

TOURISM INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

by

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ABSTRACT

Information and knowledge exchange is considered a process through which information, knowledge, experience, skills and expertise are exchanged and transferred among different stakeholders. While earlier frameworks (Sheldon, 1997; Deery *et al.*, 2007) acknowledged the exchange of information, they did not consider knowledge exchange or the benefits that may result from the exchange process. The purpose of this study was therefore to examine the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in Visitor Information Centres (VICs) and how this exchange contributes to memorable visitor experiences, visitors' behavioural intentions and socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. The reviewed literature laid the foundation to identify theoretical constructs used to develop a conceptual framework of information and knowledge exchange relevant to the VIC environment.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in parallel and in a complementary manner. For the quantitative element, self-completed and structured questionnaires were used to collect data from visitors and local tourism businesses. The qualitative element comprised conducting semi-structured interviews using an interview guide with open-ended questions to gather information from VIC staff members while focus group discussions employing a focus group guide were used to elicit information from surrounding community members. Each set of data from the two methods was collected, analysed and presented separately and the information generated was integrated in the discussion and interpretation of the overall findings and conclusions reached.

The findings and results from the study revealed the following:

- There is an exchange of different types of information between VIC staff and different stakeholders involved in the operation of VICs, including local tourism businesses, institutions of learning, surrounding communities and neighbouring VICs. The exchange is mainly with local tourism businesses and institutions of learning and not so much with general community members. Local tourism businesses receive economic opportunities while learners and students get

opportunities related to their studies. However, there is limited exchange of local knowledge with all stakeholders and this result mainly from the limited engagement with surrounding communities who possess knowledge of local products. In addition, the exchange is executed on an ad-hoc basis and in an uncoordinated manner, without a standardised framework to guide the exchange process.

- The attainment of socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses were facilitated by extensive visitor and business support information they received from VICs and electronic and online information sources they perceive to be useful to receive the information.
- Travel behaviour characteristics related to visitors' planned duration of stay at visited areas contributed significantly to predicting their memorable experiences and behavioural intentions.
- Memorable experience that visitors had in visited areas did not contribute to their behavioural intentions. Instead, electronic information sources they prefer to receive information through while at VICs, their experience of VIC information resources and staff's knowledge contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- The information that is exchanged in VICs, and particularly, the extensive information they searched for at VICs, preferred VIC electronic information sources and the experiences they have at VICs contribute to memorable experiences
- The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs and in particular, preferred electronic information sources and experience of VIC information resources and staff knowledge contributed to their behavioural intentions

Based on the findings, the conceptual framework was refined in order to arrive at a tested and confirmed framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The framework seeks to position the role that VICs may play to enhance visitors' memorable experience and facilitate their behavioural intentions; and create socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: information, information exchange, knowledge, knowledge exchange, memorable visitor experiences, behavioural intentions, socio-economic opportunities, VICs, visitors, local tourism businesses and surrounding communities

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KEY TERMS

To avoid misinterpretation of results, findings and conclusions, key terms and phrases that are central to this study are discussed and defined, mostly according to the UNWTO standards. Other terms are defined in relation to the context within which they are applied in the study:

Department of Tourism is a government department whose vision is to lead sustainable tourism development for inclusive economic growth in South Africa.

Information refers to organised data that are useful and relevant in a particular context. It is concerned with asking questions such as knowing who, what, when and how many (Yachin, 2018). In this study, information is regarded as data that are relevant, useful, and timely, and that are exchanged between VIC staff and their stakeholders. It may be available in printed format such as brochures, maps and leaflets or through online platforms such as the Internet, websites, social media or mobile technology. However, the term 'information' is often used interchangeably with 'knowledge' in the study, as respondents could not distinguish between the two terms.

Information exchange: refers to the exchange of information between VICs and their stakeholders. It is used interchangeably with information sharing because both encompass the process of giving and seeking information.

Knowledge refers to information embedded in a person's reasoning resources and provides grounds for action, decision making and innovation (Yachin, 2018). It is the end-result of value-adding interactions (Sharma & Dey, 2018) created by the intelligent application of experience and skills in information dissemination (Yachin, 2018). In organisations, knowledge is crucial to maintain competitive advantage (Suppiah & Sandhu, 2011) and plays a vital role for efficiency and effectiveness in organisational operations (Muthuveloo, Shanmugam & Teoh, 2017). In this study knowledge refers to local information that is not available in brochures, but may be obtained from community members in the surroundings of VICs with experience and understanding

of the of the history, culture, and traditions of local areas. However, ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’ are often used interchangeably in the study, as respondents could not distinguish between the two terms.

Knowledge exchange is conceptualised as a process that involves the request for and supply of information and knowledge between VIC staff and their stakeholders. It is used interchangeably with knowledge sharing because both encompass the process of giving and seeking knowledge.

Local tourism business refers to businesses that operate in subsectors of the value chain of tourism such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, and in the context of this study are located near VICs. For purposes of the study, local tourism businesses refer to businesses operating nearby VICs and are registered in the databases of VICs and Tourism Marketing Agencies.

Memorable visitor experiences refer to incidents that happen and are treasured long after the trip is over. The term is used synonymously with Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) as it encompasses both same-day and overnight visitors/tourists. MTEs refer to positive tourism experiences that are remembered and recalled after the event or activity has occurred (Kim, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2012). Considering that only dimensions that strongly affect visitors and lead to memorability constitute a memorable tourism experience, the study adopted Kim *et al.*’s., (2012) dimensions of MTE Scale (hedonism, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, refreshment, involvement and knowledge) to measure visitors’ memorable experiences.

Social Exchange Theory emphasises socio-economic opportunities that individuals might obtain from exchanging and sharing resources (Jeong & Oh, 2017; Liu, Liang, Sambamurthy, Rajagopalan, & Wu, 2011). In tourism, the SET assumes that residents’ attitudes toward and support for tourism development in their communities are influenced by their evaluation of the actual and perceived benefits that tourism has for their community. If they perceive that the benefits are greater than the costs, they are likely to be involved in the exchange, show positive attitudes, and support future tourism development in their community. However, if they perceive tourism’s impacts

negatively, they are likely to show negative attitudes and not to support tourism development in their communities (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Woo *et al.*, 2018; Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2017, Jani, 2018).

As benefits in an exchange process are central to the SET, the theory is therefore adopted as the theoretical foundation of the study and is applied to understand the exchange of tourism information and knowledge between VICs and their stakeholders, and how this exchange contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. The SET is also used to understand how tourism information and knowledge exchange with VIC stakeholders contributes to memorable visitor experiences.

Socio-economic opportunities refer to social and economic benefits that are likely to result from the role that tourism plays as a key driver for local economic development and providing opportunities for improvement in the quality of life (Kim, Stepchenkova & Babalou, 2018; Ramukumba, 2019; Rogerson & Nel, 2016; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2019). In this study, socio-economic opportunities refer to social and economic opportunities that accrue from the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs in order to benefit VIC stakeholders.

Stakeholders refer to “Any group of people, organised or unorganised, who share a common interest or stake in a particular issue or system: They can be at any level or position in society, from global, national and regional concerns down to the level of household or intra household, and be groups of any size or aggregation” (Lyon *et al.*, 2017:235). In the study, stakeholders refer to individuals, local tourism businesses, surrounding communities or organisations that supply or obtain information and knowledge from VICs. The stakeholders may serve as information and knowledge suppliers and/or consumers.

Surrounding community is a multidimensional and complex concept that is defined differently by different scholars. Muganda, Sirima and Ezra, (2013:54) define a community as “a set of multiple actors with formal and informal rules and norms that shape their interaction in local level processes”. For Aref (2011) a community is a

group of individuals living in the same geographic area with some shared culture or common interests. This definition clearly relates to the purpose of the study as surrounding community in the study refers to a group of individuals living in the same geographic area with some shared common interests in the operation of VICs in their local areas.

Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

The tourism sector consists of the set of institutional units whose principal economic activity is a tourism-characteristic activity. These units might belong to the following institutional sectors: households, non-financial corporations (private, foreign owned, publicly owned), financial corporations, general government or non-profit institutions serving households (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The sector is an amalgamation of various sub-sectors such as accommodation services, restaurants, passenger transport services, travel agencies and related services, attractions, cultural services, and sports and recreational services (TSA, 2019).

Visitor is any person travelling to a place outside their usual environment for less than 12 months and whose main purpose of the trip is not to be remunerated at the visited place (Statistics South Africa, 2019). The concept of 'visitor' is used in the study to include both same-day visitors and overnight visitors, often referred to as 'tourists'. Same-day visitor is a visitor who visits a place for less than one night while overnight visitor or tourist is a visitor who stays at least one night in the place visited. (UNWTO 2019). The term visitor and tourist are therefore used interchangeably in the study.

Visitors' behavioural intentions: involves desirable behaviours that tourists are likely to demonstrate in the future (Chen, Lee, Chen & Huang, 2011). Recommendation intentions and revisit intentions are the most common indicators used to measure tourists' behavioural intentions or loyalty in tourism (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2019). In this study, visitors' behavioural intentions refer to their intentions to return to visited VICs, return to visited

destinations, visit more places, spend more money, extend the length of stay, and recommend the visited destinations to family and friends.

Visitor Information Centre is “a clearly labelled, publicly accessible, physical space with personnel providing pre-dominantly free of charge information to facilitate travellers’ experiences” (Pearce, 2004:8). In this study, a VIC refers to a clearly labelled and publicly accessible physical facility with personnel providing tourism information, knowledge, and other value adding services to day and overnight international and domestic visitors in order to enhance their travel experiences. This research study adopted the term ‘VIC’ in order to involve both same-day visitors (e.g. surrounding communities) and overnight visitors, whether domestic or international.

Visitor Information Centre staff refer to personnel who provide information and knowledge in VICs.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATION	MEANING
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CTO	Community Tourism Organisation
CTT	Cape Town Tourism
CVBs	CVBs Conventional Visitor Bureaux
DIKW	Data-Information-Knowledge-wisdom
DMO	Destination Marketing Organisation
eWoM	electronic Word Of Mouth
GTA	GTA Gauteng Tourism Authority
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPS	Global Positioning System
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
KM	Knowledge Management
LTO	Local Tourism Organisations
MICE	Meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions/events
MTE	Memorable Tourism Experiences
MPAs	Marine Protected Areas
NDP	National Development Plan
NTSS	National Tourism Sector Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RTO	Regional Tourism Organisation
SAT	South African Tourism
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SMME	Small-Medium and Micro Enterprise
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
SRI	Social Responsibility Implementation
StatsSA	Statistics South Africa

SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
TIC	Tourism Information Centre
TSA	Tourism Satellite Account
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organisation
UGC	User Generated Content
VIC	Visitor Information Centre
WTCC	World Travel and Tourism Council

CHAPTER 1:INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Tourism has become an important economic sector, making a significant contribution to the economies of many countries. It is considered a stimulator of new economic activities, it is a mechanism for regional development, and it has a positive impact on the balance of payments, gross income, production, and employment of many countries (Almaimoni, Altuwaijri, Asiry, Aldossary, Alsmadi, Al-Marashdeh, Badawi, Alshabanah & Alrajhi, 2018). Furthermore, it is well-recognised as playing a key role in global economic activity and as a source of export, revenue, and value added to domestic products and services (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018; United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2019). In this way, tourism is regarded as the lifeblood of the economies of many developing and developed countries that have adopted it as a viable means of sustaining the economy in the face of economic difficulties (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore & Nair, 2014; Sayira, 2015). In South Africa, tourism is recognised as an important pillar of economic growth and employment creation (Strydom, Mangope & Henama, 2018; Van der Schyff, Meyer & Ferreira, 2019). This assertion is evident in the identification of tourism as an important priority economic sector in addressing a range of socio-economic imbalances (e.g. poverty, unemployment, and inequality) in government policy documents such as the National Development Plan: 2030 (South Africa, 2011), the National Tourism Sector Strategy (National Department of Tourism. 2011a, 2017), and the New Growth Path (South Africa, 2010).

Once considered an activity enjoyed by a small elite group, tourism has gradually become a mass phenomenon, reaching large numbers of people throughout the world and experiencing an almost constant and rapid annual increase in revenue and employment (Pirnar & Gunlu, 2012). The UNWTO (2020) indicates that, worldwide, international tourist arrivals grew 3.8% in 2019 to reach 1.5 billion. In 2019, international tourist arrivals to South Africa reached 10.2 million, which is a decline of 2.3% compared to 2018. The total foreign direct spend for international tourists was

R81.2 billion in 2019, which was a decrease of -1.6% from R82.5 billion in 2018 (South African Tourism, 2020). With regard to domestic tourism, 28.5 million total domestic overnight trips were recorded in 2019 compared to 17.6 million recorded in 2018. This is a growth of +61.3%. Domestic tourism spend increased from R26.4 billion in 2018 to R43.9 billion in 2019. The total revenue generated by domestic tourism in 2019 was R43.9 billion, a growth of 66.3% (South African Tourism, 2020). The 2019 Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) shows that the direct contribution of tourism to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2016 was R124 911 million, and that it increased from R118 977 million in 2017 to R130 163 million in 2018. In respect of employment, the 2016 figures indicate that 705 871 people were directly employed in the tourism sector, while the provisional figures for 2018 indicated that the sector directly employed 739 657 persons, representing an increase of 58 038 compared with 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2019).

To harness tourism growth, destinations around the world compete in attracting visitors (Korneliussen & Greenacre, 2017; Woo, Uysal & Sirgy, 2018). What makes a tourism destination truly competitive is its ability to apply creative and effective management and marketing strategies to attract visitors (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). In such a competitive environment, the search, provision, and use of information are critical aspects to assist visitors to identify, evaluate, and make informed decisions when choosing tourism products and services (Coromina & Camprubí, 2016; Ho, Lin & Chen, 2012). Accordingly, the sector is considered information-intensive, making information the lifeblood of the tourism sector (Benckendorff, Sheldon & Fesenmaier, 2014; Ho *et al.*, 2012; No & Kim, 2015).

Visitors use different sources to search for information, including internal and external sources (Ispas; Rada & Sava, 2014). Internal sources encompass eliciting information from previous experiences and personal memory (Wong & McKercher, 2011). However, should these internal sources not be sufficient or appropriate to make optimal purchase decisions, visitors tend to use a variety of external sources such as travel agents and consultants, family and friends, travel books, guidebooks, pamphlets, magazines, and newspaper articles (Korneliussen, 2014; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011; Wong & McKercher, 2011). The Internet, as an external source, is a

critical source of information and subsequent visitor behaviour and decision-making across all stages of the travel cycle (Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Pabel & Prideaux, 2016; Wang, Park & Fesenmaier, 2012). The advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), mobile technology, and social media is fundamentally altering the ways in which visitors search, find, read, co-produce, and distribute information about destinations and tourism experiences (Sotiriadis, 2017). Increasingly, visitors use smart devices to navigate destinations, make bookings, and access travel information (Dorcic, Komsic & Markovic, 2019). Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram play an influential role in shaping travel planning behaviour (Pabel & Prideaux, 2016; Xiang, Wang, O'Leary & Fesenmaier, 2015). These technologies also support visitors in making informed travel decisions, adding to their satisfaction, and reducing travel risk, uncertainty, and fear (Wang, Wu, Lou & Lu, 2017). On this basis, visitors no longer consume the information and services they receive, but actively participate in co-creating their own experiences. This gives them valuable insights and options to create and develop personalised services that meet their individual needs in real time (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2015).

Another external information source, not yet mentioned, is visitor information centres (VICs). Various terms, such as welcome centre, tourist centre, visitor centre, orientation centre, interpretive centre, or information centre, are often used to describe facilities that provide tourism information (Pearce, 2004). However, VICs are highly recognised resources for disseminating tourism information (Ballantyne, Hughes & Ritchie, 2009; Deery, Jago, Mistilis, D'Ambra, Richards & Carson, 2007; Draper, 2018; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015). Pearce (2004:8) defines a VIC as "a clearly labelled, publicly accessible, physical space with personnel providing pre-dominantly free of charge information to facilitate travellers' experiences". Fallon and Kriwoken (2002) define a VIC as a physical location that provides site-specific information to visitors who tour the location or local area. Moscardo (1999), on the other hand, shows that VICs are facilities that provide information and services to visitors and that have management, industry, orientation, or interpretive functions. These definitions have common elements such as a physical location with personnel providing information and services to visitors with a view to facilitating their experiences.

Using the common elements derived from the definitions above, it is clear that a VIC is different from other types of information centres, such as libraries, because it provides local area information and services to visitors (same-day and overnight/tourists) with a view to facilitating their travel experiences. This research study adopted the term 'VIC' in order to involve both same-day visitors and overnight visitors, whether domestic or international. It is also important to point out that, since different kinds of visitor use VICs, the terms 'visitor' and 'tourist' are used interchangeably in this study.

VICs are perceived as the first points of contact and the main platforms from which visitors obtain information about a destination's tourism offering (Ispas *et al.*, 2014; Smith & Holmes, 2012). Visitors receive information on payments and products as well as itineraries and schedules to help them make decisions in areas such as choice of destination; length of stay; what to see, do, and experience; and whether to return or to recommend the destination to others (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; De Ascaniis, Gretzel & Mistilis, 2012; Teymouri, 2012). VICs also offer visitors a chance to ask questions and to get recommendations. They also offer other services such as travel bookings and reservations (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Draper, 2018). In addition, VICs provide visitors with useful facilities such as computers, printers, fax machines, water fountains, and public toilets (Lyu & Hwang, 2015). Value-adding information and services such as travel advice, interpretation and knowledge of the local region, and visitor data are also offered in VICs (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009). The additional information and services that visitors receive from VICs reflect the role that staff play in providing both information and knowledge.

With the provision of information and knowledge being central to VICs, Ortega, Rodriguez and Kitchen (2014) mention that staff must not be limited to making it available only when visitors arrive at destinations. This is mainly because visitors require information and knowledge at different times and places throughout the travel cycle (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Draper, 2018). The overall travel cycle is often characterised as having three stages: pre-trip, during trip, and post-trip (Choe, Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Inversini, Sit & Pyle, 2016; Leung *et al.*, 2013; Mackay & Vogt, 2012; Pabel & Prideaux, 2016). Some researchers identify other

stages, such as dreaming, researching, booking, experiencing, and sharing (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2012). Creevey, Kidney and Mehta (2019) propose another stage, the believing stage, which involves connecting and engaging visitors after purchasing products (post-purchase) but prior to undertaking a trip (pre-consumption). Whatever the different stages, information and knowledge form an integral part of the travel cycle. For information providers such as VICs, encounters with visitors during the travel cycle are the locus of value creation and knowledge sourcing to understand their needs and to generate the required knowledge to offer experiences that address these needs (Yachin, 2018).

The information provided in the travel cycle has the potential to influence visitors' travel behaviours in several ways. First, it can enhance visitors' memorable experiences because they seek high-quality memorable experiences when deciding to search for information and travel to destinations they wish to visit (Chandralal, Rindfleish & Valenzuela, 2015; Draper, 2018; Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Liu, Li & Kim, 2015; Ritchie, Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Yu, Chang & Ramanpong, 2019). However, Kim *et al.* (2012) argue that only attributes that strongly lead to memorability have an effect on memorable tourism experiences (MTEs). They identified seven dimensions of MTE: hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge (Kim *et al.*, 2012). The dimensions also have an effect on visitors' behavioural intentions to revisit a place and re-participate in the same tourism activities (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Yu, Chang & Ramanpong, 2019).

Second, the information provided during the travel cycle has the potential to influence visitors to visit more places than initially planned, to spend more money, to increase their length of stay, and ultimately to grow their behavioural intentions to re-visit the destination (Ispas *et al.*, 2014; Ortega *et al.*, 2014; Tena & Raquel, 2014; Tsai, 2016; Yu *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, the behavioural intentions positively affect the economic growth of local destinations (Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014). It thus follows that the type and quality of information provided by VICs (Nabi & Zaman, 2014) should become a strategic factor that contributes to memorable visitor experiences and the economic and social well-being of local communities by encouraging visitors to experience local

events and attractions, and to support the local economy financially (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009).

