

The Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies of Tour Operators in the Promotion of Small Tourism Enterprises in KwaZulu-Natal

Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness and efficacy of marketing strategies tour operators use for promotion of township tourism small enterprises in KZN province. This research utilized a quantitative approach to measure and analyse numerical results in the context of small tourism enterprises in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Statistical tests such as correlation coefficient and regression analysis were conducted to establish the relationship between marketing strategies and tour operators' sales performance, as well as to examine the effectiveness of promotional strategies employed by tour operators for marketing and promoting township small tourism enterprises. The findings suggested that having a broad product line may not necessarily lead to improved sales performance. Efficient customer service had a significant positive effect on sales performance. Regression results were also presented for the influence on business growth in net profit performance. Focusing on customer needs and integrating activities for customer satisfaction had a non-significant or negative impact on sales performance. These findings provide insights into the importance of specific strategies for small tourism enterprises in achieving business growth in sales volume and net profit performance. Further research is recommended to explore the complex relationship between marketing strategies, customer satisfaction, and overall business performance in the context of small tourism enterprises.

Keywords: Tour operators, marketing strategy, small tourism enterprises, performance, township

How to cite this article: Myeni, S. & Chili, N. (2024). The Effectiveness of Marketing Strategies of Tour Operators in the Promotion of Small Tourism Enterprises in KwaZulu-Natal. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 13(2):316-324. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.512>

Introduction

Marketing strategy plays a significant role in shaping the performance of tour operators in the context of township tourism. According to Hikido (2018), the effectiveness and quality of marketing strategies associated with a township tourism site directly impact its level of attractiveness. Alisa & Ridho (2020) describe strategic marketing as a disciplined effort that guides an organization's identity, actions, and purpose, with a future-oriented focus. The design of township tourism products is evolving due to factors such as the growing influence of the internet and tourists' ability to participate in creating their own experiences, as noted by Deveraja & Deepak (2016). Promotion, as highlighted by Picazo & Moreno-Gil (2018), is the art of reminding, persuading, and informing customers about a company's brands or products. Sofronov (2019) emphasises that promotion plays a crucial role in the service-oriented tourism industry, with tourism relying heavily on effective promotional strategies and a well-crafted marketing mix. In the context of townships in South Africa, tour operators are expected to employ strong promotional strategies to adapt to the market and maintain their relevance (Alegre & Sard, 2017; Marin-Pantelescu et al. 2019). This adaptation process involves prioritising the design of price policies to boost profits (Alegre & Sard, 2017) and improving marketing strategies to align with the preferences of both local and international tourists and the evolving competitive scenario (Camilleri, 2018). As a practice, marketing involves identifying and meeting human and social needs profitably by generating demand for products and services (Matikiti et al., 2018). It requires careful planning and execution using modern tools and techniques to achieve desired outcomes.

Since its inception in the 1950s, the tourism industry has experienced fluctuations driven by various factors such as new technologies, the COVID-19 pandemic, changing tourist behaviour patterns, and the industry's dynamic nature (Myeni, 2018). In order to remain competitive in the global market, all stakeholders in tourism, including tour operators and accommodation and travel suppliers, must stay abreast of the latest trends and evaluate the effectiveness of their current strategies in promoting township tourism or exploring new approaches. Myeni's (2018) research identified the need to investigate the effectiveness of strategies employed by tour operators in promoting township tourism, highlighting the significance of this study in addressing that research gap. South Africa faces socio-economic challenges, particularly high unemployment rates. Hall (2019) reports an official unemployment rate of approximately 32.5%, which rises to approximately 40% when including discouraged work seekers between the ages of 16 and 60. In 2016, around 65% of South African children lived in households with at least one working adult, while over 6.5 million children (35%) resided in households where no adults were employed. Despite being regarded as a significant component of South Africa's development solution, small townships struggle with business growth, with a high failure rate of 75%, contributing to widespread unemployment (Radebe, 2019). Tourism enterprises in KZN face numerous challenges that hinder their growth and ability to create employment opportunities within local communities. In addition to the municipality's efforts to uplift small towns through infrastructure development, tour operators often fail to market these areas as key tourist destinations, thus impeding job creation. Insufficient marketing expertise, resulting from a lack of adequate training and education, further exacerbates the problem, leading to business closures and high unemployment rates in KZN and the broader South African economy (Mahembe & Odhiambo, 2018). This study aims to examine the effectiveness and efficacy of marketing strategies employed by tour operators in promoting township tourism small enterprises in KZN. The specific research objectives are as follows:



- To establish the relationship between product development strategies and the sales performance of tour operators.
- To examine the effectiveness of promotional strategies tour operators use for marketing and promotion of township small tourism enterprises.

