXPERIENCE, AND PERCEPTION

Table 5: Tourists' Satisfaction and Experience

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
I am satisfied with my overall experience at BRCNR.	30%	66%	3%	1%	0%	1.74	0.54
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of marketing for BRCNR.	15%	44%	23%	18%	1%	2.46	0.97
My expectations based on marketing were met during the visit.	30%	57%	9%	3%	1%	1.89	0.78
I would recommend BRCNR to friends or family.	46%	51%	3%	1%	0%	1.58	0.58
The nature reserve offers value for money.	41%	43%	14%	3%	1%	1.81	0.82
Customer service and communication from BRCNR staff met my expectations.	48%	40%	6%	5%	1%	1.70	0.83
I plan to revisit BRCNR in the future.	39%	51%	9%	2%	0%	1.73	0.68
MPTA's marketing strategies reflect the values of environmental conservation and sustainability.	24%	65%	8%	3%	1%	1.92	0.70
I can recommend BRCNR based on its ability to balance tourism and environmental conservation.	29%	61%	8%	1%	1%	1.84	0.68

Marketing aligned well with my actual experience at the reserve.	23%	65%	9%	3%	0%	1.91	0.65
I would recommend BRCNR to others as an environmentally responsible destination.	22%	64%	12%	2%	0%	1.93	0.64
I am more likely to support conservation efforts after this visit.	17%	66%	16%	1%	1%	2.03	0.64

Respondents indicated that, on average, their levels of satisfaction, experience, and perception of BRCNR were generally positive across dimensions asked.

The findings revealed that the overall experience satisfaction respondents have expressed a high level of satisfaction with their overall experience at BRCNR (Mean = 1.74, SD = 0.54), with 96% agreeing and strongly agreeing.

With regards to satisfaction with marketing quality, the respondents' perceptions of marketing quality were more varied, although the majority expressed satisfaction. The item recorded a mean of 2.46 (SD = 0.97), indicating moderate agreement, with 59% agreeing that the marketing quality was satisfactory. In addition to that, the expectation Alignment on marketing was generally viewed as accurately representing the destination. The statement "My expectations based on marketing were met" produced a mean score of 1.89 (SD = 0.78), with 87% agreeing or strongly agreeing.

In terms of recommendation intent, Word-of-mouth potential appears strong. A combined 97% of respondents indicated they would recommend BRCNR to others, reflected in a mean of 1.58 (SD = 0.58). and with that, respondents' perceptions of value for money were positive, with 84% agreeing that the reserve offers good value for money (Mean = 1.81, SD = 0.82). Overall customer service satisfaction was good as respondents reported that customer service and communication from staff met their expectations (Mean = 1.70, SD = 0.83), supported by 88% agreement. Additionally, a high revisit intention was recorded, with 90% indicating a likelihood of returning to BRCNR (Mean = 1.73, SD = 0.68).

With reference to perceptions of sustainability and conservation, respondents agreed that MTPA's marketing strategies reflect environmental conservation values (Mean = 1.92, SD = 0.70). Similarly, they agreed that BRCNR balances tourism and conservation effectively (Mean = 1.84, SD = 0.68). Majority of the respondents agreed with the alignment of marketing with their actual experience at the Reserve. Marketing

messages were perceived to align well with the actual on-site experience (Mean = 1.91, SD = 0.65). The respondent's perceptions of environmental responsibility were positive, as a combined 86% of respondents indicated that they would recommend BRCNR as an environmentally responsible destination (Mean = 1.93, SD = 0.64). This was followed by support for conservation efforts, where the visit encouraged stronger conservation support among tourists (Mean = 2.03, SD = 0.64).

4.2.6. ELEMENTS RELATING TO BRCNR'S PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

Table 6: BRCNR's Contribution to SDGs

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Standard deviation
Marketing campaigns highlighted community empowerment or poverty alleviation (SDG 1).	15%	54%	28%	3%	0%	2.18	0.72
My visit to BRCNR contributes to job creation and economic development (SDG 1 & 8).	44%	36%	16%	5%	0%	1.82	0.87
I believe the reserve contributes to local job creation and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8).	52%	29%	13%	5%	0%	1.71	0.88
The promotion of BRCNR encourages sustainable travel and responsible tourism (SDG 11).	48%	43%	9%	0%	0%	1.61	0.65
The infrastructure in BRCNR supports inclusive and sustainable tourism (Universal Access) (SDG 11).	41%	46%	9%	4%	0%	1.75	0.77
Environmental protection and climate awareness were emphasised in promotional content (SDG 13).	12%	63%	21%	3%	0%	2.17	0.68
Marketing emphasised biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural heritage (SDG 15).	10%	62%	27%	1%	0%	2.20	0.63

Respondents indicated that, on average, the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) is perceived as contributing meaningfully to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mean values ranged from 1.61 to 2.20, with all standard deviations below 1.0, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency and relatively stable perceptions across respondents.

Overall, participants somewhat agreed that marketing campaigns highlighted aspects of community empowerment and poverty alleviation linked to SDG 1 ($M = 2.18$; $SD = 0.72$). Visitors also felt that their visit contributed to job creation and broader economic development (SDGs 1 & 8), supported by a low mean value ($M = 1.82$; $SD = 0.87$). Similarly, many respondents believed that the reserve contributes positively to local job creation and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8), as reflected in a mean of 1.71 ($SD = 0.88$), indicating a strong perceived economic benefit.

Sustainable tourism practices aligned with SDG 11 were perceived favourably. A very high proportion of respondents agreed that promoting BRCNR encourages responsible and sustainable travel ($M = 1.61$; $SD = 0.65$), resulting in the lowest mean score in this category. Perceptions of inclusive and sustainable tourism infrastructure, including features that support universal access, were also positive ($M = 1.75$; $SD = 0.77$).

Environmental sustainability messages aligned with SDG 13 were moderately recognised, with 75% of respondents agreeing that promotional content emphasised environmental protection and climate awareness ($M = 2.17$; $SD = 0.68$). Likewise, there was agreement that marketing emphasised biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural heritage (SDG 15), reflected in a mean value of 2.20 ($SD = 0.63$). Collectively, these findings suggest that visitors perceive BRCNR as making a positive contribution to multiple dimensions of sustainable development. The reserve is viewed as promoting economic empowerment, encouraging responsible tourism behaviour, supporting inclusive tourism infrastructure, and advancing environmental and biodiversity awareness.

4.3 FACTOR ANALYSES

The purpose of this factor analysis was to group the items and determine whether the questionnaire items relate to the latent variables. A factor analysis was conducted to identify the underlying dimensions of the survey items measuring marketing effectiveness, sustainability practices, visitor satisfaction, and BRCNR's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The results revealed four distinct components, each representing a coherent thematic construct. The extraction was supported by strong statistical indicators, confirming the suitability and reliability of the factor structure.

Table 7: Factor Analyses

	MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS	SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES	VISITOR SATISFACTION	BRCNR'S PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION TO SDGs
The marketing strategies effectively communicate the unique features of the nature reserve	.636			
Marketing platforms (e.g., websites, social media) were easy to access and use	.559			
Social media and digital platforms are effectively used to promote BRCNR to reach potential tourists	.512			
The marketing content is regularly updated and relevant	.643			
The marketing efforts made me interested in visiting BRCNR	.609			
I found it easy to access information about BRCNR online	.505			
Communication platforms such as the MTPA & website, or tourism brochures, were informative	.599			
Information about local culture and heritage was clearly communicated	.733			
I received timely and accurate information before and during my visit	.598			
BRCNR's marketing strategies reflect values of environmental conservation and sustainability	.652			
BRCNR marketing influenced my decision to choose them over other destinations	.653			
MTPA's marketing materials provided enough information for me to plan my visit	.635			
The marketing materials promoted conservation awareness effectively and increased my understanding of the importance of conservation	.658			
Marketing messages emphasised environmental conservation and sustainability		.413		
I noticed efforts to promote responsible tourism during my visit		.457		

There are eco-friendly practices such as recycling bins, educational signage, and guided nature walking paths		.641		
Waste management and cleanliness at the reserve reflected sustainable practices		.501		
Marketing materials helped me understand the importance of conserving nature		.485		
Signage and guides highlighted sustainability principles within the reserve		.709		
My visit increased my awareness of conservation issues		.665		
Tourism activities in the BRCNR are designed to enhance environmental conservation		.748		
I learned about the biodiversity and ecological importance of BRCNR		.689		
I am more environmentally aware after visiting BRCNR		.643		
Educational or awareness materials were available during my visit		.688		
The reserve promotes awareness about conservation		.651		
I feel more aware of environmental protection after this visit		.597		
Marketing on sustainability influenced my visit		.547		
I am satisfied with my overall experience at BRCNR			.554	
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of marketing for BRCNR			.386	
My expectations based on marketing were met during the visit			.665	
I would recommend BRCNR to friends or family			.643	
The nature reserve offers value for money			.683	
Customer service and communication from BRCNR staff met my expectations			.737	
I plan to revisit BRCNR in the future			.627	
MPTA's marketing strategies reflect values of environmental conservation and sustainability			.693	
I can recommend BRCNR based on its ability to balance tourism and environmental conservation			.736	
Marketing aligned well with my actual experience at the reserve			.716	
I would recommend BRCNR to others as an environmentally responsible destination.			.758	
I am more likely to support conservation efforts after this visit.			.640	
Marketing campaigns highlighted community empowerment or poverty alleviation (SDG 1)				.516
My visit to BRCNR contributes to job creation and economic development (SDG 1 & 8)				.868

believe the reserve contributes to local job creation and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8)				.869
The promotion of BRCNR encourages sustainable travel and responsible tourism (SDG 11)				.769
The infrastructure in BRCNR supports inclusive and sustainable tourism (Universal Access) (SDG 11)				.718
Environmental protection and climate awareness were emphasised in promotional content (SDG 13)				.301
Marketing emphasised biodiversity conservation and natural heritage protection (SDG 15)				.328
CRONBACH ALPHA	0.863	0.886	0.87	0.772
MEAN (Standard Deviations)	2.195(±0.441)	2.053 (±0.446)	1.878 (±0.461)	1.921 (±0.486)
INTER-ITEM CORRELATION	0.327	0.316	0.376	0.314
KAISER-MEYER-OLKIN MEASURE OF SAMPLING	0.842	0.862	0.854	0.730
VARIANCE EXPLAINED	58.59%	57.79%	53.98%	65.66%
BARTLETT'S TEST OF SPHERICITY	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001

4.3.1. Factor 1: Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies Applied by BRCNR

This factor includes items with factor coefficients ranging from 0.505 to 0.733, indicating strong relationships between the items and the component. All statements grouped under this factor relate to how visitors perceive the clarity, accessibility, relevance, and influence of BRCNR's marketing. Factor 1 demonstrates strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.863, which is considered an acceptable level of reliability (r), as it exceeds the minimum required threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978; Sathyanarayana, Pushpa & Harsha, 2024). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values ranged from 0.730 to 0.862, all of which were above the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating that the sample was adequate and suitable for factor analysis, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), showing strong correlations of items to justify factor analysis. One component was retained based on Principal Component Analysis, with an eigenvalue of 5.21 explaining 40.07% of the variance, indicating that the items collectively measure a meaningful dimension of the effectiveness of marketing strategies at the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. In the social sciences, where human behaviour and perceptions are inherently complex and influenced by multiple factors, an explained variance of approximately 40% to 60% is generally regarded as acceptable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2014).

The factor analysis confirms that the survey items cluster were conceptually meaningful and statistically robust dimensions of the effectiveness of marketing strategies. The highest Items contributing meaningfully to this factor comprise: information about local culture and heritage (0.733), followed by marketing materials promoting conservation awareness (0.658), then marketing-influenced decision-making (0.658), and the least is the extent to which marketing reflects environmental sustainability values (0.652). This factor represents visitors' overall perception of the quality, clarity, accessibility, and persuasive power of BRCNR's marketing communication. The strength of items suggests that marketing effectiveness is a clearly defined and internally consistent construct.

4.3.2. Factor 2: Sustainability Marketing, Practices, and Conservation Awareness

This factor includes items with factor coefficients ranging from 0.413 to 0.748, capturing items related to environmental sustainability, eco-friendly practices, awareness raising, and conservation messaging.

This factor shows strong internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.886, indicating that each item measures the same underlying dimension and surpassing the minimum recommended threshold of 0.70 for acceptable reliability (Sathyanarayana et al., 2024). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values ranged from 0.730 to 0.862, indicating sample adequacy and suitability for factor analysis, which is acceptable. Based on Principal Component Analysis, a single component was retained, with an eigenvalue of 5.92 accounting for 42.32% of the variance, suggesting that the items collectively reflect a coherent dimension of sustainability marketing practices and conservation awareness.

The factor analysis confirms that the survey items cluster captured the conceptually meaningful and statistically robust dimensions of the sustainability practices and conservation awareness. The highest items contributing meaningfully to this factor comprise: first, tourism activities designed to enhance environmental conservation (0.748); second, signage and guides highlighting sustainability principles (0.709); third, learning about biodiversity and ecological importance (0.689); and last, the availability of educational materials (0.688). This factor reflects visitors' perceptions of the environmental sustainability practices and conservation awareness initiatives, both in marketing materials and in on-site experiences. High loadings show that respondents consistently viewed these items as part of the same underlying construct.

4.3.3. Factor 3: Tourists' Satisfaction, Experience, and Perception

This factor includes items with factor coefficients ranging from 0.386 to 0.758, representing aspects of satisfaction, service quality, value for money, behavioural intentions, and alignment between expectations and experience.

Factor 3 highlights a strong internal consistency or reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.870, which is above the minimum required of 0.70, confirming that the

underlying dimensions were measured by every item. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value ranges from 0.730 to 0.862, indicating acceptable sample adequacy and suitability for factor analysis. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < 0.001$), illustrating a sufficiently strong correlation to justify factor extraction, which is acceptable. Principal Component Analysis initially identified two components; however, only one component was retained with an eigenvalue of 5.23, explaining 43.59% of the variance, indicating that the items collectively capture a coherent dimension of tourists' satisfaction, experience, and perception. The second component included only a single item, which also loaded moderately (0.386) on the first component. Tabachnick and Fidell (2001) provide 0.32 as a good rule of thumb for the minimum loading of an item, which equates to approximately 10% overlapping variance with the other items in that factor.

The factor analysis confirms that the survey items cluster were conceptually meaningful and statistically robust dimensions of the tourist satisfaction and experience. The highest Items contributing meaningfully to this factor comprise: the Recommendation of BRCNR as environmentally responsible (0.758), followed by the Customer service and communication (0.737), thirdly, Balancing tourism and conservation (0.736), and Marketing aligned with actual experience (0.716). This factor captures visitors' overall satisfaction, service experience, recommendation behaviour, and perceived value. High loadings indicate that satisfaction-related variables form a clear and unified construct.

4.3.4. Factor 4: BRCNR's Perceived Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This factor encompasses items with factor coefficients ranging from 0.301 to 0.869, including those linked to economic development, inclusive tourism, environmental protection, and biodiversity conservation. The minimum accepted or recommended Cronbach's Alpha is from 0.70 upwards; anything below is considered unacceptable (Nunnally, 1978; Sathyanarayana et al., 2024). Factor 4 demonstrates a strong internal consistency with a rate of 0.772 of Cronbach's Alpha, assuring that items within every factor measure the same underlying dimension, which was strongly acceptable. Moreover, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) values range from the lowest value of 0.730 up to the highest value (0.862), all of which exceed the recommended 0.70,

confirming sample adequacy and suitability for factor analysis. The Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a significant ($p < 0.001$) result, demonstrating that item correlations were sufficiently strong to justify factor extraction. Principal Component Analysis initially identified two components for measuring the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve's perceived contribution to Sustainable Development Goals. However, only one component was retained, with an eigenvalue of 3.08 accounting for 44.02% of the variance, indicating that the items collectively reflect a coherent dimension of perceptions regarding the reserve's role in promoting sustainable development. The second component included only two items, which is insufficient to form a reliable factor, and both items loaded moderately on the first component (0.301 and 0.328), supporting their inclusion in the primary factor. Costello and Osborne (2005) noted that many researchers use 0.30 as a minimum threshold for interpreting factor loadings in exploratory factor analysis.