A model of VIC information exchange developed by Deery *et al.* (2007) shows that information available in VICs originates with and is exchanged by different stakeholders, including primary suppliers such as local businesses operators, sector groups or associations, other VICs, and government agencies, and secondary suppliers such as wholesalers and brochure distribution agencies. VICs also work with different national, regional, and local tourism organisations to supply information that visitors can access during travel (Alonso & Liu, 2012; Cox & Wray, 2011). Collaboration with various key stakeholders is critical to VIC operation and sustainability (Fallon & Kriwoken (2002). Moreover, such collaboration becomes effective when stakeholders are able to identify the potential benefits (Cavallo, Lynch & Scull, 2014). The generation of benefits for stakeholders involved in a collaborative relationship is central to the Social Exchange Theory (SET). According to the theory, individuals engage in a reciprocal process of exchanging resources from which some future benefit is expected (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels & Hall, 2017; Kim & Park, 2017). In a tourism context, the SET suggests that stakeholders are likely to be involved in tourism development if they perceive the benefits to be greater than the costs. However, they are likely not to support tourism development if they perceive that tourism impacts negatively (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Woo *et al.*, 2018; Afthanorhan, Awang & Fazella, 2017, Jani, 2018).

Because stakeholder collaboration and benefits are emphasised in the SET, the study adopts it as the main theoretical foundation, and applies it in a VIC context to understand tourism information and knowledge exchange from the perspective and viewpoints of the demand side (visitors) and the supply side (VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities), and how the exchange generates memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders, including surrounding communities and local tourism businesses.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Earlier research on VICs examined various issues such as the reasons for stopping at VICs (Gitelson & Perdue, 1987; Tierney, 1993), the influence of VICs on tourists' travel behaviour (Fesenmaier, Vogt & Stewart, 1993), VIC user profiles (Fesenmaier, 1994), and the travel and information behaviours of visitors to Welcome Centre (Pennington-Gray & Vogt, 2003). Other studies analysed elements contributing to effective and sustainable VICs (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002), the functioning and planning of VICs (Pearce, 2004), the quality of VIC information services (Deery *et al.*, 2007), visitors' experiences of VIC information quality (Mistilis & D'Ambra, 2008), and how VICs can meet the needs of their users (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009).

With the proliferation of ICTs, mobile technology, and social media facilitating visitors' information search behaviours to access real-time information at their convenience, anytime and anywhere (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), earlier research examined the state and use of technology in VICs (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010). Several researchers (Arãna, León, Carballo & Gil, 2016; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Swart, 2016) expressed caution about the impact that technology might have on the future operation of VICs. To this end, Lyu and Hwang (2015:56) indicate that "the advent of the ubiquitous information era has encouraged many people to believe that VICs, as traditional tourism promotional facilities, have become relics of the old days". To maximise the optimal performance of the VIC environment, Lyu and Lee (2015) assert that staff should use a diversity of information sources, printed and online, to provide real-time information that is tailored to meet the needs of different visitors. For Arãna *et al.* (2016), technology should complement the design of VICs, adding value and enhancing the quality and depth of information and service they provide to visitors.

Most of these research studies, however, focused on the demand side of providing information to visitors, paying less attention to knowledge provision and to understanding the views of those on the supply side, such as those who are responsible for VICs' operation and those who supply VICs with information and knowledge. It is for this reason that Fallon and Kriwoken (2003:289) emphasise the importance of considering the needs of staff, local communities, and business

operators, as “it is not enough to only assess a VIC’s sustainability by its popularity with visitors”. Thus the aim of VICs should go beyond merely providing information to visitors, and include mechanisms through which other stakeholders such as local tourism businesses and surrounding communities may be involved in their operations (Alonso & Liu, 2012; Ispas *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, Lyon, Hunter-Jones and Warnaby (2017) mention that visitors, local communities, entrepreneurs, and local government or management officials are the most critical stakeholders in tourism. The assertions by these authors show that an inclusive stakeholder analysis is important in order to consider the views of stakeholders and their behaviours, interests, and influences on operations in VICs.

Despite authors acknowledging the importance of integrating multi-stakeholder perspectives in the operation of VICs, limited studies have addressed the involvement of different stakeholders in the operation of VICs. Furthermore, while some studies examined information provision and exchange in VICs (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Deery *et. al.*, 2007), they did not consider knowledge an important element in the exchange process. In addition, most studies were conducted in developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) and Australia, and did not include contextual conditions that may be important in developing countries such as South Africa. Also, these studies did not examine how the exchange process may contribute to memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. What is more, while the VIC Framework (National Department of Tourism, 2011a) reflects efforts by the South African government to use VICs to provide information to visitors, the socio-economic opportunities that surrounding communities and local tourism businesses may derive from the information and knowledge provided to and gained from VICs is not addressed. The generation of socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities is an important aspect that the South African government strives to achieve in order to improve the lives of its citizens. For public entities receiving public funds, such as VICs, it is important that their functions also contribute to government’s wider plan of improving the lives of communities, including tourism businesses in their surroundings.

This research study therefore aims to address these research gaps that were not addressed in previous studies by examining the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs from the perspective and viewpoints of the demand side (visitors) and the supply side (VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities), and how this exchange contributes to memorable visitor experiences and to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. The benefits that are likely to accrue to stakeholders involved in a collaborative relationship of exchanging resources are emphasised in the SET, which forms the theoretical foundation of the study. On this basis, the main research question for this research study is formulated as follows: How can tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs contribute to memorable visitor experiences and to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities?

1.3 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to examine the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs, and how this exchange contributes to memorable visitor experiences and to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. To achieve this, the SET is used as the theoretical foundation to develop a conceptual framework with constructs that are critical in the exchange process. The framework also considers other constructs not included in previous information exchange frameworks such as the tourism information exchange model (Sheldon, 1997) and the VIC information exchange model (Deery *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, the study aims to refine the conceptual framework in order to arrive at a tested and confirmed framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to develop a framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The study also aims to understand the

full potential of VICs with a view to synergise the engagement with stakeholders and even between stakeholders and the community; and to find the best synergies for the visitors, local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. The following secondary research objectives are formulated to support the achievement of the primary objective:

Objective 1: To discuss information and knowledge exchange in the tourism sector.

Objective 2: To describe information search and memorable visitor experiences in the travel process.

Objective 3: To discuss tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs and to develop a conceptual framework to guide this exchange.

Objective 4: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.

Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

Objective 6: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions.

1.5 HYPOTHESES

The first two secondary objectives mentioned above are achieved through a literature review, while objective 3 is achieved through developing a theoretical and conceptual framework from the literature. Objective 4 is attained through focus group discussions with surrounding communities. Objective 5 is achieved through a survey with local tourism businesses, while objective 6 is attained through a survey conducted with visitors. Semi-structured interviews with VIC staff complemented the achievement of objectives 4, 5, and 6.

The following hypotheses that correspond to objectives 5 and 6 are formulated:

Table1.1: Research hypotheses

Hypotheses	Sub-hypotheses
H ₁ : Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences.	• H_{1a}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of hedonism. • H_{1b}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of novelty. • H_{1c}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of local culture. • H_{1d}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of refreshment. • H_{1e}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of meaningfulness. • H_{1f}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of involvement. • H_{1g}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of the knowledge they gained.
H ₂ : Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.	
H ₃ : Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.	• H_{3a}: Visitors' experience of hedonism contributes to their behavioural intentions. • H_{3b}: Visitors' experience of novelty contributes to their behavioural intentions. • H_{3c}: Visitors' experiences of local culture contribute to their behavioural intentions. • H_{3d}: Visitors' experience of refreshment contributes to their behavioural intentions. • H_{3e}: Visitors' experience of meaningfulness contributes to their behavioural intentions. • H_{3f}: Visitors' experience of involvement contributes to their behavioural intentions. • H_{3g}: Visitors' experience of the knowledge they gained contributes to their behavioural intentions.

Hypotheses	Sub-hypotheses
H4: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences.	• H4a: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of hedonism. • H4b: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of novelty. • H4c: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of local culture. • H4d: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of refreshment. • H4e: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of meaningfulness. • H4f: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of involvement. • H4g: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experiences of the knowledge they gained.
H5: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.	
H6: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.	

Source: Researcher's own construction

1.6 METHODOLOGY

A literature review was conducted to gain a better understanding of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, particularly regarding socio-economic opportunities that may be available to local tourism businesses and surrounding communities, as well as of visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions that may be enhanced through this exchange process. The insight gained from the literature review resulted in a conceptual framework to inform the study's research design. The conceptual framework was tested and refined to produce the final framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs.

Using Creswell's (2014) descriptions of worldviews, pragmatism was adopted as a research paradigm to guide the study. Pragmatism was best suited for this study to draw different perspectives from different respondents and participants in order to get a complete picture of the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. In this way, VIC visitors, VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities were involved in the study to share their views and experiences on tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. In addition to the pragmatic worldview, a deductive reasoning approach was adopted, in which conclusions are derived from the set of hypotheses mentioned in section 1.5 above.

An exploratory, cross-sectional, empirical study was conducted to discover new ideas and insights in tourism information and knowledge exchange. The exploratory nature of the study allowed flexibility to consider different aspects of the problem under investigation from various perspectives. Thus VIC visitors, VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities formed the target populations for the study.

A purposive sampling strategy was used purposefully to select 18 VICs owned and financially supported by government and listed in the Department of Tourism's database of VICs in all nine provinces in South Africa. Strategic location, and the purposes for which these VICs were established to address some of the country's challenges such as poverty alleviation, job creation, skills development, and Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) development through the Social Responsibility Implementation (SRI) Programme, served as the main criteria for selection and participation in the study. Owing to the exploratory nature of the study, VICs that yielded multiple stakeholder perspectives, including those of visitors, staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities were considered for participation in the study. These criteria produced a sample of 11 VICs located in urban municipalities and seven in rural municipalities, as shown in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2: VICs that participated in the study

Province	Name of VIC	Local municipality	Type of municipality	Type of VIC
Eastern Cape	Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism: Donkin VIC	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan	Urban	VIC in a tourist and historical town
	Cape St Francis VIC	Koega Local Municipality	Rural	VIC in a tourist town
Free State	Mangaung VIC	Mangaung Metropolitan	Urban	2010 SRI project
	Mangaung Tourist Information Centre	Mangaung Metropolitan	Urban	VIC at a historical attraction
	Senekal Library	Setsoto Local Municipality	Rural	VIC in library
Gauteng	Tshwane VIC	City of Tshwane Metropolitan	Urban	VIC in the vicinity of a historical attraction
	Johannesburg VIC	City of Johannesburg Metropolitan	Urban	VIC in a shopping mall
KwaZulu-Natal	Durban Tourism: Tourist Information Centre (TIC)	eThekweni Municipality	Urban	VIC at beachfront
	Shelly Beach VIC	Ray Nkonyeni Local Municipality	Rural	VIC in a shopping mall
Limpopo	Polokwane VIC	Polokwane Local Municipality	Urban	2010 SRI project
	Makhado VIC	Makhado Local Municipality	Rural	VIC on major national road to World Heritage Site and border gate to Zimbabwe
Mpumalanga	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency VIC	Mbombela Local Municipality	Urban	VIC at airport
	Pilgrim's Rest VIC	Thaba Chweu Local Municipality	Rural	VIC in a historical tourist town
Northern Cape	Kimberley VIC	Sol Plaatjie Local Municipality	Urban	VIC in a bus ticketing complex
	Colesberg Museum	Umsombovu Local Municipality	Rural	VIC in museum
North West	Rustenburg VIC	Rustenburg Local Municipality	Urban	2010 SRI project

Province	Name of VIC	Local municipality	Type of municipality	Type of VIC
	Pilanesberg VIC	Moses Kotane Local Municipality	Rural	VIC in National Park
Western Cape	Cape Town Tourism: Burg Street VIC	Cape Town Metropolitan	Urban	VIC in a tourist and historical town

Source: Researcher's own construction

To present a comprehensive understanding of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs from the perspective and viewpoints of the demand side (visitors) and the supply side (VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities), the study adopted a mixed methods research design and, in particular, the convergent parallel mixed methods approach. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in parallel and in a complementary manner. Each set of data from the two methods was collected, analysed, and presented in separate chapters, and the information that was generated was integrated in the discussion and interpretation of the overall findings and the conclusions reached.

1.6.1 Quantitative research design

The quantitative part of the study involved two questionnaires that were distributed to two target populations. The first group were a sample of visitors who had visited the 18 participating VICs in the 12 months prior to the study being undertaken. However, in the absence of a pre-existing visitor list or a visitor sampling frame, it was impossible to draw a representative sample of visitors or to determine a visitor sample size in advance; thus a non-probability convenience sampling strategy was employed to involve 152 visitors across the 18 VICs who were willing and available to participate in the study. Moreover, as this was an exploratory study, no claims were made about being able to generalise the findings to other VICs and visitors.

Self-completed and structured questionnaires were used to collect data via an online link (https://pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eKYujdZTQqkB7W5) that was created using the software package Qualtrics. The collection of data from

questionnaires took place from April 2017 to March 2018. The online data collection was initially planned to take place from April to September 2017. However, owing to a low online response rate, paper-based questionnaires were mailed to the 18 participating VICs in October 2017 for staff to encourage visitors to complete a paper-based questionnaire when they visited the various VICs.

The scales used to measure the constructs in the questionnaire (socio-demographic characteristics, travel behaviour characteristics, travel decision-making, pre-trip planning, information search, and VIC information provision) were developed from previous literature. Sources such as Araña *et al.* (2016), Ballantyne *et al.* (2009), Bronner and de Hoog (2011), Bruwer and Thach (2013), Coromina and Camprubí (2016), Deery *et al.* (2007), D'Ambra and Mistilis, (2010), Draper (2016), Lyu and Hwang (2015), Lyu and Lee (2015), Pearce (2004), Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998), Xiang *et al.* (2015), and Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier (2015) were used. For memorable visitor experiences, the standard MTE scale (Kim *et al.*, 2012) with seven dimensions (hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge) was used to measure visitors' experiences at visited areas. Chandralal *et al.* (2015), Fallon and Kriwoken (2002), Minghetti and Celotto (2013), Mistilis and D'Ambra (2008), and Wong and McKercher (2011) were used to measure visitors' experience at VICs. Questions on visitors' behavioural intentions were formulated from sources such as Ballantyne *et al.* (2009), Deery *et al.* (2007), Hung, Lee and Huang (2014), Hwang and Fesenmaier (2011), Kim (2014), Kim and Ritchie (2014), Mistilis and Gretzel (2014), Ortega *et al.* (2014), and Sheldon (1997). Details on the questionnaire's development are provided in section 5.6.4.

The aim of the questionnaire was to understand the information used to determine visitors' travel behaviour patterns and the decisions they made. More importantly, visitors provided responses about information they received from VICs and the experiences they had at the visited VICs and local areas. Suggestions on how information and knowledge provision may be improved at VICs were also elicited. Responses from 152 visitors were captured in Microsoft Excel, and then imported into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis and interpretation. The techniques that were used in the data analysis included descriptive statistics in the

form of measures of central tendency, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics that were used were factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis.

The second group of respondents were local tourism businesses. In the absence of a pre-existing list of local tourism businesses or actual business population figures from which to draw a representative sample and so give each an equal opportunity to participate, purposive sampling was used to solicit the participation of local tourism businesses listed in the VIC databases. VIC staff were asked to include different types of local tourism businesses whose purpose was to serve the needs of visitors in the different tourism subsectors such as accommodation, food and beverage services; attractions, events and special interest offerings; and transport services packages and tours.

A self-completed and structured questionnaire was used to collect data using an online link (https://pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPjvVMYeA4A6b) created in the software package Qualtrics. Data collection took place from April to September 2017. However, owing to a low online response rate, paper-based questionnaires were mailed to the 18 participating VICs in October 2017 for staff to distribute to local tourism businesses listed in their databases. Most of the businesses in the database, however, were accommodation establishments.

Data collected related to information and knowledge that local tourism businesses received and supplied to VICs, as well as socio-economic opportunities they received from this exchange process. Scales to measure these constructs were developed from studies such as those of Andereck, Valentine, Knopf and Vogt (2005), Ap (1992), Ballantyne *et al.* (2009), Cropanzano *et al.* (2017), Deery *et al.* (2007), Draper (2016), Fallon and Kriwoken (2002), Lyu and Lee (2015), Lyu and Hwang (2015), Savage and Bergstrand (2012), and Sheldon (1997). Suggestions about how the exchange process may be improved were also extracted from the respondents. Details on the questionnaire's development are provided in section 5.7.4.

Responses from 75 local tourism businesses were captured in Microsoft Excel, and then imported into SPSS for analysis and interpretation. The data analysis techniques were descriptive statistics in the form of measures of central tendency, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics that were used were factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis.

1.6.2 Qualitative research design

A qualitative research design involves making sense of the subjective and socially constructed meaning expressed about a phenomenon under investigation (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). With tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs as the phenomenon under investigation, it was important to obtain and verify the views and perspectives of those involved in conveying or acquiring information and knowledge in that context. As important stakeholders involved in the operation of VICs, staff and surrounding communities participated in the study.

Unlike quantitative techniques, in which respondents have a limited number of predefined and structured responses from which to choose, qualitative techniques were used to allow VIC staff members and surrounding communities to elaborate on their respective viewpoints. Moreover, the qualitative techniques allowed for an in-depth exploration and probing of insights about information and knowledge exchange between staff and other stakeholders, such as local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. Such extensive examination of information and knowledge exchange would not have been achieved through a predetermined list of structured questions. The combination of quantitative and qualitative research findings enabled the researcher to refine the conceptual framework in order to arrive at a tested and confirmed framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs across the target populations.

Purposive sampling was used to identify and purposefully select staff members of the 18 participating VICs, based on their extensive working experience and involvement in tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. Although only one staff

member in each VIC who had the requisite information, and who was working at the frontline of information provision, was targeted for participation, additional staff members took part in the study in some VICs where the targeted member felt not fully able to answer questions. As a result, 28 staff members expressed their availability for participation. Numerous telephone calls were made and electronic mails sent to these staff members to negotiate appointments at a date and time convenient to them. Once appointments were confirmed, an interview schedule was emailed to the staff members to familiarise them with the topic under discussion.

Semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule with open-ended questions were conducted with VIC staff between March 2017 and January 2018. The interview schedule was used to gather qualitative information from staff members, who shared the information and knowledge that they provide and receive from visitors and other stakeholders, including local tourism businesses, surrounding communities, other VICs in the vicinity, and learners and students studying tourism-related fields. More importantly, staff highlighted how this exchange process contributed to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions, and to socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders. The interview schedule was developed from previous literature (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Alonso & Liu, 2012; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Deery *et al.*, 2007; National Department of Tourism, 2011a; National Department of Tourism, 2015; Draper, 2016; Fairer-Wessels, 2014; Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002, 2003; Ispas *et al.*, 2014; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Ortega *et al.*, 2014; Pearce, 2004; Smith & Holmes, 2012; Wong & McKercher, 2011). Details of the sources used to develop the interview schedule are provided in section 5.8.4. All the semi-structured interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim. It was only in instances when some parts of the interviews were conducted in an African language that translations were made. The interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Content analysis was performed following the protocol of Kumar (2014).

For surrounding communities, a purposive sampling was used. The researcher used her own judgement purposely to include only communities in the vicinity of VICs in rural areas to examine how public VICs fulfil some of their rural development mandate

to create socio-economic opportunities for such communities. Since seven of the 18 VICs in the study were located in rural municipalities, communities in their vicinity served as a sample with which to examine how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding community members.