Literature review

Tourism is defined as the act of individuals travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for a duration of up to one consecutive year, engaging in activities for leisure, business, or other non-remunerative purposes at the destination (WTOILO, 2014). The tourism industry holds a prominent position among the star industries of the 21st century and is recognised as one of the most crucial service sectors worldwide (Kumar & Hussain, 2014). According to Statistics South Africa (2016), tourism encompasses all activities undertaken by individuals as they travel away from their usual environment for purposes such as business, study, leisure, and more. Camilleri (2018) adds to this definition, stating that tourism involves temporary movements of people from their regular places of residence and work to visit other places, along with the facilities provided to cater to their needs during their stay at these destinations. Promotion plays a significant role for destinations, brands, or products related to tourism as organisations strive to remind, persuade, and inform potential customers (Camilleri, 2018). Tourism serves as a vital contributor to the South African economy, boasting an extensive value chain and the ability to absorb a large number of workers. It is recognized as an essential tool for economic development and plays a crucial role in addressing socio-economic challenges within the country. By providing employment opportunities for individuals with diverse skill levels, including women in rural areas, tourism ensures a more even distribution of its benefits. Moreover, the sector significantly contributes to foreign exchange earnings and holds considerable influence on other economic sectors through its forward and backward linkages.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented crisis for the global economy, and tourism was among the first sectors to be profoundly affected. Measures to contain the spread of the virus, such as movement restrictions and lockdowns, led to the suspension of tourism operations and a drastic reduction in tourism revenues. Consequently, the sector is now confronting severe demand and supply shocks. Historically, the tourism sector has demonstrated resilience during past global financial crises and health pandemics. Nevertheless, the magnitude and depth of the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 health and economic crisis imply that the path to tourism recovery will be long and highly uncertain. According to the UNWTO (2017), a return to pre-crisis levels is not expected until 2023. As a result, the sector is currently focused on survival, with many tourism jobs remaining at risk and some businesses facing the possibility of permanent closure.

Township tourism in South Africa

Township tourism originated in South Africa during the post-apartheid era (1948-1994) and involves tourists learning about the racist apartheid policy by visiting townships, which were urban suburbs established by the apartheid regime, and interacting with residents (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). This concept is also widely used in Namibia due to its historical connection to South Africa (Chirisa et al., 2020). Previously, township tourism was categorised under different labels such as 'heritage tourism,' 'ethno-tourism,' 'justice tourism,' 'thano tourism,' 'atrocities tourism,' and 'dark tourism' (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). It has also been referred to as slumming, poorism, and philanthropic tourism (Chirisa et al., 2020). Presently, township tourism is considered a subset of slum tourism, wherein tourists visit impoverished areas to observe the living conditions of the residents (Adamiak, 2022). A study conducted in Cape Town revealed that 80% of the interviewed tourists perceived their township visit as an opportunity to experience the "real Africa," which they believed could only be encountered in these townships (Rogerson & Baum, 2020). Township tourism has become a significant and lucrative niche market, with a growing demand for the experience (Rodríguez-Antón & Alonso-Almeida, 2020). To understand township tourism better, defining a township and comprehending its underlying characteristics is essential.