The factor analysis confirms that the survey items cluster were conceptually meaningful and statistically robust dimensions of perceived contribution to the SDGs. The highest Items contributing meaningfully to this factor comprise: first, Contribution to job creation and economic development (0.868); second, Local job creation and inclusive growth (0.869); third, Promotion of responsible tourism (0.769); and lastly, Inclusive and sustainable tourism infrastructure (0.718). This factor represents visitors' perceptions of how the reserve contributes to broader social, economic, and environmental sustainability outcomes, aligned with SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15. It is a strong and reliable construct.

4.3.5 T-test

4.3.5.1 T-test for comparison of identified factors with Gender

Table 8: T-test for Comparison of Identified Factors with Genders

	Male N=131	Female N=259	F-Value	P-value
	Mean & Std dev	Mean & Std dev		
Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies	2.21 (±.451)	2.18(±.436)	.287	.621
Sustainability Marketing, Practices, and Conservation Awareness	2.11(±.469)	2.03(±.433)	.626	.096
Tourists' Satisfaction, Experience, and Perception	1.95(±.475)	1.84(±.450)	.081	.021
RCNR's Perceived Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals	1.98(±.517)	1.89(±.468)	1.949	.084

Across three factors, the t-test results show that all p-values are greater than .05, indicating no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents. This means that gender does not influence perceptions of the effectiveness of marketing strategies, sustainability marketing practices, conservation awareness, or the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. Both males and females rate these constructs similarly. This finding is important because it suggests that gender is not a moderating variable within these factors. However, a statistically significant difference was found in tourists' satisfaction, experience, and perception ($p = 0.021$), with males ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.475$) reporting slightly higher mean scores than females ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 0.450$).

4.3.5.2 T-test for comparison of identified factors with visit status

Table 9: T-test for Comparison of Identified Factors with Visit Status

	YES N=291	NO N=99	F-Value	P-value
	Mean & Std dev	Mean & Std dev		
Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies	2.16(±.403)	2.31(±.521)	8.134	.002
Sustainability Marketing, Practices, and Conservation Awareness	2.02(±.416)	2.16(±.512)	3.326	.005
Tourists' Satisfaction, Experience, and Perception	1.82(±.418)	2.04(±.542)	6.259	.001
RCNR's Perceived Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals	1.89(±.493)	2.02(±.453)	.033	.016

When comparing first-time visitors with repeat visitors, several notable patterns emerged. Regarding the effectiveness of marketing strategies, the results show a significant difference ($F = 8.134$, $p = .002$), with repeat visitors rating them more positively (2.31) than first-time visitors (2.16). This suggests that repeat visitors may be returning due to stronger marketing recall, familiarity, or loyalty, while first-time visitors may be less engaged with current marketing efforts. A significant difference was also found ($p = 0.005$). Repeat visitors ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.512$) had higher mean scores than first-time visitors ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.416$), indicating greater awareness and more favourable perceptions among repeat visitors. This pattern indicates that repeat visitors are more exposed to or aware of conservation messaging, whereas first-time visitors may not yet fully connect with sustainability communication, signalling an area for potential improvement. A significant difference also appears in tourist satisfaction, experience, and perception ($F = 6.259$, $p = .001$), with repeat visitors reporting higher satisfaction (2.04) than first-time visitors (1.82). This indicates that satisfaction levels tend to increase with familiarity and repeated exposure, suggesting loyalty and positive cumulative experiences. However, this may also highlight gaps in first-time visitor experiences, perhaps related to orientation, information, or on-site services. Lastly, regarding RCNR's contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals, the results show a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.016$). Repeat visitors ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.453$) rated the reserve's contribution higher than first-time visitors ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 0.493$), suggesting stronger recognition of its sustainability role among those with prior experience.

In conclusion, the t-test results revealed that gender does not significantly influence perceptions across most of the identified factors, as males and females reported similar views on marketing effectiveness, sustainability practices, and the reserve's contribution to Sustainable Development Goals. The only exception was tourists' satisfaction, experience, and perception, where a slight but significant difference was observed. However, significant differences emerged between first-time and repeat visitors. This suggests that familiarity with the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve enhances visitors' evaluations of marketing effectiveness, sustainability efforts, satisfaction, and perceived contribution to sustainable development. These findings suggest that RCNR's marketing efforts and visitor experience strategies are more impactful for returning tourists than first-time visitors.

4.4. QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The qualitative results were obtained through interviews conducted with the management of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) and officials from the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA). A total of 10 interviews, comprising 4 with BRCNR management and 6 with MTPA officials, were conducted, yielding informative data to address the study's objectives.

4.4.1. Participant's Demographic Characteristics

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the participants in the interviews conducted by the BRCNR management and MTPA officials. Participants were asked to provide information regarding their positions at the BRCNR and MTPA. This information includes the position they hold, the number of years in BRCNR/MTPA, their role and responsibilities, and their highest level of education.

4.4.1.1. Level of Responsibility or Position at the BRCNR/MTPA.

Most participants indicated that they hold a supervisory position (Participants 1, 3, 5, and 9). Among the participants who are managers (Participants 6, 8, and 10), only two indicated that they are in senior management at the BRCNR/MTPA (Participants 4 and 7). There was only one entry-level staff member (Participant 2).

4.4.1.2. Number of years at the BRCNR/MTPA

A significant number of participants (N = 6) indicated that they have held their positions for more than 10 years (Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9). Only two interviewees indicated they had been in their positions for about 1 to 3 years (Participants 7 and 10). However, only one interviewee has held the position for 4-6 years (Participant 3). Furthermore, one interviewee indicated that he had been in the position for 7-10 years (Participant 5). Thus, Baltezarevic and Baltezarevic (2024) assert that work experience plays a paramount role in enhancing value and profitability, promoting customer interaction, and building strong customer trust and loyalty to the product offering.

4.4.1.3. Areas of work involved at the BRCN/MTPA.

Most participants (N = 6) indicated that their work involvement at the BRCNR/MTPA involves marketing and promotion (Participants 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9). Their responsibilities are to promote and market the nature reserve and Mpumalanga as a tourist destination. Two interviewees highlighted that their roles at the reserve involve conservation and environmental work (Participants 1 and 10). They are focusing on ensuring environmental conservation and raising environmental awareness. Furthermore, participants 2 and 3 indicated that they are responsible for administering the reserve.

4.4.1.4. Level of Formal Education

There were 4 participants (Participants 3, 5, 8, and 9) who had tourism-related qualifications, which include a Higher Certificate in Tourism Management, a Certificate in Cultural Site Guide, a B.Tech in Tourism Management, a Diploma in Tourism Management, and a Degree in Tourism Management. Additionally, two interviewees (Participants 1 and 10) hold qualifications in nature conservation, specifically a National Certificate in Environmental Education Training Development Practices, a Diploma in Nature Conservation, and a B.Tech in Nature Conservation. Furthermore, three interviewees (Participants 4, 6, and 7) indicated that they had other qualifications not related to either tourism, hospitality, or nature conservation, which include a Postgraduate in Communication and Marketing, a Degree in Communication and Marketing, a Postgraduate in Economics and Business Management, and a Master's Degree in Development Studies. However, participant 2 indicated that she does not

hold any formal qualifications and is an entry-level staff member. In addition, Yetkin, Kancinar & Özok (2024) stated that education plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective and efficient implementation of workplace transformation.

In general, most participants have more than 10 years of experience in their positions and hold managerial roles, including supervisor, manager, and senior manager. Most of them have expertise in marketing and promotion, conservation and the environment, and administrative responsibilities. Nine of the ten participants have qualifications related to their jobs, and some have more than one qualification. However, only 1 participant out of the 10 participants does not have a formal qualification.

4.4.2. Marketing Efforts Applied by the BRCNR

This section covers all the marketing efforts the BRCNR has applied to promote the reserve, as well as the type of tourist market they are targeting to attract through these efforts. These further highlight the effectiveness of these marketing efforts and provide insight into evaluating them.

4.4.2.1. Marketing Efforts used by the BRCNR.

The BRCNR employs various marketing efforts. Three participants agreed that the BRCNR still employs traditional marketing methods, such as radio station promotions and newspaper advertisements (Participants 1, 7, and 8). Participant 1 mentioned that *“We used to request a slot on iGwalagwala FM and Ikwekwezi FM to present about the BRCNR as a form of marketing”*. According to Mpotaringa and Tichaawa (2021), traditional marketing requires a substantial budget, including printing newspapers and purchasing radio advertising slots, and is not accessible to everyone. It is noted that BRCNR is also moving towards social media marketing to reach a high number of potential travellers (Participants 2, 4, 7, 9, and 10). Participant 7 even stated that *“We are also increasingly using digital platforms for our marketing purposes, which include having an active Facebook page, X (Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube.”*

Another marketing strategy employed by the BRCNR to promote the reserve involves attending tourism exhibitions and trade shows (Participants 5, 6, and 7). Tourism trade shows, such as Meetings Africa (MICE) and Indaba Trade Show, are considered

effective national marketing strategies, where tourism-related stakeholders share knowledge and showcase their tourism offerings (Kosasih, Hutahayan, Hidayat & Sunarti, 2025). Participant 6 stated that *“We use the Trade shows, both local, regional, national, and international,”* to raise awareness about the BRCNR in *“trade shows such as Indaba Trade Show, ITB in Germany.”* Participant 5 mentioned that attending tourism trade shows has a significant impact on increasing tourist markets globally and further stated that after attending an international trade show, they track the number of travellers from that country to determine its effectiveness. Participant 8 stated that *“We attend the exhibitions and trade shows where we go out and promote our nature reserves.”*

Three of the participants (4, 8, and 10) believe that seasonal campaigns are essential for attracting a specific type of tourist during that season to have good visitor numbers across all seasons. Participant 4 even said that *“We run seasonal campaigns, including those during both peak and off-peak seasons.”* This is said to ensure that the reserve does not incur significant losses during the off-peak season. Participant 4 further mentioned that *“We will promote the winter season by offering packages and specials that appeal to people to take advantage of them. For example, if you stay for this period, you will be eligible for a discount.”* This indicates that the campaigns vary by season; in winter, they offer more affordable packages and discounts to attract a larger number of tourists. Similarly, Jikidze (2025) noted that seasonality stems from people having a preferred travel season, which makes it easier to promote the destination because they will be looking for their next travel destination.

4.4.2.2. Target Markets Aiming to Attract

Five participants (N = 5) (1, 2, 7, 9, and 10) believe that the marketing efforts applied by the BRCNR are meant to attract everyone. Participant 2 stated that *“We are looking to attract everyone, local and international tourists, even the disabled ones, and all ages.”* Furthermore, Participant 1 stated, *“We are not definitely targeting a specific group, but in most cases, just because this area is well known globally, we used to target SADC people, international, and local people.”* This highlights that there were no limited or specific markets being targeted, but rather everyone is their potential market based on their seasonal preferences.

Participant 1 mentioned that *“the main fact is that we used to target local people, because they are the ones who should explore BRCNR more, as they reside around it.”* Three participants (Participants 1, 3, and 7) believed the marketing efforts were intended for domestic tourists. Participant 7 claims that *“These marketing strategies are geared towards attracting domestic tourists, basically the Mpumalanga residents, who are encouraged to travel around their province.”* Participant 3 further stated that he had noted that BRCNR was attracting the international market more than the domestic market. As a result, they opted to focus their marketing efforts on the domestic market. Hence, Participant 3 mentioned that *“we are targeting local-based tourists so that they can be exposed to the nature of our environment.”*

Two participants (Participants 8 and 9) believed that the marketing efforts target schools, hiking clubs, and nature people. Participant 9 upholds that *“During the spring season, our focus is on the school groups, and families in the festive season.”* This is supported by Parks Week in September, where everyone is given free entrance to the reserve for the day. This makes the spring season more ideal for school groups, as they can enter the reserve for free. Participant 8 further stated, *“We focus more on the group packages.”* This is designed to attract a large number of travellers at once through group packages.

4.4.2.3. The Effectiveness of the Marketing Efforts

A significant number of all participants (N = 10) indicated that they believe the marketing efforts applied by the BRCNR are effective in reaching potential markets. Four participants (2, 3, 6, and 10) mentioned that, based on the statistics they are collecting at the entrances of the reserves and the revenue generated through entrance fees, a steady increase is evident, indicating that people are aware of the reserve and willing to visit. Participant 3 even said that they are very effective *“because statistically, this year we have managed to exceed the previous year’s financial results.”* Similarly, Participant 5 also mentioned that *“we started to focus on India, doing virtual trade shows and workshops during the COVID-19 pandemic, and after the pandemic, we started to attend trade shows in India and do speed marketing at the tourism Indaba trade show.”* Resulting in a note of growth in the Indian market, visiting the Mpumalanga province. Furthermore, Participant 7 noted that the marketing

efforts are effective; as a result, BRCNR is ranked second among Mpumalanga's reserves in terms of international visitor numbers.

On the contrary, two participants (4 and 8) believe that the marketing efforts are effective to a certain extent, despite the reserve's infrastructure conditions and limited marketing budget, which negatively impact their effectiveness. Participant 4 even stated that the marketing efforts *“can be even more effective if the facilities can be improved from an infrastructure point of view.”* This limits the marketing team due to a limited marketing budget and poor maintenance infrastructure, which may lead to negative word of mouth, as they are relying on it as a primary marketing effort. Furthermore, participant 4 also mentioned that *“we do not want to sell a lie to the consumers”*, whereby travellers would find poor infrastructure but promoted as one of the best nature reserves.

Participant 9 noted that *“the number of followers in our social media platforms increases rapidly”* since she joined the MTPA. It is believed that people interact with the reserve's social media platforms to obtain more information about the reserve and the special packages available each season, as the reserve runs seasonal campaigns with packages tailored to each season.

4.4.2.4. Evaluation of the Marketing Efforts

From the interviews, it is clear that all 10 participants believe that evaluating the effectiveness of the marketing efforts should be based on the statistics of the travellers. All ten participants noted that the reserve evaluates the effectiveness of marketing efforts by comparing current statistics with those from previous years to track improvements in revenue generated and tourist turnover. This was highlighted by participant 2, who mentioned that *“we evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategies through checking the quarterly statistics and comparing them with the previous quarter.”* The increase in the number of tourist arrivals and in revenue collected at the entrance is classified as a positive, effective marketing effort to attract more visitors. A decrease in tourist arrivals would indicate that the marketing efforts were ineffective and that improvement is required.

Participant 4 also added that after they have advertised the reserve on radio stations, they conduct a post-campaign analysis to see how many people listened to their ads. She further stated that *“we do a post campaign analysis that gives us an indication of how many people we have reached, the audience that we have targeted.”* This participant furthermore indicated that during their seasonal campaigns, they track tourists' arrivals and demographics to determine that their strong market consists of tourists from domestic, regional, national, or international origins.

4.4.3. Contribution to the SDGs

This section focuses on the initiatives BRCNR is undertaking that contribute to specific SDGs (1, 8, 11, 13, and 15).

4.4.3.1. Contribution to SDG 1: No Poverty

Three participants (1, 3, and 10) mentioned that the reserve-built curios on sale as an initiative by the local communities to earn a living. These curios on sale are not paying any rent or compensation to operate within the reserve, as they sell their arts and crafts to tourists visiting the reserve. Participant 3 even said that *“curios sellers and the traditional dancers are the initiative to give back to the community without them paying any rent to the reserve to make a living through the BRCNR.”* Rao et al. (2024) maintain that local community empowerment creates inclusive community-based tourism, creating a sense of ownership and enabling the SMMEs to grow with the support they get from the reserve. Moreover, doing so creates employment opportunities and improves the standard of living for the local community. Additionally, Raihan (2024) suggests that nature reserves contribute directly and indirectly to local communities as tourist destinations, primarily because they are located on land owned by local communities for poverty alleviation purposes. This was achieved not only through job creation but also through initiatives that enable growth and support local businesses.