Focus group discussions, using a focus group schedule, were held from April 2017 to November 2017. Each focus group comprised between six and ten community members. Open-ended questions were posed to them about the information they required, had received from and had supplied to VICs, and how this exchange process might have contributed to socio-economic opportunities for the surrounding communities. Suggestions on how the exchange of information and knowledge between the VICs and their stakeholders may be improved were also elicited. Arãna *et al.* (2016), Alonso and Liu (2012), Ballantyne *et al.* (2009), D'Ambra and Mistilis (2010), Deery *et al.* (2007), Draper (2016), Fallon and Kriwoken (2002, 2003), Lyu and Lee, (2015), Lyu and Hwang, (2015), Minghetti and Celotto, (2013), Mistilis and Gretzel (2014), Pearce (2004), Smith and Holmes (2012), and Wong and McKercher (2011) were used to develop the focus group schedule (details are provided in section 5.9.4).

The focus group discussions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, and were conducted in the language with which participants were most comfortable. With the exception of focus group discussions held in communities in the vicinity of the Shelly Beach VIC and the Makhado VIC, which were facilitated in English, those held in Rustenburg VIC, Pilgrim's Rest VIC, and Senekal Library were conducted in an African language. While discussions with communities in the surroundings of the Cape St Francis VIC and the Colesburg VIC were mainly held in English, both the researcher and the participants used African languages to seek clarity or to emphasise issues under discussion. All discussions were transcribed verbatim in English, and were analysed according to Kumar's (2014) approach to content analysis.

1.7 ACADEMIC VALUE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Several studies have focused on VICs. To date, topics such as reasons for stopping at VICs (Gitelson & Perdue, 1987; Tierney, 1993), the influence of VICs on tourists' travel behaviour (Fesenmaier *et al.*, 1993), VIC user profiles (Fesenmaier, 1994), and the travel and information behaviours of visitors to Welcome Centre (Pennington-Gray & Vogt, 2003) have been investigated. Other studies have analysed the elements contributing to effective and sustainable VICs (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002), the functioning and planning of VICs (Pearce, 2004), the quality of VIC information services (Deery *et al.*, 2007), visitors' experience of VICs' information quality (Mistilis & D'Ambra, 2008), and meeting the needs of VIC users (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009). Up to now, researchers have ignored the views of those on the supply side of providing VICs with information, such as VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities. This study intends to make a contribution to the literature by considering the views of the supply side in information and knowledge exchange, but also the views of stakeholders on knowledge exchange, an area often ignored in the VIC literature. The study also aims to contribute to the SET that underpins the research. While the theory has been applied in studies of residents' attitudes to the benefits that result from exchanges in tourism, it has not been used to explain exchanges that take place in other tourism settings such as VICs. The study therefore emphasises the exchange of information and knowledge between VICs and their stakeholders, and the opportunities generated by these exchanges, as important constructs to be considered in the application of the SET. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to the VIC literature by revealing new constructs that were not addressed in previous information exchange frameworks, such as the tourism information exchange model (Sheldon, 1997) and the VIC information exchange model (Deery *et al.*, 2007), but that are critical in contributing to socio-economic opportunities and visitors' memorable experiences. Ultimately, the study aims to make a contribution by proposing a framework that guides how the exchange of information and knowledge may contribute to memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for VIC stakeholders.

1.8 RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY TO THE TOURISM SECTOR

The relevance of the study to the tourism sector may be seen in the proposed framework to guide information and knowledge exchange in VICs. The framework should assist staff to extend their role to include community beneficiation in their operations. As initiatives established through public funding, VICs should aim to improve the livelihoods of communities in their surroundings. They should also involve different stakeholders in their operations, and create an environment in which stakeholders such as local tourism businesses and surrounding communities may reap socio-economic opportunities that may ultimately boost the economies of their local areas. The framework should guide VICs to remain effective and relevant by extending their role beyond their physical structure to include electronic, online, mobile, and smart technologies to enhance visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions, and enable them to access information at anytime and anywhere and throughout the travel process. In this way, VICs will become multifunctional information centres that respond to and address the needs of different stakeholders. The study also suggests several managerial implications and recommendations in implementing the framework to help VICs to remain relevant in meeting the changing needs of visitors, sharing good practices and improving the lives of communities and local tourism businesses in their surroundings, thereby boosting the local economies in which they operate.

1.9. DELINEATION OF THE STUDY

The study aims to examine tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. To achieve this, the study is delineated as follows:

- Government-owned VICs are the main focus of the study. In addition to their role of providing tourism information, government-owned VICs were established to contribute to socio-economic opportunities and to improve the lives of people in their vicinity. The emphasis on socio-economic opportunities is in line with the study's research objectives 4 and 5. The study does not consider the views of

private VICs, as their mandates do not emphasise the generation of socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.

- Facilities such as information kiosks or booths that do not have a human presence to provide local knowledge sourced from surrounding are not considered within the ambit of this research study.
- The respondents and participants in the study are limited to the following:
 - Visitors who had visited VICs during the twelve months prior to data collection, in order to allow them to recall the information and knowledge they received at VICs.
 - Local tourism businesses listed in VIC databases.
 - Surrounding communities in the proximity of VICs located in rural municipalities who are likely to experience the socio-economic impacts of the operation of VICs.

1.10 OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

Chapter 1 provides an introduction and background to the study, and formulates the problem statement, purpose statement, research objectives, and hypotheses. The methodology followed in carrying out the research study is then outlined, followed by the contribution that the study makes academically and to the tourism sector. The chapter ends by highlighting the boundaries that delineate the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the main constructs and discusses the theoretical perspective that has been adopted to guide the study. The concepts of information, knowledge, information and knowledge management (KM), information and knowledge exchange, and stakeholder relationships are discussed within the tourism context. The SET, and its application in knowledge-exchange behaviour, and the model of tourism information flows (Sheldon, 1997) are discussed to lay the theoretical foundation of the study.

Chapters 3 focuses on the importance of integrating information and knowledge in the travel process as a way to help visitors make informed travel decisions. Travel

behaviour patterns, the information that visitors search for, and the sources they use to search for information during trip planning, at a destination, and after their trips are discussed. This chapter also discusses visitors' experiences at visited VICs and destinations. In addition, the influence that visitors' memorable experiences and the information they received during their trip has on their behavioural intentions is discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 examines tourism information and knowledge provision and exchange in VICs as one of the most notable external information sources used in the travel process. The chapter provides an overview of VICs from a global perspective, highlighting tourism information and knowledge provision in VICs and the roles and functions of VICs and their staff. Based on the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed in chapters 2, 3, and 4, the chapter provides a conceptual framework that links the literature review chapters with the empirical phase of the study.

Chapter 5 outlines the research design and methodology applied in the study, states the strategy of enquiry, data collection, and selection procedures of the units of analysis, the data-collection instruments, the data capturing and analysis procedures, reliability and validity, the research ethics, the rigour required in the empirical process, and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 6 presents the findings from the qualitative component of the study. Responses from the semi-structured interviews conducted with VIC staff and from the focus group discussions held with the surrounding communities are discussed.

Chapters 7 and 8 present the results from the quantitative component of the study. The results from the survey conducted with local tourism businesses are discussed in chapter 7, while the results from the visitor questionnaires are discussed in chapter 8.

Chapter 9 provides an overall discussion of the findings and conclusions in relation to the objectives and hypotheses of the study. The perspectives of the different target populations are amalgamated in line with the proposed framework to guide tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. The chapter also identifies the

contribution that the study makes to the VIC literature and to the tourism sector, theoretically, practically, and managerially. The limitations of the study and directions for future research are also discussed.

1.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the study and provided its background, problem statement, purpose statement, research objectives and hypotheses, and methodology. Boundaries to delineate areas that are not addressed in the study are defined. The chapter also highlights the value and contribution that the study makes academically and to the tourism sector.

The next chapter provides a theoretical perspective to understand the main constructs examined in the study – namely, tourism information and knowledge exchange. The literature on the various ways in which the exchange takes place in the tourism sector, as well as the memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities that different stakeholders derive from this exchange, are examined.

CHAPTER 2: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Having introduced and provided some background on the study in chapter 1, this chapter provides a theoretical perspective on understanding the main construct to be examined in this study – namely, tourism information and knowledge exchange. More importantly, the various ways in which the exchange takes place in the tourism sector, as well as the memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities that different stakeholders derive from this exchange, are examined.

This chapter provides an overview of tourism from both global and South African perspectives, highlighting why it is regarded as a significant sector that contributes to the economies of many countries. The concept of information and its role in tourism, the characteristics of the tourism sector that makes it information-intensive, and typologies of tourism information are discussed in section 2.2, while information management and information exchange are discussed in sections 2.3 and 2.4 respectively. To locate information exchange in a tourism context, the tourism information exchange model developed by Sheldon (1997) is also discussed in section 2.4. The model is relevant to this study, given the various stakeholders that produce and receive information and the connections between them in the tourism sector.

Sections 2.5, 2.6, and 2.7 discuss the concepts of knowledge, knowledge management (KM), and knowledge exchange respectively. The different tourism stakeholders that are involved in knowledge exchange, and the approaches used to describe the relationships and exchanges among stakeholders, are discussed in section 2.8. The Social Exchange Theory (SET) as the theoretical underpinning of this study and its application in tourism is also discussed in that section. The conclusions derived from the literature reviewed in this chapter are presented in section 2.9.

2.2. INFORMATION IN TOURISM

In a globalised world characterised by changes in various aspects of society, such as business conditions, market liberalisation, information and communication technology, and information and knowledge are recognised as essential assets for organisations (Naik & Chandran, 2017). While numerous definitions are used, and the terms 'information' and 'knowledge' are often used interchangeably, they are in fact distinct but related. It therefore follows that, rather than focus on trying to define the terms precisely, it is important to discuss and understand the two terms in order to appreciate their value and importance in society, and in the tourism sector in particular (Jennex, 2017; Stodola, 2019).

2.2.1 The concept of information

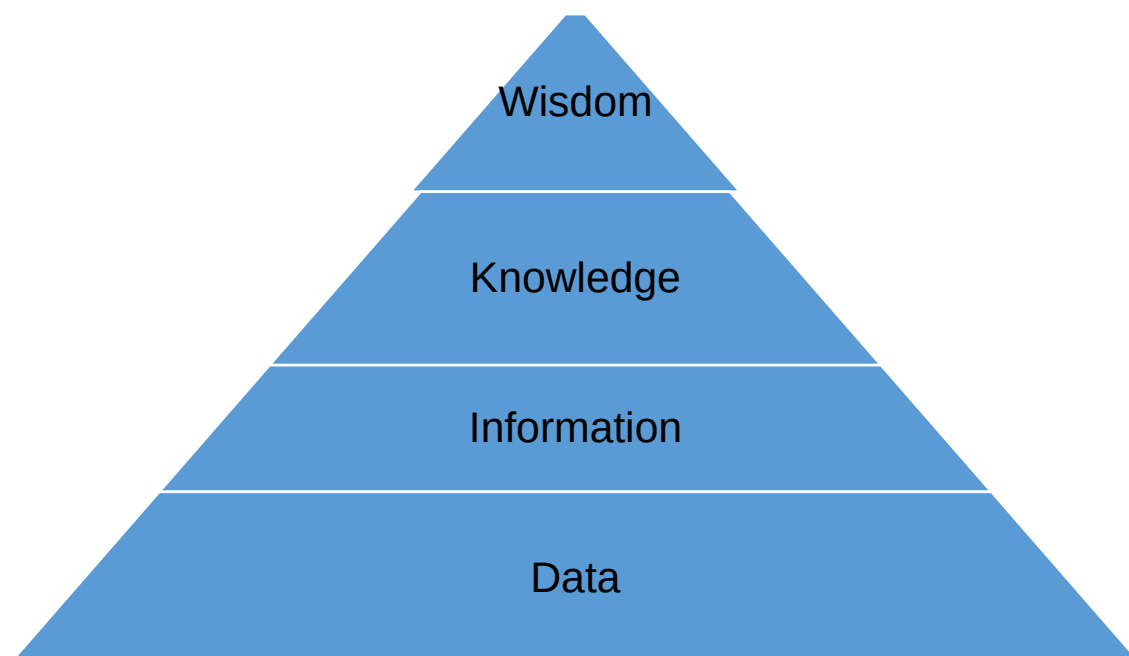
Information has always been of crucial importance to human development, and it forms the basis of all human interactions. Accordingly, it is considered a valuable resource because people need it to solve problems and make decisions affecting both the present and the future (Dorr, Walther & Eymann, 2013; Ngirigacha, Wasike & Gichuhi, 2019). Since the dawn of humankind, the creation and application of information in every sphere of human activity has contributed to the evolution of societies and to the economic welfare of people (Walker, 1992). The ability to acquire information, to organise it systematically into a framework of knowledge, and to pass on the accumulated knowledge and wisdom of society to our descendants, has been one of the major distinguishing features of humankind (Shillinglaw & Thomas, 1988).

The definitions of 'information' vary in different situations, between paradigms, but also within a single paradigm (Stodola, 2019). These differences are also evident in the context in which the term is used (Boon, 1992; Stodola, 2019). Ma (2012) argues that, although the term 'information' is often used to represent a variety of things, events, or expressions, it cannot be interpreted as such unless it is situated within a particular context and is understood meaningfully. The flexibility to contextualise the definition or meaning of 'information' makes it almost impossible to formulate any single and

universally acceptable definition of the term. As a result, there are many definitions without any being generally accepted (Bosančić, 2016; Ngirigacha, *et al.*, 2019; Stodola, 2019).

Information is often defined in terms of the traditional data-information-knowledge-wisdom (DIKW) pyramid frequently used to explore the nature of and relationship between these terms (Ackoff, 1989; Rowley, 2007; Zins, 2007). As shown in Figure 2.1 and as discussed below, the traditional knowledge pyramid reflects the relationships between the four elements.

Figure 2.1: The data-information-knowledge-wisdom (DIKW) hierarchy



Source: Rowley (2007:164)

Jennex (2017) summarises the elements of the DIKW pyramid as follows:

- Data are basic, discrete, and objective facts about something such as 'who', 'what', 'when', and 'where'.
- Information refers to data that are related to one another through a context that provides a useful perspective.

- Knowledge relates to information that provides insight into and understanding of something, and explains the 'how' and 'why' of something.
- Wisdom involves placing knowledge into a framework that allows the knowledge to be applied to different situations.

In the pyramid, data creates information, which creates knowledge, which in turn creates wisdom (Bosančić, 2016). In addition, the pyramid assumes that there is more data than information, more information than knowledge, and more knowledge than wisdom (Rowley, 2007).

In all its manifestations, verbal, printed, or technological, information has become a new resource of the modern economy (Stodola, 2019). Information has changed the space-time dimensions by transcending the need to transfer it personally (Tavares, Neves & Sawant, 2018). It has been used in different situations to describe different contexts – for example, as a commodity of commerce, an indicator of wealth and power, a basis for decision-making, or a source of entertainment (Walker, 1992). It is one of the most important resources that are needed to solve societal or organisational problems and to make decisions affecting the present and the future (Dorr *et al.*, 2013; Opoku, 2015; Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2017). Its accessibility and dissemination is considered an important basic building block that holds positive social and economic benefits for society (Olsson, 2014). These benefits include improved productivity, increased work opportunities, disseminated information and knowledge, and support for the development and improvement in the quality of life of populations (Giebel, 2013). As a vital resource, information plays important roles in the life of organisations. Its usefulness in organisations is expressed in the various strategic roles it plays in achieving organisational objectives and attaining a sustainable competitive advantage (Mensah & Adams, 2014; Opoku, 2015; Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2017). It provides relevant intelligence, and serves as a valuable business resource by providing knowledge that helps to reduce uncertainty in decision-making (Al-Mobaideen, Allahawiah & Basoni, 2013; Laudon & Laudon, 2015). It has value in the decision-making process in that it changes the probabilities attached to expected outcomes in decision-making (Laudon & Laudon, 2015). Consequently, it aids planning and

evaluation, while serving as a means of communication, motivation, and learning (Laudon & Laudon, 2015).

The transformational value of information is also seen in the movement from an environment of relative information scarcity to one of overwhelming abundance, in which immediate access to information is a key resource in areas as diverse as medicine, law, education, and government (Walker, 1992). The tourism sector is no exception. For the purposes of this study, information is regarded as data that are relevant, useful, and timely, and that are exchanged with stakeholders in a VIC context. As information means different things to different people, its daily use may also be regarded as ambivalent when applied in the tourism sector. The next section therefore discusses the role of information in the tourism sector.

2.2.2. Information in the tourism sector

Tourism is generally considered an information-intense sector (Antunes, Ramos & Sousa, 2018; Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; No & Kim, 2015; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010) since it plays an essential role in guiding both supply and demand (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, visitors require different types of information during the travel process (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010).

Benckendorff *et al.* (2014) identify several characteristics that differentiate tourism from other products, services, and experiences, and that makes the sector information-intensive. These characteristics are its heterogeneity, intangibility, perishability, inseparability, and the global nature of the sector (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014). These characteristics are described below.

- ***Heterogeneity***

Tourism products are heterogeneous, as they are supplied by numerous suppliers and organisations. A typical trip is complex, and often consists of numerous components

requiring visitors to interact with many different tourism-related organisations and agencies in sub-sectors such as accommodation and transportation (both private and public). Coordination and cooperation between these organisations and agencies is necessary to make the visitors' planning and experience seamless. Such an experience requires the provision of efficient, accurate, and timely information flows to bind together the multifaceted components of a trip (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014).

- ***Intangibility***

In contrast to physical products in other sectors, tourism products cannot be directly seen, felt, heard, tested, or controlled in advance (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; Chan & Lee, 2015). Thus visitors require detailed information about the destination or experience in order to compensate for the lack of tangibility. In addition, information serves to reduce the risk associated with travel, especially for visitors who know very little about destinations they would like to visit (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; Chan & Lee, 2015; No & Kim, 2015).

- ***Perishability***

Most tourism products, including accommodation, flight tickets, and tickets to attractions, are time-sensitive because they can easily expire if they are not sold within a particular period. For example, a seat on a flight – and the revenue from selling it – expires if it is not sold, and it cannot be sold in the future (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; Chan & Lee, 2015). As a result, information is necessary to make potential tourists aware of such business services to help them avoid possible penalties from not using a pre-booked service.

- ***Inseparability***

Tourism consumption is often inseparable from experience production. Unlike goods that may be purchased and consumed away from where they are purchased, the production and the consumption of the experience in tourism occur simultaneously in the same place (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; No & Kim, 2015). Thus information is

important to help visitors make decisions on the selection of tourism products and services that will result in memorable experiences.

- ***Global nature***

The tourism sector is, by its very nature, global: visitors require different types of information to be available worldwide during their entire trip. Information on issues such as border controls, visa and passport regulations, customs regulations, arrival and departure taxes, currency controls, and health regulations such as immunisation controls is needed during travel. Visitors also require information on such diverse topics as cultural practices, driving regulations, and language translations. The global nature of information makes tourism an information-intensive sector (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014).

While the characteristics discussed above reveal the information intensiveness of the tourism sector, they may become obstacles when visitors have to make decisions related to tourism. This is because, for visitors, making a decision and converting it into actions are separate events (No & Kim, 2015). This gap can be overcome by providing detailed, relevant, valuable, accessible, and timely information. Provision of such information may help to deal with the uncertainty that visitors may experience during their travel (Jordan, Norman & Vogt, 2013; Chan & Lee, 2015), thus ensuring visitors' satisfaction and loyalty (Minghetti & Celotto, 2013).

