

Evaluation of Government Responses and Measures on COVID-19 in the Tourism Sector: A Case of Tour Guides in South Africa

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Abstract

The aim of this paper was to explore and evaluate the support mechanisms or measures that the South African government has put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic for tour guides within the tourism sector. This was a non-empirical study, which used an exploratory research design. The study employed document analysis to gather the data, and discourse analysis was utilized to analyze the collected data. This study findings indicate that the government responses and measures assisted numerous tour guides during the lockdown period. Furthermore, the results showed that the tourism sector continues to be severely affected as the government has only recently allowed some business travel and leisure tourism. The study recommends that the government and other tourism stakeholders place new standards to reassure domestic and international travellers' safety so that the tour guides could generate income and avoid possible business closure in this tourism sub-sector.

Keywords: South Africa, tour guide, government, relief fund, measures, responses

Introduction

The travel and tourism sector is a labour-intensive industry that has been identified by the South African government as an important driver for the country's economic and social development. In the year 2018, the tourism sector contributed R425 billion to South Africa's economy, and it generated direct foreign spending of R82.5 billion (Department of Tourism, 2020). There are more than 700 000 people employed in the sector (Department of Tourism, 2020). As a result of the COVID-19, the tourism sector's contribution to the country's GDP meagre and business closure and severe job losses have been incurred in this sector. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in Africa, the tourism sector lost about 8 million jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic (City Press, 2020). The Department of Tourism conducted two surveys: one was in April and the other in June 2020, concerning tourism businesses' performance during the pandemic. The surveys' findings indicated that 99% of the businesses were affected, 75% closed their businesses due to revenues declined, and 67% were optimistic about the business's survival (Department of Tourism, 2020).

The world is experiencing unparalleled universal social, health and economic emergency with the virus. Although all sectors of the economy have been affected by the COVID-19, the tourism sector is mostly affected with hotels closed, aeroplanes not operating, and travel restrictions in numerous countries worldwide (White & Case, 2020). The COVID-19 health-related strategies and measures implemented by various governments have halted

global travel, tourism and leisure (Sigala, 2020). In South Africa, tourism is one of the most critical economic sectors. According to the Department of Tourism (2020), in 2018, they were 10.4 million international tourism trips and contributed to the South African economy, a total injection of R273.2 billion.

Furthermore, the Department of Tourism (2020: n-p) indicated that the Tourism sector “supports 740,000 direct jobs and over 1.5 million jobs across the economy”. Travel, Distribution, Hospitality and Accommodation are subsectors of the tourism sector in South Africa. It consists of many micro and small enterprises, creating numerous economic opportunities for women, men and youth across the county. It is one of the critical economic sectors in rural areas with attractive destinations (Department of Tourism, 2020: 10). Chimucheka (2015) noted that the SMMEs sector is essential in creating employment, stimulating economic growth, tackling poverty, and decreasing inequality levels. While the SMMEs sector is critical, it faces numerous challenges that constrain its growth and development. Such challenges include: poor management, lack of financial support, lack of training and experience, lack of marketing research skills, poor marketing skills, lack to prepare marketing plans, poor analysis of the market, inability to understand and forecast future customer trends and needs, product demand and competition (Lekhanya, 2010; Maloka, 2013; Rogerson, 2013; Chimucheka & Mandipaka, 2015; Maziriri & Chinomona, 2016).

The tour guides form a critical part of the tourism value chain having links to certain components of the Hospitality sub-sector. Due to travel restrictions and border closures, the tour guides have experienced a substantial decrease in their activities, contributing to the loss of their income. This paper explores the impact of mechanisms and measures that the government has put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic for tour guides in South Africa. In other words, the paper assessed the governments’ measures to minimize the effect of the pandemic on the tourism sector, with particular attention to tour guides. The following section provides an overview of the tourism sectors’ performance during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature review

Performance of international and domestic tourism sector due to COVID-19

It is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has created social and economic crisis both in developed and developing countries, and the tourism sector has been mostly affected by the pandemic. The majority of the countries in which the tourism sector contributes significantly to job creation, export generation revenues, economic income, and investments were mainly exposed to the effect of the COVID-19 crisis. Globally, the countries have announced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic. In May 2020, “97 destinations (45%) have totally or partially closed their borders for tourists, 65 destinations (30%) have suspended totally or partially international flights, and 39 destinations (18%) are implementing the closing of borders in a more differentiated manner by banning the entry for passengers from specific countries of origin” (World Trade Organisation, 2020: n.p.).

The Asia and Pacific regions were the first to suffer the effect of the COVID-19. These regions “saw a 35% decline in tourists’ arrivals in Q1 2020, and the second-hardest hit was Europe with a 19% decline, followed by the Americas (-15%), Africa (-12%) and the Middle East (-11%)” (World Tourism Organisation, 2020: n.p.). Also, the WTO estimated that there could be a decline of 20% to 30% of international tourist arrivals in 2020. Figure 1 below clearly shows the impact of COVID-19 on the number of tourists globally in Q1 2020. It was predicted that the tourism sector might recover in Q4 2021 (World Tourism Organisation, 2020). This means that the pandemic has mostly impacted the sector, and numerous individuals have lost their jobs and small operators have shutdown. According to WTO (2020), an estimated drop to 78% of international tourist arrivals, causing a loss of US\$ 1.2 trillion in

export revenues from tourism and 120 million direct tourism job cuts. In responding to COVID-19, numerous countries have implemented several socio-economic measures to assist both businesses and individuals.

