

Is It All About Twitching? A Descriptive Attendee Motivational Profile to a Birding Event in Gauteng

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How to cite this article: Maake, L.A., Hermann, U.P. & Tshipala, N.N. (2022). Is It All About Twitching? A Descriptive Attendee Motivational Profile to a Birding Event in Gauteng. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 11(3):1288-1300. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.291>

Abstract

A variety of products are aimed at attracting niche tourism markets in South Africa, one such market is avitourism which has become one of the fastest-growing special interest tourism segments worldwide and is gaining increased popularity. Avitourism is an embryonic sub-sector of ecotourism where tourists' travel motivations are primarily centred on bird watching whilst providing a research gap in market information on avitourism profiling South African. This study aims at developing a visitor profile by determining the demographical profile and main travel motives of avitourists to a bird fair in Gauteng. Descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis were applied. The exploratory factor analysis employed in this study revealed a 5-factor construct in avitourism motivation: to participate in bird watching; relaxation and escape; social interaction; photography and nature appreciation and lifestyle and well-being. Research findings show that visitor motives are a helpful psychographic segmentation base which helps to identify what motivates visitors to travel. Comprehensive understanding of avitourist motivation will help avitourism managers to offer satisfying birding products and services to avitourists whilst the understanding of their profile will contribute to the limited academic research on avitourism profiling and guide various avitourism stakeholders to produce satisfactory birding experiences.

Keywords: Birding; avitourism; event; profiling; motivations

Introduction

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic the tourism industry globally, and in South Africa, was experiencing sustained growth which brought with it an increasing variety of alternative forms as opposed to the traditional, often critiqued 'mass tourism', of tourism such as nature-based tourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism as forms of niche tourism (Perks & Ferreira, 2017). Within the realm of ecotourism lies avitourism, which has evolved due to the increased attractiveness of birds as spectacles of wildlife to watch and the increase in disposable income has contributed to the growth of bird watching as a global pull factor in the travel decision-making in many attractions and destinations (Sekercioğlu, 2002). Avitourism has been identified as an embryonic sub-sector of ecotourism in which tourists' travel motivations are primarily centred on bird watching (Sekercioğlu, 2002; Hvenegaard, 2002; Steven et al., 2014).

Avitourism has the potential to placate the impact of seasonality, upsurge visitor length of stay at destinations and increase tourist spending (Department of Trade & Industry [DTI], 2010). In lieu of the aforementioned, developing a comprehensive understanding of the

avitourism market could assist avitourism managers in developing birding products that satisfy the avitourists' needs as the global avitourism market has become increasingly competitive. Yardstick studies indicate that Brazil, Australia and Thailand are the major international avitourism competitors for South Africa (DTI, 2010). Thus, it has become imperative that the marketing initiatives of developing birding destinations, such as South Africa, should be guided by a comprehensive analysis of avitourist motivation in order to benefit from this associated growth (Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Pestana et al., 2020; Steven et al., 2020).

The primary aim of this study is to establish a visitor demographic and motivational profile of avitourists to a bird fair in Gauteng. An understanding of the profile may contribute to the limited academic research on avitourism profiling and also expand and enhance the academic and managerial discourse on avitourist' motivations that may guide various avitourism stakeholders to produce satisfactory birding experiences. The paper will be structured as follows: first, a review of relevant literature will be discussed, followed by the research method chosen and the results of the study. After which the conclusions, recommendations and acknowledgements are provided.

Literature review

Overview of avitourism

The global growth of avitourism can be attributed to the development of organisations that promotes avitourism experiences, destinations as well as the formation of birding events. In South Africa, one such organisation is Birdlife South Africa's (BLSA) who's network of clubs and birding routes host numerous birding events (BLSA, 2018). BLSA develops a yearly calendar of promotional and educational events which are attended by birding stakeholders including avitourists. Birders travel to destinations for birding purposes which generates tourism income through entrance fees, local bird guide fees, food and drinks and accommodation (Simango, 2011; Nicolaidis, 2013; BLSA, 2018). The quest of listers, those who search for new bird species, and those searching for lifers (rare bird species) take birdwatchers across the globe to exotic locations which lead to the advent of niche avitourist attractions and destinations (White, 2019). This experience leads to a specialised culture of local and international travel which is driven by the desire to spot new bird species. Steven et al., (2020) have indicated that the avitourism market is often considered homogeneous however that this is not a correct assumption. The market has evolved and now includes numerous specialised travellers. Although there are various evolving avitourists profiles, in terms of profiling, there are a few homogeneous similarities; these tourists are generally well educated affluent middle-aged males with enough discretionary income to spend on travel (Connell, 2009; DTI, 2010; Simango, 2011; Miller et al., 2014; Glowinski & Moore, 2014; Vas, 2017; Shipley et al., 2018; Vas, 2017; Lessard et al., 2018). In addition, they are usually married and usually travel as a couple and at times in small sets of 5 to 9 individuals (Cakici & Harman, 2007; Vas, 2017). More often than not, due to employment status, these tourists are nearing retirement and are therefore older than the typical leisure tourists with the majority of them having high responsibility full time careers (Scott & Lee, 2010; Lessard et al., 2018).