Benckendorff *et al.* (2014) mention that, in addition to being voluminous, tourism information is diverse in nature, mainly because it is produced by different stakeholders, in both public and private sectors, in order to meet the needs of a wide range of visitors. Benckendorff *et al.* (2014) categorise these stakeholders and their information needs as follows:

- Visitors require information on tourism products and services such as destinations, accommodation, transport, activities, facilities, availability, prices, border controls, geography, and climate. In addition, visitors require information to help them make informed travel decisions and convince them whether to return

or recommend the destinations they had visited to other potential visitors (Coromina & Camprubí, 2016; Ho *et al.*, 2012; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Teymouri, 2012). The information is also essential to enhance the quality of the trip and experience (Coromina & Camprubí, 2016; Ho *et al.*, 2012).

- Intermediaries such as travel agents need information about visitor travel trends, destinations, transport, activities, facilities, availability prices, border controls, geography and climate, and other suppliers and competitors.
- Suppliers such as local tourism businesses require information about visitor needs and behaviour, intermediaries and competitors.
- Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) require information about trends in the sector, the size and nature of tourism flows, marketing, impacts, policies, planning, and development. Ortega *et al.* (2014) suggest that, to influence visitors' behaviours, tourism stakeholders should participate actively in the dissemination of visitor information, with DMOs, Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs), and VICs taking the lead to coordinate and provide tourism information that is best suited to meet the interests and needs of visitors in an efficient, easy, and convenient way (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014).

It is important, however, to point out that tourism's stakeholders should not be limited to providing information to visitors when they arrive at destinations, but should work together to design and disseminate information that visitors can access throughout their trips. In order for information to be useful and meet the needs of different stakeholders in tourism, it must be detailed, accurate, relevant, reliable, consistent, accessible, and timely (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010). These features of information may be achieved through effective information management (Dorr *et al.*, 2013). Managing information is therefore a key issue to achieve organisational goals and sustain a competitive advantage.

2.3. INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Ravi (2011) regards information management as a continuous cycle of closely related activities such as the identification of information needs, acquisition and creation of

information, analysis and interpretation of information, organisation and storage of information, information access and dissemination, and information use. Similarly, Ngirigacha *et al.* (2019) consider information management as a cycle of organisational activities, from the acquisition of information from one or more sources, through the custodianship and the distribution of that information to those who need it, and ultimately to its archiving. Carrying out organisational activities involves various stakeholders: first, those responsible for assuring the quality, accessibility, and utility of the acquired information; second, those responsible for its safe storage or disposal; and last, those who need it for decision-making (Ngirigacha *et al.*, 2019).

Information management seeks to provide accurate, timely, and complete information at the right time for effective decision-making related to the management and operation of an organisation and the achievement of organisational objectives (Opoku, 2015; Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2017). Effectively managing information and using strategies and policies that support and guide information management practices is critical to helping organisations to maximise their business performance and minimise their exposure to competitive and reputational risks (Hausmanna, Williams, Hardy & Schubert, 2014; Mensah & Adams, 2014). In this regard, Ngirigacha *et al.* (2019) found that the key effects of information management practices entail the advancement of operations and service delivery, improved efficiency owing to reduced uncertainties, and time conservation. The various definitions and discussions of information management show that it involves the effective and efficient creation, storage, processing, and dissemination of information in order to support organisational activities, operations, and decision-making. To achieve this, organisations use various systems to manage information.

An information management system facilitates managerial functioning, and is an important input at every level in the organisation for decision-making, planning, organising, implementing, and monitoring and controlling (Ngirigacha *et al.*, 2019). It plays an important role in helping organisations to provide services faster and to market these services more easily and accurately. Furthermore, it enables the exchange of experiences among staff, and between staff and external stakeholders, it enhances organisational performance, and it sustains the organisation's competitive

advantage. The capabilities that an information management system has, including its content, perceived ease of use, and usefulness, render it a valuable system to manage and exchange information (Ngirigacha *et al.*, 2019).

According to Ngirigacha *et al.* (2019), an information management system may be manual or computerised. A manual information system does not use any computerised devices, but uses human capabilities and other equipment and methods of records-keeping such as files, boxes, or filing cabinets. It is less expensive to set up, does not require technical expertise, and is associated with the easier correction of entries and less corrupted data and data loss (Ngirigacha *et al.*, 2019). These systems, however, have some pitfalls. Laudon and Laudon (2015) point to disadvantages such as inaccurate data and information handling, limited capacity, and the slow pace of information processing and distribution, all of which pose challenges to organisations. Other challenges include data losses and higher costs (Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2017).

With the proliferation of and emerging trends in ICTs, the types of information, and the ways in which information is managed, have changed, and organisations use different approaches to manage it effectively (Owiti, 2011). In this regard, computerised information systems that use a combination of software and hardware to record, store, analyse, and retrieve information are used to provide and manage the information that organisations need (Laudon & Laudon, 2015; Ravi, 2011). Such a system has advantages such as faster data processing and information retrieval, improved data accuracy, improved security of information, reduced data duplication, an improved backup system, easy access to information, and reduced managerial and human costs (Laudon & Laudon, 2015; Ngirigacha *et al.*, 2019). According to Opoku and Enu-Kwesi (2017), computerised systems are more efficient in guarding against data losses, and are less expensive to maintain. Some of the challenges associated with computerised information systems include being expensive to set up and configure, the prevalence of cybercrime, and the fact that they may not be accessible to small companies (Macevičiūtė & Wilson, 2002).

Despite the advantages associated with computerised information systems, Opoku and Enu-Kwesi (2017) found that, while the majority of Ghanaian organisations in their

study had databases as part of their information management practices, a large proportion used the manual approach to manage their information. This shows that some organisations in developing countries still lag behind in the uptake of technology, and of computerised information management systems in particular. Opoku and Enu-Kwesi (2017) maintain, however, that it is advisable for organisations to consider transforming their systems from the manual approach to computerised systems. Ngirigacha *et al.* (2019), on the other hand, suggest that organisations maintain some sort of hybrid system that would allow for the use of parallel or complementary manual and computerised systems. These changes therefore require organisations to consider exposing their staff to training courses that will empower them to become aware of newer computer systems they may use to manage information effectively and at a faster pace, thus placing the organisation at a competitive advantage (Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2017).

For effective information management, Opoku (2015) emphasises the following as strategic areas that organisations should consider:

- Develop policies and strategies that are in line with organisational goals;
- Adopt appropriate technologies; and
- Mobilise support from top-level management.

Opoku (2015) argues that a failure to consider these strategic areas may affect an organisation's ability to make strategic decisions, meet its goals, and sustain competitive advantage.

In tourism, the effective management of information is critical to meeting visitors' needs and enhancing their experiences in areas they visit. Providing visitors with accurate and relevant information about tourism products is considered one of the best ways to encourage and increase the number of visitors to destinations (Almaimoni *et al.*, 2018). With the availability of various online platforms, including the Internet, social media, and mobile technology, to disseminate and share information, visitors can upload and search for relevant travel information on tourism products (Almaimoni *et al.*, 2018). However, given the vast amount of information available on the Internet,

visitors often find it difficult to decide which information, among the vast range of available options, is relevant (Tanuja & Tulasi, 2019). This challenge has led to the development of mechanisms that provide quick access to relevant content in order to help visitors make travel decisions. Accordingly, artificial Intelligence algorithms and web technologies are used to implement tourism information systems and travel recommender systems in order to assist visitors in the search for relevant information (Stalidis, Karapistolis & Vafeiadis, 2015; Shah, Rami & Shaikh, 2017). These technologies help visitors to filter out and narrow down information of interest related to destinations, accommodation, transportation, shopping, food, festivals, and other attractions. In this way, these technologies provide visitors with possible travel suggestions based on their needs and the views and/or ratings of other visitors (Tanuja & Tulasi, 2019). A detailed discussion of online technologies, including smart technologies used to disseminate and share information and to help visitors to make informed travel decisions, is provided in the next chapter (section 3.3.3). With information and knowledge exchange being a critical aspect examined in this study, the next section focuses on information exchange – a term that is used interchangeably with ‘information sharing’. A model of tourism information exchange (Sheldon, 1997) is also discussed to locate information exchange within a tourism context. Knowledge exchange is discussed in section 2.7.

2.4. INFORMATION EXCHANGE

The terms ‘information exchange’ and ‘information sharing’ are often used interchangeably (Savolainen, 2017). However, the term ‘information sharing’ has been used to refer to a range of collaborative information giving and receiving activities (Pilerot & Limberg, 2011). It is also used to refer to the phenomenon of exchanging (Burnett, 2000; Hersberger, 2003). With the focus of this study being on information and knowledge exchange, it uses the terms ‘information sharing’ and ‘information exchange’ interchangeably.

Information sharing is identified as a transformational phenomenon that deals with the flow of data and information within or across organisations (Žabkar & Arslanagić-Kalajdžić, 2014). From a technical perspective, information sharing enables different

systems to exchange data and information that the recipient and the receiver may further exploit to generate some form of operational value (Wong, Lai, Cheng & Lun, 2015; Žabkar & Arslanagić-Kalajdžić, 2014). For Tong and Crosno (2015), information sharing leads to positive outcomes, while withholding information often results in negative outcomes.

At an organisational level, information sharing leads to a positive organisational culture (Singh & Soltani, 2010) and informed organisational decision-making (Ahmad & Huvila, 2019; Maras, 2017). However, if not applied effectively, it may lead to power relations and a lack of trust, particularly with external stakeholders (Tong & Crosno, 2015). With the focus of the study being on VICs operating in the public sector, information sharing in the public sector is a value-rendering process that influences the planning and deployment of public services (Clark, Brudney & Jang, 2013). It serves as a cohesive mechanism for integrating information from different and fragmented systems, and for making the delivery of services a well-planned and coordinated process across multiple organisations and external partners (Cavallo *et al.*, 2014; Wu, Chuang & Hsu, 2014). It also enables the exchange of ideas and resources in pursuing governments' effectiveness and citizens' satisfaction (Aldama-Nalda & Gil-Garcia, 2011).

Gil-Garcia, Pardo and De Tuya (2019) assert that information sharing enables the following:

- Effective allocation of funds for high-priority and high-demand services.
- Achievement of organisational efficiencies that include savings on time resources, capital, and operational expenses.
- Creation of an information-sharing infrastructure that allows the development of a centralised and integrated system with accurate and ready-to-use data.
- Better prioritisation of requests and understanding of the needs of citizens, and deploying them in a timely manner.
- Development of policies and programmes with well-defined performance and socio-economic indicators targeted at specific sectors of the population, such as

single mothers, low-income families, and school-age children, based on characteristics such as need, demographics, and location.

- Provision of feedback on the quality of services that citizens receive and services that organisations provide in order to determine future actions and improvements.

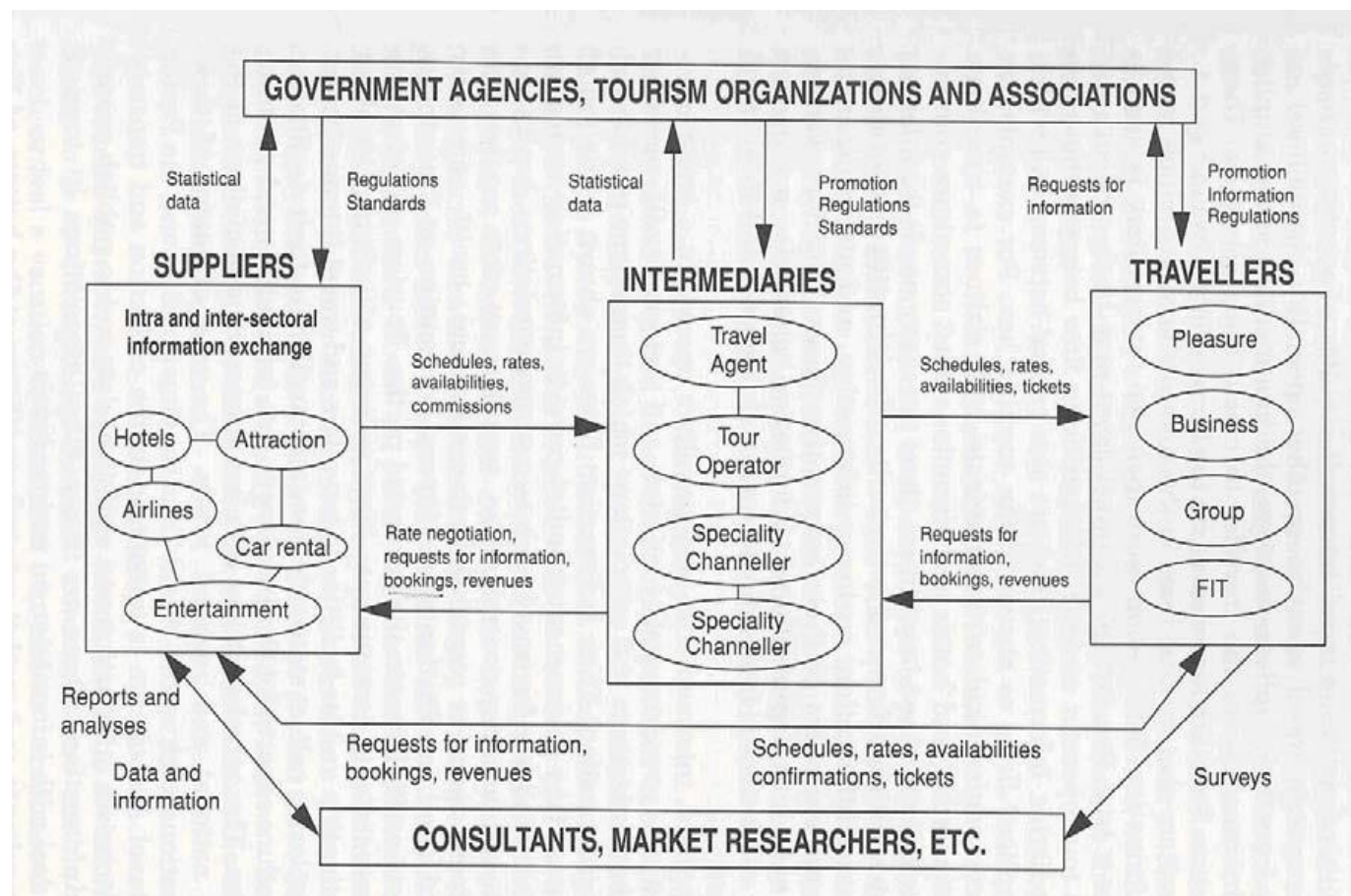
Several challenges – such as a lack of technical skills, limited financial resources, low-quality data, data privacy, and technology limitations, including the use of multiple systems and data structures from diverse agencies – may affect the establishment of an information sharing structure. In addition, political ideologies and stakeholder interests may compound these challenges, and thus affect the coordination of information sharing with various stakeholders such as local businesses and surrounding communities (Alhusban & Adams, 2015; Gil-Garcia, Chun & Janssen, 2009). In order to deal with these challenges, Gil-Garcia *et al.* (2019) suggest that public sector organisations should undertake the following:

- Establish a collaborative and centralised structure comprising committed and engaged high-ranking officials who could champion and invest their time and their political capital in implementing an information sharing infrastructure.
- Set up appropriate collaboration agreements between public agencies and external partners.
- Standardise data from different organisations prior to integrating the data in a single database.

Effective information exchange therefore requires organisations in the public sector to realise that cooperation, collaboration, and value creation are key elements in fulfilling their missions and goals (Wu *et al.*, 2014) and promoting citizen participation (Figlio, Hamersma & Roth, 2015). Moreover, information exchange becomes important when collaborating organisations are able to identify the potential benefits and the target audiences who would benefit from such collaboration (Cavallo *et al.*, 2014). These benefits may include improved quality of services and increased citizen participation (Clark *et al.*, 2013; Cledou, 2014). Achieving these benefits, however, requires support and commitment from organisational managers.

To locate information exchange in a tourism context, the model of tourism information exchange developed by Sheldon (1997) in Figure 2.2 below was found to be relevant to this study, even though it focuses only on information. The model identifies various stakeholders that produce and receive information, and the connections between them, in the tourism sector. As shown in the model, information flows between suppliers, travel intermediaries, and visitors.

Figure 2.2: Tourism information exchange model



Source: Sheldon (1997:3)

The model shows that different suppliers (hotels, attractions, airlines, car rental companies, and entertainment agencies) provide intermediaries (e.g. travel agents, tour operators, or corporate travel agencies) with information that visitors seek, such as schedules, rates, availabilities, and commissions. In turn, the intermediaries customise the information and provide it to travellers. Similarly, travellers request

information from intermediaries, which they request in turn from suppliers to assist visitors in making bookings and reservations (Sheldon, 1997).

The information flow between and among suppliers, travel intermediaries, and travellers is shown in the model by horizontal arrows, while the vertical lines in the intermediary box represent the information flow when more than one intermediary is used to organise a trip. As shown in the suppliers' box, information also flows between suppliers. In addition, information such as accounting and customer and marketing information flows within an organisation and between its offices in different locations. Therefore, intra- and inter-organisational information channels are necessary within and between international, national, regional, and local information suppliers (Sheldon, 1997).

The model also takes into account the broader tourism environment, incorporating government agencies and tourism organisations and associations, both national and international, that are both suppliers and consumers of information. For example, many governmental bodies provide information on regulations and standards for travel, such as customs regulations, health regulations, and currency controls. The bodies also regulate suppliers requiring, for example, business licences, health and safety standards, and certification of employees. As a result, information on these topics flows between relevant parties (Sheldon, 1997).

The model completes the feedback loop by demonstrating the need for information to flow from visitors back to suppliers. The information may take the form of research information, such as visitor travel patterns and needs, as well as information to facilitate services such as bookings and reservations. For example, various international tourism organisations such as the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTCC) generate and communicate diverse information about destinations. These organisations also collect statistical data on visitors' travel patterns and behaviours, and produce reports for the sector to use for analysis and planning purposes. The consultants and market researchers shown at the bottom of the model are also important links in the tourism information flow: they assist suppliers in organising corporate and visitor data into

meaningful reports and analysis, and survey travellers to obtain market information. This information may also be supplied to government agencies (Sheldon, 1997).

Sheldon's (1997) model demonstrates the information intensity of the tourism sector owing to the many and varied sources and types of information exchanged between different stakeholders. Although this model is silent on the flow of knowledge between and among the different stakeholders, it is worth considering. Moreover, the model does not consider the benefits and opportunities that stakeholders may receive from exchanging information. This gap is one that this study hopes to fill, while at the same time extending the body of knowledge on how information and knowledge exchanged between and among different stakeholders may contribute to memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. Since this research is conducted in the VIC context, a VIC information exchange model developed by Deery *et al.* (2007) that is more applicable to this research – because it is specifically customised for application within VICs – will be discussed in chapter 4.

The provision of knowledge, however, is considered to be more than the provision of information. It is this knowledge that visitors require to make travel-related decisions because it involves the use of competency, expertise, and experience to help solve problems, develop new ideas, or implement procedures (Cooper, 2018; Kim & Lee, 2013). The next section discusses the concept of knowledge and its management, emphasising knowledge exchange as a critical component of Knowledge Management (KM).

2.5. KNOWLEDGE

It was not until the 1990s that the knowledge-based economy emerged. This economy recognised that knowledge is more than just information: it is one of the most critical and strategic sources of competitive advantage and organisational success (Khan, 2014; Boikanyo, Lotriet & Buys, 2016; Naik & Chandran, 2017; Omotayo, 2015). Knowledge is seen to have replaced capital, land, labour, and other tangible resources

as a source of competitive advantage (Kebede, 2010). The foundation of industrialised economies has shifted from natural resources to intellectual assets. Organisations no longer compete solely based on financial capital and strength; instead, knowledge is the new competitive advantage in business. In fact, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate is now determined by, among other factors, the quantum and quality of knowledge stock harnessed and applied in the production process in sectors of the economy (Naik & Chandran, 2017; Omotayo, 2015).