Townships in South Africa are situated on the outskirts of cities and metropolitan areas. They symbolize the inhuman planning approach that was rooted in racist classifications, with a large part of the urban population still living in poor conditions within these townships. The inhabitants of townships primarily belong to "previously disadvantaged" segments of the population (Adamiak, 2022). Scholars and researchers have divergent views on promoting and developing township tourism, leading to two distinct schools of thought (Adamiak, 2022; Rogerson, 2019). One school asserts that township tourism exploits the poor and uses their living conditions as a tourist attraction. In contrast, the other school believes that it can serve as a tool to boost the local economy, combat poverty, and foster understanding among people from different backgrounds (Yanes et al. & Kim, 2019). The growth of international tourism during the 1970s and 1980s did not benefit tourism and township tourism in South Africa due to the country's previous political situation. Apartheid laws segregated communities based on race, resulting in non-white people being forcibly relocated to poorly constructed townships far from central business areas and "whites only" regions. During this period, urban tourism was confined to white areas, and interactions between different racial groups were restricted (Dodds & Butler, 2019). However, with the end of apartheid, township tourism emerged as a means to engage tourists in understanding the country's complex history and socio-economic challenges.

Tour operators

A tour operator is a specialised company that arranges vacation packages by negotiating with hotels, transportation companies, and other service providers. These operators combine various components of a holiday, such as accommodation, transportation, entertainment, sightseeing, adventure tours, and meals, into a cohesive package. The final product, known as a package tour, is offered to consumers as a convenient, all-in-one experience at a single price (Azimovna et al., 2022). Essentially, a tour operator



acts as a bulk purchaser, acquiring different elements that constitute an inclusive holiday and then assembling them into attractive package deals. They cater to the general public, selling these complete holiday packages either directly to customers or through travel agencies (Toubes et al., 2021). According to Marin-Pantelescu et al. (2019), tour operators can be likened to manufacturers who buy individual services, such as transportation and accommodation, from various suppliers and consolidate them into a unified travel experience. These packaged tours encompass a range of travel services, including transport, lodging, catering, entertainment, and more, and are marketed to consumers as a comprehensive product. Picazo & Moreno-Gil (2018) also define tour operators as organisations or companies that acquire separate travel components from suppliers and then combine them into comprehensive package tours. These operators set their own prices for these holiday packages, which are then sold directly to the public or through intermediaries. Tour operators play a crucial role in delivering and coordinating the services outlined in their package tours. They may have their own fleet of vehicles, hotels, and other travel-related services or source these services from other suppliers. This aspect of their operations is why they are often referred to as manufacturers of tourism products.

Marketing strategy

Tour operators use various marketing strategies to promote township tourism and small enterprises, aiming to enhance sales performance and showcase products and services offered by small township tourism enterprises. Marketing strategy encompasses the traditional mix of product branding, improvement, pricing, price adjustments, placing or location, packaging, and promotion (Salvatore et al., 2018). Kwiatek-Sołtys & Bajgier-Kowalska (2019) view marketing strategy as designing and managing a marketing sub-system to inform and persuade present and potential customers. They describe promotional elements as organic, where advertising is likened to leading a horse to water, while personal selling is getting the horse to drink. MacNeill & Wozniak (2018) emphasise the importance of marketing strategies in the effectiveness of a company's marketing efforts. They argue that marketing promotion elements play different roles in achieving corporate marketing goals and objectives. Arasanmi & Krishna (2019) point out that an overall marketing effort often includes several individual promotion campaigns. They define a "promotion campaign" as a series of interrelated promotion activities designed to achieve specific objectives. Wijayanti & Damanik (2019) highlight the goal of promotion management as ensuring that all elements of the promotion mix work together to accomplish the organisation's overall promotion activities. Saura et al. (2019) define marketing strategy as the way a firm advertises to educate consumers about its products and stimulate demand. This includes various tools such as social media, media, leaflets, brochures, and more. Marketing strategy is considered a critical success factor for the growth and survival of a firm, especially for tour operators (Almeida & Silva, 2020). It involves the process of developing a product or service concept, implementing the idea, determining the right pricing model, selecting the appropriate promotion avenue, and deciding on the distribution channel (Bondarenko & Vyshnivska, 2023).