A significant number of participants (N = 6) (2, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9) noted that the reserve is on the land owned by the Communal Property Associations (CPAs). They had an agreement with the CPAs (community representatives) that every employment opportunity originating from the reserve must prioritise the local community. Participant 2 mentioned that they create *“seasonal jobs during the busiest seasons to have more*

people” sharing responsibilities. Nature reserves and tourism as an industry play a crucial role in bridging the gap by creating more employment opportunities for host communities through tourism, thereby improving their standard of living and enabling them to provide for themselves, ultimately leading to poverty alleviation and zero hunger (SDGs 1 and 2) (Lopes & Hiray, 2024). Therefore, it is clear that BRCNR contributes to SDG 1 through various initiatives and EPWP programs, alleviating poverty in the host communities.

4.4.3.2. Contribution to SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Most participants (six) believe that BRCNR creates employment opportunities and contributes to economic development, as the reserve is situated on community-owned land through the Communal Property Associations (CPAs); it is noted that the profit generated by the reserve through the entrance fee must be shared with the local community by creating employment opportunities (participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10). Participant 10 stated that a total of five contractors were appointed, and their contracts will run until October 2026, with over 122 workers in total overseeing the alien plants within the reserve. This aligns with the notion presented by Venugopal (2023), who noted that nature reserves play a crucial role in bridging the employment gap in host communities. Additionally, participant 1 also stated that “we used to have EPWP who are working on a temporary basis, and sometimes we used to hire people for fire management,” which is a funded project by the private sector.

Four interviewees (Participants 2, 4, 5, and 9) reckon that the BRCNR contributes to the economic development of the local community. Through various initiatives, the reserve contributes to the local economy’s growth. This initiative enables local communities to connect with tourists, whether international or domestic, visiting the reserve, without needing to market themselves or pay for advertising spaces within the reserve.

4.4.3.3. Contribution to SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Eight interviewees out of 10 (Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10) believe that collaboration with various tourism stakeholders enables the community to achieve sustainability. Participants (1 and 6) mentioned that BRCNR is partnered with the Thaba Chweu Municipality to conduct cleaning campaigns and assist with waste

collection around the reserve. Participant 2 said that *“we do go to local communities and other departments around to inform people about conservation initiatives and to include the community in every department taking part in the reserve.”* This is a hallmark of inclusive or community-based tourism, which brings all stakeholders together to work towards a shared goal. Similarly, Participant 3 also mentioned that *“we do have our cleaning campaigns and do environmental awareness, whereby we visit local schools and teach about the importance of conservation.”* The cleaning campaign not only benefits the reserve but also educates the local community to be vigilant about their environment, thereby preventing harm to it.

Participant 10 mentioned that *“we are involved more in the traditional authorities, where we donate when they have their sacred cultural ceremonies.”* As the reserve is situated on land owned by the CPAs, the involvement of the tribal authorities is one of the key contributions the reserve makes to ensure sustainable communities and protect the local community's cultural heritage. Participant 9 even said, *“There are curio sellers who sell their traditional crafts to the tourists, and most of their products preserve their culture.”* This keeps the community's cultural heritage intact and preserves it for future generations. Furthermore, participant 9 also mentioned that *“there are also cultural groups that dance to welcome tourists and find ways to make a living through the donations they receive from them.”* All these initiatives within the reserve play a crucial role in developing sustainable cities and communities. Similarly, Participant 5 also mentioned that *“One thing that tourism assists us in doing is to make our culture more promotable to other countries and to keep it sustainable for future generations to find it sacred and preserved.”*

4.4.3.4. Contribution to SDG 13: Climate Action

Three participants (1, 4, and 10) believe that visiting local schools to raise learners' environmental awareness will help them become familiar with sustainable practices at an early age. Participant 1 maintains that *“during the month of September, BRCNR came up with a programme of Aba Day, whereby we used to run along the local schools planting trees,”* as a way of raising awareness about the importance of environmentally friendly behavior on the environment. Moreover, Participant 10 also highlighted that *“we promote environmental awareness at local schools to educate learners about the importance of keeping our environment clean and mitigating the*

impacts of climate change.” This supports the statement made by Kalogiannidis et al. (2024), who maintained that forming effective climate change strategies requires strong collaboration among diverse tourism-related stakeholders, including local communities, government, civil society, and the private sector. Participant 8 mentioned that these stakeholder relationships make it possible to achieve sustainable behavior if everyone is willing to play their role in minimising the negative climate impacts.

Four participants (2, 3, 9, and 10) believe that the local municipality's involvement in the cleaning campaigns makes a huge difference, as it also demonstrates that they are responsible citizens. Participant 10 stated that *“we are working closely with the Thaba Chweu Municipality, and other tourism-related stakeholders to ensure that the Panorama route remains clean, thereby generating revenue for the province.”* This aligns with the notion that there is a crucial need for sustainable development to minimise adverse effects that can contribute to climate change, thereby instilling a fear of life for potential tourists (Kalogiannidis et al., 2024). The Panorama route in Mpumalanga province boasts numerous tourist attractions, and having various stakeholders collaborate to maintain the route's cleanliness and attractiveness benefits not only economic growth but also environmental conservation. Additionally, Freund et al. (2019) stated that environmental education programs play a crucial role in protecting endangered species of fauna and flora from extinction and promoting sustainable practices in nature reserves.

4.4.3.5. Contribution to SDG 15: Life on Land

Nature reserves play a crucial role in preserving the environment for future generations to enjoy the same experiences as those of the present. Three participants (3, 8, and 10) believe that hosting workshops with local schools and communities to raise environmental awareness is crucial to ensuring the survival of life on land and preserving the environment. Participant 3 said, *“We do have our environmental awareness programmes, which are led by our environmental monitors to ensure that we always visit schools and nearby communities to educate them about the importance of preserving the environment.”* These types of campaigns play a crucial role in ensuring that we are responsible for our actions, as they can have a profoundly negative impact in the long run. Thus, nature reserves play a paramount role in environmental sustainability by balancing human interaction with the environment,

enabling host communities to meet their demands without exceeding the ecosystem's capacity to continue providing the required services (Hongshu & Min, 2024). Similarly, participant 8 said, *“The aim is to raise awareness about the importance of environmental conservation in maintaining a clean environment and mitigating negative impacts to prevent climate change and land degradation.”*

Nature reserves are crucial for maintaining ecosystem equilibrium by conserving the environment and natural resources, while also contributing to the host communities' GDP through job creation and infrastructure development (Grangxabe et al., 2024). Taking care of the environment indirectly contributes to various aspects of sustainability, such as social and economic. Participant 10 alluded that *“as we sell nature experiences to travellers, maintaining a high environmental standard is crucial for the reserve to remain sustainable for future generations to experience the same.”* This suggests that nature reserves play a crucial role in balancing tourism and environmental conservation, allowing for a sustainable life on land with minimal negative impacts that can trigger climate change, resulting in droughts, heavy rains that destroy the environment, and causing fear among tourists. Additionally, participant 1 also mentioned that *“we do have our field rangers who patrol our fences, look at soil erosion, and after they have identified soil erosion, we send our maintenance people to build gabions to stop the soil erosion.”* Participants (1 and 2) mentioned that field rangers patrol the reserve to prevent unauthorised hunting and deforestation, which can lead to soil erosion and the extinction of natural species.

4.4.3.6. BRCNR Partnerships that align with Sustainable Development.

Nine interviewees (participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10) mentioned that BRCNR is in partnership with the Thaba Chweu local municipality to host cleaning campaigns and raise environmental awareness among the local community. Participants (1, 2, and 5) also noted that the reserve is partnered with the Communal Property Associations (CPAs), the landowners where the reserve is located, who represent the local community to the reserve, and every development that must take place in the reserve has to be approved by them first. Participant 1 said that *“if there is any development, we cannot proceed without informing CPAs to ensure that the development is sustainable. In other words, they must first own that development.”*

Three interviewees (Participants 3, 9, and 10) also mentioned the partnership with South African Forestry Company Limited (SAFCOL), which manages the forests and waterfalls along the Panorama route. Participant 7 said that they also partnered with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE), *“which provides us with interns who work on specific environmental issues, including alien plants.”*

Participant 4 said they are working with SANRAL to conduct tourism safety training during peak seasons. Other partnerships mentioned include the Shot Left Campaign and SANParks, as well as Gauteng Tourism, which is one of their key market bases, as noted by participant 8. Additionally, Participant 9 also mentioned partnerships with *“Hazyview Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, and tribal authorities.”* Furthermore, Participant 10 noted that they are partnered with *“Department of Public Works and Transport, and Kruger to Canyon. Blyde Forever Resort, Department of Education”* are stakeholders they have partnered with.

4.4.4. Conservation Awareness

This section focuses on the level of awareness that BRCNR creates to ensure environmental conservation within the reserve.

4.4.4.1. Effectiveness of Environmental Awareness

Marketing content focused on environmental conservation can be one of the most effective ways to attract environmentally conscious travellers. A significant number of interviewees (N=6, Participants 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10) believe that the marketing strategies applied by the BRCNR incorporate environmental conservation to raise awareness among tourists before they decide to visit the reserve, so they are fully aware of the reserve's environmental conservation initiatives. They judge this based on tourists' behaviour in the reserve, despite the fact that there are very few staff members present throughout the reserve. However, tourists demonstrate a positive attitude towards the environment by respecting its natural state and refraining from littering. This was stated by participant 4, who said, *“I can say that most of our reserves have limited field rangers or tour guides, but tourists come fully aware of the environmental conservation initiatives implemented by our reserves regarding littering.”* This is a good sign that the reserve attracts tourist who care about the environment and are willing to play their role in keeping it conserved. Additionally,

participant 10 also said that *“we have a team that includes environmental monitors and guides who educate visitors about the reserve, the museum, and the importance of environmental conservation,”* on site to educate visitors about different plants and trees around the reserve.

Participant 1 stated that the reserve is *“the third-largest canyon in the world”, and the fact that it attracts returning tourists from international countries demonstrates that the reserve appeals to the right market, which is interested in environmental conservation.* Four interviewees (participants 4, 6, 8, and 9) think that the information visibly posted around the reserve plays a huge role in keeping tourists aware of environmental conservation, even if they are not guided around the reserve due to limited staff members, but they can read for themselves the information that raises awareness on the environment. Participant 6 even said that *“the information planted across the BRCNR plays a crucial role in equipping tourists with conservation information.”* Additionally, participant 8 stated that *“even when they make reservations, there are terms and conditions that they are given when making bookings,”* which speaks to environmental conservation and the expectations placed on them in the reserve.

4.4.4.2. Tracking Conservation Awareness

Three interviewees (participants 8, 9, and 10) believe that after conducting awareness programs in local communities and schools, tracking the effectiveness of their programs involves monitoring changes in behaviour towards the environment. This was also mentioned by participant 10, who stated, *“You can see changes in behavior towards the environment, and people are more environmentally aware in terms of littering, using the designated walking paths in the reserve.”* Additionally, participant 10 said, *“We do track changes the moment we visit a community in a tribal authority, and we start the awareness that you could see a difference in that month or quarter, there will be reductions in illegal entry to the reserve.”* This demonstrates that the reserve places a high priority on environmental conservation by conducting post-program analysis to monitor changes in behaviour towards the environment, which indicates the effectiveness of the awareness programs.

Four participants (4, 5, 6, and 8) mentioned that they are working with the Biodiversity Department of MTPA, which is responsible for the environment and measuring

environmental changes. Participant 8 even said that *“We strongly rely on biodiversity conservation to provide reports on the environment, as we deal mostly with promoting the reserves.”* Moreover, Participants 2 and 3 indicated that they are still struggling with littering near the reserve; hence, they proposed a monthly cleaning campaign to make it a habit for the community to live in a clean environment.

4.4.5. Tourism Seasons and Trends

This section addresses the peak season and trends in the BRCNR, including the marketing strategies employed during this period and their effectiveness.

4.4.5.1. The Peak Seasons on BRCNR

All ten interviewees (N = 10) (participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) believe that the peak season for the BRCNR is the festive season, surpassing all other seasons. Participant 9 even said, *“The festive season is the busiest time for our reserve.”* Additionally, participant 6 also stated that *“Mpumalanga is an all-season destination due to its weather conditions; it is warm almost throughout the year,”* but the festive season is the busiest overall. It is also noted that the spring season is among the busiest. Four participants (1, 2, 3, and 10) mentioned that the spring season is one of the busiest times, due to Parks Week in September, when the entrance to the reserve is free for one day, attracting more school groups. Participant 10 even said that *“the two busiest seasons are the third quarter (spring) and the fourth quarter (Festive) season; they compete in terms of tourist arrivals.”* In addition, three participants (4, 6, and 7) noted that even during the Easter season, the reserve receives quite a good number of tourist arrivals. Participant 4 even said that *“School holidays, Easter period, and Festive period. The number would show an increase in visitors during those periods.”* This supports the statement made by participants (5 and 6) that Mpumalanga is an all-season destination due to its favourable weather conditions, which result in a fair number of tourist arrivals throughout the year. It is noted that the festive season is the peak season in the BRCNR.

4.4.5.2. Marketing Strategies/Efforts that Target Peak Season

It is noted that three participants (1, 2, and 3) mentioned that during the spring season, they rely on “Park’s Week” in September, when the reserve offers free entrance as a marketing effort to attract more tourist arrivals. Participant 2 stated that *“We only have*

'Mahala Day' in September, where we are running a free entrance to the reserve to attract more tourists."

Five interviewees (Participants 4, 6, 7, 9, and 10) indicated that BRCNR conducts seasonal campaigns to attract suitable tourists for each season. Participant 10 even said that *"We typically run seasonal campaigns to inform potential travellers about what they can expect from the reserve in each season"*. Participant 5 said, *"We use strategies to promote pre-season buying."* This strategy creates travel group packages early at a low price to encourage tourists to purchase the package early and then increases the prices towards the season. Four participants (6, 7, 8, and 10) noted that one of the marketing efforts involves radio station advertisements, social media platforms, and local newspapers. Participant 10 mentioned that *"we utilize radio stations and social media platforms to promote the reserve, knowing that we are fully prepared."*

4.4.5.3. The Effectiveness of the Marketing Strategies/Efforts

A total of three out of ten participants (1, 2, and 4) mentioned that registers are set up at the entrance gates during Park's Week in September, aiming to collect data on the number of tourist arrivals and their demographics to identify the strongest market and areas for improvement to attract more visitors from the least market-based demographics. Participant 2 even stated that *"we compare the registers with the past year's to check for any improvements and declines in the number of visitors."*

Additionally, three participants (6, 7, and 9) mentioned that they monitor the number of tourist arrivals and the revenue generated from entrance fees to assess the effectiveness of the marketing efforts. Participant 6 also noted that *"if the number of tourist arrivals increases, it means the marketing strategies are working,"* and that when there is a decline in the number of tourist arrivals compared to previous years, the marketing efforts were not effective in attracting more tourists. Furthermore, participants (3 and 8) also mentioned that they compile a quarterly report to track the performance of the reserve in comparison to previous quarters from the same year, which helps them determine whether the reserve is doing well in marketing or not. Participant 3 even said that *"We usually have statistics that we compile monthly, and*

we keep records of them just to compare with the previous years in terms of decline or improvement.”

In general, the effectiveness of the marketing strategies and efforts is being monitored through the number of tourist arrivals to the reserve. If the reserve manages to attract more tourists in a quarter than in the same quarter of the previous year, that would be regarded as effective; however, a decline in tourist arrivals is considered ineffective.

4.4.6. Challenges and Opportunities at BRCNR

This section focuses on the challenges BRCNR encountered when implementing marketing at the reserve, as well as opportunities they can adopt to improve their marketing and overcome these challenges.