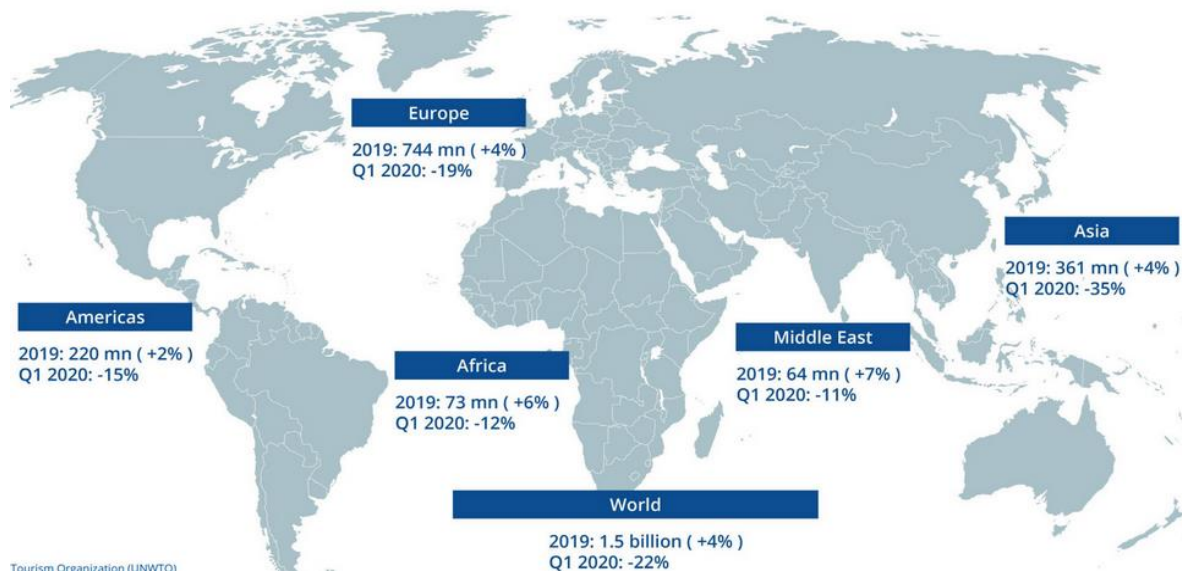


Figure 1: International tourist arrivals by region in Q1 2020
Source: World Tourism Organisation, 2020

The cultural and natural diversity found in South Africa distinguishes the country's tourism as a compelling global sector. Adventure tourism, township tourism, beaches, wildlife and safari, city and cultural lifestyles offer high-quality and value for tourists' money in the country. Due to the tourism sector's direct and indirect link with other network sectors in the country, the tourism sector's essential role in the South African economy is substantial. According to the Department of Tourism (2020: 16), tourism supports a vibrant and complex value chain and is a sector not characterized by significant market concentration or deep vertical integration like many others in South Africa.

In the year 2018, the tourism sector contributed R425 billion to South Africa's economy, and it generated direct foreign spending of R82.5 billion, and there are more than 700 000 people employed in the sector (Department of Tourism, 2020). Since the country's implementation of the lockdown since March 2020, all activities related to tourism have been stopped, borders have been closed and scheduled flights have been suspended. Before the COVID-19, the performance and optimism around the South African tourism economy were relatively positive. Figure 2 below shows the performance of the tourism sector in South Africa before COVID-19. As a result of the pandemic, the tourism sector's contribution to the country's GDP will be meagre and business closure and severe job losses will be incurred in this sector. The travel restrictions and border closures that were implemented to contain the virus's transmission reduced the tourism market's demand and supply (Mail & Guardian, 2020). Meaning, the travel restrictions and border closures imposed have rendered the tourism sector downright sluggish.

The effects for tourism were demonstrated instantly following the South African President's announcement of declaring a National State of Disaster and the initial of a three-week challenging lockdown period from 15 March 2020, which was extended subsequently to August 2020. As emphasized by Rogan and Skinner (2020: 5), in comparison with other

countries, the lockdown regulations in South Africa were strict as “all citizens were instructed not to leave their homes other than to access food, medicine, and social grants, and only workers defined as ‘essential service’ providers could travel”.

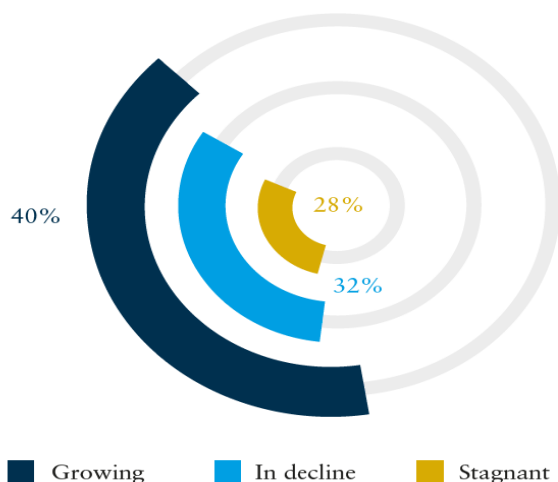


Figure 2: Tourism performance in South Africa before COVID-19
Source: Department of Tourism, 2020