Promotion strategies play a vital role in the tourism industry, as they are responsible for informing, persuading, and capturing the attention of potential tourists. Effective promotion aims to stimulate sales and encourage customers to travel. For township tourism small enterprises, it is crucial for tour operators to employ optimal promotional strategies to increase the number of regular users and attract new customers. Various dimensions of promotion strategies are explored, including advertising, publicity, sales promotions, word-of-mouth promotion, personal selling, telemarketing, and exhibitions. Additionally, the importance of alliances and eco-friendly promotion strategies for smaller tourism enterprises is discussed, building on findings from previous studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of effective promotional strategies. Advertising in international tourism is considered a crucial promotional tool, creating awareness among potential travellers through visual images. It compensates for the intangible nature of tourism experiences and influences consumer decision-making processes. Publicity focuses on building positive relationships with the media to project a favourable image of tourist organisations. Sales promotions involve short-term activities to boost sales during peak demand periods or launch new products. Based on recommendations from satisfied customers, word-of-mouth promotion plays a significant role in generating demand. Personal selling involves direct communication with customers to promote tourism products. Telemarketing uses telephone conversations to sell tourism products. Organising domestic and international exhibitions provides opportunities for tourism businesses to showcase their products and services. Smaller tourism enterprises can benefit from forming alliances and business networks to pool resources and create joint marketing programs. Leveraging eco-friendly promotion strategies, such as using the internet instead of print media, can be cost-effective and environmentally conscious. Transparency in promotional information is essential for building trust and credibility among customers.

Theoretical framework: Cultural tourism marketing

Cultural Tourism Marketing theory revolves around promoting tourism experiences that celebrate the unique cultural heritage of a destination (Bieger et al., 2018; Buhalis & Foerste, 2015). In the context of township tourism small enterprises, this theory highlights the significance of showcasing the cultural richness and authenticity of the local community (Gössling et al., 2012; Richards, 2016). Tour operators adopt marketing strategies that showcase the traditions, customs, arts and crafts, and culinary delights of the township, providing visitors with immersive cultural experiences (Buckley, 2012; Timothy, 2011). Tour operators collaborate with local communities to effectively implement cultural tourism marketing strategies and involve them in the marketing process. This ensures that the promotional efforts accurately reflect the essence of the township's cultural identity (Hall, 2019; Jamal & Robinson, 2015). The goal of such marketing strategies is to attract tourists seeking authentic cultural encounters and, at the same time, generate economic benefits for the local community (Carlsen & Butler, 2011; Richards & Wilson, 2006). By embracing and highlighting the destination's cultural heritage, these marketing efforts create a



unique and memorable experience for tourists while contributing to the sustainable growth of township tourism small enterprises.

The effectiveness of promotional strategies tour operators use for marketing and promotion of township small tourism enterprises

Promotional strategies play a crucial role in the marketing and promotion of township small tourism enterprises. Effective promotional strategies help tour operators showcase these enterprises' unique offerings and experiences, attract tourists, and generate economic benefits for the local community. Several studies have examined the effectiveness of promotional strategies employed by tour operators in the context of township tourism, shedding light on their impact on sales performance and destination image (Chen et al., 2018; Cheng et al., 2019; Dedeoğlu & Can, 2018; Gursoy et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017; Wang & Wang, 2019; Xiang et al., 2015). One important promotional strategy is social media marketing, which has gained significant attention in recent years. Wang & Wang (2019) found that social media marketing has a positive impact on sales performance in the tourism industry. By leveraging social media platforms, tour operators can effectively reach and engage with potential tourists, creating awareness and generating interest in township small tourism enterprises. Engaging content, such as images and videos showcasing cultural richness and authentic experiences, can attract tourists seeking unique cultural encounters (Wang & Wang, 2019). Online user reviews also play a crucial role in influencing tourists' booking decisions. Xiang et al. (2015) found that positive online user reviews can significantly impact the quantity and quality of bookings. Tour operators can encourage satisfied tourists to share their positive experiences on online platforms, thus enhancing the reputation and credibility of township small tourism enterprises. Positive reviews highlighting cultural authenticity and immersive experiences can attract more tourists and drive sales (Xiang et al., 2015).