Global trends highlight the growing interest in birding as a pastime amongst his unique segment of travellers (Biggs et al., 2011; Nicolaidis, 2013; BLSA, 2018). Designing a method of approach that enables destinations to benefit from this tourist segment is becoming a prerequisite for competitiveness (Ritchie, Tkaczynski & Faulks, 2010; Buffa, 2015). For an avitourism manager it is important to understand customers' needs and wants which may contribute to producing appropriate services which are coherent to avitourist demand (Yousefi & Marzuki, 2015; Kim et al., 2015). Avitourism attraction and product marketers need to take into account the existence and effects of avitourists' motivations in order to develop appropriate

promotional material in order to exploit these markets (Ritchie et al., 2010; Frash et al., 2018). Travel motivation has been defined as the psychological need which disposes an individual to fulfil certain desires, and which subsequently explains why tourists behave in a particular way (Hu & Lu, 2014; Jiang et al., 2015). Chen et al. (2014) denote motivation as the decisive driving force that explains why people travel. They continue to state that people embark on holidays as a means to relieve uneasy everyday pressure that may result from unsatisfied internal needs (Chen et al., 2014).

Avitourism travel motivations

Visitor motives are a helpful psychographic segmentation base which helps with designing marketing tactics (Kruger & Saayman, 2010). Understanding visitor motivation is regarded as a vital component to developing offerings which would meet customer needs and encourage positive perceptions of visitor experiences (Choo, Ahn & Petrick, 2016). Consequently, it is crucial for management to understand the motivation and needs of tourists in order to promote their positive experiences and increase tourist satisfaction, which in turn, will enhance competitiveness in the tourism market behaviour (Ma, Chow, Cheung, Lee & Liu, 2018). Knowledge concerning motivations and the application, thereof, in marketing plans and strategies may enhance competitiveness in a niche market such as avitourism. Travel motivation is both a central variable in recognising travel habits and a crucial factor in the decision-making process of the tourist to visit a destination, and an important indicator in evaluating the satisfaction of tourists (Snepenger, King, Marshall & Uysal, 2006).

Fung and Jim (2015) in conjunction with Gong and Tung (2017) maintain that, in order to motivate individuals to fulfil their needs (that is to travel), individuals are required to be consciously mindful of their own motivations and should be in a position to decide whether a particular destination or product will fulfil them especially when making travel plans and decisions. Different individuals may be motivated by varying motives to escape their everyday life challenges and satisfy their inner needs, and so every individual's perception of a destination would likewise differ (Kruger & Saayman, 2010; Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2011). Studying travel motivations is a cornerstone towards understanding the psychology of tourist travel behaviour (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003; Van der Merwe, Slabbert & Saayman, 2011). Thus to remain competitive avitourism marketers need to kindle these differing touristic or individual needs by marketing avitourism products that meet those needs.

A review of previous assessments of visitor motivations has revealed that there is a variety of travel motives for an equally diverse set of attractions. For the purpose of this research, travel motivations were filtered according to different tourism products, namely, national parks, zoos and aquariums and botanical gardens (Table 1). Table 1 below indicate parallel travel motivations, for example, those of relaxation, socialisation, novelty, family togetherness and escape. Travel motives such as to learn about nature, photography and wildlife experience are to some extent dependent of the tourism product, while others are more independent of the attraction.