According to Novelli, Gussing Burgess, Jones and Ritchie (2018), the tourism sector is used to and has become resilient in bouncing back. However, it is the sector that is highly vulnerable to several socio-economic, political, environmental risks. Taking into consideration the sector’s vulnerability, certain researchers view the present COVID-19 situation offers a unique opportunity for transformative change in tourism (Brouder, 2020; Mair, 2020; Sigala, 2020). According to Brouder (2020:488), the transformative change in tourism is possible if “sufficient institutional innovation occurs on both the demand and supply side of tourism and if new paths also emerge”. On the other hand, Sigala (2020: 312-313) indicated that the knowledge about how the COVID-19 crisis can foster tourism change and convert crisis into transformative innovation is lacking. Hence, transdisciplinary transformative research related to COVID-19 should assist the tourism sector in reimagining and implementing a functional environment that human-centered and responsible for sustainability and well-being values (Sigala, 2020).

Due to the reason that the tourism sector flourishes on social interaction, the sectors’ ability to return into full operation will take longer compared to other industries (Mail & Guardian, 2020). Therefore, the government should produce instruments or measures to safeguard the sector's utmost susceptible sections, such as Small, Medium and Micro-Sized Enterprises (SMMEs), self-employed, women and the youth. The following section provides an overview of the Small, Medium and Micro-Sized Enterprises within South Africa.

SMMEs in South Africa

Chimucheka (2015) noted that the SMMEs sector is essential in creating employment, stimulating economic growth, tackling poverty, and decreasing inequality levels. The concept of SMMEs is not new in South Africa as it was officially recognized through the publication of the National Small Business Act No. 102 of 1996. The Department of Small Business Development through the Government Gazette of 2019 defined small enterprise as a “separate and distinct business entity, together with its branches or subsidiaries, if any, including cooperative enterprises, managed by one owner or more predominantly carried on in any sector or subsector of the economy and classified as a micro, a small or a medium enterprise by

satisfying the criteria mentioned under the schedule” (2019, 1). The size of the SMMEs enterprises provides for the maximum of 250 total full-time equivalents of paid employees in any sector or sub-sector of the economy, with Micro providing for a maximum of 10, Small with a maximum of 50 and Medium enterprises with a maximum of 250 workers (Department of Small Business Development, 2019).

Numerous key challenges hinder the success of SMMEs in developing countries. Such challenges include lack of marketing research skills, poor marketing skills, lack to prepare marketing plans, poor analysis of the market, inability to understand and forecast future customer trends and needs, product demand and competition, lack of knowledge of the market and management style (Lekhanya, 2010; Maloka, 2013; Chimucheka & Mandipaka, 2015; Maziriri & Chinomona, 2016). These are certain factors that the SMMEs experienced in conducting their businesses successfully.

The government's role in supporting and promoting SMMEs has been essential as they are considered key role-players regarding the realization of core socio-economic objectives. Reducing poverty, contributing towards stimulating the country's growth and development, and reducing unemployment are the key socio-economic objectives that the government wants to achieve to improve society's well-being (Maziriri, & Chinomona, 2016). According to Petersen, Bruwer and Le Roux (2018), the increase of the SMMEs in South Africa show their socio-economic importance to the country's economy.

The development and promotion of the SMMEs in South Africa have been the fundamental government focus since 1994. Given the country's history, the “policy focus of the national government is particularly on transforming the prospects for those enterprises established and owned by black South Africans that were disadvantaged under apartheid” (Rogerson, 2013: 137). Considering the government's support for SMMEs, it is fair to expect an improvement in these business entities' (economic) sustainability. The SMMEs in South Africa continue to experience certain challenges, although government interventions support SMMEs (Timm, 2011). According to Bruwer and Coetzee (2016: 206), if the “support of the South African government had a limited influence on the economic sustainability of South African SMMEs over the span of two decades, the inference can be made that the dismal economic sustainability of South African SMMEs is spurred on by factors that are beyond the control of the support initiatives offered to these business entities by national government”.

Considering the challenges that the SMMEs are experiencing, enterprises falling under this category are highly exposed to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has affected the SMMEs both on the supply and demand sides. The government's ability to support the survival of the SMMEs is essential in mitigating the enterprises' economic impact and creating the conditions that will be crucial for the sectors' growth post-COVID-19 pandemic.

On the supply side, there has been an enormous decrease in the supply of labour that the SMMEs have experienced, as employees have to work remotely, look after their children and the inability of enterprises to remunerate the workers. The severe drops in capacity utilization within the SMMEs have been due to measures that the government had implemented to contain the spread of COVID-19 (Zeidy, 2020). Furthermore, there have been significant disruptions in the supply chains, which led to shortages of certain goods.