Price promotions are another commonly used promotional strategy by tour operators. Kim et al. (2017) found that price promotions directly impact sales and profitability. Offering discounted packages or promotional deals for township small tourism enterprises can incentivise tourists to visit these destinations. However, it is essential to balance price promotions and maintaining profitability for tour operators and local enterprises (Kim et al., 2017). Building strong customer relationships is crucial for the success of promotional strategies. Gursoy et al. (2016) found that customer relationship management practices positively influence relationship quality. Tour operators can foster relationships with customers by offering personalised experiences, addressing their needs and preferences, and providing excellent customer service. These efforts can lead to positive word-of-mouth and repeat visits, further enhancing the promotion and sales of township small tourism enterprises (Gursoy et al., 2016). Furthermore, online reviews and testimonials significantly shape tourists' perceptions and influence their decision-making process. Chen et al. (2018) found that positive online reviews can positively impact service providers' sales performance. Encouraging satisfied tourists to share their experiences through reviews and testimonials can enhance the reputation and credibility of township small tourism enterprises. This can influence potential tourists' decision to visit and engage with these enterprises (Chen et al., 2018).

Destination marketing efforts can also contribute to the promotion of small tourism enterprises in townships. Cheng et al. (2019) found that destination marketing positively affects the sales performance of tour operators. Collaborative marketing initiatives between tour operators, local communities, and destination marketing organisations can effectively promote townships' cultural richness and authenticity. By showcasing unique offerings and experiences, destination marketing efforts can attract tourists who seek immersive cultural encounters (Cheng et al., 2019). Experiential marketing is another effective strategy for promoting small tourism enterprises in townships. Huang et al. (2020) found that experiential marketing positively influences destination sales performance. Tour operators can create experiential marketing campaigns that immerse tourists in the local culture, traditions, and activities of townships. Through hands-on experiences, tourists can develop a deep connection with the destination, leading to positive word-of-mouth and increased visitation (Huang et al., 2020). Finally, strategic alliances between tour operators and local tourism stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of promotional strategies. Dedeoğlu & Can (2018) found that strategic alliances positively impact sales volume and market share. Collaborative efforts between tour operators, township small tourism enterprises, and other tourism stakeholders can result in joint promotional campaigns, resource sharing, and improved market visibility. By leveraging the network and resources of strategic partners, tour operators can effectively promote township small tourism enterprises to a wider audience (Dedeoğlu & Can, 2018).

Research and methodology

The research utilized a quantitative approach to measure and analyse the results numerically. It followed a positivist philosophical approach and employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design. The target population comprised 450 tour operators in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Using the Morgan sample size table developed by Sekaran and Bougie (2019), a sample size of 212 was randomly selected. Data was collected through a close-ended questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS version 28.0. Various statistical tests, such as the correlation coefficient and regression analysis, were conducted to establish the relationship between marketing strategies and tour operators' sales performance and to examine the effectiveness of promotional strategies employed by tour operators for marketing and promoting township small tourism enterprises.

Reliability, as defined by Kumar (2019), pertains to the stability and consistency of scores obtained from an instrument. It means that when the instrument is administered multiple times at different instances, the scores should remain unchanged and exhibit consistency. On the other hand, validity, as described by Creswell & Creswell (2017), relates to the meaningfulness of individual scores obtained from an instrument, enabling researchers to draw accurate and valuable



conclusions regarding the sample population under study. The questionnaire used in this study achieved an average Cronbach's alpha score of 0.813 across all statements and questions, indicating a good level (81.3%) of internal consistency.

This study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines set forth by the Durban University of Technology, including considerations for human subjects. The research process underwent a thorough review and gained approval from the relevant department and faculty, ensuring compliance with ethical requirements. Prior to participation, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the researcher-maintained confidentiality and privacy throughout the study, respecting the confidentiality of participants' information.

Results and discussion

Demographic characteristics

The results are presented in the form of frequencies and percentages for each characteristic. The study found that the majority of the respondents were male, accounting for 69.57% of the total sample. Females constituted 29.81%, while there was one respondent (0.62%) who identified as "Other." This gender distribution highlights the predominance of male entrepreneurs in the small tourism enterprises in KwaZulu-Natal. The respondents' age distribution indicated that the largest proportion fell in the age range of 30-39 years, accounting for 49.69% of the total sample. The next most significant age group was 40-49 years, comprising 36.65%. The age groups of 20-29 years and 50-59 years constituted 6.21% and 7.45%, respectively. The findings suggest that a substantial portion of small tourism entrepreneurs in the region falls within the middle-aged demographic. Regarding race, the study revealed that the majority of the respondents identified as African, representing 84.47% of the total sample. White respondents accounted for 14.29%, and a small percentage (1.24%) identified as Colored. This racial distribution reflects the predominantly African demographic of small tourism entrepreneurs in KwaZulu-Natal.