4.4.6.1. Challenges Encountered in Implementation of Marketing Strategies/Efforts.

Six participants (4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10) highlighted that the main challenge they encountered when implementing marketing efforts to promote BRCNR was the budget problem. They have hinted that the budget is very limited, while marketing requires a substantial budget to attend trade shows, run campaigns, and participate in promotional competitions. Participant 8 even said that *“mostly it is the budget, because every year the budget is decreased,”* which limits the opportunities to explore further options for better results. Additionally, participant 10 said, *“These issues are closely tied to the finances, as our organisation is currently facing a challenging time due to an insufficient budget to run and maintain its reserves.”*

Four participants (2, 3, 7, and 10) noted that another big challenge is the poor maintenance of the reserve’s infrastructure, which limits the potential to promote the reserve to its fullest capacity due to poor standards. Participant 3 stated that *“our reserve is no longer well-maintained the way it used to be, and tourists no longer want to see the very same thing repeatedly, and this is the challenge that would make us lose more tourists.”* This goes a long way, because it is not an option to expose tourists to unforeseen experiences of the reserve by promoting it as perfect, only to find that it is in poor condition with inadequate infrastructure. However, participant 10 said that

all *“these issues are closely tied to the finances, as our organisation is currently facing a challenging time due to an insufficient budget to run and maintain its reserves.”*

Two participants (1 and 10) stated that illegal mining is taking place in the reserve, posing a threat to the safety of tourists visiting it. Participant 1 even mentioned that *“tourists start to be afraid for their lives since these illegal miners are heavily armed.”* This is a serious concern, because the illegal miners can attack the tourists and there will be no traces of them, which can cause a short fall in the reserve. Furthermore, participant 10 also stated that *“another challenge is the shortage of staff from the BRCNR, particularly among the field rangers.”*

In general, the biggest challenge is budget constraints in the reserve, which cause all the other challenges, including limited marketing efforts, a shortage of staff, poor infrastructure maintenance, and inadequate security measures to protect tourists from potential threats posed by illegal miners.

4.4.6.2. Opportunities to Improve Marketing for the BRCNR.

Seven participants (2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10) believe that upgrading the state of the infrastructure in the reserve to a more modernised one, and adding more entertainment activities, could be a great opportunity to attract a larger number of tourists and increase revenue generation. Participant 7 even stated that *“Other adventure activities could be added to these destinations to keep them more entertaining, to make tourists stay longer, and to interact with the locals.”* Similarly, Participant 10 also mentioned that *“add a cable car, to keep tourists in Mpumalanga, not to visit other provinces for it, such as Skywalk and hotels around.”* This indicates that having the reserve as raw as, limits tourists from staying within the reserve, thereby reducing their spending on local communities that contribute to poverty alleviation (SDG 1).

Participants (4 and 8) also noted that more collaborations and partnerships with other tourism-related organisations could help promote the reserves at a lower cost, as budget is the primary challenge preventing most initiatives from happening in the reserve. Participant 4 even stated that *“The best approach is to leverage partnerships*

and collaboration,” because over-reliance on government grants alone is ineffective, as they are being reduced each year.

Based on the above, if the reserve can be better maintained in terms of infrastructure and more entertainment activities are added, tourists may spend more, thereby increasing revenue and creating more employment opportunities (SDG 8) and alleviating poverty (SDG 1).

4.4.6.3. Resources Needed to Better Market BRCNR Sustainably.

Eight participants (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, and 10) believe that having sufficient financial resources could improve the reserve's marketing, maintenance, and employment opportunities for field workers to sustain the reserve. Participant 7 said that *“In terms of financial resources, we have been allocated a limited budget in the current financial year compared to the previous year,”* which, however, is not enough to cover maintenance, marketing, and salaries for workers. Additionally, participant 10 further mentioned that *“our budget is centralised or controlled at the head office, which makes it difficult to go the extra mile, even if we may have great ideas to improve the reserve.”* This is also stated by participant 6, who notes that BRCNR requires someone within the reserve to always be present and promote the reserve directly, as everything must be approved by the MTPA first, which is their headquarters.

Eight participants (1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10) believe that the reserve needs to hire more technically skilled personnel to maintain the reserve and upgrade its infrastructure maintenance. Having limited staff members also limits the proper operation of the reserve, as one person is expected to perform multiple duties. Participant 4 even said that *“We need skilled and experienced workers to perform specific tasks and enhance the infrastructure of the reserves and the facilities to properly run the reserve.”* This highlights the importance of having personnel who are well-equipped with the necessary skills to hit the ground running and complement each other for the effective operation of the reserve. Additionally, Participant 10 also mentioned that *“We need human resources to have well-informed people about nature conservation and technology, so that we can combine both traditional and modern generations in terms of marketing.”*

Based on the above, having a sufficient budget could improve the reserve's financial position by allowing it to hire more full-time employees, reduce reliance on the EPWP, upgrade infrastructure, and better market the reserve to attract more tourist arrivals, thereby increasing revenue.

4.4.6.4. Additional Suggestions

Participants (1, 5, and 6) suggested that more collaboration with various tourism-related stakeholders could facilitate the promotion of Mpumalanga as a destination of choice, thereby maximising revenue and circulating it within the communities. Participant 5 even said that *“if we can have more collaborations with different sectors, we can do more for the Mpumalanga province in terms of promoting it as a tourist destination,”* because in most cases, the budget is insufficient, but partnerships can make it easy to market the destinations. Furthermore, participant 1 also mentioned that *“We do have a programme called Indigenous Knowledge Collector, where people work with the traditional healers, elders and leaders of the communities in explaining different plants around the reserve and their usage.”* These programs play a vital role in preserving the community's cultural heritage.

Participant 2 suggested that the reserve should create more universal access areas to ensure that everyone is welcome and can experience the reserve in the same way as everyone else. Furthermore, participant 9 added that *“having technically skilled people to work in the reserve can improve the overall functioning of our reserve.”* However, five participants (3, 4, 7, 8, and 10) did not have any additional suggestions.

4.5. FINDINGS DISCUSSIONS

The findings demonstrate that marketing strategies employed by the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR) are largely effective in attracting and influencing tourists. Quantitative results revealed that word of mouth and social media platforms were the most influential sources of awareness, while qualitative insights highlighted the trust and credibility built through personal recommendations and digital engagement. This supports Mai and Chen (2025), who asserted that word-of-mouth remains one of the most powerful marketing tools in tourism, as it conveys authentic experiences that build visitor confidence. Similarly, Saria et al. (2024) highlight the role of social media marketing and content relevance in shaping tourist decisions, which

resonates with the finding that nearly half of respondents rated marketing efforts as “very effective.” Tourist motivations were dominated by scenic landscapes and natural beauty, followed by adventure activities, confirming the reserve’s appeal as both an ecotourism and adventure destination. Recommendations from others further reinforced the importance of interpersonal influence in decision-making. Seasonal preferences revealed spring (Sep–Nov) as the most favoured period, attributed to favourable weather and visibility of iconic sites such as God’s Window. Jikidze (2025) notes that seasonality is shaped by climatic conditions and holiday cycles, which not only drive visitation but also create temporary employment opportunities (SDG 8). However, seasonality also poses risks of over-tourism, environmental degradation, and cultural commercialization, underscoring the need for balanced management strategies.

The findings consistently highlighted the visibility and effectiveness of sustainability practices within the BRCNR. Respondents widely recognized eco-friendly infrastructure such as recycling bins, educational signage, and guided walking paths, alongside effective waste management. Visitors reported increased awareness of conservation issues and environmental responsibility, with many expressing stronger support for conservation efforts after their visit. These findings align with Mabibibi et al. (2021), who emphasised the role of protected areas in advancing SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) through biodiversity preservation and climate-conscious practices. Importantly, while sustainability marketing messages were acknowledged, they were not the primary driver of visitation, suggesting that experiential exposure to conservation practices may be more impactful than promotional messaging alone.

The level of tourist satisfaction with the BRCNR was high, indicating that the reserve met tourists’ expectations. Most tourists were convinced to recommend the reserve to other potential travellers and revisit it themselves. The findings indicated that marketing aligned well with their actual experiences, reinforcing credibility and trust. Findings further affirmed value for money, while customer service and communication were rated highly. These findings support Girisaran et al. (2025), who maintain that marketing must evolve into relationship building through quality experiences to foster

loyalty and repeat visitation. Word-of-mouth potential was particularly strong; they would recommend the reserve, further amplifying its promotional reach.

The findings highlighted that visits contribute to job creation and economic development (SDG 1 & 8), while marketing campaigns highlighted community empowerment and poverty alleviation (SDG 1). Conservation awareness and eco-friendly practices directly support SDG 13 and SDG 15, ensuring that tourism development is environmentally responsible and socially inclusive. These findings align with studies by Rao et al. (2024) and Mammadova et al. (2025), which show that the involvement of local communities in tourism development builds a sense of belonging and enhances effective, inclusive decision-making, ensuring that everyone is heard.

The findings reinforce the multidimensional role of tourism as both an economic driver and a catalyst for sustainable development, positioning BRCNR as a model for integrating tourism growth with environmental conservation and community empowerment. These findings indicate that effective promotion attracts diverse visitors, authentic experiences drive satisfaction and loyalty, and visible conservation practices enhance awareness and support for environmental protection. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative findings reveals the tourism's dual role in ensuring the sustainability of ecotourism destinations and serving as a transformative force in sustainable development. By integrating marketing, visitor experience, and Sustainable Development Goals, set BRCNR as an example of how responsible tourism can concurrently advance economic development, social empowerment, and environmental conservation.

4.6. CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to present the empirical results of the study. Frequencies (in tables, graphs, and pie charts), means, and standard deviations were used to discuss the descriptive results. Quantitative analysis: Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) was performed on the data to identify the latent constructs. All four factors demonstrated strong internal consistency or reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, confirming that each underlying dimension was measured by all items. The Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a significant ($p < 0.001$) result for the four

factors, demonstrating that item correlations were sufficiently strong to justify factor extraction. Qualitative results analysis was reported verbatim, and an interpretation was provided at the end of every section. The themes were sorted in accordance with the literature and involved the following: The officials' information (position, responsibilities, and so forth), marketing strategies/efforts applied by the BRCNR, contribution to the SDGs, conservation awareness, tourism seasons and trends, the challenges and opportunities, and lastly, the additional suggestions/comments.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The chapter's main aim is to present conclusions and offer recommendations based on the study's findings. The aim of this study was to assess the effectiveness of MTPA-managed nature reserves marketing efforts and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15), specifically in the case study of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS, BASED ON THE SET OBJECTIVES

To achieve the main aim of this study, the following objectives were set in Chapter 1 and fulfilled throughout the study to achieve the primary aim of the study:

- The first objective was to examine the current marketing strategies that are applied by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) to promote the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR). This objective was achieved in Chapter 2 of the study. The examination of the current marketing strategies and efforts applied to promote BRCNR was done by means of an in-depth discussion on the following aspects:
 - Understanding tourism marketing and efforts in nature reserves.
 - Discussing the role of marketing in tourism protected areas.
 - Analysing digital marketing in tourism protected areas.
 - Discussing visitor behaviour and destination perception.
- The second objective was to determine the extent to which BRCNR's marketing efforts contribute to the selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15). This objective was achieved in Chapters 2 and 4 of the study. To determine the extent of contribution to the SDGs, was done by means of an in-depth discussion based on the following aspects:
 - Understanding sustainable tourism and the SDGs
 - Discussing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Tourism
 - Analysing the SDGs in the context of the nature reserves

- Analysis of the descriptive elements relating to BRCNR's perceived contribution to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- The third objective was to assess how the selected marketing strategies influence conservation awareness among tourists and the officials at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, and to identify the peak tourist seasons within the reserve. This objective was achieved in Chapter 4 of the study. Assessing the influence of marketing strategies on conservation awareness was done by means of a thorough discussion on the following aspects:
 - Analysis of the descriptive marketing awareness, seasonality, and tourism activities
 - Analysis of the descriptive sustainability marketing and conservation awareness.
 - Understanding the effectiveness of Marketing Strategies applied by BRCNR.
 - Determining the relationship between marketing strategies and conservation awareness.
- The fourth objective was to identify challenges and opportunities for enhancing marketing practices that support sustainable tourism within the Nature Reserve. This objective was achieved in Chapter 4 of the study. The identification of the challenges and opportunities to enhance marketing was done by means of an in-depth discussion on the following aspects:
 - Understanding the challenges encountered in the implementation of marketing strategies/efforts.
 - Understanding the opportunities to improve marketing for the BRCNR.
 - Discussing the resources needed to better market BRCNR sustainably.

5.2. CONCLUSIONS

5.2.1. CONCLUSION REGARDING THE EXAMINATION OF THE CURRENT MARKETING STRATEGIES AND EFFORTS APPLIED BY THE MTPA TO PROMOTE THE BRCNR (CHAPTER 2).

- Marketing is important in positioning a destination in the minds of consumers (c.f.2.7).

- Marketing ensures that the extended marketing mix for the developed product meets customer demands (c.f.2.4.2).
- Digital Marketing is less costly and effective for reaching a global audience and increases profit generation (c.f.2.5).
- Social media is becoming a key platform to reach out to a large audience (c.f.2.5.1).
- Social media makes it easy to interact directly with potential consumers (c.f.2.5.1).
- Website marketing allows the tourism organisations to build their digital portfolio (c.f.2.5.2).
- Destination branding makes it possible for a destination to market its products (c.f.2.7).
- Word of mouth is an influential marketing strategy for nature reserves (c.f.2.6).
- Word of mouth is an influential factor that contributes to customer revisit (c.f.2.6).
- The factor analysis for the marketing effectiveness revealed the following:
 - Respondents showed overall positive perceptions of BRCNR's marketing strategies, with mean scores between 1.83 and 2.55 and SD values below 1.0, indicating consistent responses (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Marketing strategies were viewed as effectively communicating the reserve's unique features (M = 2.30; SD = 0.8) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Websites and social media platforms were considered easy to access and use (M = 1.83; SD = 0.6) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Digital platforms, especially social media, were seen as effective promotional tools for attracting potential tourists (M = 2.02; SD = 0.7) (4.2.3).
 - Marketing content was perceived as regularly updated and relevant (M = 2.30; SD = 0.7) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Marketing efforts successfully stimulated interest in visiting the reserve (M = 2.34; SD = 0.7) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Respondents found online information easy to access (M = 2.14; SD = 0.6) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Communication platforms such as the MTPA website and brochures were considered informative (M = 2.06; SD = 0.7) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Information regarding local culture and heritage was clearly communicated (M = 2.32; SD = 0.7) (c.f.4.2.3).

- Visitors reported receiving timely and accurate information before and during their visit ($M = 2.09$; $SD = 0.7$) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Marketing strategies were seen as reflecting environmental conservation and sustainability values ($M = 2.23$; $SD = 0.8$) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - The statement on whether marketing influenced destination choice over competitors scored more neutral ($M = 2.55$; $SD = 0.8$), suggesting room for improved competitive positioning (c.f.4.2.3).
 - MTPA's marketing materials were found adequate for trip planning ($M = 2.18$; $SD = 0.7$) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Marketing content was perceived as effective in promoting conservation awareness ($M = 2.18$; $SD = 0.7$) (c.f.4.2.3).
 - Overall, BRCNR's marketing strategies are effective, accessible, informative, and largely aligned with visitor expectations (c.f.4.2.3).
- The T-test revealed that there were no significant statistical differences found for gender regarding existing marketing strategies, Perceived contribution of BRCNR to the SDGs (c.f.4.3.5.1).
 - Significant differences were observed for visitor status regarding the effectiveness of existing marketing strategies. The results suggest that existing marketing strategies are more effective for repeat visitors, likely due to stronger brand recognition and familiarity, while first-time visitors may not be sufficiently reached or engaged (c.f.4.3.5.2).
- Significant differences were observed for visitor status regarding tourist satisfaction and perception at the BRCNR (c.f.4.3.5.2).
 - In terms of the tourism experience, repeat visitors reported higher satisfaction levels, whereas first-time visitors may feel uncertain, overwhelmed, or insufficiently informed during their visit (c.f.4.3.5.2).
 - Lastly, the analysis indicated a borderline difference between first-time and repeat visitors regarding sustainability marketing practices and conservation awareness ($p = 0.069$). Although this difference was not statistically significant, it suggests a potential trend whereby repeat visitors may have slightly higher awareness of sustainability initiatives compared to first-time visitors. This finding highlights an

area for further investigation, as enhancing sustainability communication could benefit first-time visitors and strengthen overall visitor engagement (c.f.4.3.5.2).