As the government places strict international trade and travel measures, the tourism sector has been severely affected. On the demand side of the small enterprises in the tourism sector, the unexpected loss of demand and revenue has affected their ability to function and generate income (Zeidy, 2020). Due to the decrease in supply and demand in the tourism sector caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous small enterprises failed to pay their workers' salaries. The TransUnion conducted an online survey on 659 small enterprises in South Africa

to understand how the pandemic affected the small enterprises and the changes they have been experiencing. The study found that “90 percent of small businesses in South Africa are struggling or temporarily closed as a result of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and 96 percent of small business owners reported a decrease in revenue, with 78 percent saying they have seen a significant decrease in their business revenues since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic” (BusinessTech, 2020: n.p). This shows that the small enterprises in the country have been adversely affected by the pandemic.

In assisting the SMMEs in dealing with the challenges caused by COVID-19, the government had put in place certain measures to support them. According to Zeidy (2020:4), the South African government introduced a wide array of measures to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak on businesses. Many other countries introduced measures to support SMMEs during this severely challenging time, with a strong focus on initiatives to sustain short-term liquidity (Zeidy, 2020: 2-4). The following section explains the tour guide profession within the tourism industry.

Tour guide in the tourism sector

A tour guide is usually a resident who converses with, informs and leads the tourists about the destination in a fascinating way in the language they understand. The Department of tourism (2020: n-p) defines a tour guide as someone who “travels with the tourists from their place of arrival to all places they would like to visit in South Africa, where they are registered in a particular province”. According to Cetin and Yarcan (2017: 347), a tour guide is a knowledge holder and provider, instructor, culture broker, translator, entertainer, actor, storyteller, missionary, mentor, pathfinder, middleman, intermediary, buffer, caretaker, organizer, salesperson, shepherd and decision-maker. Also, Weiler and Black (2015a: 60) noted that six key themes focused on tour guide roles, namely: guides as storytellers, interpreters and intercultural communicators, guide’s contributions to sustainability, training and education, visitor expectations of and satisfaction with the guide, and quality assurance.

Ap and Wong (2001), Ham and Weiler (2003), Black and Ham (2005), Kong (2014), Látková et al. (2018) stipulated that tour guide is one of the oldest forms of verbal interpretation that assist the tourists to enhance their knowledge and understand the site they are experiencing. Also, to improve tourists’ understanding and knowledge, enhance tourists' destination image, tour guides must unlock tourist emotional-spiritual experience in heritage sites (Poria et al., 2009; Gutic et al., 2010; Rabotić, 2010; Weiler & Black, 2015b). The tour guides improve the quality of tourist experience by ensuring safety, distributing useful and relevant information, providing cultural, social and environmental interpretations at the sites, ensuring tourists satisfaction, and ensuring that tourists participate in activities (Weiler & Ham, 2002; Weiler & Kim, 2011; Bryon, 2012; Chan et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2015; Van Loggerenberg et al., 2015; Weiler & Black, 2015a; Weiler & Black, 2015b; Lackey, 2016; Chen, Weiler & Black, 2018; Makopo et al., 2018; Alazaizeh et al., 2019). As the individuals or groups of individuals working at tourist destinations, the tour guides are sometimes required to be “the essential interface between the host destination and its visitors” (Ap & Wong, 2001: 551). Certain tour guides operate independently as freelance tour guides while the organizations employ others under the travel agency industry.

While the tourism sector has expanded since 1994, considerable research has been conducted, but research on tour guides has been minimal in South Africa (De Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). Unlike Asian, European and North American countries, most researchers have been increasingly publishing empirical papers on tour guides in the last ten years. (Chen, Weiler & Black, 2018). Nyahunzvi and Njerekai (2012) noted that the tour guiding profession is not given the attention it deserves by different tourism stakeholders as they continue facing

similar challenges within the tourism sector. Chen, Weiler and Black (2018) emphasized that tour guides' research is relatively recent and receives insufficient scholarly attention. Meaning, tourism researchers have recently turned their attention to investigate tour guides' significance within the tourism sector's value chain. Black, Weiler and Chen (2019) also noted a lack of critical review of theoretical engagement of empirical research on tour guides. However, this sector is crucial for enhancing tourists' experience and their roles have been acknowledged by various tourism researchers. Although the research on tour guides is minimal, they form an essential part of sustainable tourism and plays a crucial role in enhancing the tourists' experience (Weiler & Kim, 2011; Weiler & Black, 2015b).

The lack of formal documentation of tour guides in the country shows that there has been minimal effort to investigate their role and growth in the tourism industry (DeBeers, 2011, De Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). These authors further stipulated that the tour guide are categorized as site guides, driver guides and special interest guides, which are further sub-categorized into local, regional and national. According to the Department of Tourism (2015), there are three tour guides: nature, culture, and adventure tour guides. A brief explanation of these three categories are discussed below (Department of Tourism, 2015: n.d.):

- Nature guides possess in-depth knowledge about flora and fauna and know a particular area's natural environment. Nature trails, national parks, conservation areas are certain types of fields for nature guides.
- Culture guides focus more on cultural heritage. Meaning they conduct tours with emphasis on cultural heritage. Cultural experiences in rural villages, art, museums, township history and historic buildings are fields for the cultural guides.
- Adventure guides conduct guided outdoor recreation leisure activities with an element of risk involved, e.g., abseiling, hiking and mountain climbing.