In such a knowledge-based economy, companies are required to innovate and to develop new techniques to improve the quality and functionality of products, reduce costs, and meet the demands of customers, including visitors. The effective management of human capital is important to ensure that workers continue to create the right value for the economy (Omotayo, 2015). It is on this basis that Nonaka (1994) argued that successful companies would be those that are able to create and disseminate knowledge rapidly and then transfer this knowledge into their new products.

2.5.1 The concept of knowledge

Similar to the term 'information', there is no single universally accepted definition of the term 'knowledge'. However, it generally refers to the application of competency and experience to make information useable for effective decision-making and action (Cooper, 2018). According to Micić (2015), knowledge is the most valuable resource of an organisation – a factor of vitality, innovation, and efficiency. It is considered to be the only resource that is not diminished by sharing; in fact, using and sharing it enables expansion of an organisation's overall knowledge.

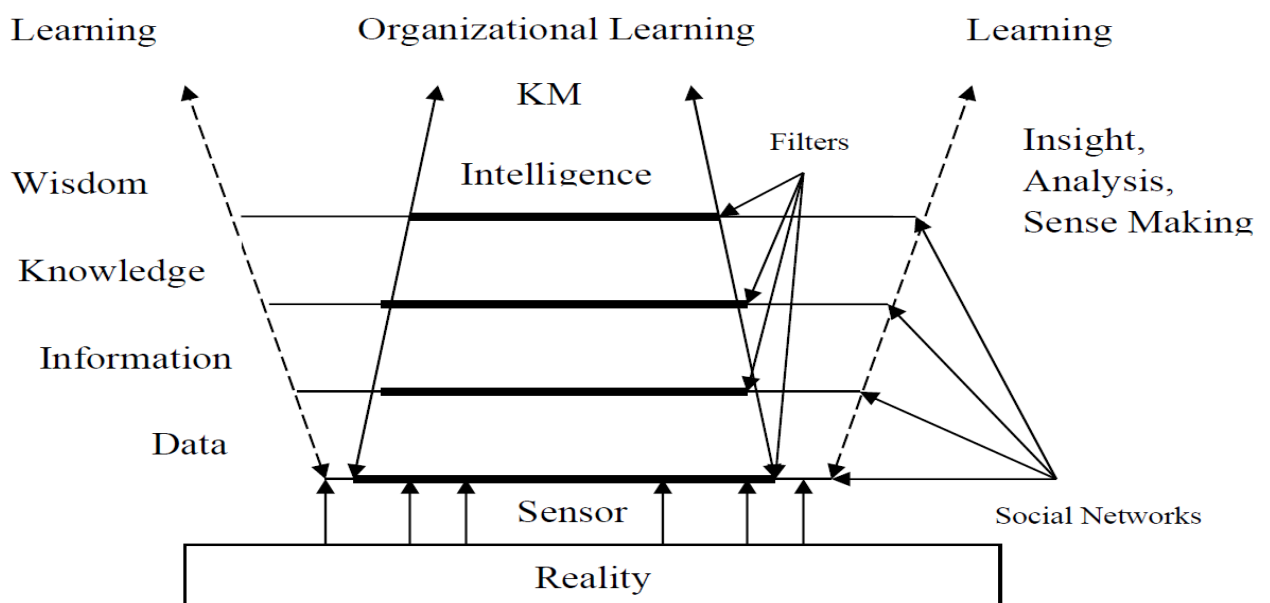
Skyrme (2011) emphasises the importance of knowledge as follows:

- Competition and globalisation: many organisations depend on knowledge for the creation of strategic advantage and competitiveness.
- Knowledge can lead to a premium price in the market: applied expertise can improve the value and hence the price of services and products.

- Downsizing and restructuring: without effective means and procedures to collect the knowledge of experienced employees, organisations make mistakes and end up paying for knowledge that was once readily available.
- Sharing of best practices: organisations can save costs by capturing the knowledge from their best performers and using it in the same conditions elsewhere.
- Successful innovation: organisations using KM procedures can create new products and services quicker and better through knowledge networking.

Although the term 'knowledge' is often used interchangeably with 'information', the DIKW pyramid (Figure 2.1) shows that the two terms are different but related. As shown in the figure, the knowledge layer is located above the information layer, indicating that information creates knowledge (Bosančić, 2016). Jennex and Bartczak (2013) revised the knowledge pyramid to include learning, filtering, and transformation processes and technologies. Owing to the effect of rapid technological advancement on societal and organisational decision-making, Jennex (2017) further revised the pyramid (Figure 2.3) to include KM, analytics, big data, the Internet of Things, and various intelligence initiatives such as business intelligence and customer intelligence.

Figure 2.3: The revised knowledge–knowledge management pyramid



Source: Jannex (2017:22)

The revised knowledge pyramid reflects the way in which technological innovation is radically addressing societal and organisational needs for more data and actionable intelligence. The need for evidence-based decision-making rather than intuitive decision-making is driving the creation and adoption of technologies that gather and analyse observations of reality faster and in greater amounts than humans can process. The revised knowledge pyramid provides value to understand, first, how to manage data and technologies; second, which technologies to use; and third, what data, information, knowledge, and actionable intelligence is needed for decision-making. Through the relationships between technologies and decision support artefacts (big data, data, information, knowledge, intelligence), the knowledge pyramid provides a model that helps to create a strategy for selecting and managing technologies and decision support artefacts (Jannex, 2017). For visitors, the knowledge pyramid is important to support the travel planning and decisions process owing to the wide range of information that is available through social networking service channels such as Facebook and Twitter (Jannex, 2017).

2.5.2. Dimensions of knowledge

Knowledge is most commonly categorised as existing in two dimensions: explicit or tacit (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Sharma & Dey, 2018). ‘Explicit knowledge’ refers to knowledge that is set out in a tangible form. It is directly taught, and can be codified, making it easy to understand and transmit in formal and systematic language. It is transferable and straightforward to codify and communicate (Cooper, 2018). Thus it is knowledge that is recorded as information in some media such as drawings, writings, documents, reports, articles, manuals, patents, pictures, images, video, sound, and in records of the past such as libraries, archives, software, and databases (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009). In organisations, explicit knowledge allows for ease of communication internally and externally. In the tourism context, it represents the knowledge capital of tourism organisations, as it provides a framework for managing different types of knowledge (Cooper, 2018).

Tacit (or implicit) knowledge refers to knowledge that exists in a person's mind (Nonaka & Von Krogh, 2009; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). It is generally informal, intangible, and intuitive, and is often acquired over time through a person's actions, experiments, and experiences (Sharma & Dey, 2018). Owing to its subjective nature, tacit knowledge is difficult to codify, digitise, and communicate (Cooper, 2018). It is not directly taught but is learned, shared, and exchanged through direct and face-to-face interactions (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Von Krogh, 2009). In tourism, tacit knowledge may be seen in the knowledge that is passed on from an experienced tour operator about how to plan and assemble tours, or from a tourist guide or storyteller, thanks to their knowledge of local products. Because of its uniqueness and difficulty to duplicate, tacit knowledge forms the basis of an organisation's competitive advantage and decision-making process.

Both tacit and implicit knowledge have been widely adopted as the basis for discussing KM (Edwards, Cheng, Wong, Zhang & Wu, 2016).

2.6. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Despite the categorisation of knowledge, it is important that it be made available, managed, and shared in order to meet the needs of individuals in an organisation. To exploit knowledge more efficiently, organisations need to identify ways to gain, maintain, and leverage knowledge in order to achieve higher levels of success (Omotayo, 2015). Furthermore, the ability to create, use, and manage knowledge, and so to generate a competitive advantage, is essential for organisational effectiveness, performance, survival, and sustainability (Omotayo, 2015).

KM is identified as a framework for designing strategies, structures, and processes that an organisation can use to learn and create economic and social value for its customers and community (Omotayo, 2015). According to Sharafuddin (2017), KM is the process of converting data into the right information and delivering it to the right person at the right time. It is the process of putting information into action in ways that will improve a company's performance. Omotayo (2015) defines KM as a systematic

management process of making use of, collecting, arranging, and disseminating knowledge to create business value and gain a competitive advantage. Perry and Bernard (2016) sum it up as a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, maintaining, and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously uncaptured expertise and experience from individual workers (Meihami & Meihami, 2014).

Teng and Song (2011) point out that the importance of KM is no longer restricted to knowledge-intensive organisations in high-tech industries, but to all sectors of the economy. This shows that KM is also beneficial to other sectors, be they educational, banking, telecommunications, production, manufacturing, or even the public sector (Omotayo, 2015). The tourism sector is no exception. Cooper (2018:3) emphasises that "KM is about applying the knowledge assets available to a tourism organisation to create competitive advantage". Therefore, KM facilitates access to markets, enhances decision-making, and streamlines organisational operations. It can also leverage employees' intellectual capital, facilitate individual learning, help to retain employees, and ensure that knowledge is captured when individuals leave an organisation (Cooper, 2018). Organisations therefore need a good capacity to retain, develop, organise, and use their employees' capabilities in order to remain at the forefront and to have an edge over their competitors (Omotayo, 2015).

KM is made up of initiatives, processes, strategies, and systems that sustain and improve the storage, evaluation, distribution, refinement, and creation of knowledge (Boikanyo *et al.*, 2016). To this end, Desouza and Paquette (2011) identifies four key components as being critical to leverage and manage knowledge effectively: knowledge, people, processes, and technology (KP2T) (Desouza & Paquette, 2011).

- Knowledge refers to insights, understandings, and practical expertise that people possess. It is the fundamental resource that allows people to function intelligently (Omotayo, 2015). It is an invisible or intangible asset whose acquisition involves complex cognitive processes of perception, learning, communication, association, and reasoning (Epetimehin & Ekundayo, 2011).

- People: KM begins with, revolves around, and ends with people as they create the knowledge, consume it, and nurture the environment and culture of knowledge sharing in an organisation.
- Process is the mechanical and logical artefacts that guide how work is conducted and accomplished; and making knowledge sharing part of the daily work of employees.
- Technology is a critical enabler and platform for employees to network and share knowledge from and/or to any part of the world.

To provide value to an organisation, these components must be executed; and knowledge in particular must be easily accessible and shared with individuals (Omotayo, 2015). As Yusof, Zakaria, Zainol and Ananthan (2018) assert, to be successful, knowledge must exist in a format that enables it to be exchanged. This therefore makes knowledge sharing one of the main components – and an important goal – of effective KM (Gao & Bernard, 2018). This aspect of KM is critical to this research if we are to understand the opportunities that might result from knowledge exchange.

2.7. KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

The term ‘knowledge sharing’ is used interchangeably with the term ‘knowledge exchange’ because both encompass knowledge giving and knowledge seeking (Kim & Lee, 2013; Wang & Noe, 2010; Zheng, 2017). With the focus of this study being on obtaining and supplying information and knowledge, the terms ‘knowledge sharing’ and ‘knowledge exchange’ are used interchangeably.

Ma and Chan (2014:52) define knowledge sharing as “the communication of knowledge from a source in such a way that it is learned and applied by the recipient”. Similarly, Wang and Noe (2010:117) suggest that knowledge sharing refers to “the provision of task information and know-how to help others and to collaborate with others to solve problems, develop new ideas, or implement policies and procedures”. It therefore occurs when individuals convey knowledge or acquire it from others.

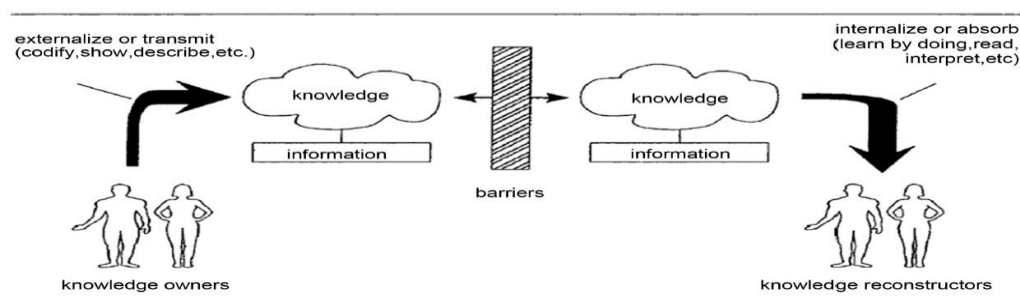
In this study, information and knowledge exchange is used interchangeably with information and knowledge exchange, and conceptualised as a process that involves the request for and supply of information and knowledge between the various stakeholders in VICs.

Zheng (2017) summarises the basic characteristics of knowledge sharing as follows:

- Knowledge sharing is an individual behaviour.
- Knowledge sharing is a voluntary, proactive, and behavioural awareness activity.
- Knowledge sharing is controlled by environmental systems or procedures, such as legal and ethical standards and codes of conduct.
- The result of knowledge sharing is jointly occupied by two or more individuals.

According to Deloitte (2015), knowledge sharing leads to competitive advantage and adds real customer value. As Rao, Yang and Yang (2018) assert, knowledge sharing can reduce the cost and time of information transfer, improve the timeliness of decision-making, and promote the occurrence of knowledge innovation. On this basis, knowledge sharing can promote the innovation of tourism organisations to gain competitive advantage. Effective knowledge sharing behaviour can also lay the foundation for excellent customer relationship management and internal revenue management, and become an important source of competitive advantage for an organisation (Rao *et al.*, 2018). However, as shown in Figure 2.4, knowledge sharing may be hindered by obstacles such as barriers of time and space or social, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual differences.

Figure 2.4: A simple model of knowledge sharing

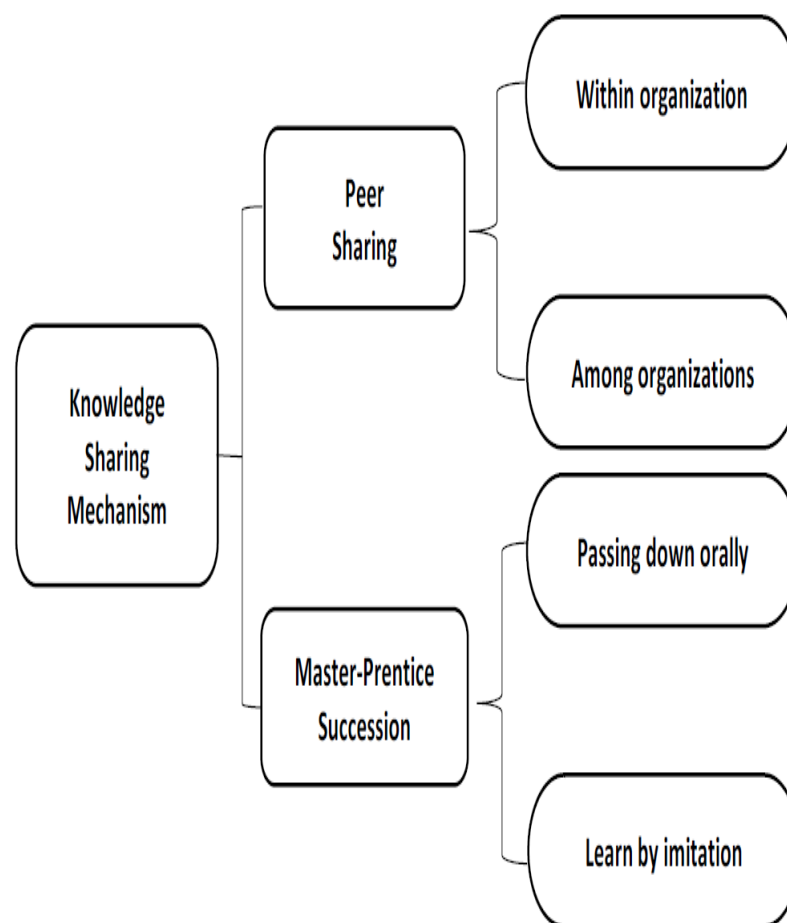


Source: Hendriks (1999:93)

In tourism, knowledge sharing is regarded as an important factor that stimulates the innovation and development of the tourism sector (Rao *et al.*, 2018). It has become an essential factor influencing organisational learning and service innovation, which further produces a competitive edge for tourism organisations. From a tourism perspective, knowledge sharing is the process through which experience, information, skills, and expertise are exchanged, shared, and transferred among members of an organisation and between members and stakeholders (Kim & Lee, 2013).

According to Rao *et al.* (2018), knowledge sharing in tourism organisations occurs in two ways: peer sharing and master–prentice succession. The two mechanisms are shown in Figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5: Patterns of knowledge sharing mechanism in tourism



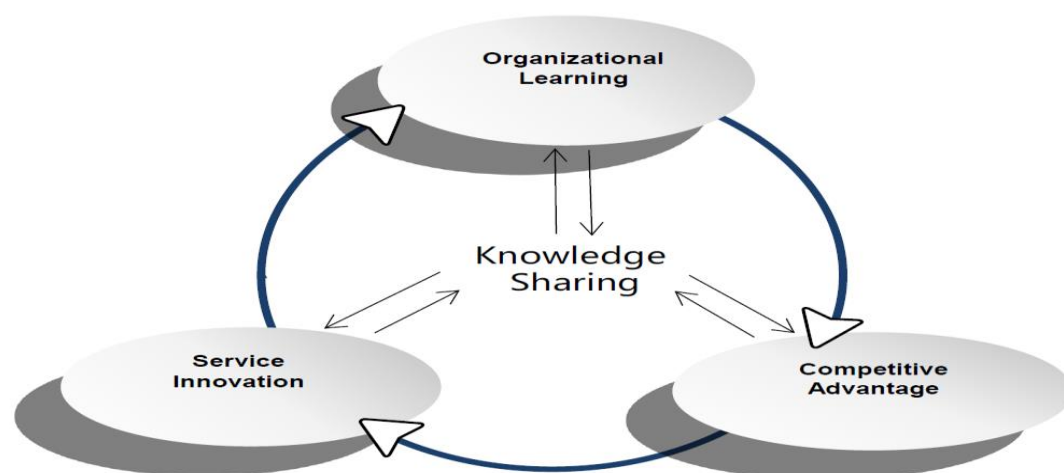
Source: Rao *et al.* (2018:513)

The first mechanism involves the peer sharing of knowledge that occurs inside an organisation. During this sharing process, information and skills are transmitted among co-equals during the daily communication between employees (Kyoungjoo, 2016). Such knowledge sharing may happen in a formal or an informal way. Formal knowledge sharing is mostly led by management, and includes organised experience sharing sessions or seminars, while informal knowledge sharing is flexible and diverse, and takes place in regular gatherings or office chats (Rao *et al.*, 2018). Peer knowledge sharing may also occur horizontally and vertically in an organisation. Horizontally, tourism organisations share visitor customer information and market trends with each other in order to build up an efficient customer-relationship management system; while vertically, tourism enterprises can strengthen their industrial competitiveness by sharing knowledge with upstream and downstream partners (Rao *et al.*, 2018).

The second mechanism of knowledge sharing is through master–prentice succession. This involves staff sharing and transferring experience and expertise with new staff through hands-on operation, explanation, and imitation (Rao *et al.*, 2018).

To address the mechanisms of knowledge sharing in tourism organisations, Rao *et al.* (2018) developed a logical framework that emphasises the three elements highlighted in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6: Knowledge sharing - Closed loop



Source: Rao *et al.* (2018:522)

- **Organisational learning**

Knowledge sharing is an important part of an organisational learning mechanism. It is not only a process of creating, retaining, and transferring knowledge within an organisation, but also a process of helping employees to internalise knowledge. Through knowledge sharing, tourism organisations can create a learning atmosphere and the free movement of knowledge, thereby enhancing the learning efficiency of employees and improving business service levels (Rao *et al.*, 2018).

- **Service innovation**

Knowledge sharing enables tourism organisations to have a stronger service innovation ability and to achieve performance improvement. Through knowledge sharing, employees can be exposed to knowledge in different fields that can stimulate their innovative behaviours. Such innovation may lead to new operational methods and techniques that employees can use to develop new products in order to improve service quality and visitor satisfaction (Rao *et al.*, 2018).