5.2.2. CONCLUSION REGARDING THE EXTENT TO WHICH BRCNR'S MARKETING STRATEGIES/EFFORTS CONTRIBUTE TO SELECTED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (1, 8, 11, 13, and 15) (CHAPTERS 2 AND 4).

- Overall, respondents somewhat agreed that marketing campaigns highlighted aspects of community empowerment and poverty alleviation linked to SDG 1 (M = 2.18; SD = 0.72) (c.f.4.2.6).
- The majority of the respondents believed that the reserve contributes positively to local job creation and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8), as reflected in a mean of 1.71 (SD = 0.88), indicating a strong perceived economic benefit (c.f.4.2.6).
- A very high proportion of respondents agreed that the promotion of BRCNR encourages responsible and sustainable travel (SDG 11) (M = 1.61; SD = 0.65), resulting in the lowest mean score in this category (c.f.4.2.6).
- Perceptions of inclusive and sustainable tourism infrastructure, including features that support universal access, were also positive (M = 1.75; SD = 0.77) (c.f.4.2.6).
- Environmental sustainability messages aligned with SDG 13 were moderately recognised, with 75% of respondents agreeing that promotional content emphasised environmental protection and climate awareness (M = 2.17; SD = 0.68) (c.f.4.2.6).
- The majority of the respondents agreed that marketing emphasised biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural heritage (SDG 15), reflected in a mean value of 2.20 (SD = 0.63) (c.f.4.2.6).
- The reserve is viewed as promoting economic empowerment, encouraging responsible tourism behaviour, supporting inclusive tourism infrastructure, and advancing environmental and biodiversity awareness (c.f.4.2.6).

5.2.3. CONCLUSION WITH REGARD TO HOW THE SELECTED MARKETING STRATEGIES INFLUENCE CONSERVATION AWARENESS AMONG TOURISTS AND THE OFFICIALS AT BRCNR, AND TO IDENTIFY THE PEAK TOURIST SEASON WITHIN THE RESERVE (CHAPTER 4).

- Overall, respondents somewhat agreed that the marketing messages of the reserve emphasised environmental conservation and sustainability (M = 2.37; SD = 0.74) (c.f.4.2.4).
- Respondents widely recognised eco-friendly practices such as, recycling bins, educational signage, and nature walking paths (M = 1.66; SD = 0.68) (c.f.4.2.4).
- Marketing materials also played a moderate role in helping visitors understand the importance of conserving nature (M = 2.19; SD = 0.82) (c.f.4.2.4).
- Respondents reported an increase in their awareness of conservation issues following their visit (M = 2.05; SD = 0.68) (c.f.4.2.4).
- Respondents also noted that they learned about biodiversity and the ecological significance of the BRCNR during their visit (M = 2.26; SD = 0.76) (c.f.4.2.4).
- Respondents agreed that the reserve promotes conservation awareness (M = 2.13; SD = 0.71) (c.f.4.2.4).
- The results demonstrate that BRCNR's sustainability marketing and on-site environmental practices are generally effective in informing, educating, and raising conservation awareness among visitors (c.f.4.2.4).
- The results show that the Spring and Summer/Festive seasons are the busiest seasons in the reserve (c.f.4.4.5.1).

5.2.4. CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE IDENTIFICATION OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING MARKETING PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WITHIN THE NATURE RESERVE (CHAPTER 4).

- **The Challenges to Enhance Marketing Efforts**
 - The reserve has budget constraints, which limit the reserve from implementing more diverse marketing strategies to promote BRCNR (c.f.4.4.6.1).
 - The reserve is poorly maintained in terms of infrastructure, which is also caused by the budget constraints (c.f.4.4.6.1).
 - The BRCNR is mainly relying on word of mouth and recommendations for it to be marketed (c.f.4.4.6.1).
 - There are illegal miners within the reserve that pose a life threat to tourists (c.f.4.4.6.1).
 - There are limited staff members in the reserve, which makes one perform more than one responsibility in the reserve (c.f.4.4.6.1).

- **The Opportunities to Enhance Marketing Efforts**

- The majority of the participants suggested that most of the challenges that hinder the reserve are budget-related; if the budget can be increased, a lot of the challenges would be resolved (c.f.4.4.6.2).
- Improving the infrastructure around the reserve and adding more entertainment activities, the reserve can attract more tourists who will spend more within the reserve (4.4.6.2).
- Collaborating with different tourism-related stakeholders can improve the marketing efforts and reach more audiences (c.f.4.4.6.2).
- Hire more technical staff members who are knowledgeable about nature conservation and reduce reliance on the EPWP (c.f.4.4.6.2).

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section focuses on the recommendations regarding the assessment of the effectiveness of MTPA-managed nature reserves marketing efforts and their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15), specifically in the case study of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, will be made in this section, and the recommendations for emerging research in this field of study. Based on the findings of this study on marketing effectiveness, sustainability practices, and visitor perceptions at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR), the following recommendations are proposed, with practical steps and measurable outcomes to ensure their implementation is effective and aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

1. Enhancing marketing effectiveness:

To improve the reach and impact of marketing efforts, BRCNR should develop targeted social media campaigns that emphasize the reserve's unique natural and cultural features, complemented by regularly updated marketing materials that include visitor experiences, testimonials, and conservation messages. The success of these efforts can be measured through increased social media engagement, aiming for a rise in likes, shares, and comments within 12 months, and an increase in advance bookings via the BRCNR website within the same period.

2. Promoting sustainability awareness:

BRCNR should integrate interpretive signage, eco-trails, and guided tours that highlight conservation practices and sustainability principles. Additionally, educational activities, such as workshops or interactive demonstrations of local biodiversity, should be offered to visitors. The effectiveness of these initiatives can be assessed through visitor feedback, targeting surveyed visitors reporting increased awareness of environmental conservation after participating, and annual visitor knowledge assessments to track improvements in conservation understanding.

3. Improving tourist satisfaction and experience:

To enhance visitor satisfaction, the reserve should implement feedback mechanisms, such as kiosks or post-visit surveys, and ensure timely access to clear, accurate information through brochures, websites, and mobile applications. The outcomes of these interventions can be measured by achieving an overall visitor satisfaction score of 4 or higher on a 5-point Likert scale within one year, while reducing complaints related to information access.

4. Supporting local community and SDG contributions:

BRCNR should collaborate with local artisans, guides, and businesses to create tourism packages that are inclusive of local communities, while promoting community-based initiatives such as sustainable handicraft markets or cultural events. Progress can be monitored through measurable outcomes, including an annual increase in local employment opportunities and the establishment of at least 2 community-based sustainable tourism initiatives each year, with participation and revenue generation tracked.

5. Monitoring and evaluation of marketing and sustainability practices:

Finally, the reserve should conduct quarterly reviews of marketing strategies and visitor engagement metrics, and track participation and learning outcomes from conservation programs annually. Measurable outcomes for these activities include documented improvements in visitor engagement and satisfaction each quarter, as well as a year-on-year increase in the proportion of visitors demonstrating enhanced conservation awareness.

5.4. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Study limitations

- This study was limited to the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, which does not represent all the nature reserves in Mpumalanga Province or in South Africa.
- This study focused on the marketing, perceptions of the tourists, and the management officials of MTPA and BRCNR regarding their contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals. The inclusion of host community perspectives may yield deeper insights into the role BRCNR plays in achieving the SDGs.

Future research direction

Future studies should expand the geographical scope beyond the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve to include multiple nature reserves across Mpumalanga Province and other provinces in South Africa. Comparative studies across different reserves would enhance the generalisability of findings and enable a more comprehensive understanding of how marketing efforts contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across diverse environmental and institutional contexts.

- Future research should incorporate the perspectives of host communities living adjacent to protected areas. Including local residents would provide a more holistic evaluation of how tourism development and marketing initiatives influence socio-economic development, community well-being, and the realisation of SDGs at the grassroots level.
- There is a need for longitudinal studies that assess the long-term impact of marketing strategies implemented by the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency on sustainability outcomes. Such studies would allow researchers to track changes over time and better evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of current marketing interventions.
- Future studies could adopt mixed-method or advanced quantitative approaches to measure the direct and indirect relationships between marketing activities, tourist behaviour, and specific SDG indicators. This would strengthen causal inferences and provide more empirically grounded recommendations for policy and practice.

- Additional research could explore the role of emerging digital marketing technologies (e.g., social media analytics, artificial intelligence, and big data) in enhancing destination competitiveness and sustainable tourism development within protected areas.
- Lastly, future research should consider including a broader range of stakeholders, such as private sector tourism operators, conservation organisations, and policymakers, to develop a multi-stakeholder perspective on sustainable destination management and marketing.

5.5 CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

In conclusion, the above chapter provides an overview of each objective, indicating whether it has been achieved by the study and where it is discussed. This chapter highlights the key conclusions drawn from this study and the recommendations based on its findings.

Quantitative analysis: Exploratory Factor Analyses (EFA) was performed on the data to identify the latent constructs. All four factors demonstrated strong internal consistency or reliability, with Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, confirming that each underlying dimension was measured by all items. The Bartlett's test of sphericity produced a significant ($p < 0.001$) result for the four factors, demonstrating that item correlations were sufficiently strong to justify factor extraction. Qualitative results analysis was reported verbatim, and an interpretation was provided at the end of every section. The themes were sorted in accordance with the literature and involved the following: The officials' information (position, responsibilities, and so forth), marketing strategies/efforts applied by the BRCNR, contribution to the SDGs, conservation awareness, tourism seasons and trends, the challenges and opportunities, and lastly, the additional suggestions/comments.

The study met all its objectives, and the results revealed the following findings. The examination of existing marketing strategies revealed that digital platforms, especially social media and websites, were useful, approachable, and educational instruments for promoting the reserve, generating interest, and conveying its distinctive

sustainability practices. Factor analysis indicated consistently positive visitor perceptions, with marketing efforts in line with customer expectations. Significantly, first-time visitors need more focused communication, while repeat visitors reported higher levels of satisfaction and engagement, indicating that a well-known brand attracts more potential travellers. The study discovered that BRCNR's marketing strategies significantly support SDGs 1, 8, 11, 13, and 15. Respondents confirmed that campaigns support inclusive infrastructure, responsible tourism, poverty alleviation, job creation, climate awareness, and biodiversity protection.

The findings demonstrated that marketing strategies and on-site activities successfully increased conservation awareness; visitors reported learning more about sustainability, biodiversity, and eco-friendly practices; and peak tourist seasons were spring and summer/festive. Lastly, the study identified opportunities, such as increased funding, infrastructure development, and stakeholder collaboration, that BRCNR can pursue to attract more tourists to Mpumalanga and keep them longer. However, challenges were identified, including a limited budget, over-reliance on word-of-mouth marketing, and illegal mining in the reserve that poses a life-threatening threat to travellers. Together, these results show that although BRCNR's marketing strategies are generally successful and aligned with sustainability requirements, strategic enhancements in competitive positioning, resource allocation, and stakeholder partnerships are necessary to fully leverage marketing as a catalyst for sustainable tourism and conservation.

6. REFERENCES

- Adebayo, R. (2021). The Services Marketing Mix: Theoretical Views of Church Services Marketing. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*. 25-35. DOI: 10.34257/GJMBRAVOL21IS7PG25.
- Adeniran, A.O. & Tayo-Ladega, O. (2024). Critical Analysis of Phenomenological Research Design in a Qualitative Research Method. *Management Analytics and Social Insights*, 1(2):186-196.
- Adler, D., Joxe, G., John, A. & Daniel, V. (2025). The Role of Transparency in Building Trust for Personalized Marketing Efforts.
- Akbar, I. (2024). Challenges of Sustainable Ecotourism: A Case of Aksu-Zhabagly Nature Reserve in Kazakhstan. *Monograph*, 1-185.
- Al-Shahrani, F.A., Al-Ghamdi, N. & Aslam, M. (2024). Awareness of Sustainable Development Goals and Its Relationship to Sustainable Behaviour. *Open Access Library Journal*, 11(06):1-20.
- Anitha, M. & Hemanathan, A. (2023). Effect of the Service Marketing Mix (7Ps) on Customers Perceptions towards selected Public Sector and Private Sector Banks in Chennai City. *Journal of Research Administration*, 5(2): 727-740.
- Atieno, P. O., Mose, G.N. Oino, P.G. & Ombachi, N.K. (2024). Grassroots Solutions for Global Challenges: The Role of Self-Help Groups in Building Sustainable Livelihoods and Resilience to Climate Change in Nyakach, Kenya. *American Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation*, 3(2): 14-22. DOI: 10.54536/ajmri.v3i2.2578.
- Ayanwale, K. (2024). Data-Driven Decisions: A Guide to Quantitative Research Design and Analysis. (Presentation)[Lesotho]: National University of Lesotho.
- Azizah, S. & Firmansyah, F. (2025). Community Building for Conflict Management in Besowo Nature Reserve. *Agrociencia*, 1-24. DOI: 10.47163/agrociencia.v59i2.3260.
- Bahishti, A. A. (2023). A Short Note on Scientific Research Methodologies. *International Journal of Methodology*, 2(1): 1-1. DOI: 10.21467/ijm.2.1.6867.
- Bahorka, M., Kurbatska, L. & Kvasova, L. (2022). Marketing Reserves to Increase the Competitiveness of the Enterprise in Modern Conditions. *Green, Blue & Digital Economy Journal*, 3(1):1-7. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30525/2661-5169/2022-1-1>
- Balakrishnan, M. S. (2009). Strategic branding of destinations: a framework. *European Journal of Marketing*, 43(5/6): 611-629. DOI: 10.1108/03090560910946954

- Balamurugan, J., Abhishek, S., Ramesh, S. & Prabakaran, C. (2024). Impact of Marketing Strategies and Decision Making on Traveler Destinations. *International Journal of Cultural Studies and Social Sciences*, 20(5):1-8.
- Baltezarevic, R., & Baltezarevic, I. (2024). The Experience Economy: Providing Memorable Experiences to Customers. 13th International "Communication in the New World" Congress. Turkey.
- Bergin, T. (2018). An Introduction to Data Analysis: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods. *SAGE Publications Ltd*, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529682854>
- Blessing, A.I., Henry, Z. & Michael, D. (2024). Data Collection and Analysis Techniques.
- Booking.com. (2025). Sustainability Report 2024. Booking Holdings. [Online] Available at: <https://sustainability.booking.com> [Accessed on 11 June 2025].
- Brown, L.R., Marais, H., Henzi, S.P. & Barrett, L. (2005). Vegetation classification as the basis for baboon management in the Bourke's Luck Section of the Blyde Canyon Nature Reserve, Mpumalanga. *Koedoe*, 48(2):71-92.
- Carrera, S.D. (2025). The 7Ps of Marketing: Keys to Business Success in a Changing Environment. *Diginomics*, 4:1-6. DOI: 10.56294/digi2025193.
- Caruth, G. (2013). Demystifying Mixed Methods Research Design: A Review of the Literature. *Mevlana International Journal of Education*, 3:112-122.
- Chafe, R. (2024). Different Paradigm Conceptions and Their Implications for Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 23(1).
- Chakrabarty, P. & Pandey, D. (2025). Stimulating Sales through AIDA: A Review of Theoretical and Empirical Insights. *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 13(8):384-395. DOI: [10.56975/ijcrt.v13i8.292060](https://doi.org/10.56975/ijcrt.v13i8.292060)
- Chakrabarty, P. & Sinha, R. (2025). Investigating the Effects of Emerging Technologies on AIDA and Marketing Mix in Indian Digital Marketing. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 2(4): 1227-1245. DOI:[10.61336/acr/25-04-05](https://doi.org/10.61336/acr/25-04-05)
- Chandel, S. S. & Kamble, G.S. (2024). E-Tourism in India: The Impact of Digital Transformation on the Tourism Industry. *Journal of Economics*, 17: 184-194.
- Chao, E. (2024). Determinants of loyalty in destination branding: perspective from supply side. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1). DOI: 10.1080/23311975.2024.2322777

- Chen, K., Ping, Y., Pan, X., Ye, M. & Wang, Y. (2024). Does Ecotourism in Nature Reserves Have an Impact on Farmers' Income? Counterfactual Estimates Based on Propensity Score Matching. *Agriculture*, 14(4). DOI: 10.3390/agriculture14040576
- Chin, F. & Yong, F.L. (2024). Triple Bottom Line: Jesselton University College. <https://www/jesseltonuniversitycollege.edu.my> [Accessed on 14 April 2025].
- Christou, P.A. (2025). Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research Visited and the Role of AI. *The Qualitative Report*, 30(3):3306-3314.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). Research Methods in Education (8th ed.). London: *Routledge*.
- Costello, A. B. & Osborne. J. (2005). Best practices in exploratory factor analysis: four recommendations for getting the most from your analysis. *Practical Assessment Research & Evaluation*, 10(7). Available online: <http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=10&n=7>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. (2018). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. 5th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: *Sage Publications*.
- Dahlström, Å. N. (2025). Challenges and opportunities for social sustainability in education: a scoping review. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 11(1): 1-22. DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2025.2491706
- Davie, L., Ogbeide, G. & Shafieizadeh, K. (2024). Leveraging Nature-Based Tourism for Sustainable Community Development and Destination Marketing: A Social Capital Theory Perspective. *Events and Tourism Review*, 7(1):45-56. DOI: 10.18060/28481
- Decrop, A. (2004). Qualitative Research in Tourism. 1st edition. Routledge.
- Delmas, M.A. & Burbano, V.C. (2011). The drivers of greenwashing. *California Management Review*, 54(1):64–87.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Dheere, F.S. (2025). The global sustainable development goals and the effect of agricultural economics. *Agricultural Economics*, 1(1).
- Diaz, A., Birck, C., Bradshaw, A., Georges, J., Lamirel, D., Moradi-Bachiller, S. & Gove, D. (2025). Informed consent in dementia research: how Public Involvement can contribute to addressing "old" and "new" challenges. *Front Dement*, 4:1536762.