Department of Tourism (2015) further stipulates that the tour guides are also categorized according to the areas they operate, e.g., site or provincial guides. A site guide is a person whose knowledge is limited to a specific geographical location or place (for example, at Cango Caves or Shakaland). Such an individual possesses the knowledge or information that relates to that particular site. A provincial guide is a person who guides in one or more provinces (for example, Eastern Cape or KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo). A provincial tourist guide who is competent to guide in all nine provinces is typically referred to as a national guide. National tour guides have a vast knowledge of each province and South Africa in general (De Beers, 2011). For the tour guide to register as a provincial and national tour guide, a minimum qualification at NQF level 4 and unit standard of specialization area are required (Department of Tourism, 2015). In addition to the above, De Beers (2011: 16–17) quoting McIntyre (2009: 17–20), described the duties of a driver and special interest guides as follows:

- Driver guides must possess a valid driver's license so that they can able to transfer tourists or guests to specific sites or places. These tour guides must be registered with the traffic authority department to receive the legal permit allowing them to transport tourists/passengers to generate money.
- Special interest guides are not popular in South Africa. These are experts in specific disciplines, and they often follow a vocation in their area of expertise and guide only part-time, at weekends, or on their annual leave.

The duties that each of these guides performs differs according to the registration and qualifications they possess. The qualifications for tour guides are governed by the National Qualification Framework (NQF), and there are two qualifications registered on the NQF for a tour guide, namely: National Certificate in Tourism: Guiding (NQF2) and National Certificate in Tourism: Guiding (NQF4). The Culture Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Sector Education and Training Authority (CATHSSETA) regulate these programmes, and private

sector providers conduct the training. CATHSSETA must accredit all the private sector providers to train according to the nationally recognized standards and qualifications.

The tour guides secure employment in many ways. Working as either independent contractor/ freelance and as a direct contract worker with a tour operating company are the two most critical ways of securing employment. The tour operating companies function as intermediaries in the supply chain of tourism in South Africa as a service (De Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014: 95). The tour operator sector plays a crucial role or background for the employment of tour guides in this country. A small number of large operators dominate the tour operating sector in South Africa (De Beers, 2011: 28). The tour guides are mostly employed or contracted by the tour operating companies daily, with only a few guides employed permanently. Due to the nature of their employability, during this COVID-19 crisis, the tour guides are most vulnerable and such vulnerability has affected them on qualifying for relief measures.

The tour guide's experiences and qualifications are critical factors in determining their remuneration by the tour operators. The “intangible factor” of the “personality” and “language ability” are also other factors that influence the decision of tour operators of how much tour guides would be paid per day or after each trip (De Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014). Furthermore, De Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson (2014: 98) noted that few guides have more than ten years of touring experience due to ‘stressful’ and ‘unfriendly’ working conditions. While the tour guide plays a crucial role in enhancing the tourists’ overall experience and impression of a destination, Nyahunzvi and Njerekai (2012) indicated a lack of research investigating the challenges that the tour guides experience. Citing Ap and Wong (2001), Nyahunzvi and Njerekai (2012: 3) noted the following challenges stills exist even today in the tour guiding profession: the lack of due recognition of the tour guiding profession by the general public, the tourism industry and the government, low remuneration packages, unethical practices adopted by travel agents and tour companies and the limited availability of training opportunities. In addition to the above, poor working conditions, overworking but underpaid, lack of benefits such as insurance and medical cover and working without any formal contracts are some of the challenges that the tour guiding profession faces, especially in the African continent (De Beer, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014; Nyahunzvi & Njerekai, 2012).

In summary, the tour guides play an essential role within the tourism sector to influence the visitors’ image of the destination and decision to revisit the destination area (Látková et al., 2018). It can be seen that the tour guides play an essential role within the tourism sector to ensure that the tourists improve their knowledge about the destination areas and able to convince them to revisit due to the quality tour guide provided. Despite the significant functions that the tour guides execute in the tourism sector, Aloudat and Yarmouk (2013) noted that they had received little attention from the academic tourism community. The following section explains the methodology that was utilized for this study.

Research methodology

The article explores the governments’ measures to minimize the impact of the COVID-19 on the tourism sector, particularly the tour guides. This was a non-empirical study, which used an exploratory research design. Document analysis was used as a tool to collect the data. In other words, the data was sourced from newspapers, government documents and peer-reviewed journal articles. The primary purpose of utilizing current and past data was to conduct a literature review and analyze the collected secondary data. The study focused on the tourism sector with particular attention to tour guides within South Africa during the COVID-19 pandemic. The discourse analysis was utilized to analyze the collected data, which helped the researcher evaluate the government's responses and measures. Discourse analysis is one of the

qualitative analysis methods that researchers utilize to analyze naturally occurring talk and written text types. Therefore, the discourse analysis was utilized to analyze the tour guide's day-to-day environment and how government measures helped lessen the pandemic's impact. In selecting relevant studies that contribute to the tourism sector's knowledge, especially the tour guide, there are two used criteria. Firstly, The researcher identified and used articles published in tourism-related and tourism-focused peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, government documents, reports and online documents related to COVID-19 were used. Secondly, articles related to tourism, particularly the tour guides between 2002 to 2020, formed a crucial part of this research. The motivation behind selecting articles in peer-reviewed journals and from the last 15 years was that they focused on tour guides in the tourism sector and possibly add value to the body of knowledge on tour guiding. The keywords that were used to find sources were: a tour guide, tour guiding, tourist experience, tourism, COVID-19, challenges and issues on tour guiding and working conditions. A total of 100 papers in peer-reviewed journals and online articles or government documents were identified. Only sixty-papers were retained for literature review and analysis. Based on the literature and methodology used, the following section provides an analysis of the responses and measures that the government had put in place to help the tour guides in South Africa.