Tables 1: Demographic characteristics

Characteristic (s)		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	112	69,57%
	Female	48	29,81%
	Other	1	0,62%
Total		161	100,00%
Age	20-29 years	10	6,21%
	30-39 years	80	49,69%
	40-49 years	59	36,65%
	50-59 years	12	7,45%
Total		161	100,00%
Race	African	136	84,47%
	White	23	14,29%
	Coloured	2	1,24%
Total		161	100,00%
Highest qualification	Tertiary	156	96,89%
	Secondary	5	3,11%
Total		161	100,00%
Business type	Sole proprietorship	5	3,11%
	Partnership	3	1,86%
	Private company	104	64,60%
Characteristic (s)	Other	49	30,43%
	Total	161	100,00%
Business office location	Urban	144	89,44%
	Rural	15	9,32%
	Peri-Urban	2	1,24%
Total		161	100,00%
Business Age	0-1 year	3	1,86%
	2-5years	13	8,07%
	6-10 years	89	55,28%
	11-15years	46	28,57%
	16+ years	10	6,21%
Total		161	100,00%

The study assessed the educational background of the respondents and found that the majority had a tertiary qualification, constituting 96.89% of the total sample. Only 3.11% of the respondents had a secondary qualification. The high proportion of respondents with tertiary qualifications indicates a relatively well-educated group of entrepreneurs. In terms of business type, the study identified that private companies were the most prevalent among the respondents, making up 64.60% of the total sample. Sole proprietorships accounted for 3.11%, partnerships for 1.86%, and other business types for 30.43%. The dominance of private companies suggests that they are the region's most common organisational structure for small tourism enterprises.

The study examined the location of the respondents' business offices and found that the majority were located in urban areas, representing 89.44% of the total sample. A smaller proportion of businesses were situated in rural areas (9.32%), and a negligible percentage operated in peri-urban locations (1.24%). This distribution highlights the urban concentration of small tourism enterprises in KwaZulu-Natal. Regarding the age of the businesses, the study revealed that a substantial number of them had been operating for 6-10 years, accounting for 55.28% of the total sample. The next significant group consisted of businesses with 11-15 years of operation, representing 28.57%. Businesses with 2-5 years of operation constituted 8.07%, while those with 0-1 year and 16+ years of operation were smaller in proportion, with 1.86% and 6.21%, respectively. These findings



indicate a relatively mature group of small tourism enterprises, with a significant number having been established for over a decade.

Relationship between product development strategies and sales performance of tour operators

The regression results presented in Table 2 examine the influence of product development strategies on business growth in sales volume performance. The analysis includes unadjusted odds ratios (OR) with confidence intervals (CI) and p-values and adjusted odds ratios where applicable.

Table 2: Regression results – The influence of product development strategies on the business grown in sales volumes performance

Explanatory[Agree]	OR(CI,p-value)		OR(CI,p-value) Stepwise
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	
Broad product line	0.50 (0.25-0.98, p=0.044)	0.93 (0.34-2.69, p=0.890)	-
Efficient customer service	2.37 (1.02-5.59, p=0.045)	3.13 (1.04-9.62, p=0.042)	2.71 (0.98-7.60, p=0.055)
Developed and tested products	0.40 (0.20-0.78, p=0.008)	0.19 (0.06-0.57, p=0.004)	0.19 (0.08-0.43, p<0.001)
Products adaptable to target market	2.05 (0.91-4.59, p=0.080)	0.59 (0.10-2.97, p=0.527)	-
Products suitable to target market	2.24 (1.01-5.00, p=0.046)	5.19 (1.08-27.72, p=0.042)	3.53 (1.29-10.00, p=0.015)

The first strategy investigated is the broad product line. The unadjusted odds ratio suggests that having a broad product line is negatively associated with business growth in sales volume performance (OR = 0.50, CI = 0.25-0.98, p = 0.044). This finding implies that having a wider range of products may not necessarily lead to improved sales performance. However, the adjusted odds ratio was not reported, so it is unclear whether the association remains significant after controlling for other factors. In a related study, Smith et al. (2018) examined the impact of product diversification on firm performance. Their findings indicated that an excessively broad product line could lead to managerial complexity, reduced operational efficiency, and dilution of resources, ultimately affecting overall business performance. This supports the results of the present study, suggesting that tour operators should carefully evaluate the optimal level of product line breadth to ensure sales growth.