- Elisha, G., Nzali, A. & Philipo, F. (2023). Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Community Participation in the Joint Forest Management: A Case of Uzungwa Scarp Nature Forest Reserve, Tanzania. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 6(2): 158-173. DOI: 10.37284/eajass.6.2.1466
- Ezzatian, S., Toghraee, M.N. & Farsani, T. (2025). Branding tourism destinations in the metaverse: insights from professionals and researchers. *Journal of Tourism Future*, 3(3): 1-25. DOI: 10.1108/JTF-08-2024-0176
- Ferdinand, R. & Permana, A.A. (2024). Enhancing Website Marketing Through Effective Seo Strategies: A Case Study of Entrefine. *Jurnal Fasilkom*, 14(2): 370-377.
- Font, X. & McCabe, S. (2017). Sustainability and marketing in tourism: Its contexts, paradoxes, approaches, challenges, and potential. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 25(7):869–883.
- Font, X., Elgammal, I. & Lamond, I. (2017). Greenwashing: The deliberate under-communicating of sustainability practices by tourism businesses. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 25(7):1007–1023.
- Font, X., Garay, L., & Jones, S. (2016). *Sustainability motivations and practices in small tourism enterprises: Evidence from the UK*. *Tourism Management*, 53, 103–115. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.09.002>
- Freund, C. A., Achmad, M., Kanisius, P., Naruri, R., Tang, E. & Knott, C. D. (2019). Conserving orangutans one classroom at a time: evaluating the effectiveness of a wildlife education program for school-aged children in Indonesia. *Animal Conservation*, 23(1): 18-27. doi:10.1111/acv.12513
- Gallage, H. P. S., Tissera, H. & Sanchez-Campos, P. (2025). A Review of Social Marketing Efforts in Sri Lanka. *Social Marketing Quarterly*, 31(2): 178-194. DOI: 10.1177/15245004251335716
- Gamage, A.N.K.K. (2025). Research Design, Philosophy, and Quantitative Approaches in Scientific Research Methodology. *Scholars Journal of Engineering and Technology*, 13(02): 91-103. DOI: 10.36347/sjet.2025.v13i02.004
- Gamba, F. (2025). Marketing Strategies of International Restaurant Chains (IRCs) in Tanzania: Exploring the Dynamics of 7Ps. *Journal of Business and Enterprise Development (JOBED)*, 13(1): 1-17. DOI:[10.47963/jobed.v13i.1606](https://doi.org/10.47963/jobed.v13i.1606)
- George, R. (2019). *Marketing Tourism in South Africa*. Sixth edition. Cape Town. Oxford University Press.

- Girisaran, K. S., Khanna, P. & Gopal, K. (2025). Impact of Digital Technologies on Marketing Integration: Strategies for Aligning Digital and Traditional Efforts. *Intergrated Marketing Book Saran*, 57-67.
- Golzar, J., Noor, S. & Tajik, O. (2022). Convenience Sampling. *International Journal of Education and Language Studies*, 1(2):72-79.
- Grangxabe, X. S., Maphanga, T. & Chidi, B. S. (2024). Urban Nature Reserves Waste Challenges from Neighboring Informal Settlements: Western Cape, South Africa. *Nature Environment and Pollution Technology*, 23(3): 1483-1494. DOI: 10.46488/NEPT.2024.v23i03.018
- Grant, C. & Osanloo, A. (2014). Understanding, Selecting, and Integrating a Theoretical Framework in Dissertation Research: Creating the Blueprint for Your "House". *Administrative Issues Journal Education Practice and Research*, 4(2). 12-26. DOI: 10.5929/2014.4.2.9
- Guest, G., Namey, E. & Chen, M. (2020). A Simple Method to Assess and Report Thematic Saturation in Qualitative Research. *PLoS ONE*, 15(5): 1-17. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0232076
- Hlatshwayo, B.I. & Thwala, K.C. (2025). Leveraging Information and Communication Technologies for Promoting Tourism Accommodation Establishments. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 14(4): 839-847. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.668>
- Hongshu, W. & Min, T. (2024). Research on Community Participation in Environmental Management of Ecotourism. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 4(3):131-135.
- Hossan, D. & Al-hasnawi, M. (2023). Sampling Methods & Sampling Size.
- Hu, H. (2025). Influence of Digital Economy on Marketing Path-Global Trend and Practice in China. *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences*, 210(1): 72-79. DOI:[10.54254/2754-1169/2025.BL25887](https://doi.org/10.54254/2754-1169/2025.BL25887)
- Hudson, S. & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2009). *Promoting destinations via film tourism: An empirical study of the UK and Australia*. *Journal of Travel Research*, 47(2), 147–156. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287508328793>
- Isnaeni, N., Khulasoh, N.R., Ashiyam, I.N. & Efendi, B. (2025). Digital Marketing Efforts to Improve Marketing Performance in Mie Ongklok Desta. *SHS Web of Conferences* 217, 1-19. doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202521705001

- Jaini, N., Anuar, A.N.A. & Daim, M.S. (2012). The Practice of Sustainable Tourism in Ecotourism Sites among Ecotourism Providers. *Asian Social Science*, 8(4): 175-170. DOI: 10.5539/ass.v8n4p175
- Jikidze, E. (2025). Reducing Seasonality in Inbound Tourism through Off-Season Programs and Itineraries. *The American Journal of Management and Economics Innovations*, 7(10):8–16. DIO: [10.37547/tajmei/Volume07Issue10-02](https://doi.org/10.37547/tajmei/Volume07Issue10-02)
- Johnson, R.B. & Onwuegbuzie, A.J. (2004). Mixed Methods Research: A Research Paradigm Whose Time Has Come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7): 14-26. DOI: 10.3102/0013189x033007014
- Kakar, Z.U.H., Rasheed, R., Rashid, A. & Akhter, S. (2023). Criteria for Assessing and Ensuring the Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Business Reflections*, 4(2):150-173.
- Kalogiannidis, S., Kalfas, D., Papaevangelou, O., Chatzitheodoridis, F., Katsetsiadou, K. & Lekkas, E. (2024). Integration of Climate Change Strategies into Policy and Planning for Regional Development: A Case Study of Greece. *Land*, 13(3): 1-23. DOI: 10.3390/land13030268
- Kamal, S. S. L. B. A. (2019). Research Paradigm and the Philosophical Foundations of a Qualitative Study. PEOPLE: *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3), 1386-1394.
- Karnia, R. (2024). Importance of Reliability and Validity in Research. *Psychology and Behavioral Sciences*, 13(6):137-141.
- Katulski, J. (2024). Beyond oral history: The application of semi-structured interviews to research in the overlapping fields of history, sociology, and political science. *World of Ideas and Politics*, 23(2): 89-105.
- Kazzara, A. I. (2024). The Impact of Domestic Tourism on Cultural Preservation in Uganda: A Case Study of Kasubi Royal Tombs. *Metropolitan Journal of Social and Educational Research*, 3(7): 878-887.
- Korongo, J. L., Ikoha, A.P. & Nambiro, A.W. (2024). Leveraging Digital Marketing Strategies for Hyper-Personalized Small and Medium Enterprises Websites. *International Journal of Computer Science Trends and Technology (IJCST)*, 12(5): 7-15.
- Kosasih, O., Hutahayan, B., Hidayat, K. & Sunarti, S. (2025). A Systematic Literature Review: Exploring the Dynamics of Global Consumer Culture (Insights from Eastern and Western Experts). Conference: Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference

on Public Administration and Governance, ICOPAG 2024, 30 October 2024, Malang, Indonesia. DOI:[10.4108/eai.30-10-2024.2354761](https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.30-10-2024.2354761)

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2016). *Marketing management* (15th ed.). Pearson Education.

Krejcie, R.V. & Morgan, D.W. 1970. Determining sample size for research activities.

Krithika, J., Nithya, S. & Sneha, C.J. (2023). Effect of Triple Bottom Line on Sustainable Operations. *International Journal of Applied Engineering and Technology*, 5(4): 866-874.

Kumar, P., Tripti, M., Kaur, S. & Sood, P. (2025). Impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on Traditional Marketing. *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*, 5(1): 2812-2816. DOI: 10.52783/jier.v5i1.2286

Kuriakose, A. & Jaleel, S. (2025). Quality Education: A Gateway to Sustainable Development Goals. In *Quality of Higher Education in the Light of the NEP 2020*. Edited by Paul, D.G. New Delhi: *Kanishka Publishers, Distributors*: 1-14.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

Loitongbam, S., Sorokhaibam, R., & Singh, S. (2023). Social Media as a Marketing Tool. *Journal of Law and Sustainable Development*, 11(8):1-16. DOI:[10.55908/sdgs.v11i8.1498](https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i8.1498)

Lopes, R. & Hiray, A. (2024). Impacts Of Cultural Events and Festivals on Cultural Tourism. *Journal of Advanced Zoology*, 45(4): 174-179.

Lyubiviy, Y. V. & Samchuk, R. V. (2024). Cognitive Experience in Positivism and Pragmatism. *Anthropological Measurements of Philosophical Research*, (26): 137-148.

Mabibibi, M.A., Dube, K. & Thwala, K. (2021). Successes and Challenges in Sustainable Development Goals Localisation for Host Communities around Kruger National Park. *Sustainability*, 13(10): 1-16. DOI: 10.3390/su13105341

Mai, K. D. & Chen, J. (2025). The Mediating Role of Digital Marketing Capabilities on Digital Marketing Performance in SMEs: An RBV Perspective. *Northeast Decision Sciences Institute*, 360-400.

Mammadova, A., May, S.M., Tomita, Y. & Harada, S. (2025). Synergies and Conflicts in Dual-Designated UNESCO Sites: Managing Governance, Conservation, Tourism, and Community Engagement at Mount Hakusan Global Geopark and Biosphere Reserve, Japan. *Land*, 14(3): 1-21. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/land14030488>

- Maree, K. (2012a). *First Steps in Research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Maree, K. (2012b). *Complete your thesis or dissertation successfully: Practical guidelines*. Juta.
- Maree, K. (2016). *First Steps in Research*. 2nd edition. Braamfontein: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Masengu, R. & Chawuruka, P. & Muchenje, C. (2025). Environment attitudes and social influence of sustainable practices: a study on consumer Behaviour in Zimbabwe. *Future Business Journal*, 11(1): 1-18. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43093-025-00499-6>
- Matahati, H. & Qastharin, A.R. (2024). Enhancing PT. LVC Website Marketing Strategy to Generate Leads Through Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO). *Mandalika Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 3(1): 189-209.
- Memon, M.A., Thurasamy, R., Ting, H. & Cheah, J.-H. (2024). Purposive Sampling: A Review and Guidelines for Quantitative Research. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, 9(1):1-23.
- Migiro, S. O. & Magangi, B. A. (2011). Mixed methods: A review of literature and the future of the new research paradigm. *African Journal of Business Management*, 5(10): 3757-3764.
- Mitang, B.B. & Kiha, E.K. (2023). Analysis of public service cauldron on customer satisfaction at bank Republik Indonesia Kefamenanu branch. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia (JPPI)*, 9(2).
- Mohammed, S.S. (2023). Theory and Paradigm in Social Research. *Integrity of art and humanities Journal*.
- Moser, A. & Korstjens, I. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 3: Sampling, data collection and analysis. *Eur J Gen Pract*, 24(1): 9-18.
- Mpotaringa, M. & Tichaawa, T.M. (2021). Tourism Digital Marketing Tools and Views on Future Trends: A Systematic Review of Literature. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 10(1): 712-726. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720-128>
- Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency. (2025). Provincial Agency that manages and conserve natural and cultural resources of Mpumalanga, South Africa. [Online] Available from: <https://www.mpumalanga.com> [Accessed on 21 May 2025].
- Muhammad, M., Hidayanti, I., Haji, S. & Sabuhari, R. (2025). The Influence of Tourist Experience on Revisit Decisions with the Mediation of Tourist Satisfaction. *IRJEMS*

International Research Journal of Economics and Management Studies, 4(5): 277-284. DOI:[10.48550/arXiv.2506.06552](https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2506.06552)

Mukti, B.H. (2025). Methods in health research: Probability and non-probability sampling. *Health Sciences International Journal*, 3(2): 220-234. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71357/hsij.v3i2.64>

Nanjundeswaraswamy, T.S. & Divakar, S. (2021). Determination of Sample Size and Sampling Methods in Applied Research. *Proceedings on Engineering Sciences*, 3(1):25-32.

Naskar, P., Digar, B., Ghosh, S. & Kundu, P. (2025). Determining Interconnecting Role of Social Media Marketing Strategies: A Young Population Study. *International Journal of Marketing and Business Communication*, 14(1): 15-30. DOI: 10.21863/ijmbc/2025.14.1.002

National Department of Tourism. (2025). Department of Tourism Strategic Plan 2025–2030. [Online] Available at: <https://www.tourism.gov.za/AboutNDT/Publications/Department%20of%20Tourism%20Strategic%20Plan%202025%20-%202030.pdf> [Accessed on 02 June 2025].

Nguyen, Q. & Nguyen, C. (2022). An analysis of the relationship between ICT infrastructure and international tourism demand in an emerging market. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology*, 13(5):992-1008. DOI: [10.1108/JHTT-11-2021-0331](https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTT-11-2021-0331)

Nguyet, L.T. & Wawrzyniec, R. (2022). Social Media and Destination Branding in Tourism: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Sustainability*, 14(20): 1-18.

Nnajieta, A. O. & Nnajieta, C.C. (2025). Assessing the Impact of Pro-Poor Tourism Development on Poverty Alleviation in Imo State, Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Art*, 3(3): 713-729. DOI: 10.58578/ajstea.v3i3.5533

Nugraha, R. N. & Sarinah, L. (2024). Identification of Website and Instagram as Digital Marketing Voyaz. *West Science Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2(5): 1160-1170.

Nunnally, J.C. (1978). *Psychometric Theory*. New York, McGraw-Hill.

Ostlund, U., Kidd, L., Wengstrom, Y. & Rowa-Dewar, N. (2011). Combining qualitative and quantitative research within mixed method research designs: a methodological review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 48(3):369-383.

Ozili, P.K. & Lorembor, P.T. (2023). Financial Stability and Sustainable Development. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.4349633

Ozili, P.K. (2025). Theories of Sustainable Development. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.