Results and discussion

Across the globe, governments created numerous interventions such as tax relief, deferrals of payments and subsidies to ensure the sustainability and stability of the tourism sector and prevent massive job losses. The South African government announced several temporary economic and social relief measures targeting a different economic sector. Due to the national lockdown, numerous tourism-related businesses established a complete closure changing the business horizon for tourism, and the tourism SMMEs experienced possible bankruptcy with employees' retrenchment (Joubert, 2020). The pandemic also affected the local communities that depend on such SMMEs' economic health for their livelihood (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020). The government has implemented several interim economic and social measures to support both businesses and citizens in surviving the pandemic's disadvantageous impacts. The following section explains the mechanisms and measures that the government has put in place for tour guides in South Africa.

Government COVID-19 responses and measures for tour guides

The Department of Small Business Development introduced the Small, Micro and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMMEs) Support Intervention fund which involved a “Debt Relief Fund and a Business Growth/Resilience Facility to lessen the expected economic slowdown on SMMEs in South Africa” (White & Case LLP, 2020: n.p.). The Department of Small Business Development has made R500-million available to assist the SMMEs. The Debt Relief Fund's purpose was to provide relief for existing debts and repayments and support SMMEs in purchasing raw material and remunerating workers and other costs associated with its operations. The provision of working capital, bridging finance, stock and finance for equipment to small businesses that supply in-demand medical supplies was the purpose of the Business Growth/Resilience Facility. In addition to the SMMEs Support Intervention, a further R200 million was made available by the Department of Tourism to support SMMEs in the hospitality and tourism sector (Department of Tourism, 2020). For SMMEs to qualify for the SME Support Intervention relief, the following criteria were to be met: business to be owned by South African citizen, comply with SARS and UIF business requirements and be registered and comprised 70% of employees who are South Africans (Department of Tourism, 2020). Companies to be funded through the funds from the Department of Tourism includes (i)

“accommodation: hotels; resort properties and bed and breakfast (B&B’s); (ii) hospitality and related services: restaurants (not attached to hotels); conference (not attached to hotels), professional catering; attractions; and (iii) travel and related services: Tour Operators; Travel Agents; tour guides; Car rental companies; and Coach Operators” (Department of Tourism, 2020, 5). Considering the tourism sector's size, those who were eligible for funding should be coming from “all forms of accommodation establishments, travel and related services, and hospitality and related services” (Department of Tourism, 2020: 10). Hence, the support intervention was not enough for all tourism and other SMMEs businesses.

Due to the tourism sector's broad scope, the R200 million relief fund was also not enough to assist all SMMEs in this industry. Therefore, the Department of Tourism further allocated an R30 million relief fund specifically for registered tour guides. This R30 million relief fund was provided over three months. Each eligible tour guide received a financial relief of R1500.00 (Mail & Guardian, 2020). This relief fund's primary purpose was to cover specific tour guides, including freelancers and independent guides who were not previously eligible for assistance on the R200 million tourism relief fund (van der Merwe, 2020).

While the Department of Tourism has created these packages but the National Federation of tour guides Associations (NFTGA) has called on the government to assist members “with specially allocated and ring-fenced mitigation packages, aimed at sustaining jobs and ensuring capacity for the restoration of services once business resumes, as has been the case in many other countries” (Mackenzie, 2020: n.p.). According to the BIZ community (2018), there has been a steady increase in the tourist guiding profession in South Africa with close to 12,000 registered guides. The NFTGA indicates that the government must show recognition of tourism drivers, tour guides and all freelancers through appropriate support as their role is essential in the tourism sector” (Mackenzie, 2020). Although the Tourism Act of 2014 stipulates that all tour guides must be registered, most of the guides are not registered. Therefore, certain guides did not benefit from the tourism department's funding but receive support from other relief funds.

Although the financial relief package was not enough, they assisted numerous tourism SMMEs and tour guides during the COVID-19 lockdown (Department of Tourism, 2020). The Minister of Tourism reported that the department paid 3 106 tour guides from the R30 million fund for three months, and more than 3 000 tour guides were paid through Unemployment Insurance Fund (Kubayi-Ngubane, 2020). Such figures show that the government managed to assist numerous tour guides as close to 12 000 registered professional guides in South Africa. Those tourism businesses that were falling out of the R200 million Tourism Relief Fund criteria accused the Department of Tourism that the “criteria for dispensing relief funding were racist, but those accusations were dismissed in a High Court citing that with limited funds available, the Department of Tourism had to prioritize applicants from previously disadvantaged communities” (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2020: 1087). The Department of Tourism acknowledged that the fund was not enough. This is because of the disparate plight of numerous SMMEs within the tourism sector. Thus, the Department of Tourism encouraged those tourism businesses who did not receive the funding to apply to other relief schemes that have been made available by the government (Department of Tourism, 2020). Over 600 000 employees applied for Unemployment Insurance Fund within the tourism value chain (IOL News, 2020). Other relief funds that were announced for SMMEs included the National Empowerment Fund (NEF) Support, Guaranteed Loan Scheme and South African Future Trust (SAFT). These relief funds were introduced, firstly with an assumption that the tour guides will also be eligible to apply for these support measures, not only the dedicated tourism relief funding. The set-up requirements for these relief packages were too high for most of the tour guides to meet. Hence, the introduction of R30 million specifically for tour guides by the Department of Tourism.