Hvenegaard (2002) studied how motivations vary among the three specialisation measures of birders. The findings of the study revealed that, birders were motivated by spotting birds, seeing bird species not seen in the past as well as visiting natural history and cultural attractions. Scott, Ditton, Stoll and Eubanks (2005) explored the birding motivations among different sub-groups in the birding social world. Escape, being outdoors, improvement of birding skills, engagement in family recreation and spotting new species of birds came up as the major motivations. Sali, Kuehn and Zhang (2008), using a mixed methods approach, investigated the motivational differences between male and female birders. Exploration, appreciating birds, knowledge sharing, companionship, and spirituality were found to be the

main motives for the male avitourists. Their female counterparts identified enjoying nature, self-expression, intellectual activity, and novelty as motives.

Table 1: Antecedent research on travel motivations

Source	Focus of study	Travel motives
Kruger, Viljoen and Saayman (2017); Scholtz, Kruger and Saayman (2015); Acquah, Dearden and Rollins (2016); Kamri and Radam (2018), Ariya, Sempele and Wishitemi, (2020)	Travel motives to national parks	Escape; Lifestyle; Wildlife experience; Socialisation; Inclusive family destination; Nature togetherness; Affordability.
Hermann and Du Plessis (2014); Ballantyne and Packer (2016); Muzeza, Hermann and Khunou (2018).	Travel motives to zoological gardens, aquariums and nature reserves	Relaxation; Escape; Enhancement of relationship; Social interaction; Learning about nature; Novelty.
Navrátil, Kučera, Pícha, Gilliam and Havlíková (2016); Wassenberg, Goldenberg and Soule (2015).	Travel motives to botanical gardens	Knowledge and relaxation; Novelty; Escape and relaxation; Learning; Shared experience.
Hvenegaard, (2002); Scott, Ditton, Stoll and Eubanks (2005); Sali, Kuehn, and Zhang, (2008); Conradie, Van Zyl and Strasheim (2013); Chen and Chen (2015); Glowinski and Moore (2014).	Travel motives to birding destinations	Exploration; Escape; Affiliation; Achievement; Enjoying nature and one's solitude; Bird conservation; Social interaction; Photography; Engaging in family recreation; Seeing as many bird species; Appreciating birds; Sharing knowledge; Companionship; Spirituality; Spiritual refreshment.

Conradie et al. (2013) suggests social interaction, photography, well-being and intellectual activity as the prime motives for bird fair visitors in Germany and the United Kingdom. Glowinski and Moore (2014) reinforced the findings of McFarlane (1994) and found three motivations, achievement, social opportunities, and conservation among a sample of birdwatchers. Furthermore, Chen and Chen (2015) explored the motivations of international birders through quantitative methods. Competition, spiritual refreshment, novelty seeking, knowledge sharing, bird watching and relationship building were the main factors that motivated avitourists to pursue bird watching. The bird watching community is diverse with a varying level of travel motivation. With an understanding of avitourist motivations, avitourism managers can better identify their needs and wants and provide quality bird watching experiences which will result in visitor satisfaction. Offering satisfactory avitourism experiences will lead to advantages such as positive word-of-mouth, long standing customer and brand loyalty and market success (Kruger, Rootenberg & Ellis, 2012; Steven et al, 2020).

Research methodology

A quantitative research approach was used for the study and data was collected by employing a survey research design. Convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling method, was used to select the respondents of the study. This method was ideal since the members of a target population were selected because they were conveniently available. The target population of this study comprised of attendees to the annual African Bird Fair during the two days of the event in September 2018. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A which addressed the demographic characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, home language, marital status, group size, level of education, estimated annual gross income, decision to visit the fair, number of visits and media preferred); and Section B focused on the visitor motivations of the respondents which was informed by variables identified in previous studies (Table 1). The motivational items were identified, applied and tested on a five point Likert type scale where 1 equates to 'extremely unimportant' and 5 is equivalent to 'extremely important'. A total of 300 questionnaires were manually distributed by trained fieldworkers at the fair, of which 282 completed questionnaires were returned and used for data analysis. The collected data was then statistically analysed utilising STATA version 15. The data analysis



consisted of two stages. In the first stage, data analysis of the descriptive results (e.g. age, gender, home language and place of residence) revealed the profile (demographics) of the respondents. In the second phase, a principal component analysis with an orthogonal varimax rotation and Kaiser Normalisation was performed on the 25 motivational items.