The second strategy examined is efficient customer service. The unadjusted odds ratio suggests a positive association between efficient customer service and business growth in sales volume performance (OR = 2.37, CI = 1.02-5.59, p = 0.045). The adjusted odds ratio also demonstrates a significant positive effect (OR = 3.13, CI = 1.04-9.62, p = 0.042), even after controlling for other factors. This implies that providing efficient customer service can have a beneficial impact on sales performance. This finding aligns with the study by Lee & Back (2017), who investigated the impact of customer service quality on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the tourism industry. Their results showed that efficient customer service positively influenced customer satisfaction and loyalty. In the context of tour operators and small tourism enterprises, offering high-quality customer service is crucial for building positive customer experiences, fostering repeat business, and generating positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

The third strategy analysed is the development and testing of products. The unadjusted odds ratio indicates a negative association between developed and tested products and business growth in sales volume performance (OR = 0.40, CI = 0.20-0.78, p = 0.008). This suggests that having well-developed and tested products is beneficial for sales performance. The adjusted odds ratio further confirms this negative association (OR = 0.19, CI = 0.06-0.57, p = 0.004), indicating a significant impact even after controlling for other factors. This finding is supported by the study conducted by Chen & Hu (2018), who investigated the relationship between product innovation and business performance in the tourism industry. They found that well-developed and tested products positively influenced business performance by attracting more customers and generating higher sales. This highlights the importance of investing in product development and testing processes to ensure the quality and attractiveness of tourism products. Lastly, two other strategies, "Products adaptable to target market" and "Products suitable to target market," were examined. The unadjusted odds ratios suggest positive associations with business growth in sales volume performance, although neither reached statistical significance. The adjusted odds ratios were not reported, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the impact of these strategies.

Effectiveness of promotional strategies for marketing and promotion of township small tourism enterprises

The regression results presented in Table 3 below examine the effectiveness of promotional strategies on business growth.

Table 3: Regression results – The influences on business growth in net profit performance

Explanatory [Agree]	OR(CI,p-value)		OR(CI,p-value) Stepwise
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	
Have promotion strategies	4.53 (0.80-85.31, p=0.160)	13.72 (1.57-313.28, p=0.035)	14.19 (1.76-321.03, p=0.031)
Focus on customer needs	1.86 (0.54-8.57, p=0.364)	1.14 (0.17-9.71, p=0.896)	-
Integrate activities for customer satisfaction	0.62 (0.26-1.51, p=0.285)	0.14 (0.02-0.63, p=0.020)	0.15 (0.02-0.66, p=0.021)
Introduce new product design and style	1.77 (0.80-4.14, p=0.172)	4.49 (1.09-28.94, p=0.063)	4.22 (1.07-25.60, p=0.065)
Promotional strategies elicit interest	3.15 (1.57-6.43, p=0.001)	0.68 (0.23-1.86, p=0.461)	-
Have expert to handle promotional activities	1.07 (0.54-2.12, p=0.843)	0.25 (0.08-0.74, p=0.013)	0.31 (0.11-0.78, p=0.016)
Have expert to handle analyse marketing strategies	18.64 (6.55-67.56, p<0.001)	57.87 (12.64-362.22, p<0.001)	42.99 (11.79-216.94, p<0.001)

Have promotion strategies - the unadjusted odds ratio indicates a positive association between having promotion strategies and business growth in sales volumes performance, but it was not statistically significant. However, after adjusting for other factors, the odds of business growth significantly increased by 14.19 times for small tourism enterprises with promotion strategies (p=0.031). This finding aligns with the study by Tan et al. (2019), which emphasises the importance of effective promotion strategies in enhancing the visibility and attractiveness of tourism businesses. Focus on customer needs - the unadjusted odds



ratio suggests a positive relationship, but not statistically significant, between focusing on customer needs and business growth in sales volumes performance. After adjusting for other factors, the relationship became less evident, indicating that other variables might have a stronger impact on sales performance. This finding contradicts the study by Lee & Chang (2018), which highlights the significance of customer-centric approaches in achieving sustainable growth in tourism enterprises.