- **Competitive advantage**

Competitive advantage refers to the ability gained through attributes and resources to perform at a higher level than others in the same industry or market. Knowledge sharing can enhance the convenience of knowledge transfer, and thus provide organisations with a competitive advantage. Through knowledge sharing and innovation, organisations can acquire high-value returns at low cost. Furthermore, knowledge sharing can encourage the transfer of employee experience and customer information, thus enabling better customer management and satisfaction (Rao *et al.*, 2018).

With the wide proliferation of online social networks, knowledge sharing that use these networks has become a crucial aspect of the generation of competitive advantage. It has become a source of information to reduce uncertainty, influence tourism decision-making, and guide the purchase of travel-related products and services (Chiappa &

Baggio, 2015; Nezakati, Amidi, Yah, Moghadas, Aziz & Sohrabinezhadtalemi, 2015). In this way, visitors are no longer just passive readers but rather active contributors in creating, searching, organising, and commenting on their travel experience, as well as building online travel communities to share travel information and knowledge (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Kim, Joun, Choe & Schroeder, 2019; Neuhofer *et al.*, 2015; Rihova, Buhalis, Gouthro & Moital, 2018).

Community stakeholders such as local tourism businesses and community members also participate in knowledge sharing structures, serving as travel experts and ambassadors of destinations to co-produce intelligence and knowledge to supplement the information found on the websites of DMOs (Edwards *et al.*, 2016). Through computer-mediated channels – for example, online travel forums such as TripAdvisor – these community stakeholders serve as knowledge surrogates of a destination who disseminate destination-specific information and co-produce trip-specific knowledge for potential visitors (Edwards *et al.*, 2016). They can be involved in travel knowledge co-production to reach, persuade, and attract potential visitors, and to mediate and shape visitors' experiences (Leung *et al.*, 2013), and in turn create value on behalf of both visitors and destinations (Edwards *et al.*, 2016).

Knowledge sharing is therefore important in generating competitive advantage, creating collective intelligence for and from different stakeholders. Furthermore, effective knowledge sharing behaviour can lay the foundation for excellent customer relationship management and internal revenue management, and become an important source of good reputation and competitive advantage for tourism organisations (Rao *et al.*, 2018).

With tourism information and knowledge exchange as the main theme examined in this study, the framework developed by Rao *et al.* (2018) provides a basis for understanding how the exchange process may generate socio-economic opportunities, particularly for different stakeholders involved in the operation of VICs. This is important, as tourism comprises various industries and suppliers, such as transportation, accommodation, food and beverage services, recreation and entertainment, and travel agencies. Therefore inter-organisation information and

knowledge sharing, collaboration, and increased interdependencies among tourism organisations are important to offering competitive services (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015). Moreover, Gebauer, Worch and Truffer (2012) mention that competitive advantages and innovativeness can no longer rely on internal knowledge only, but also originate from the absorption of external knowledge. Thus, to gain a competitive advantage through knowledge creation, sharing, and exchanges, it is important for tourism organisations such as VICs to go beyond relying only on their internal information and knowledge, but also to consider providing and obtaining other information and knowledge from external stakeholders. In this way, the value of information and knowledge sharing and exchanges will benefit both VICs and their stakeholders.

2.8. STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS AND INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGES IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

Stakeholders are a significant component of an organisation's environment. Tourism is a complex sector that involves different stakeholders such as visitors, government, tourism authorities, local agencies, chambers of commerce, tourism businesses, local residents and communities, special interest groups, and tourism-related educational institutions and professionals (Saftić, Težak & Luk, 2011; Waligo, Clarke & Hawkins, 2013). This is mainly because the sector comprises an amalgamation of various industries such as accommodation, restaurants, passenger transport services, travel agencies and related services, attractions, cultural services, and sports and recreational services (TSA, 2019).

Different researchers use different theories or approaches to describe relationships among stakeholders. Saftić *et al.* (2011) use the stakeholder approach and stakeholder theory, while Woo *et al.* (2018) use the stakeholder and social exchange theories to explain these relationships. Each of these approaches is discussed below.

2.8.1 Stakeholder approach

The stakeholder approach relates to concepts, ideas, and opinions that are based on interactive discussions (Saftić *et al.*, 2011). It emphasises the identification of various stakeholders as well as their interests and concerns. These stakeholders may be divided into two: primary stakeholders, whose continued participation is critical to the survival of an organisation; and secondary stakeholders, whose involvement in the organisation is not as critical to its survival (Freeman, 2010). The support of all stakeholder groups who interface with an organisation is therefore necessary for its survival. Emphasising the application of the stakeholder approach in tourism, Saftić *et al.* (2011) mention that cooperation among different stakeholders is necessary in order to reap benefits.

2.8.2. Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory encompasses a set of properly reasoned ideas that are intended to explain facts or events (Saftić *et al.*, 2011). The theory suggests that an organisation is characterised by its relationships with various groups and individuals who may affect or be affected by the organisation. In tourism, stakeholders in the value chain may affect and be affected by tourism development (Waligo *et al.*, 2013). Thus, from a tourism perspective, the theory implies that individuals who believe that they might gain personal benefit from tourism activities will have a more favourable attitude than those who do not believe that they stand to benefit from such activities (Sharma & Gursoy, 2015). The resulting benefits for stakeholders may include, among other things, income and job creation, economic gains, destination development, socio-cultural benefits, linkages with other economic sectors, and business development opportunities for Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) (Stylidis & Terzidou, 2014).

It is therefore imperative to recognise stakeholders involved in tourism development, consider their different perspectives and needs, and encourage their engagement and participation, not only as recipients but also as active participants throughout the development process (Waligo *et al.*, 2013). However, multi-stakeholder involvement

is complex, as it is influenced by various factors such as leadership qualities, information quality and accessibility, stakeholder mind-sets, stakeholder involvement capacity, stakeholder relationships, contextual circumstances, and sustainable tourism implementation priorities (Waligo *et al.*, 2013). In this regard, it is crucial to clarify stakeholder roles so that all take responsibility and ownership of decisions and outcomes during the development process.

2.8.3. Social exchange theory

In proposing the original Social Exchange Theory (SET), Homans (1958) viewed a social relationship as a series of repeated exchanges. He explained the social behaviour (power, conformity, status, leadership, and justice) and the patterns of social relationships between and among individuals produced by social exchanges. Homans made several key propositions that framed the study of social behaviour in terms of rewards and punishments:

- The success proposition: behaviour that generates positive consequences is likely to be repeated.
- The stimulus proposition: behaviour that has been rewarded in the past will be performed in similar situations.
- The value proposition: the more valuable the result of an action is, the more likely it is that the action will be performed.
- The deprivation-satiation proposition: if an individual has received the same reward several times in the past, its value declines with time.
- Individuals will react emotionally to different reward situations. They will become angry and aggressive when they do not receive what they anticipate.

Molm (2003) identifies the following basic elements of the social exchange process:

- Individuals in the exchange process are assumed to be self-interested and motivated to behave in ways that increase valued benefits and decrease negatively valued outcomes.

- Resources in social exchange are capabilities or objects that are held by one individual and valued by another in an exchange relationship. Resources can range from tangible goods or services to benefits such as status, approval, advice, or psychological gratification (Savage & Bergstrand, 2012).
- An individual's ability to secure resources is in part a function of the exchange structure. Exchange structures bind the mutual dependence of individuals, and vary by network structure and exchange form.
- Network structures shape, to a great degree, the exchange behaviours of actors, as they affect the availability of alternative exchange partners (Savage & Bergstrand, 2012).

Despite the different perspectives emphasised in the theory, 'social exchange' refers to transactions or relationships between two or more individuals that involve a reciprocal process of exchanging resources from which some future benefit is expected (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Kim & Park, 2017). The SET emphasises that, for individuals to get what they need and value, they engage in a process of interacting and exchanging resources with others. When interactions result in the mutual exchange of benefits and opportunities, a transaction occurs, with repeated transactions resulting in an exchange relationship (Savage & Bergstrand, 2012).

The central view of the SET is that individuals in a social relationship determine whether to continue or terminate the relationship, based on a comparison of the rewards with the costs for maintaining the relationship (Jeong & Oh, 2017). In the exchange, resources that the individual provides are seen as costs, while those they receive as positive outcomes of exchange are regarded as benefits (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Jeong & Oh, 2017). These rewards and costs, however, are not confined to economic benefits and opportunities, but may also be non-economic in nature (Jeong & Oh, 2017). While benefits involved in the economic exchange are formal and often contractual, those in social exchanges are often voluntary and negotiated, and entail unspecified future obligations (Liu, Liang, Sambamurthy, Rajagopalan & Wu, 2011; Nunkoo, 2016). In an exchange relationship, regular and frequent meetings (Liu *et al.*, 2011), appropriate feedback (Constant, Kiesler & Sproull, 1994), and incentives (Chen, Vogel, Zhang & Zhao, 2009) may encourage future exchanges.

Introducing the SET to tourism, Ap (1992) emphasised that local residents form their attitudes towards tourism based on their evaluation of the perceived benefits and costs of exchanges in tourism. From a tourism development perspective, the SET assumes that residents' attitudes toward and support for tourism development in their communities are influenced by their evaluation of the actual and perceived benefits that tourism has for their community. If they perceive that the benefits are greater than the costs, they are likely to be involved in the exchange, show positive attitudes, and support future tourism development in their community. However, if they perceive tourism's impacts negatively, they are likely to show negative attitudes and not to support tourism development in their communities (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Woo *et al.*, 2018; Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2017, Jani, 2018).

Table 2.1 summarises prior studies in tourism that applied the SET, indicating their subject areas, purposes, factors related to SET, and results.

Table 2.1: SET tourism-related studies

Study	Area	Purpose	Factors based on SET	Results
Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2011)	Residents' satisfaction and attitudes towards tourism	To analyse the influence of residents' level of satisfaction with community attributes on their attitudes towards tourism development and subsequent support for it.	Satisfaction with: • neighbourhood conditions • community commitment • community services	Non-economic benefits shape attitudes toward tourism development and subsequent support for it. Satisfaction with neighbourhood conditions, community commitment, and community services determine attitudes toward tourism and subsequent support for it.
Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2012)	Residents' support for tourism	To test a model of community support for tourism	• Perceived benefits and costs of tourism • Residents' power • Trust in government	Residents' level of power and their perception of the benefits and costs of tourism determine community support. Trust is predicted by residents' level of power and their perception of tourism's benefits and costs.
Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh (2014)	Residents' attitudes towards tourism development	To investigate rural residents' perceptions on the impact of tourism on the economic, social, environmental, and physical status of the area.	Economic, social, and environmental benefits	Residents expressed strong support for tourism development. Although they expressed some social and environmental concerns, they most valued the economic benefits. Socio-demographic factors such as gender, education, age, income, employment, and a high degree of community attachment

Study	Area	Purpose	Factors based on SET	Results
				affect residents' perception of the impact of tourism.
Afthanorhan <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Residents' perception of tourism impacts	To determine the perception of residents towards tourism development	Economic and environmental benefits	Residents who derive economic benefits from tourism show positive perceptions towards the sector and are likely to support it in future. On the other hand, those who experience loss and harm due to tourism, and particularly environmental factors, exhibit negative perceptions. Socio-demographics, and gender in particular, have the potential to moderate the causal effects of tourism impacts.
Capistrano & Weaver, (2017)	Visiting friends' and relatives' travel	To explore the social interactions between Filipino immigrant-hosts residing in New Zealand and their visiting relatives from the Philippines, using social exchange theory to understand their experiences	Social interaction	Social interactions create reciprocal relationships and influence the depth of the shared experiences of the immigrant-hosts and visiting relatives by re-establishing and reviewing family ties.
Chang (2018)	Tourism development attitudes	To examine attitudes affecting tourism development based on the SET and social network theory.	Social network	Social network (intelligence, friendship, and advice) plays different influential roles in the hierarchy of the effects of tourism attitudes (cognition, affection, and action tendency).

Study	Area	Purpose	Factors based on SET	Results
				Social network has an impact on tourism development attitudes.
Jani (2018)	Residents' perception of tourism's impacts	To examine residents' perception of tourism's impacts around Mount Kilimanjaro by comparing those who are involved and not involved in tourism.	• Economic dependence on tourism • Direct contact with tourists • Involvement in tourism decision-making.	Residents who derive economic benefits from tourism and participate in tourism planning and those who have contact with tourists have positive perception of tourism impacts.
Woo <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Residents' perception of tourism's impacts	To examine differences in the perceived impact of tourism development between residents affiliated with the tourism sector and those not affiliated.	• Community well-being • Satisfaction with life	The influence of residents' perceptions of tourism's impact and their life satisfaction is dependent on whether they are affiliated or not affiliated with the tourism sector.
Maruyama, Keith & Woosnam (2019)	Emotional ties in social exchange	To examine the influence that individuals' emotions toward their ethnic counterparts within a community can have on residents' attitudes to ethnic neighbourhood tourism within the Korean neighbourhood of Ikuno, Osaka, Japan.	Emotions	Emotional solidarity with residents' ethnic counterparts within a community has an influence on attitudes towards ethnic neighbourhood tourism.

Source: Researcher's own construction

Table 2.1 above shows that the SET has mostly been applied in studies of residents' attitudes towards and support for tourism development. The studies show that communities are likely to support tourism development if the benefits they receive from the sector exceed the costs. Central to the SET are benefits or costs in an exchange process. However, while the theory emphasises that the benefits that residents receive from tourism have a greater influence on their attitudes and support for tourism development in their communities, it is without limitations. Some studies (Sirakaya, Teye & Sönmez, 2002; Wang & Pfister, 2008) indicate that some residents who do not receive economic benefits from tourism still show positive or negative attitudes, instead of forming neutral attitudes. This shows that non-economic benefits that residents receive from tourism, such as social and psychological empowerment (Boley, McGehee, Perdue & Long, 2014; Maruyama, Woosnam & Boley, 2016) or trust in government actors (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012), are also important in shaping their attitudes positively toward the sector and towards support for future tourism development.

While the table above indicates that the SET has been applied widely in tourism studies, it has not been used to explain exchanges that take place in other areas of tourism, such as tourism information and knowledge exchange. In particular, limited studies have addressed the exchange of information and knowledge that takes place in tourism information dissemination organisations such as VICs. Similarly, a limited number of studies have addressed the exchange of information and knowledge that takes place between VICs and their different stakeholders, such as surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. Moreover, the studies do not address the socio-economic opportunities that stakeholders may receive from exchanging information and knowledge with VICs. As benefits in an exchange process are central to the SET, the theory is relevant to understanding the socio-economic opportunities that accrue to VIC stakeholders. It is for this reason that this study adopted the SET and applied it to understand the exchange of tourism information and knowledge between VICs and their stakeholders, and how this exchange contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. As one of the main functions of VICs is to disseminate tourism information to visitors, it is also important to understand how the exchanges in VICs benefit visitors. The SET is

also used to understand how tourism information and knowledge exchange with VIC stakeholders contributes to memorable visitor experiences.

2.9. CONCLUSION

Information and knowledge are critical and strategic resources of competitive advantage and organisational success. To provide value to organisations, these resources must be made available, managed, and shared with both internal and external stakeholders, using different information sources in order to meet the needs of these stakeholders. However, it is important to ensure that the exchange of information and knowledge creates opportunities that will improve the lives of stakeholders. Also important is that the exchange should be undertaken in a coordinated way, with all stakeholders participating in guiding the exchange process.

This chapter attempted to address research objective 1 (section 1.4) by comprehensively discussing the literature on the importance of information and knowledge in the tourism sector, as well as associated constructs such as information and knowledge exchange. The main theoretical foundations of the study were emphasised, with the SET being relevant to understanding the exchange of information and knowledge in the tourism sector. The next chapter continues the discussion of information and knowledge by focusing on their importance in helping visitors to make informed travel decisions and to enhance their memorable experiences in visited areas.

CHAPTER 3: TRAVEL INFORMATION SEARCH AND MEMORABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed literature on the importance of information and knowledge in the tourism sector. The main theoretical foundations of the study were emphasised, with the Social Exchange Theory (SET) being relevant to explain exchanges that take place in the tourism sector. The theory was adopted to explain exchanges that take place in other areas of tourism, such as tourism information and knowledge exchange in VIC. This chapter aims to review the importance of information in the travel process in order to help visitors make informed travel decisions, and to enhance their experiences during travel. The travel cycle, the decisions that visitors make during travel, and their travel behaviours are discussed in section 3.2, emphasising the integration of information throughout the travel stages.

Section 3.3 examines the information search, focusing on visitors' information needs, information search strategies, and internal and external information sources that visitors use during travel. Traditional and online information sources are discussed, emphasising the use of these sources in the tourism sector, mainly for travel purposes. With the wide scale proliferation of technological developments, online information sources used for travel and how they are changing visitors' travel behaviours are discussed. Factors that influence information search behaviour, particularly socio-demographic and travel behavioural characteristics, are examined.

Section 3.4 focuses on memorable tourism experiences (MTEs). The notion of tourism experiences and dimensions of MTE are discussed. Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE scale with seven dimensions and 24 indicators is emphasised. Demographic and travel behaviour characteristics that influence MTE are also discussed. In section 3.5 visitors' behavioural intentions and the MTE dimensions that influence behavioural intentions are discussed. This section also discusses the demographic and travel behaviour

characteristics that influence behavioural intentions. Conclusions derived from the literature reviewed in this chapter are presented in section 3.6.

3.2 THE TRAVEL PROCESS

Travel is a process in which visitors move from their place of residence to a particular tourism destination, experience different aspects of the destination, and eventually return to their ordinary lives (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Jung & Cho, 2015). Several authors (Choi, Lehto, Morrison & Jang, 2012; Fodness & Murray, 1998; Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002) conceptualised travel as a multistage process during which visitors have to make several decisions that are interrelated and that evolve over time. This conceptualisation emphasises three aspects of the travel process that are critical in this study: the stages that visitors go through during travel; the decisions they make during travel; and the behaviours they exhibit during travel, including socio-demographic and travel behaviour characteristics that influence these behaviours. Each of these aspects is discussed below.

3.2.1 The travel cycle

Travel is conceptualised as a cycle that has various stages through which potential visitors go (Mehta, 2014). The travel cycle is often viewed as consisting of three sequential and interrelated stages: the pre-trip, during-trip, and post-trip stages (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Huertas & Marine-Roig, 2018; Inversini *et al.*, 2016; Leung *et al.*, 2013; Mackay & Vogt, 2012; Okazaki, Campo, Andreu & Romero, 2015; Pabel & Prideaux, 2016).

These travel stages can be described as follows:

- 'Pre-trip' is the stage that visitors face before travelling. It consists first of the introduction of the demand to travel, and second, of the gathering of information and the evaluation of tourism activities that can be carried out in the visited destination, the best time to travel, and how to reach the intended destination. Third is the travel decision-making and the purchasing of products that need to

be done prior to travelling, such as booking airline tickets and/or accommodation (Dwityas & Briandana, 2017).

- 'During-trip' is the stage in which visitors undergo travel experiences. It involves the consumption of tourism products such as accommodation, transportation, attractions, and food (Jadhav, Raman, Patwa, Moorthy & Pathrose, 2018). This stage also includes deciding on activities to be undertaken at the destination, and searching for additional information, such as other attractions and transport to be used at the destination (Dwityas & Briandana, 2017).
- 'Post-trip' is the stage when a series of travel activities have been completed and visitors have returned home after travelling. During this stage, visitors evaluate their experiences and their satisfaction with the products, activities, and sources of information they used. The evaluation is important in influencing their future travel behaviour (Dwityas & Briandana, 2017).