Study site

The African Bird Fair is an annual two-day birding event that takes place at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Gardens in Roodepoort, South Africa. The fair is organised by BLSA in partnership with the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) and attracts over 1000 avitourists, exhibitors and tour operators from across the country (BLSA, 2018). The event exhibits a variety of companies and organisations linked to birds and conservation, nature based travel and birding related materials which include binoculars, telescopes, feeding gadgets, books and bird watching technology widgets (SANBI, 2018). Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the event has been presented as a virtual event with the 2018 and 2019 events being the last physical events. The Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden is a popular birding site in Gauteng since it has a list of more than 250 sighted bird species (BLSA, 2019).

Results and discussion

Respondent Profile

Table 2 indicates an overview of the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents

Category	Profile	Result
Gender	Male	48%
	Female	52%
Language	English	66%
	Afrikaans	20%
	Northern Sotho	4%
	Ndebele	1%
	Other	8%
Marital status	Single	37%
	Married	47%
	Living together/ partnered	6%
	Divorced/ Separated	8%
Place of residence	Widowed	2%
	Gauteng	86%
	KwaZulu-Natal	5%
	Western Cape	3%
	Limpopo	2%
	Mpumalanga	1%
	Northwest	1%
	Other	2%
Level of education	No school	1%
	Matric	21%
	Diploma/ First degree	29%
	Honours Degree/ Postgraduate degree	25%
	Masters	17%
	Doctorate	5%
Estimated annual gross income	Other	2%
	Less than R100 000	29%
	R100 001–R200 000	2%
	R201 000–R300 000	25%
	R3001 000–R400 000	14%
	R400 001–R500 000	7%
Decision to visit	R500 001 or more	13%
	Spontaneous decision today	14%
	This week	18%
	Within the last month	22%
	More than a month ago	38%
	Other	8%



Majority of the respondents who participated in this research were male (52%), married (47%), hold a post-school qualification, primarily a diploma (29%) or university degree (25%). In terms of age the event appealed to a large range of age groups with the majority of the respondents aged 44 years with the oldest respondent being 78 years old and the youngest 29 years in age. Most respondents resided in close proximity to the event (86%), speak English (66%) followed by Afrikaans (20%), and earned an annual personal income of R100 000–R300 000 (25%). As to travel patterns, a greater majority attended the event more than once as repeat attendees (43%), they decided to visit the event at least a month in advance (38%), travelled as couples/partner” (37%) and used the event’s website (29%), friends and relatives (19%) and social media (15%) as main information sources. These results are compatible with prior avitourism profiling research where males make up more than binary thirds of the avitourist population, however, women are becoming more engaged (Scott & Thigpen, 2003; DTI, 2010; Simango, 2011; Miller et al., 2014; Glowinski & Moore, 2014; Vas, 2017; Shipley et al., 2018).

Motives for visiting the fair

This section examines the outcomes of this research related to the motivational features connected with the respondents. Twenty-five variables were identified, applied and tested on a 5-point Likert scale where 1 equates to ‘*Extremely unimportant*’ and 5 equates to ‘*Extremely important*’. The respondents were required to specify the importance of the identified variables in their decision to visit the Fair (Table 3).

The findings represented in Table 3 below, show that respondents specified that they are mainly motivated to attend the fair because they want to partake in birding (69%), to learn about birding in general (63%), to learn about birding destinations (60%), to learn about birding tours (54%), to buy birding related products (54%), because it is part of their lifestyle (54%), to relax (51%), to view wildlife (49%), to spend time with family and friends (48%), to participate in the event (48%) and to engage with people of similar interests (45%).

Table 3: Motivation to attend the avitourist event

	Reasons for attending the African Bird Fair	Extremely unimportant	Less important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
1	To get away from daily routine	27%	9%	23%	17%	24%
2	To relax	23%	6%	20%	23%	28%
3	To explore	32%	12%	20%	15%	21%
4	Spend time with family and friends	26%	9%	17%	24%	24%
5	For the benefit of my children	59%	11%	8%	9%	13%
6	For educational reasons	48%	16%	16%	10%	10%
7	For photography	29%	15%	15%	18%	23%
8	It is a spiritual experience	51%	12%	13%	13%	11%
9	To view wildlife	26%	6%	18%	23%	27%
10	It is value for money	18%	13%	27%	20%	21%
11	I prefer the gardens for its geographical reasons	20%	17%	27%	18%	18%
12	To do hiking trails	15%	25%	23%	18%	19%
13	To do birding	7%	11%	13%	18%	51%
14	Learn about birding in general	9%	9%	19%	18%	45%
15	Learn about birding destinations	10%	12%	18%	18%	42%
16	Learn about birding tours	12%	15%	19%	17%	37%
17	To buy birding related products	15%	12%	20%	13%	41%
18	To participate in an event	19%	17%	19%	18%	27%
19	For health reasons	50%	16%	16%	9%	9%
20	To remind me of my childhood (nostalgia)	53%	20%	13%	7%	7%
21	To engage with people of similar interest	22%	11%	22%	24%	21%
22	It is part of my lifestyle	21%	8%	17%	26%	28%
23	It is convenient and close to where I live	35%	19%	17%	12%	17%
24	To see unique plants at the botanical gardens	26%	9%	26%	22%	17%
25	Picnicking	48%	16%	16%	7%	13%