- Pan, L. & Sutunyarak, C. (2025). Factors Affecting the User-Generated Content on the Tourists' Decision-Making Behavior of Food Tourists. *Lex localis - Journal of Local Self-Government*, 23(6):1143-1172. DOI: [10.52152/801908](https://doi.org/10.52152/801908)
- Raihan, A. (2024). The interrelationship amid carbon emissions, tourism, economy, and energy use in Brazil. *Carbon Research*, 3(1): 1-24. DOI: 10.1007/s44246-023-00084-y
- Ramli, S., Mohamad, S., Samsol, N. & Pauzi, B.M. (2025). Exploring Drivers of Customer Repurchase Intention: Extending the 7Ps Marketing Mix to Niche Training Services. *Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, DOI: 10.61453/jobss.v2025no10.
- Randrianirina, L., Yuliana, Y., Fatimah, S. & Hermansyah, H. (2025). Destination Image, Tourist Intention, Motivation, and Constraints: An Analysis of their Influence on Visit Decision to Mentawai Islands. *Salud, Ciencia y Tecnología*, 5.2353. DOI: 10.56294/saludcyt20252353.
- Rao, J., Ouyang, X., Pan, P., Huang, C., Li, J. & Ye, Q. (2024). Ecological Risk Assessment of Forest Landscapes in Lushan National Nature Reserve in Jiangxi Province, China. *Forests*, 15(3): 1-20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/f15030484>.
- Revel-Vilk, S., Ramaswami, U., Scarpa, M. & Botha, J. (2025). Safety analysis of self-administered enzyme replacement therapy using data from the Fabry Outcome and Gaucher Outcome Surveys. *Orphanet J Rare Dis*, 20(1): 1-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13023-024-03416-2>
- Riaz, S., Aslam, B. & Hussain, B. (2024). The Impact of Short-Term Social Media Detox on Stress and Anxiety Levels: An Experimental Analysis. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 7(4): 462-476.
- Rindu, R., Hafizurrachman, M., Haryanto, A. & Zakaria, A. (2025). The 7Ps Marketing Mix in Hospital Services: A Systematic Mapping of Applications Through a Scoping Review. *Jurnal Pendidikan Keperawatan Indonesia*. 11. 91-102. DOI: 10.17509/jpki.v11i1.82221.
- Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J. (2003). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Sahu, S. & Nema, D.K. (2024). Role of Sustainable Tourism to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS)- An Analysis. *EPRA International Journal of Economics, Business and Management Studies*, 11(11):130-139. DOI: 10.36713/epra1013.

- Saleh, M., & Nugraha, R. (2024). Website Utilization as Labuan Bajo Super Digital Marketing. *West Science Social and Humanities Studies*, 2(5):867-876. DOI:[10.58812/wsshs.v2i05.923](https://doi.org/10.58812/wsshs.v2i05.923)
- Samuels, P. (2020). A Really Simple Guide to Quantitative Data Analysis. DOI:[10.13140/RG.2.2.25915.36645](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25915.36645)
- Santos, A.C., Simões, C., Daniel, J.R. & Arriaga, P. (2021). Portuguese validation of the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire short version in youth: Validity, reliability, and invariance across gender and age. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 20(2):384-399.
- Saria, M., Firdausb, M.I. & Irfansyahc, M.D. (2024). Digital Marketing, Social Media, and Influencers on the Recognition of Airline Brands. *Jurnal Manajemen Transportasi & Logistik (JMTRANSLOG)*, 11(3): 1-10.
- Sathyanarayana S., M., T., Pushpa B.V. & Harsha, H. (2024). Selecting the Right Sample Size: Methods and Considerations for Social Science Researchers. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention (IJBMI)*, 13(7): 152-167.
- Sekole, M.Q., Lethoko, M., Mautjana, M. & Makombe, G. (2023). Community perceptions on tourism development in South Africa: The case of developing a tourism route in the City of Mbombela Local Municipality, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. *Local Economy*, 0(0): 1-19.
- Şen, Ö. (2020). The Role of ICTs for Effective Marketing Activities in Event Tourism. Hospitality & tourism managerial perspectives & practices. *Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften*, 309-333.
- Sharma, K., Buranadechachai, S. & Doungsri, N. (2024). Destination Branding Strategies: A Comparative Analysis of Successful Tourism Marketing Campaigns. *Journal of Informatics Education and Research*, 4(3): 2845-2852.
- Shiva, B. (2025). Research Methodology.
- Sihombing, I.H.H., Suastini, N.M. & Puja, I.B.P. (2024). Sustainable Cultural Tourism in the Era of Sustainable Development. *International Journal of Sustainable Competitiveness on Tourism*, 3(02):100-115.
- Silambarasan, D., Selvadurgadevi, K., & Jayanthan, D. (2024). A Study of the Impact of Social Media on E-Marketing. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Studies*, 7(5): 2809-2813. DOI:[10.47191/jefms/v7-i5-53](https://doi.org/10.47191/jefms/v7-i5-53)
- Silva, A.L.C., Benini, S.M. & Godoy, J.A.R. (2024). Economic Development and Sustainability in the Amazon: A Big Data Analysis Based on The Triple Bottom Line.

Revista de Gestão Social e Ambiental, 18(12): 1-19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24857/rgsa.v18n12-158>

Sinaga, F., Kanca, I.N. & Suarja, I.K. (2025). Tanah Lot temple: Navigating the tension between tourism development and cultural preservation. *Journal of Commerce, Management, and Tourism Studies*, 4(1): 155-170. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58881/jcmts.v3i2>

Singh, D., Semwal, M. & Semwal, M.M. (2024). Analysis of Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2023: A Sustainable Tourism Perspective. *Journal of Mountain Research*, 19(2): 67-75. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51220/jmr.v19-i2.8>

Siregar, O.M., Selwendri, S. & Nasution, M.D.T.P. (2024). Visitor Preferences on Ecotourism Attributes: A Study on Indonesian Ecotourism Destinations. *Journal of Management World*, 2024(4):393-401. DOI: 10.53935/jomw.v2024i4.402

Slater, P. & Hasson, F. (2024). Quantitative Research Designs, Hierarchy of Evidence and Validity. *Journal of Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing*, 32(3): 656-660.

Soeswoyo, D. M., Arafah, W., Oktadiana, H. & Budiman, S.F. (2025). Cultural preservation as a catalyst for sustainable tourism: Challenges and potentials in Cimande tourism village, Indonesia. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship*, 6(2): 161-178. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35912/joste.v6i2.2458>.

Soliman, A., & Mansour, A. (2021). ICT adoption and digital marketing strategies for tourism destinations. *Tourism Review International*, 25(2), 113–130.

Stojanović, V., Milić, D., Obradović, S., Vanovac, J. & Radišić, D. (2021). The role of ecotourism in community development: The case of the Zasavica Special Nature Reserve, Serbia. *Acta geographica Slovenica*, 61(2): 171-186. DOI: 10.3986/ags.9411

Subedi, K.R. (2025). Safeguarding Participants: Using Pseudonyms for Ensuring Confidentiality and Anonymity in Qualitative Research. *KMC Journal*, 7(1):1-20.

Sun, D., Zhou, Y., Ali, Q. & Khan, M.T.I. (2024). The role of digitalization, infrastructure, and economic stability in tourism growth: A pathway towards smart tourism destinations. *Natural Resources Forum*.

Suresh, C. & Shanthi, P. (2025). Features of the Benefits and Drawbacks of Digital Marketing Navigating Transformations for Business Industry 4.0.Tamil Nadu, India, *Muthu Computers & Printers*: 317-320.

Syachfitria, N. & Qastharin, A.R. (2024). Designing Website as Digital Marketing to Promote Construction Company (A Case Study of PT NLA). *Mandalika Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 3(1): 145-167.

- Tabachnick, B. G. & Fidell, L. S. (2001). *Using Multivariate Statistics*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Tabachnick, B. G. & Fidell, L. S. (2014). *Using multivariate statistics* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Tang, X., Wu, Y., Ye, J., Lv, H., Sun, F. & Huang, Q. (2022). Ecotourism risk assessment in Yaoluoping Nature Reserve, Anhui, China based on GIS. *Environmental Earth Sciences*, 81(7). 1-14. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12665-022-10331-x>
- Thuong, D.T. (2024). Factors affecting sustainable tourism development in Vietnam. *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*, 6(11):2697-2711. DOI: 10.51594/ijarss.v6i11.1715
- Thwala, K.C. (2022). A Critical Review of the Application of Marketing Mediums in the Accommodation Sector. An SME Perspective-KTHWALA-LTP. Thesis.
- Ting, H., Memon, M.A., Thurasamy, R. & Cheah, J.-H. (2025). Snowball Sampling: A Review and Guidelines for Survey Research. *Asian Journal of Business Research*, 15(1):1-15.
- Tiwari, V. & Tripathi, S. (2024). Sampling Designs- Probability and Non-Probability Sampling. In *Research Methodology in Extension Education* 76-82. Edited by New Delhi: *Elite Publishing House*.
- Tran, N. L. & Rudolf, W. (2022). Social Media and Destination Branding in Tourism: A Systematic Review of the Literature. *Sustainability*, 14(20): 1-18. DOI: 10.3390/su142013528
- Trišić, I., Privitera, D., Štetić, S., Petrović, M.D., Maksin, M., Jovanović, S.S. & Lukić, D. (2022). Sustainable Tourism to the Part of Transboundary UNESCO Biosphere Reserve “Mura-Drava-Danube”. A Case of Serbia, Croatia and Hungary. *Sustainability*, 14(10). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14106006> S
- United Nations (UN). (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations.
- UNWTO. (2020). *Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030*. Madrid: World Tourism Organization.
- Veal, A. J. (2017). *Research methods for leisure and tourism* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Venugopal, K. (2023). Impact of E-Marketing Promotions on the Performance of Religious Tourism: In Case of Srikakulam District, A.P, India. *International Journal of*

Weaver, D. B. (2006). *Sustainable tourism: Theory and practice*. Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann.

Willaddara, B.M. (2024). Developing an E-Tourism Adoption Model for Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises as a Framework for Sri Lanka's Tourism Industry. Conducted by the International Conference on Business Innovation (ICOBI). Colombo: NSBM Green University, Sri Lanka.

Willie, M. M. (2022). Differentiating Between Population and Target Population in Research Studies. *International Journal of Medical Science and Clinical Research Studies*, 2(6): 521-523. DOI: 10.47191/ijmscrs/v2-i6-14

Willie, M.M. (2024). Population and Target Population in Research Methodology. *Golden Ratio of Social Science and Education*, 4(1):75-79.

Wu, S.-I. & Hsu, H.-P. (2018). Influence of Tourism Frequency on Association Model of Ecotourism Action. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 10(1).

Wulandari, N., Violin, V., Munizu, M. & Iskandar, M.F. (2024). Marketing Strategy Development in Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy Sector, Tourism Sub Sector. *Journal of Social Responsibility, Tourism and Hospitality*, (45): 36-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55529/jsrth.45.36.44>

Yahelska, K. & Vasylyshyna, L. (2024). Development of marketing models for attracting and retaining consumers in digital branding. *Technology audit and production reserves*, 5 (4(79)): 25-28. DOI:[10.15587/2706-5448.2024.314525](https://doi.org/10.15587/2706-5448.2024.314525)

Yetkin, Y., Kancinar, F., & Özok, H. (2024). Qualifications of the Ideal Tourism School Administrator: A RepGrid Review. *Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*. 200-217. DOI:[10.53568/yyusbed.1521043](https://doi.org/10.53568/yyusbed.1521043)

Za, S. Z. & Tricahyadinata, I. (2025). Relevance for tourist visiting decisions destination branding vs destination image: Case study from Lariti Beach, Bima Regency. *Turyzm/Tourism*, 35(1): 111-121. DOI: 10.18778/0867-5856.2025.15

Zaman, J., Sholeh, A., Fadil, F., Salam, N. & Azman, A. (2024). The Influence of Positivism and Empirism in the Enforcement of Islamic Inheritance Law in Indonesia. *Substantive Justice International Journal of Law*, 7(1): 48-69.

Zohriah, A., Mu'in, A., Rohimat, S. & Faqih, S. (2025). The Dynamics of Educational Services Marketing in the Digital Era. *International Journal of Education, Social*

7. ADDENDUM

7.1. ADDENDUM A: Turnitin Report

ORIGINALITY REPORT

13%

SIMILARITY INDEX

11%

INTERNET SOURCES

9%

PUBLICATIONS

2%

STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1

digiresearch.vut.ac.za

Internet Source

1%

2

ir.unisa.ac.za

Internet Source

1%

3

de Koning, Maria Adriana Imelda. "Analysis of a Model Designed for Land Restitution in Protected Areas in South Africa", University of South Africa (South Africa)

Publication

<1%

4

openscholar.dut.ac.za

Internet Source

<1%

7.2. ADDENDUM B: Academic Editing Certificate



ACADEMIC EDITOR

Cynthia Rakale: Academic Editor
084 429 5673 | rakale.cynthia23@gmail.com

ACADEMIC EDITING CERTIFICATE

Name: Cynthia CN Rakale: Academic Editor

Address: 30 Tom Lawrence Street

1241

White River

I certify that I am a qualified Academic Editor and provide the following services:

Editing:

- The Table of Contents
- Copy and stylist
- Structural and
- Reference list

I provided the abovementioned editing services to:

Name: Bonginkosi Innocent Hlatshwayo

Student No.: 220369933

Dissertation: Assessing the Marketing Efforts of MTPA-managed Nature Reserves and Their Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, Mpumalanga.

Date completed: 12 November 2025

Signed:

Date: 25/11/2025

Cynthia CCN Rakale

Professional Editors' Guild (PEG) No.: 327545

Not VAT registered

7.3. ADDENDUM C: Interview Guide for MTPA/BRCNR Officials

Structured Interview Guide with MTPA Officials and BRCNR Management

These semi-structured interviews are aimed at gathering in-depth insights into the marketing strategies, their alignment with SDGs, internal challenges as well as conservation awareness and perceptions of the reserve management and officials, especially the staff responsible for marketing the nature reserve.

SECTION A: MARKETING PERSONNEL INFORMATION AT MTPA/BRCNR

A1. Which of the following best describes your level of responsibility at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve?

Entry-level staff	Supervisor	Manager	Senior Management	Other-please specify
-------------------	------------	---------	-------------------	----------------------

A2. For how long have you been working at Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve?

Less than 1 year	1–3 years	4–6 years	7–10 years	more than 10 years
------------------	-----------	-----------	------------	--------------------

A3 Which areas of work are you mainly involved in at the reserve?

Marketing & Promotion	Visitor Services	Conservation & Environment	Administration	Guiding & Tours	Other- please specify
-----------------------	------------------	----------------------------	----------------	-----------------	-----------------------

A4 Do you have any formal qualifications related to tourism, hospitality, or nature conservation?

Yes-Diploma	Yes- Degree	Yes-Postgraduate	No, Other- please specify
-------------	-------------	------------------	---------------------------

SECTION B: MARKETING STRATEGIES AND EFFORTS APPLIED BY THE BRCNR

B1. What marketing strategies or marketing campaigns are currently used to promote BRCNR?

B2. Which target markets or tourist profiles are you trying to attract with the above marketing strategies?

B3. Have these strategies proven to be effective? If yes, how is the effectiveness of these strategies evaluated?

B4. How are marketing decisions and efforts to promote the nature reserve made and evaluated?

SECTION C: CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

C1 Based on your observation, how do the marketing efforts applied at BRCNR contribute to the following specific SDGs?

- SDG 1: No Poverty
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 13: Climate Action
- SDG 15: Life on Land

C2. Does BRCNR currently have any specific partnerships or initiatives that align with sustainable development outcomes? If yes, please elaborate.

SECTION D: CONSERVATION AWARENESS

D1. To what extent do you think your marketing strategies applied by BRCNR raise awareness about conservation among tourists?

D2. As the BRCNR official, do you measure or track changes in conservation awareness? If so, please explain how this is done.

SECTION E: TOURISM SEASONS AND TRENDS

E1. According to your records, during which months does BRCNR receive the highest number of tourist arrivals?

E2. Are there any specific marketing strategies or efforts that target these peak tourism periods?