The stages of the travel cycle correspond with the phases of the visitor journey, of which there are three:

- The prospective pre-trip phase, which takes place before the trip is undertaken, and which involves information search, decision-making, and the purchase process (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Malone, McKechnie & Tynan, 2018).
- The active tourism experience phase takes place when the visitor is at the destination and having on-site interactions. Through participation and engagement in activities at the destination, the value of visiting the destination is co-created (Yachin, 2018). The provision of knowledge during this phase serves as a value-add to enhance visitors' travel experiences (Yachin, 2018).
- The reflective post-trip phase takes place after the trip has been completed. It encompasses a recollection of the experience, satisfaction, sharing of memories, and making recommendations to other potential visitors.

According to Mehta (2014), the travel cycle is made up of the following five stages:

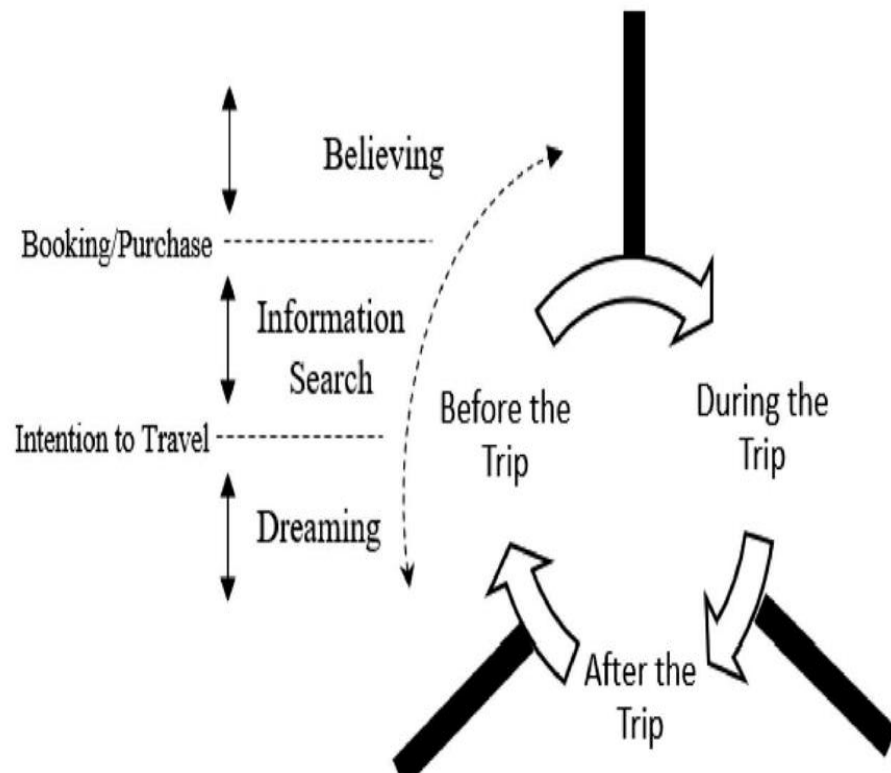
- The dreaming stage is when an aspiring visitor dreams about visiting a destination. The dream may be influenced by either a personal desire to visit the

destination or experiences shared by others who have visited the destination before. These experiences can be shared in different ways, such as word-of-mouth, mobile technology, social media platforms, or supplier websites.

- The researching or planning stage involves the collection of information about the desired destination for aspects such as transportation, prices and rates, and the sources to collect the information through word-of mouth, mobile technology, social media platforms, or supplier websites. The information is critical to helping visitors make informed purchase decisions.
- The booking stage comprises the reservation and purchasing of services to enable visitors to travel to the desired destination. During this stage, visitors use sources such as travel-specific sites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Booking.com) and supplier websites to book tickets for travel, accommodation, events, or activities.
- The experiencing stage is about the actual travel to the destination and all the experiences that visitors encounter at the destinations they visit.
- The sharing stage is made up of moments in which visitors share travel experiences by posting and reviewing pictures on social media and supplier websites. Such information sharing can help to inspire potential visitors who might be interested in visiting the destinations.

With the advent of online platforms, other stages have been added to the travel cycle. Creevey *et al.* (2019) identify the believing stage within the pre-trip stage. As Figure 3.1 shows, the believing stage occurs between the booking and departure stages. This stage emphasises the use of social media to connect and engage with visitors after purchasing (post-purchase), but before undertaking a trip (pre-consumption) (Creevey *et al.*, 2019).

Figure 3.1: Updated holiday travel process model



Source: Creevey *et al.* (2019:68)

While the travel cycle is conceptualised differently by different researchers, the consumption of information takes place in all of the stages. As a result, information and other valued-add information (knowledge) forms an integral part of travel in order to support visitors' decision-making.

3.2.2 Travel decision-making

Travel decisions about aspects such as transport mode, type of accommodation, and places to visit are likely to be relatively complex, as they are made occasionally and include a relatively high degree of financial risk (Bruwer & Thach, 2013), and therefore necessitate high levels of involvement (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011). Many tourism products and services are seen as high-risk purchases because they are of an intangible and experiential nature – they are not directly seen, felt, heard, easily verified, or evaluated prior to purchase (Chung & Koo, 2015). Owing to these inherent traits, visitors often seek to understand the tourism product better in order to make informed decisions during their travel (Antunes *et al.*, 2018), starting from the point

where they come across some information about a destination or have a need or desire to travel, to the point of coming back home (Mehta, 2014).

Travel decision-making is a dynamic process (Anugrah & Hermawan, 2019) consisting of three phases (Bae, Lee, Suh & Suh, 2017):

- In the anticipatory phase (pre-trip), visitors seek information as a basis to shape their decisions so that they can reach their destinations.
- The experience phase (during-trip) takes place when visitors implement their travel plans to enhance their travel experiences to and at the destination.
- The reflective phase (post-trip) occurs when visitors evaluate their trips and use their experiences to shape their next trips (Bae *et al.*, 2017).

The phases show that decision-making is an ongoing process that begins before visitors reach their destination and continues after their arrival at the chosen destinations (Draper, 2018). The decisions that visitors make when travelling tend to be influenced by previous and future travel decisions (Fesenmaier & Jeng 2000; Choi *et al.*, 2012). The decisions are also influenced by the way visitors behave, and why they do certain things before, during, and after travelling (Wong & McKercher, 2011). Knowledge of visitors' travel behaviours can assist in marketing and product planning and development, which can increase the number of visitors to tourism products in a destination (Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2011).

3.2.3 Visitors' travel behaviours

'Travel behaviour' refers to the way in which visitors behave according to their attitudes towards a certain product, and their response in making use of the product before, during, and after travelling (Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2011). The study of tourist behaviour is important for those involved in strategic planning and decision-making concerning tourists, particularly at a tourism destination (Vu, Li, Law & Ye, 2015). Knowledge of visitors' travel behaviours can provide a better understanding of their information search behaviour and the patterns of their consumption of tourism products in order to provide them with memorable tourist experiences (Khairi, Ismail

& Jaafar, 2018) and influence their behavioural intentions (Kim, 2014; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2019). To do this, it is important to recognise that visitor characteristics differ, and may influence their behaviours differently (Cambra-Fierro, Pérez & Grott, 2017).

Socio-demographic and travel behaviour characteristics are key factors that have an influence on visitors' travel behaviours (Khairi *et al.*, 2018). *Socio-demographic characteristics* are associated with specific personal features of visitors. Khairi *et al.* (2018) indicate that visitors' demographic characteristics comprise factors such as country of origin, gender, and age. Raun, Ahas and Tiru (2016) identify visitors' socio-demographic characteristics as including country of origin, length of stay, purpose of visit, mode of travel, gender, and age. Cultural differences, which are associated with tourists' country of origin might have an effect on tourist behaviour (Pizam & Jeong, 1996). In the case of tracking tourists, country of origin, length of stay, number of visits to a destination (first-time and repeat visitors), and the geographical location of visits can be considered when measuring visitors' travel behaviours (Kuusik, Tiru, Ahas & Varblane, 2011; Tiru, Kuusik, Lamp & Ahas, 2010).

Travel behaviour characteristics relate to the features associated with a specific trip, and comprise factors such as length of stay, past-visit experience, travel companion (Khairi *et al.*, 2018; Lehto, Fu, Li & Zhou, 2017), and mode of transport used to and within the destination visited (Martin, Marrero-Rodriguez, Moreira, Roman & Santana, 2016), including travel distance and trip cost. Past-visit experience also contributes to differences in visitors' travel behaviour patterns. For Lehto, Cai, O'Leary and Huan (2004), travel purpose and travel style are important characteristics that influence the amount of money visitors spend during their travel. Other characteristics of travel that differ across visitors include duration of travel, means of transportation, travel group, characteristics of destinations visited, distances travelled, spatial distribution of locations visited, and ways of linking visitors within a single journey (Cigale, 2020). Several researchers have also observed differences between the travel behaviour of first-time and that of repeat visitors (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; McKercher & Wong, 2004; Smallwood, Beckley & Moore, 2012).

This section demonstrates that travel is a complex process that requires visitors to make several decisions that are interrelated and evolve over time. The nature of the decisions requires them to search for information and knowledge that will assist them in dealing with purchase uncertainty and risk, not only at a specific point in time, but also at every stage of the travel cycle (Benckendorff *et al.*, 2014; Kambele, Li & Zhou, 2015; Roque & Raposo, 2015). In this way, information and knowledge are strategic and decisive factors that help visitors make informed decisions during their travel. These decisions are also necessary to enhance the quality of their trips and their behavioural intentions. Therefore destination marketers, including information dissemination organisations such as Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) and Visitor Information Centres (VIC) should take steps to understand visitors' information needs during the different stages of travel, including how they search for information and the sources they use to find the information. Understanding visitors' information search and travel behaviours is essential to guide and strengthen information-dissemination strategies and campaigns (Chan & Lee, 2015; Draper, 2016; Sotiriadis, 2017). As different visitor characteristics may influence different behaviours (Cambra-Fierro *et al.*, 2017), the effect that socio-demographic and travel behaviour characteristics have on visitors' information search, memorable experiences, and behavioural intentions are emphasised in the next sections (3.3, 3.4 and 3.5).

3.3 TOURISM INFORMATION SEARCH

In a highly competitive global tourism market, it is crucial to know how and where visitors acquire and select information to inform their travel decisions (Kambebe *et al.*, 2015). Information plays a critical role in visitors' decision-making processes prior to, during, and after their visits (Choi, Tam, Kim & Kim, 2018). Measuring visitors' information search behaviour provides insights into how they go about acquiring, evaluating, and using information (Choi *et al.*, 2018).

The information search is an important part of the travel process, and represents a crucial step in a visitor's travel decision-making (Dey & Sarma, 2010; Farahani, Mohammed & Som, 2011; Ho *et al.*, 2012; Xiang & Law, 2013). It involves making travel decisions on things about which visitors do not have any physical experience,

and therefore requires a more intensive information search than for other products (Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019). The primary role of the information search is to help visitors to evaluate alternatives, reduce travel risks, make informed decisions (Bruwer & Thach, 2013; Hwang, Jani & Jeong, 2013; Jacobsen & Munar, 2012), and enhance the quality of the travel experience (Ho *et al.*, 2012). From the visitor's perspective, the information search is a complex and dynamic process owing to the various amounts and types of information needed in the different stages of travel (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002; Zarezadeh, Benckendorff & Gretzel, 2018).

In this study, the information search is a critical construct to understand how visitors acquire information during travel. In particular, the study examines what information visitors search for, and the sources they use to search for it during travel. These constructs are discussed in the next sections (3.3.1 to 3.3.6.), as explained below.

First comes a discussion of visitors' information needs during their travel (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998) and the sources they use to search for information (Fodness & Murray, 1999). Emphasising visitors' information needs, Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) provide an understanding of the types of information that visitors need and therefore search for during their travel. The visitors' information search strategies and information sources emphasised in Fodness and Murray's (1999) information search model are critical to understanding the sources that visitors use during their travel.

Second, the literature on information sources used in the tourism information search is discussed. Applying Fodness and Murray's (1999) spatial information search strategy, internal and external information sources used during travel are discussed. Both traditional and online information sources are discussed.

Third is a discussion of the factors that influence visitors' information search behaviours, emphasising socio-demographic characteristics and travel behaviour characteristics.

3.3.1 Visitor information needs

Information needs are generally represented as a stage in the information-gathering or decision-making process for consumers, including visitors (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). In their study, Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) adapted a consumer behaviour model and applied it to the information search process, suggesting that information meets multiple visitor needs. They identified five information need constructs that play an important role in planning travel:

- The functional construct involves visitors' information needs related to gaining product knowledge, reducing product uncertainty or risks, deriving product utility or value, and maximising efficiency in the time they spend and the costs they incur.
- The hedonic construct describes visitors' information needs related to pleasure-seeking experiences.
- The innovation construct relates to novelty seeking, variety seeking, and creativity, and describes the extent to which visitors seek new information to adopt novel products or do something new or creative.
- The aesthetic construct involves information needs and experiences related to imagery and fantasies. It describes the extent to which visitors imagine and fantasise about their future trips and behaviours.
- The sign construct describes visitors' information needs related to symbolic expressions and social interaction. Visitors acquire information for self-expression, such as communicating their status, personality, or identity. Social interaction involves visitors' need to share and exchange information with others, such as family and friends or other potential visitors.

Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) identified the information need constructs prior to the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). However, with the Internet, social media, and mobile technologies integrated into everyday lives, Choe, Fesenmaier and Vogt (2017) assessed the impacts of these technologies on visitors' information needs by comparing their results with those of Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998). Choe *et al.* (2017) found that travel behaviour has changed considerably since

the advent of these technologies, with the nature and extent of the information search affected by these advancements. Visitors are getting smarter as technological devices such as smartphones assist them to search for information across trip planning, before, during, and after travel. In addition, these technologies have changed the role of information to support travel decision-making.

Choe *et al.* (2017) found that visitors' information needs differ significantly between the pre-trip planning and during-trip stages. Functional information was found to be more relevant for pre-trip planning than during the trip, while innovation and hedonic information were more important during the trip than before it. Sign information is more relevant during and after the trip. With regard to information sources, Choe *et al.* (2017) found that word-of-mouth is used more frequently for trip planning, while local companies' advertisements, concierges, and outdoor signage and billboards are used during the trip. Smartphones and navigation systems/Global Position Systems (GPSs) are used more often during the trip than during the pre-trip planning.

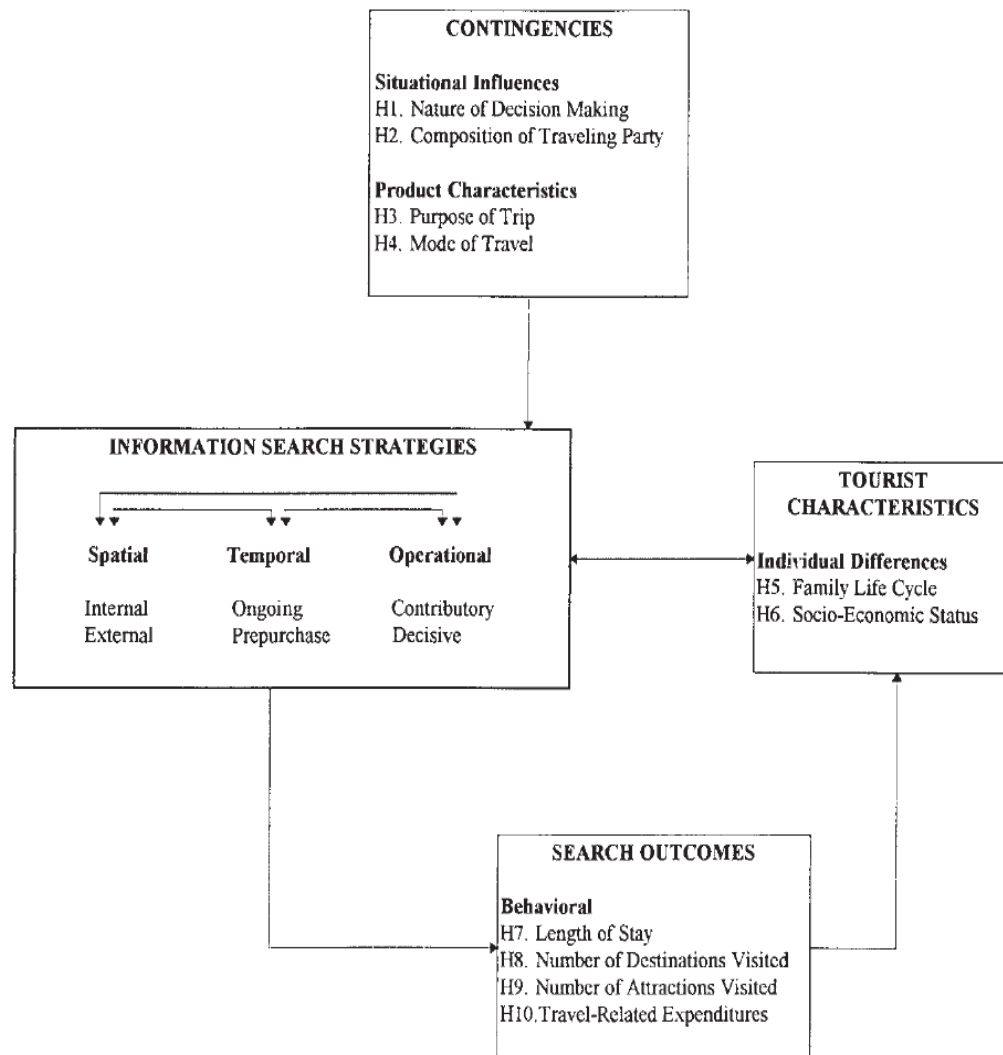
Despite the prevalence of ICT, Choi *et al.* (2018) found that visitors also search for travel information from experts and others who are familiar with destination products. These findings show the resilience of the human element, even in the period of rapid ICT advancements. It is important, therefore, that destination information disseminators such as VICs should incorporate different types of information in their marketing and information dissemination strategies. The information to be included in the strategy should differ according to how and when an information source is being used to meet the needs of different visitors. Furthermore, information disseminators should understand visitor information search behaviours in order to communicate with current and potential visitors, and to influence their future travel decisions (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998).

3.3.2 Information search strategies

Fodness and Murray (1999) proposed a model of the tourist information search strategy process (Figure 3.2) based on empirical research and earlier work conducted in marketing and consumer behaviour. It incorporates prior research on the

dimensionality of information search strategies (Fodness & Murray, 1997; 1998). The model guided the present study to examine information search strategies and the usefulness of information sources with which visitors engage throughout their travel.

Figure 3.2: Model of the tourist information search strategy process



Source: Fodness and Murray (1999:221)

According to Fodness and Murray (1999), there are three distinct strategies of information search: spatial, temporal, and operational.

- The spatial dimension of an information search strategy reflects the locus of search activity, and is divided into internal and external information search strategies. The internal information search strategy involves the use of personal

experience as an information source, while the external information search strategy involves the use of one or more information sources such as automobile clubs, brochures, commercial guidebooks, friends or relatives, highway welcome centres, local tourist offices, magazines, newspapers, official travel guides, and travel agencies.

- The temporal dimension of an information search strategy represents the timing of the search activity, and can be either an ongoing or a pre-purchase strategy. The ongoing information search strategy involves the use of information sources throughout the travel, while the pre-purchase information strategy involves the use of information sources prior to travelling.
- The operational dimension of an information search strategy reflects the conduct of the information search. It focuses on the particular sources used in the information search, their purpose, and their relative effectiveness in assisting tourists to search for information and to make informed travel decisions. The operational dimension differentiates between two types of information source: contributory information sources, which include using a combination of several sources in a complementary way; and decisive information sources, which are used as the sole sources during the travel.

3.3.3. Factors underlying the choice of an information search strategy

Fodness and Murray (1999) identify three factors underlying tourists' choice of information search strategies: contingencies, tourists' characteristics and the outcomes of the search. Each of these factors is discussed below.

3.3.3.1 Contingencies

According to Fodness and Murray (1999), contingency factors such as situational influences and product characteristics affect the choice of an information search strategy.