The European Federation of tour guide Associations conducted a survey to gather information on how the suspension of tourism activities affected the tour guiding profession. The study found that numerous tour guides mainly depend on guiding as their source of income, with 83.6 percent of surveyed participants having no additional financial source of income (Rokou, 2020). The study also revealed that the tour guides had lost huge income as they are not active (Rokou, 2020). In the South African context, the study conducted by De Beer in 2011 found that older persons dominate the tour guiding profession. Out of 60 interviewed tour guides, 67% were older persons in the age range of 36 to 64.

Furthermore, De Beer, Rogerson and Rogerson (2014) stipulated that most tour guides were engaged in a different set of professions before entering the tour guiding profession. Passion for tourism, love of nature, exploiting entrepreneurial spirit, seeking a lifestyle change, the urge to travel and utilizing linguistic skills are reasons for the tour guides to shift into the tour guiding profession (De Beer, 2011). Therefore, the South African tour guides also mainly depend on guiding as their source of income. Thus, the relief fund towards assisting the tour guides during the COVID-19 pandemic became crucial. On the other hand, the lack of database and research on the country's tour guiding profession could mean that not all tour guides benefited from the relief packages from the government.

While the European Federation of tour guide Associations' survey shows that the government had put in place financial support measures to assist the tour guides, but the "support or amount offered is nowhere near the expected average earning levels for the tour guides, and the financial support is limited in time and will not cover loss of earnings for the months to come" (Rokou, 2020: n.p.). The findings of the survey conducted by the European Federation of tour guide Associations are similar to this study results as it has been found that the government of South Africa has introduced financial support for the tour guides, but the support was limited to only three months of income. Apart from the financial support that the government had introduced, there are critical factors that need to be addressed during and post-COVID-19 as their impact will continue in the months to come. Such factors include loss of income at the start of the pandemic, stimulating domestic tourism demand, continuing uncertainty of workable guidelines for traveling, lack of a significant number of bookings for tours.

The government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic with the introduction of 500 billion rand relief packages has frightening stories as the funds have been misused. According to the South African Auditor-general (2020: 1), "the relief package redirected by the government as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, landed in a weak control environment". The Auditor-General indicated that the relief fund landed in a compromised environment because of the weak government information technology systems, which were not swift enough to react to the changes required. The lack of integration of government activities and sharing of data across government platforms resulted in individuals, members of the public and government officials getting grants they were not supposed to receive (Auditor-General, 2020: 2-3). Concerning the tourism relief fund of R200 million to support SMMEs, the Auditor-General reported to "the accounting officer the risks created by amendments made to the original process and criteria as well as inadequate review and segregation of duties". Out of 4000 approved applicants by the Department of Tourism for relief payments, only 3994 had been paid by 31 July 2020 (Auditor-general, 2020). The Department of Tourism "received over 6 000 applications for the R200 million relief fund, with 2 495 from accommodation services, 1 825 from the hospitality sector, 1 780 from travel-related service operators and 662 from other tourism businesses" (Nyanda, 2020: n.p).

As the pandemic results, the tourism sector has been thrown into crisis, placing thousands of businesses and jobs at risk. The Department of Tourism has created a recovery

plan that proposes three strategic themes or measures: rejuvenating supply, re-igniting demand and strengthening enabling capability— with ten strategic recommendations proposed along with specific actions, timeframes and accountabilities. Establishing a compelling and carefully thought strategy for tourism resumption or re-entry is essential. In other words, finding a balanced set of interventions that contemplate on both demand and supply-side, along with the gradual easing of travel restrictions, is imperative. The following Figure 3 below show the Department of Tourism's strategic recommendations.