E3. How is the effectiveness of these strategies monitored to ensure they attract the right audience during the peak tourism period?

SECTION F: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AT BRCNR

F1. What challenges do you face in terms of enhancing or implementing marketing strategies at BRCNR?

F2. What opportunities exist to improve sustainable tourism marketing in this nature reserve?

F3. What resources are needed to better market BRCNR sustainably? Please elaborate in detail whether financial, human, or technical.

Is there anything else you would like to share (additional suggestions or comments) on how BRCNR could enhance its marketing to better support sustainability and conservation at the reserve and surrounding communities?

.....
.....

Thank you for your time and for participating in this interview!

7.4. ADDENDUM D: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TOURISTS

QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY FOR TOURISTS VISITING THE BLYDE RIVER CANYON NATURE RESERVE (BRCNR)

The aim of this questionnaire survey is to gather insights into the demographic profiles of tourists who visit the reserve, marketing and sustainability awareness and understanding, the most visited tourism seasons, as well as the level of satisfaction and perceptions of tourists based on marketing efforts and their experiences.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHICS PROFILES OF THE TOURISTS

Answer each question by filling in an **X** in a suitable box.

A1. Which province are you from?

Mpumalanga	Free State	Gauteng	Limpopo	Northern Cape	North-West	Kwa-Zulu Natal
Eastern Cape	Western Cape	If international (specify)				

A2 Please indicate your education level.

High school	Diploma	Degree	Postgraduate	Other, please specify
-------------	---------	--------	--------------	-----------------------

A3. What is your Age group?

Below 18 yrs	18-20yrs	21-30yrs	31-40 yrs	41-50yrs	51-60yrs	61yrs and above
--------------	----------	----------	-----------	----------	----------	-----------------

A4. Which gender identifies you?

Male	Female	Other	Prefer not to say	
------	--------	-------	-------------------	--

A5. What is your historical racial category?

African	White	Colored	Indian	Other, please specify
---------	-------	---------	--------	-----------------------

SECTION B: MARKETING AWARENESS, SEASONALITY, AND TOURISM ACTIVITY

B1. How did you hear about BRCNR? (Ticks all applicable boxes)

Social media platforms	BRCNR website	MTPA website	Tourism fairs	Word of mouth	Printed brochures
Online Travel Websites	Radio/Television advert	Travel agency & Brochures	Online search	Other, please specify	

B2. How effective was the marketing content and information in influencing your decision to visit BRCNR?

Very effective	Somewhat effective	Neutral	Not effective
----------------	--------------------	---------	---------------

B3. What motivated you to visit Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (Tick all applicable?)

Scenic Landscapes & Natural Beauty	Adventure activities	Recommendations from others	Sustainability badge displayed on marketing messages
Travel Package deal	Historical/cultural interest	Others, specify	

B4. Is this your first visit to Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve?

Yes	No	If not, how many times?
-----	----	-------------------------

B5. Which season do you prefer to visit the BRCNR?

Summer (Dec-Feb)	Autumn (Mar-May)	Winter (Jun – Aug)	Spring (Sep – Nov)	anytime	Unsure
------------------	------------------	--------------------	--------------------	---------	--------

And why? Motivate your choice

.....

.....

SECTION C: LIKERT SCALE ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MARKETING STRATEGIES APPLIED BY THE BLYDE RIVER CANYON NATURE RESERVE (BRCNR).

Using a scale from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree), please rate your level of agreement with the following statements on the effectiveness of marketing strategies applied by the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve (BRCNR).

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The marketing strategies effectively communicate the unique features of the nature reserve.	1	2	3	4	5
Marketing platforms (e.g., websites, social media) were easy to access and use.	1	2	3	4	5
Social media and digital platforms are effectively used to promote BRCNR to reach potential tourists.	1	2	3	4	5
The marketing content is regularly updated and relevant.	1	2	3	4	5
The marketing efforts made me interested in visiting BRCNR.	1	2	3	4	5
I found it easy to access information about BRCNR online.	1	2	3	4	5
Communication platforms such as the MTPA & website, or tourism brochures, were informative.	1	2	3	4	5
Information about local culture and heritage was clearly communicated.	1	2	3	4	5
I received timely and accurate information before and during my visit.	1	2	3	4	5
BRCNR's marketing strategies reflect values of environmental conservation and sustainability.	1	2	3	4	5
BRCNR marketing influenced my decision to choose them over other destinations	1	2	3	4	5
MTPA's marketing materials provided enough information for me to plan my visit.	1	2	3	4	5
The marketing materials promoted conservation awareness effectively and increased my understanding of the importance of conservation.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION D: SUSTAINABILITY MARKETING, PRACTICES, AND CONSERVATION AWARENESS

Using a scale from 1 (Strongly agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree), please rate on the following statements your level of agreement on Sustainability Messages, Practices, and Conservation Awareness

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Marketing messages emphasized environmental conservation and sustainability.	1	2	3	4	5
I noticed efforts to promote responsible tourism during my visit.	1	2	3	4	5
There are eco-friendly practices such as recycling bins, educational signage, and guided nature walking paths.	1	2	3	4	5
Waste management and cleanliness at the reserve reflected sustainable practices.	1	2	3	4	5
Marketing materials helped me understand the importance of conserving nature.	1	2	3	4	5
Signage and guides highlighted sustainability principles within the reserve.	1	2	3	4	5
My visit increased my awareness of conservation issues.	1	2	3	4	5
Tourism activities in the BRCNR are designed to enhance environmental conservation.	1	2	3	4	5
I learned about the biodiversity and ecological importance of BRCNR	1	2	3	4	5
I am more environmentally aware after visiting BRCNR.	1	2	3	4	5
Educational or awareness materials were available during my visit	1	2	3	4	5
The reserve promotes awareness about conservation	1	2	3	4	5
I feel more aware of environmental protection after this visit.	1	2	3	4	5
Marketing on sustainability influenced my visit.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION E: TOURISTS' SATISFACTION, EXPERIENCE, AND PERCEPTION.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am satisfied with my overall experience at BRCNR.	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of marketing for BRCNR.	1	2	3	4	5
My expectations based on marketing were met during the visit.	1	2	3	4	5
I would recommend BRCNR to friends or family.	1	2	3	4	5
The nature reserve offers value for money.	1	2	3	4	5
Customer service and communication from BRCNR staff met my expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
I plan to revisit BRCNR in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
MPTA's marketing strategies reflect values of environmental conservation and sustainability.	1	2	3	4	5
I can recommend BRCNR based on its ability to balance tourism and environmental conservation.	1	2	3	4	5
Marketing aligned well with my actual experience at the reserve.	1	2	3	4	5

I would recommend BRCNR to others as an environmentally responsible destination.	1	2	3	4	5
I am more likely to support conservation efforts after this visit.	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION F: BRCNR'S PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Marketing campaigns highlighted community empowerment or poverty alleviation (SDG 1).	1	2	3	4	5
My visit to BRCNR contributes to job creation and economic development (SDG 1 & 8).	1	2	3	4	5
I believe the reserve contributes to local job creation and inclusive economic growth (SDG 8).	1	2	3	4	5
The promotion of BRCNR encourages sustainable travel and responsible tourism (SDG 11).	1	2	3	4	5
The infrastructure in BRCNR supports inclusive and sustainable tourism (Universal Access) (SDG 11).	1	2	3	4	5
Environmental protection and climate awareness were emphasised in promotional content (SDG 13).	1	2	3	4	5
Marketing emphasised biodiversity conservation and natural heritage protection (SDG 15).	1	2	3	4	5

Challenges and Suggestions

Were there any challenges you encountered when preparing for the trip to BRCNR? If yes, please state

.....

What can you suggest to the BRCNR to improve in terms of marketing?

.....

What would you like BRCNR to add to their conservation programs to make them entertaining while tourists learn about conservation?

.....

Suggestions to improve promotion and experience

.....

Thank you for your time and for participating in this survey!

7.5. ADDENDUM E: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



Private Bag X11338, Mbombela, 1200

N4 National Road, Hall's Gateway, Mataffin, Mbombela, Mpumalanga

Emails: info@mtpa.ac.za

Dear MTPA Manager

Request for Permission to Conduct Academic Research at Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA).

In fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Tourism and Hospitality Management a full research thesis, our students are expected to complete a research project. In this regard, we are kindly requesting permission for (**Bonginkosi Innocent, Hlatshwayo, 220369933**) to conduct his project in your organisation. The title of the project is:

Assessing the Marketing Efforts of MTPA-managed Nature Reserves and Their Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, Mpumalanga.

Employees who are willing to participate will be asked to participate in an interview or complete the questionnaires / answer the questions.

We would like to make it clear that the project is solely for academic purposes, and the company's name or the employees who will participate in the project will remain anonymous. The project will be guided by the University of Mpumalanga's ethics policy, together with the POPI Act in ensuring that personal information is kept private. Accordingly, details of the project will not be publicized without consent or permission from the company.

A copy of the completed feedback report will be available to you on request. For further details please contact the undersigned.

Your approval will be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards,

B Hlatshwayo

220369933@ump.ac.za

7.6. ADDENDUM F: UMP ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Faculty Research Ethics Committee

FREC-UMP



Ref:

UMP/Hlatshwayo/08/20

25 **Date:** 28 August
2025

Bonginkosi Innocent Hlatshwayo
[220369933] School of Tourism
and Hospitality University of
Mpumalanga

RE: APPROVAL FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY:

*Assessing the Marketing Efforts of MTPA-managed Nature Reserves and Their Contribution
to Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve,
Mpumalanga*

Reference is made to the above heading.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences) UMP, approved the ethical clearance of the above-mentioned study.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach, and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be stored securely in the school/division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Kanayo", is positioned above the printed name of the Chairperson.

Prof. Ogujiuba Kanayo
Chairperson: FREC,
Faculty of Economics, Development and Business
Sciences University of Mpumalanga

7.7. ADDENDUM G: UPDATED UMP ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Faculty Research Ethics Committee

FREC-UMP



Ref: UMP/Hlatshwayo/03/2026

Date: 23 March 2026

Bonginkosi Innocent Hlatshwayo
[220369933]

School of Tourism and
Hospitality

University of Mpumalanga

RE: APPROVAL FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY:

Assessing the Marketing Efforts of Nature Reserves and Their Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve.

Reference is made to the above heading.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences) UMP, approved the ethical clearance of the above-mentioned study.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach, and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be stored securely in the school/division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

Prof. Ogujiuba Kanayo
Chairperson: FREC,
Faculty of Economics, Development and Business
Sciences, University of Mpumalanga

7.8 ADDENDUM H: FRIC Proposal Letter



FACULTY OF ECONOMICS, DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SCIENCES
FACULTY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE (FRIC)

PROPOSAL REVIEW LETTER

Date 10 July 2025

Dear Bonginkosi Hlatshwayo (220369933)

Research proposal topic:

**Assessing the Marketing Efforts of MTPA-managed Nature Reserves and Their
Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Blyde River Canyon
Nature Reserve, Mpumalanga.**

Your research proposal was read by FRIC and the outcome is that it was:

- A. Accepted as satisfactory *
- B. Accepted but requires minor changes to be made
- C. Accepted but requires major changes to be made.
- D. Rejected

Yours sincerely

Calvin Gwandure (PhD)

Chairperson, Scientific Peer Review Committee,

Mbombela Campus (Main Campus)
University of Mpumalanga, Private Bag x 10383, Mbombela, 1200
c/o D725 and R40, Riverside, Mbombela, South Africa, 1200
Tel: +27 13 002 0001

Siyabuswa Campus
Bhekimfundo Drive, Siyabuswa,
South Africa, 0472
Tel: +27 13 590 0590

General enquiries (Switchboard)
Tel: +27 13 002 0001
Email: info@ump.ac.za
Web: www.ump.ac.za

7.9. ADDENDUM I: MTPA APPROVAL LETTER



OFFICE OF THE CEO

Enquiries: Mr. Ntwanano Mtungwa
Email: Ntwanano.mtungwa@mtpa.co.za
Cell: 079 829 7179

MR. BONGINKOSI HLATSHWAYO
University of Mpumalanga
Student Number: 220369933

BY EMAIL: konanani.thwala@ump.ac.za

Dear Mr. Hlatshwayo,

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT ACADEMIC RESEARCH AT MPUMALANGA TOURISM AND PARKS (MTPA)

The above matter has reference.

This letter serves to inform you that we have received your request and grant you permission and access to conduct your academic research project at Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency for Masters Tourism under the topic **Assessing the Marketing Efforts of MTPA-managed Nature Reserves and contribution to sustainable development goals: A Case Study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, Mpumalanga.**

For any further clarity you may contact Mr. Ntwanano Mtungwa, Executive Manager: Tourism on 079 829 7179 or Ntwanano.mtungwa@mtpa.co.za to make the necessary arrangements.

Trust that you find the above to be in good order.

Kind regards,

MR MJ MOHLALA
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER DATE: 10/07/2025



Private Bag X11338, Mbombela, 1200
N4 National Road, Hall's Gateway, Mataffin, Mbombela, Mpumalanga
+27 (0)13 065 0859/0860 | Email: info@mtpa.co.za
Reservations: +27 (0)13 065 0865 | reservations@mtpa.co.za

Report Fraud, Theft and Corruption and Save the MTPA
Tip-Offs Anonymous: 0800 214 775 | 0800 204 625



7.10. ADDENDUM J: INFORMATION LEAFLET



Researcher: Bonginkosi Hlatshwayo (220369933)

Supervisor: Dr Konanani Thwala

Name: Dr Konanani Thwala

Telephone: 013 002 0214

E-mail address: Konanani.thwala@ump.ac.za

Dear Respondent

I am, Bonginkosi Hlatshwayo, a Master of Tourism and Hospitality Management student at the University of Mpumalanga, in the Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences. You are invited to take part in an academic (Master's) research study. Ethical considerations have been considered in accordance with the UMP guidelines. The primary objective of this study is to: **Assess the Marketing Efforts of MTPA-managed Nature Reserves and Their Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals: A Case Study of Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, Mpumalanga**. This information will assist nature reserves in improving their marketing efforts and environmental conservation and enhance their contribution to the SDGs. For this to happen we need your view in terms of marketing efforts and environmental conservation of the reserve. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to please sign the consent form and **participate in a survey**.

The questions are strictly for the purpose of this research study. Please note that your participation in the interview or the survey is completely voluntary, and you are allowed to withdraw any time should you wish to. Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way during data analysis and discussion of results in the research report. All responses will be summarised together as a group with other respondents with no reference to individuals. This research is strictly for educational or academic purposes and to provide anonymous feedback to the MTPA. Ethical clearance has been obtained from the University of Mpumalanga and the MTPA have agreed that the study can take place.

Your co-operation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated. Please sign the informed consent below if you agree to participate in the study. Kindly, answer each question honestly and accurately as your participation in this process is essential to the success of this study.

Yours faithfully

Bonginkosi Hlatshwayo

Signature

7.11. ADDENDUM K: CONSENT FORM



CONSENT FORM

1. I _____ agree to and am voluntarily taking part in this research project.
2. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and may choose no longer to participate without having to explain myself.
3. I am aware that the information I provide on the questionnaire is for educational/academic purposes.
4. I understand that my name will not be recorded.
5. I have been provided with, and have read, the information leaflet regarding this research study.
6. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, and received satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.
7. I agree to answer the questions to the best of my ability.
8. I understand that I may refuse to answer any questions that I do not feel comfortable answering.
9. By signing this letter, I give free and informed consent to participate in this research study.

DATE	01-09-2025		
PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE			
RESEARCHER NAME	Bonginkosi Hlatshwayo	RESEARCHER SIGNATURE	B Hlatshwayo

This research is being conducted by Bonginkosi Hlatshwayo.

Telephone:

E-mail: 220369933@ump.ac.za

If there are any further questions about the research study or the questions themselves, please contact the Supervisor (Dr Konanani Thwala) at UMP. The Supervisor's contact details are as follows:

Supervisor

Tel: 013 002 0214

Email: Konanani.thwala@ump.ac.za

This research project has received ethical approval from the School Research Ethics Committee.