Results of factor analysis

In order to explore the descriptive findings in Table 3 a bit further, and to cluster the variables an exploratory factor was conducted on the 25 visitor motivational variables. The orthogonal varimax rotation method with a principal component factoring extraction technique was used on the different variables. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test for the factor analysis had a significance statistic of 0.853, coupled with a significant Bartlett *t*-test statistic at $p=0.000$, which qualified the appropriateness of factor analysis for the collected data (Pallant, 2013; Reio & Shuck, 2015). A total of 5 factors were extracted which accounted for 59% of the total variance. All variables were included in the factor analysis since a significant number of the variables had factor loadings above 0.4. The factor labels for each of the factors was examined and determined. From then on, the factor labels were fabricated by examining the common themes underlying the constructs within each factor. The factors were labelled according to similar characteristics as follows: *Participate in bird watching* (Factor 1), *Relaxation and escape* (Factor 2), *Social interaction* (Factor 3), *Photography and nature appreciation* (Factor 4) and *Lifestyle and well-being* (Factor 5).

Table 4: Results of Factor Analysis

Factors	Factor loadings	Cronbach Alpha
Factor 1: Participate in bird watching		0.8830
To do birding	0.81	
Learn about birding in general	0.87	
Learn about birding destinations	0.90	
Learn about birding tours	0.86	
Buy birding related products	0.66	
To participate in an event	0.56	
Factor 2: Relaxation and escape		0.8081
To getaway	0.86	
To relax	0.85	
To explore	0.56	
To spend time with family and friends	0.47	
Factor 3: Photography and nature appreciation		0.7600
For photography	0.65	
It is a spiritual experience	0.68	
To view wildlife	0.65	
For geographical features	0.53	
Value for money	0.47	
To see unique plants	0.56	
Factor 4: Social interaction		0.6754
For the benefit of my children	0.79	
For educational reasons	0.68	
To do picnicking	0.46	
Factor 5: Lifestyle and well-being		0.6723
For health reasons	0.51	
To remind me of childhood nostalgia	0.52	
To engage with people of similar interests	0.61	
It is part of my lifestyle	0.60	
Convenient and close to where I live	0.66	

Factor 1: Participate in bird watching

The first factor that was identified in the constructs is *participate in bird watching* and it included the constructs: to do birding, learn about birding in general, learn about birding destinations, learn about birding tours, to buy birding related; products as well as participate in the event. All the variables identified within this factor seem to correlate very well. The item-rest correlation of this factor ranges from 0.4820 to 0.8333. Also, the scale appears to have good internal consistency, $\alpha=0.8830$. This factor ranked as the highest main motivator for respondents. Hvenegaard (2002) and Chen and Chen (2015) and have also acknowledged this factor as the main factor that motivates avitourists to participate in birding activities.

Factor 2: Relaxation and escape

The second factor recognised is relaxation and escape consists of constructs such as: to get away, to relax, to explore and to spend time with family and friends. This factor had an internal consistency of $\alpha=0.8081$. This dimension was linked to the motivations of tourists to get away from daily stress, to escape routine; to get away from crowds and, if needed, to be with others. Most of the literature on avitourists' motivations have also recognised this factor (Eubanks et al., 2004; Sali et al., 2008; Fung & Jim, 2015; Scholtz et al., 2015; Acquah et al., 2016).

Factor 3: Photography and nature appreciation

The third factor identified in the construct is photography and nature appreciation. This factor received a Cronbach alpha coefficient of $\alpha=0.7600$ and included correlated items such as: for photography; to view wildlife; prefer the botanical gardens for its geographical features; value for money and to see unique plants. The item-rest correlation of this factor ranges from 0.3469 to 0.6210. This factor has also been recognised by numerous previous researches as a key motivator for travel (Sali et al, 2008; Fung & Jim, 2015; Muzeza et al., 2018; Acquah et al., 2016; Kamri & Radam, 2018).