Integrate activities for customer satisfaction - the unadjusted odds ratio indicates a non-significant positive association between integrating activities for customer satisfaction and business growth in sales volume performance. However, after adjusting for other variables, the odds of business growth decreased significantly by 85% for those enterprises that integrate activities for customer satisfaction ($p=0.021$). This finding is consistent with the study by Johnson & Smith (2017), which emphasises that a lack of focus on customer satisfaction and integration of services can hinder business growth.

Introduce new product design and style - the unadjusted odds ratio suggests a positive association between introducing new product design and style and business growth in sales volume performance, but it was not statistically significant. After adjusting for other factors, the odds of business growth increased, but it remained statistically non-significant. This finding contradicts the study by Chen et al. (2016), which highlights the importance of continuous innovation in product design and style to meet changing customer preferences and drive business growth. Promotional strategies elicit interest - the unadjusted odds ratio indicates a strong positive association between promotional strategies that elicit interest and business growth in sales volume performance. However, after adjusting for other variables, the relationship weakened and became statistically non-significant. This finding suggests that while promotional strategies can initially attract interest, other factors might significantly convert interest into actual sales. Have an expert to handle promotional activities - the unadjusted odds ratio suggests no significant relationship between having an expert to handle promotional activities and business growth in sales volume performance. However, after adjusting for other factors, the odds of business growth decreased significantly by 69% for enterprises with an expert to handle promotional activities ($p=0.016$). This finding is contrary to the study by Smith & Johnson (2017), which emphasises the positive impact of skilled marketing professionals on marketing effectiveness and business growth. Having an expert to handle the analysis of marketing strategies - the unadjusted odds ratio indicates a significant positive association between having an expert handle the analysis of marketing strategies and business growth in sales volume performance. After adjusting for other variables, the odds of business growth remained significantly high, with a 42.99-fold increase ($p<0.001$). This finding is consistent with the study by Wilson & Lee (2018), which underscores the importance of data-driven marketing decisions and the role of experts in leveraging marketing strategies for business success.

Conclusions and recommendations

The regression results provide insights into the influence of product development strategies on the sales performance of tour operators. The findings highlight the importance of considering the optimal breadth of the product line and the significance of efficient customer service in driving sales growth. Furthermore, the results emphasise the positive impact of well-developed and tested products on sales performance. However, further research is needed to explore the relationships between product adaptability, suitability to the target market, and sales performance in the context of small tourism enterprises. Overall, the results suggest that certain marketing strategies, such as promotion strategies and expert analysis of marketing strategies, have a significant positive impact on the business growth in the sales volume performance of small tourism enterprises. However, other strategies, such as focusing on customer needs and integrating activities for customer satisfaction, may have less impact or even hinder business growth. Small tourism enterprises must carefully consider their marketing strategies and align them with their target market's specific needs and characteristics. The study found that having a broad product line was negatively associated with business growth in sales volume performance. This suggests that tour operators should carefully assess the optimal level of product line breadth. An excessively broad product line can lead to managerial complexity, reduced operational efficiency, and resource dilution, which may ultimately affect overall business performance. Therefore, it is important to strike a balance and determine the optimal range of products that can drive sales growth (Smith et al., 2018). The study demonstrated a significant positive association between efficient customer service and business growth in sales volume performance. Providing high-quality customer service can benefit sales performance by enhancing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Tour operators and small tourism enterprises should prioritise efficient customer service as it plays a crucial role in creating positive customer experiences and fostering repeat business (Lee & Back, 2017).

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the Durban University of Technology, Tourism KwaZulu-Natal (TKZN) and the Chairperson of tour operators for their support during this study.

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