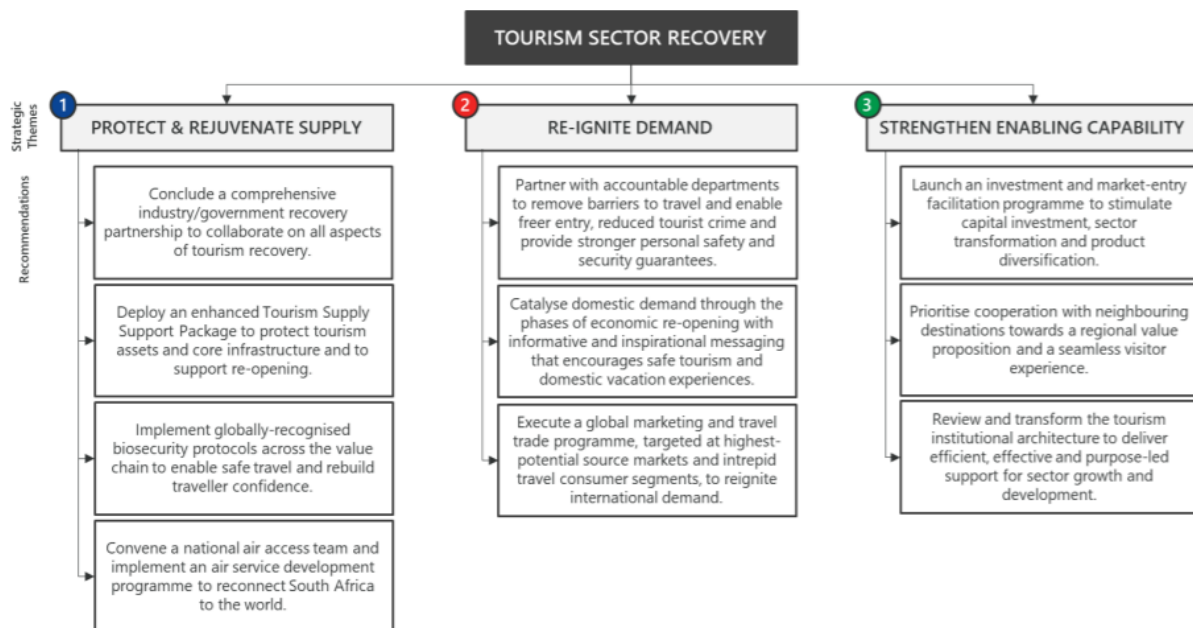


Figure 3: Department of Tourism strategic recommendations
 Source: Department of Tourism, 2020

The Department of Tourism’s strategic recommendations fails to recognize the potential of VFR travel for revitalizing local tourism economies. However, VRF travel is the utmost common form of domestic tourism in South Africa (Rogerson & Hoogendoorn, 2014; Backer & Ritchie, 2017). The strategic recommendations do not emphasize domestic tourism, while it offers a chance to drive recovery and assist the tourism sector. According to Rogerson and Hoogendoorn (2014: 175), VFR travel in South Africa is the “segment of travel which is massively dominated by ‘ordinary’ or working-class travelers”. The government needs to promote VFR travel tourism to stimulate domestic tourists' demand and indirectly restore international tourists' confidence. Promotion of VFR travel tourism could also boost the tour guiding tourism as people would be coming from different provinces. To restore the travelers' confidence and stimulate demand, the government and all stakeholders within the tourism sector should create and implement new hygiene, safety procedures and testing standards. Such measures should be ensured to reassure domestic travelers' safety before restoring the confidence of international travelers. Sigala (2020) noted that the tourism sector should redesign the servicescapes related to COVID-19 operating standards to eliminate sensorial elements and ‘changing’ tourism experiences. The servicescape design plays a crucial role in the tourism experience by influencing tourists’ behaviours, emotions, attitudes and service evaluations (Sigala, 2020: 319).

Conclusion

The pandemics in a short and long term period have substantial economic and social impacts, and the tourism sector has no exception. Pandemics' effects on businesses can manifest through significant drops in economic activities, labour market uncertainties, and commodity supply chain disruptions. On the other hand, loss of employment, loss of life and reduction in remittances can be experienced at the household level due to the effect of the pandemics. COVID-19 pandemic adversely impacted the tourism sector. The pandemic had put a financial strain on the small enterprises with their inability to pay salaries of their workers, unable to operate due to a decrease of demand caused by the restrictions put in place by governments in different countries and certain enterprises temporarily closed down. There has been an unprecedented crisis in the tourism sector due to countries' lockdowns, travel restrictions and border closures. The tour guide profession has been hardest-hit by the strict restrictions that the government had introduced to contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

In response to COVID-19, unprecedented steps have been taken by numerous countries to respond to the crisis. The response measures have mainly focused on the initiatives to lessen the economic impact of the Covi-19 pandemic on employees and industries and public health issues. Likewise, there are numerous relief measures that the South African Government has introduced to assist employees, businesses, and community members at large. This article provided a critical assessment and evaluation of the government responses and measures for the lockdown period level 5 to level 2 between March to August 2020 in South Africa. What is evidenced is that the COVID-19 relief fund has been compromised by corruption and weak integration of government activities. Furthermore, the government's financial support has been limited to a certain period and it was not planned to cover the loss of earnings for the months to come as numerous countries still have strict travel restrictions.

Based on this study's findings, it is clear that little attention has been given to the tour guiding profession in South Africa. The lack of research and database for tour guide shows that this profession has been neglected. Therefore, analysis of this nature is crucial for the government to consider when creating policies that could directly or indirectly affect the tour guides as the tour guiding community is misrepresented due to lack of information on this profession. Therefore, it is recommended that the Department of Tourism and other scholars interested in the tour guiding profession engage in research that will improve the existing data regarding the tour guides in South Africa. Availability of data on tour guides could help the Department of Tourism find ways to regulate this profession and minimize the challenges that the tour guides experience.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the government and other tourism stakeholders place new standards to reassure domestic and international travellers' safety so that the tour guides could generate income and avoid possible business closure in this tourism sub-sector. This study's main limitation provides directions for future studies. This study focused on secondary data for analysis, and data on tour guides is limited. Therefore, future studies should investigate, by conducting empirical research, the mechanisms that the government has put in place to support the tour guides in South Africa pre-and post-COVID-19.

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