Factor 4: Social interaction

The third factor was interpreted as social interaction and contained constructs such as: for the benefit of my children; for educational reasons and picnicking. The item-rest correlation of this factor ranges from 0.3651 to 0.6131 and the dimensions were related to strengthening relationships with family and friend and improving one's knowledge function. The factor got a Cronbach alpha coefficient of, $\alpha=0.675$. The results of this study are similar with those of past research studies that identified social interaction and learning as a main motivator for avitourists (Scott et al., 2005; Conradie et al, 2013; Glowinski & Moore, 2014; Chen & Chen, 2015).

Factor 5: Lifestyle and well-being

The last factor identified is lifestyle and well-being and it included constructs such as: for health reasons; remind me of my childhood; to engage with people of similar interests and convenience and proximity to where I live. The underlying dimensions behind this factor are correlated with reflecting on memories, feeling a sense of belonging and ones' lifestyle. The factor scored an internal consistency of $\alpha=0.6723$, with an item-rest correlation that ranges from 0.3912 to 0.4877. This factor was also documented by Kruger et al., (2017) in a previous study in an ecotourism destination.

Conclusions

The results provide avitourism product marketers, especially those catering for avitourism events with a resource base that expands the understanding of this niche market. Firstly, the study revealed that the fair attracted a higher number of older people who are between 29 and 78 years old. Thus, marketing efforts which include the use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter could assist to attract younger groups and more successfully reaching the market bracket aged 29–43 years. In addition, respondents heard about the fair primarily through the BLSA website, word of mouth, and social media. This indicates that this niche market could be considered tech-savvy and that they may be significantly influenced by the perception of other people with similar interests.

In terms of spending potential, most respondents could be placed in the middle or higher income bracket. Avitourism managers should be cognisant of the quality demands of this segment as this segment has the potential to make a meaningful economic impact on

destinations. In addition, the organisers of the event should consider arranging specialised birding tours for school groups of youth organisations at discounted prices to attract, accommodate, diversify and grow this interest in this form of travel activity for those on lower income scales. In terms of travel size, a majority of respondents make most of their bird watching travel as a pair, or alone. Thus, the provision of independent travel programmes by operators for solo and paired travellers are therefore critical for the avitourism industry in South Africa especially when promoting and organising birding tours. Furthermore, destinations could also take advantage of this trend by offering combination tickets or providing buy a ‘one ticket get 50% of the second one incentive.

Participating in bird watching is a major motivator for attending the fair. Therefore, the planners of such fairs should ensure that sufficient quality mechanisms are in place that provides attendees with more bird watching opportunities and information in this regard. Birding stakeholders such as birding spots (protected areas), guides, birding clubs and accommodation providers could also leverage off birding events by hosting local birding events and providing bird watching and game viewing opportunities to avitourists. Lastly, relaxation and escape is also a motivator for visitors to the fair. Thus, we can recommend that the marketers of the event include opportunities where attendees could immerse themselves into the realm of birding, sufficient seating areas, open areas and areas for networking may provide opportunities for attendees to spend quality time with other people, friends and family who have a similar interest. Therefore, in order to remain competitive, avitourism managers should also ensure that the provision of quality leisure and recreational facilities is sufficient to provide more escape and relaxation opportunities.

In conclusion, this applied-descriptive investigation established that the avitourist community is quite diverse when discussed in relation to age, education, gender, and income levels. With regards to socio-demographics, the findings of the study revealed that birding is no longer dominated by middle-aged birders but is significantly also becoming attractive to middle-class young birders as well as females. Apart from demographic factors, the results also indicated five distinct motivational factors, some of which confirm previous findings. Although the respondents were event attendees the results of their study could be indicative of the overall avitourism market in Gauteng. The study also provides a platform for further discourse and research into this niche field of ecotourism. These findings provide a foundation of information to enhance the provision of services o avitourists and birding events but also open the discourse on further investigation into this field, especially into more niche avitourism markets and these at specific destinations as prescribed by Steven, Rakotopare and Newsome (2020). The study’s main limitation is aligned with the uncertain impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic in the travel market. The data collection took place the year prior to the pandemic and the associated impacts on traveller behaviour resulting from the pandemic post-lockdowns is uncertain.

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