Situational influences: *The choice of information search strategy is influenced by the nature of the decisions that tourists have to make during their travel. Tourists make*

different types of decision during their travel: routine, limited, or extensive. Tourists therefore use different information sources based on the nature of the decisions they have to make. For routine decisions, such as making periodic visits to friends and relatives, tourists engage in minimal information searches. They do not require pre-purchase information, but use decisive sources, and rely on their past experiences to make travel decisions. Limited decision-making, such as taking a new route or engaging in a new activity at a familiar destination, does not require more time and effort to search for information. Tourists might rely on previous experience and pre-visit information, but might also use pre-purchase, internal and/or external, and several other contributory sources to complement the information they already have. For extensive decision-making, such as planning a first-time trip, tourists need to devote considerable time and effort to the information search. They therefore rely heavily on pre-purchase, internal and/or external, and a wide variety of contributory sources to reduce the perceived risks of an unfamiliar trip.

The composition of a travelling party: The choice of information search strategy is influenced by the composition of the travelling party (families travelling with children, younger couples travelling without children, and retired couples travelling without children). Families travelling with children may need to search for information on activities for children at their chosen destinations. They therefore use pre-purchase and external sources, complemented by several contributory sources. While those travelling without children may use pre-purchase information sources, they may also use ongoing, internal and/or external, and contributory sources, as their travel plans may be flexible and may change without inconveniencing others. As experienced tourists, retired couples often use their past experiences and ongoing, internal, and decisive information sources when travelling.

Product characteristics: *The choice of information search strategy is influenced by the purpose of the trip.* Tourists whose purpose is to have a vacation require more information about their travel, including the destination they will be visiting, transport to and at the destination, and activities they may engage in en route and at the destination. They therefore use ongoing, internal and/or external, and contributory sources. For visiting friends or relatives, tourists use pre-purchase, internal, and decisive sources, as they do not engage in an extensive information search.

Mode of travel: The choice of information search strategy is influenced by the mode of travel. For travel by car or truck, tourists use pre-purchase and external sources, as the trip may require them to search for information prior to travelling and also use their past experience. Travelling by truck, however, is associated with contributory sources to complement other sources. Tourists travelling by recreational vehicles (RVs) use information search strategies that reflect the use of ongoing, internal, decisive sources, as they are most likely to base their travel planning on personal experience.

3.3.3.2 Tourists' characteristics

As depicted in Figure 3.3, information search strategies affect and are affected by tourists' characteristics. Fodness and Murray (1999) show that the choice of information search strategy is influenced by the stage of the family life cycle or their socio-economic status. For *stage of the family life cycle*, households with children use pre-purchase, external sources, and a combination of both decisive and numerous contributory sources, as they may require information on activities for children at their destinations. Younger households without children use pre-purchase information sources, ongoing, internal and/or external, and decisive sources, as they may alter their travel plans without inconveniencing others. Information search strategies for retired households are characterised by ongoing, internal, decisive sources, and past experiences.

Socio-economic status: The choice of information search strategy is influenced by socio-economic status, which is measured according to tourists' income. Tourists with a lower socio-economic status require more time and effort to search for information, and so use pre-purchase, external, and a combination of both decisive and contributory sources. Those with a higher socio-economic status use ongoing, internal and external, and decisive sources owing to their experience of travelling.

3.3.3.3 Search outcomes

Fodness and Murray (1999) considered the length of stay, the number of destinations visited, the number of attractions visited, and travel-related expenditure as the behavioural outcomes of an information search. They proposed that the level of the

search increases with increases in the rates of consumption. Tourists who used numerous sources tend to stay the longest, make more destination visits, visit more attractions, and have more travel-related expenditure than those who consult fewer sources.

Fodness and Murray's (1999) study is now rather dated: it has been over 20 years since the model was created. The study was conducted in the 1990s, prior to the development of the World Wide Web. Moreover, information sources have experienced intense changes since the time the model was first published, owing to technological developments such as the Internet, social media, and mobile technologies. These developments have changed tourist information search behaviours and habits in finding information during travel (Zarezadeh *et al.*, 2018). Despite these limitations, the information search strategies in the model were still useful in guiding the development of the conceptual framework and measurement instrument in this study. The locus (internal/external), timing (ongoing/pre-purchase), and sources (decisive/contributory) of an information search provided a basis for understanding the study's critical constructs related to visitors' information needs, searches, and sources they use during travel.

As visitors also engage in an information search in order to satisfy their hedonic needs, such as seeking novelty, creativity, aesthetics, enjoyment, and learning (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Lu, Gursoy & Lu, 2016; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998), the factors underlying tourists' choice of information search strategies (contingencies, tourists' characteristics, and the outcomes of a search) emphasised in the model were used to understand their contribution to a memorable visitor experience – an important construct investigated in this study. Memorable experiences represent what visitors aim to obtain during their travel (Tung & Ritchie, 2011) and add value to what they will reminisce about during and after their travel (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014; Chandralal, Rindfleish & Valenzuela, 2015). Using information sources to search for information that will enhance the quality of the travel experience is important (Ho *et al.*, 2012). The next section therefore focuses on different types of information source that are used to search for travel information, including information to enhance memorable experiences.

3.3.4 Information sources used in tourism information search

Numerous information sources are available to visitors searching for travel information in order to help them plan and make travel decisions (Draper, 2016). Fodness and Murray (1999) found that, in the spatial information search strategy, visitors use internal and external information sources during their travel. These sources are discussed in the next sections below.

3.3.4.1 Internal information sources

Prior knowledge and travel experiences are common internal sources used by visitors to search for travel information and to make informed travel decisions (Fodness & Murray 1997; Ho *et al.*, 2012; Wong & McKercher, 2011; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2012; Draper, 2016). Prior knowledge is a multidimensional construct that is determined by two constructs: familiarity and expertise (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Jun, Vogt & MacKay, 2010). Familiarity involves visitors' knowledge about a destination, and represents their subjective knowledge, while expertise comprises the ability to perform travel-related tasks, and represents visitors' objective knowledge (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004). As a result, visitors' prior knowledge and travel experiences, influenced by familiarity and expertise, are internal search behaviours to help visitors during their travel.

3.3.4.2 External information sources

Traditional and online information sources are two type of source that visitors use in the external information search – that is, the acquisition of destination-relevant information from the environment. Visitors tend to use this form of information search when they perceive the internal information search to be insufficient to make optimal travel decisions (Bronner & De Hoog, 2011; Ramkissoon & Nunkoo, 2012; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2011; Wong & McKercher, 2011).

- **Traditional information sources**

External information sources such as travel agents, family and friends, word-of-mouth, brochures and pamphlets, magazines, newspaper articles, travel books and library materials, airlines, tourism exhibitions and fairs, and VICs are often identified as 'traditional' sources (Coromina & Camprubí, 2016; Xiang *et al.*, 2015a, Xiang *et al.*, 2015b). In addition, information sources dominated by marketers such as visitor guides and the promotional material of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), CVBs, or VICs are also considered traditional external sources (Draper, 2016). Local residents are also regarded as external traditional sources of information owing to their expertise with local products and their trustworthiness (Kambebe *et al.*, 2015; Karamehmedović, 2019). The main purpose of traditional information sources is to provide visitors with information about tourism products, including the choice of destinations. These sources also satisfy visitors' functional needs, such as gaining knowledge, reducing uncertainty, maximising utility, ensuring efficiency, improving the itinerary, and making them feeling secure or safe in their destinations (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998; Wong & Liu, 2011).

With a variety of information sources available, visitors seek credible sources in which they can trust. Draper (2016) found the word-of-mouth from friends and/or relatives and CVB resources viewed as trustworthy and credible for visitors without personal experience at the destination. While mass media, such as magazines and print ads were found to be moderately useful or important, and may not provide the detailed information such as a CVB website and/or visitors guide, they may be a source to get potential visitors interest and drive them to a destination (Draper, 2016)

- **Online information sources**

The sources used by visitors to search online for information are diverse and varied. Advances in information technology have transformed most external sources into online versions, making online sources one of the most useful tools for making travel decisions (Yuan, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2006). By using diverse online platforms that produce, distribute, and share information, visitors can search for an enormous

amount of online travel information (Choi *et al.*, 2018). While a detailed typology of online information sources is beyond the scope of this study, as they are diverse and varied, the objective is to identify those that are used by visitors to help them search for travel information and to make informed travel decisions. More important to understand is how information dissemination organisations such as VICs may incorporate these online sources into their operational practices to help enhance visitors' experiences.

The emergence of the Internet increased the number of external information sources in the tourism sector (Coromina & Camprubí, 2016; Fesenmaier, Xiang, Pan & Law, 2011). The Internet has evolved substantially over the years. It has been transformed from a simple system of websites that offered electronic brochures and limited interactive services to a system in which users create and share information, and visitors obtain information about essentially all aspects of a trip before, during, and after it (Xiang *et al.*, 2015b; Choe *et al.*, 2017),

The rapid development of the Internet ushered in the emergence of ICTs that have been leading a range of transformations in the marketplace, and affecting human life in a number of ways (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019). These ICT developments and greater accessibility to the Internet have brought new ways of interaction and communication to society. These include interactions between people and organisations, people and information, people and technology, organisations and information, and organisations and technology (Yuan, Tseng & Ho, 2019).

ICTs have made online information a widely used resource that has a significant impact on different sectors of society, including tourism (Khatri, 2019). Travel information is now ubiquitously available through the Internet (Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015), making tourism the single largest sector, with numerous products sold over the Internet (Camilleri & Neuhofer, 2017). Since tourism is a competitive sector, adapting tourism offerings to match changing visitor travel patterns is central to gaining success in the marketplace (Khatri, 2019). In this regard, the Internet has been adopted on both the supply and the demand side of tourism (Januszewska, Jaremen & Nawrocka, 2015) as well as in different tourism sub-sectors such as hotels, transportation, and associated service and information providers (Khatri, 2019). On

the demand side, the Internet plays a critical role in the process of searching for information and trip planning in areas such as choosing destinations, booking accommodation and transport, online buying and paying for trips, and booking and reserving tickets for different events and activities (Karamehmedović, 2019). The Internet enables visitors to communicate directly with suppliers without intermediaries. On the supply side, the Internet is used to optimise communication between travel services providers, tourism businesses, travel agencies, and visitors (Khatri, 2019). For travel, the Internet's main advantages are its interactive nature, universal accessibility, and the availability of large quantities of information that can be found easily and quickly (No & Kim, 2015; Lu *et al.*, 2016).

The Internet networking e-tourism era (1990-2005) enabled organisations to develop a Web 1.0 presence through websites and e-commerce. The rapid development of ICTs ushered in the Web 2.0 era (2005-2015), facilitating interaction among users and empowering many-to-many communications (Buhalis, 2019). In tourism, the introduction of Web 2.0 and of mobile and wearable devices triggered significant changes in visitor behaviour (Wang *et al.*, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2014; Xiang *et al.*, 2015a,b). The increased availability and use of smartphones, mobile gadgets, wireless tablet computers, social networks, personal blogs, and online communities has created a new landscape that is transforming many social aspects of travel, including the dissemination of travel information (Khatri, 2019; Mannaa, 2019; Sotiriadis, 2017). These devices serve as tools to find information, share experiences, and communicate and keep in touch with the rest of the world (Antunes *et al.*, 2018, Fotis, 2015; Yoo & Gretzel, 2016).

Visitors use smart devices to navigate destinations, make bookings, and access and guide them through travel information (Dorcic *et al.*, 2019). Search engines facilitate the search for and the distribution and accessibility of tourism information at the convenience of visitors, anytime and anywhere (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Webpages of different national and local stakeholders are used to disseminate tourism information (Karamehmedović, 2019). DMOs use official websites to identify target markets, promote and inform visitors about destination products and activities, develop a positive destination image, and build brands. Travel-specific sites such as Booking.com, Airbnb.com, TripAdvisor.com, Hotels.com, Expedia.com, Trivago.com,

and Agoda.com are used to disseminate information on accommodation establishments. Travel advice on and reviews of destination products and activities are available on webpages and on travel search platforms such as TripAdvisor (Karamehmedović, 2019). The practice of e-tourism and digitalised tourism activities such as online reservations, travel blogs, and e-tourist guides' online platforms are on the rise (Khatri, 2019).

Combining the features of mobility and ICTs, mobile technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and mobile applications (apps) have become the primary devices that bring convenience for tourists to access the Internet in order to get travel information (Wang *et al.*, 2012; Law, Chan & Wang, 2018). They have become a new platform to book flights, hotels, or car rentals (Yip & Mo, 2020). The widespread adoption of these devices has resulted in the development of relevant mobile information services such as mobile electronic tourist guides or app-based mobile tour guides, and mobile payment using near-field communication technologies. The instantaneous feature of mobile technologies empowers tourists to access and share information without limits (Wang *et al.*, 2014). For pre-trip planning stage, tourists rely more on tablets and smartphones in the search process (Murphy, Chen & Cossutta, 2016). They may plan less before a trip, as they know that information is readily accessible with mobile devices as long as they have Internet access (Wang *et al.*, 2014). In the during-trip experience stage, mobile technologies empower tourists to adjust their itineraries and plans efficiently in response to unexpected circumstances that arise during their trips (Lamsfus, Wang, Alzua-Sorzabal & Xiang, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2012; Wang, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2016). Tourists are also equipped to experience a destination in more innovative ways and to explore unusual attractions instead of just the frequently accessed attractions (Wang *et al.*, 2012). In the post-trip sharing stage, tourists use mobile technologies to share their experiences online, to ensure that their social circle is updated in real time (Wang *et al.*, 2014; Zhang, Omran & Cobanoglu, 2017).

Social media are used as a new platform of communication and social interaction to share opinions and experiences through the creation of testimonies that can be shared with and consulted by visitors (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Roque & Raposo, 2015). Owing to the interactivity of social media, visitors can form relationships through the exchange

of information, experiences, opinions, and ideas about goods and services (Dwitya & Briandana, 2017). Social media applications such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Instagram are influential in a variety of settings, including purchasing and selling behaviours, entrepreneurship, and visitors' travel and decision-making (Greenwood & Gopal, 2015). They are driven by user-generated content, and allow the generation of enormous amounts of information to help visitors search for real-time travel information and to make informed travel decisions (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Chung & Koo, 2015; Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil & Nerur, 2018; Yoo & Gretzel, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2017). Through social media, the information search involves more than just the dissemination of information: it is also the sharing of experiences during and after a trip (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Mariani, Styven & Ayeh, 2019). Visitors are able to generate their own content by posting text messages, pictures, or videos in real time, and by sharing their travel-related opinions, comments, and personal experiences, which can serve as a source of information for other potential visitors when making decisions during each stage of travel (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Mannaa, 2019; Yoo & Gretzel, 2016). Moreover, social media have led to a significant shift in the role of visitors, from passive recipients of information to active and innovative co-creators of information and customised tourism experiences across all the stages of travel (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Kim *et al.*, 2019; Jung, Lee, Hur & Kim, 2018; Rihova *et al.*, 2018).

Social media are not just a platform for passing on and receiving information, but also serve as an open place for digital communities, a place where visitors can engage in symmetrical multi-directional communication (Jung *et al.*, 2018). As active agents, visitors can provide valuable feedback about a destination that can be used to improve the destination's offerings to potential visitors (Kim *et al.*, 2019). This shows that potential visitors can rely on other visitors' experiences to plan their trips and to make decisions in an effort to decrease uncertainty and risk and increase the effectiveness of this exchange (Hua, Ramayah, Ping & Jun-Hwa, 2017; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Tan & Chen, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2017). Thus social media represent a significant shift of informational power that allows visitors to decide which content to ignore and which to pass on to others.

According to Tran, Phan, Nguyen and Do (2017), the sharing of experiences creates a new and alternative form of word-of-mouth called electronic word-of-mouth (eWoM). Jadhav *et al.* (2018) assert that social media sites such as TripAdvisor and Facebook can now be viewed as eWoM. Since people trust word-of-mouth when making important decisions, social media sites have become another avenue through which people can share vital travel information (Matikiti-Manyeverere & Kruger, 2019). Marketers can therefore use eWoM as a marketing tool to persuade visitors to purchase products and services, share opinions and experiences, form a two-way discussion, create an exchange platform between sector providers and visitors, and attract potential visitors (Mannaa, 2019; Tran *et. al.*, 2017). Through the analysis of comments on online communities such as TripAdvisor, the tourism sector gets a better understanding of visitors' interests, needs, and preferences (Tran *et. al.*, 2017). Although social media have been found to be the predominant sources used to search for travel information and to make travel decisions, some studies have presented contradictory findings. De Souza and Machado (2017) found that some respondents in their study did not have much trust in information posted on social media platforms. Similarly, Pesonen and Pasanen (2017) found that some respondents in their study did not use social media at all when making trip decisions.

With technological advances, artificial intelligence (AI) assists tourists to find better and more relevant information, gives them greater mobility, improves their decision-making, and provides them with a better tourism experience (Gretzel, 2011; Tussyadiah & Miller, 2019). One of the latest technological information sources with a positive impact on tourism is the chatbot (Alotaibi, Ali, Alharthi & Almehamadi, 2020; Bulchand-Gidumal, 2020). Chatbots are automated programs, a form of AI text and/or voice-based virtual assistants. They use natural language to interact with users and answer their queries effectively (Ciechanowski, Przegalinska, Magnuski & Gloor, 2019; Luo, Tong, Fang & Qu, 2019). Users interact with these programs to obtain a product or service-related information online (Luo *et al.*, 2019). In tourism, chatbots are important in areas where the quality and speed of communication with tourists matters, such as in online booking services or ordering food in real time. They help tourists to get what they ask for more quickly and accurately (Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020) and at any time from any location (Chung, Ko, Joung & Kim, 2018). Through chatbots, tourist no longer have to waste time visiting numerous websites and installing different

apps on their mobile phones to plan their trips, to find suitable destinations, hotels, or entertainment sites, or to navigate destinations they are visiting (Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020). With the increase in human-chatbot interaction, tourists can use a variety of devices such as smartphones, laptops, tablets, or desktops to communicate (Araujo, 2018; Luo *et al.*, 2019). Many platforms, including Facebook, Skype, Amazon, WeChat, and eBay use chatbots for online service (Luo *et al.*, 2019). An example of a chatbot used for tourism purposes is 'smart guidance', developed by Alotaibi *et al.* (2020). It is a text-based chatbot mobile application that offers 24/7 service availability, and answers tourists' questions related to their desired destination, recommending offerings and highlighting real-time events to satisfy their needs and demands and save them time and effort.

While numerous benefits are associated with the use of online sources, such as ubiquity, convenience, immediacy, personalisation, information access, pragmatism, money saving, innovation, planning capacity, and entertainment (Ko, 2018), several challenges are also noted. The trustworthiness, credibility, reliability, legitimacy, and accuracy of online content are some of the challenges associated with online information, since it can be easily created and altered by anonymous authors, and is not subject to the traditional forms of gatekeeping (Liu & Park, 2015; No & Kim, 2015). The high number of available sources might lead to discontentment and confusion (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Wang *et al.*, 2012). The use of online sources for information searches may lead to a phenomenon called 'online confusion', in which visitors feel overloaded with information when browsing online (Lu & Gursoy, 2015; Lu *et al.*, 2016; Zillinger, 2019). They can induce a sense of addiction and, may thus be time-consuming and enslave visitors to technology (Neuhofer, 2016). Monetary and time costs, information overload, security and loss of privacy, and access difficulties are also cited as challenges associated with online content (Eriksson, 2014; Ho *et al.*, 2012; Tan & Chen, 2012). Using smartphones for work purposes during a vacation might have several negative impacts, such as being distracted or disturbed by work and thus unable to relax (Chen, Huang, Gao & Petrick, 2017).

The challenges therefore require tourism practitioners, marketers, and VICs to position themselves to use credible information sources that will provide visitors with consistent, impartial, and current information on tourism products (Ispas *et al.*, 2014).

The accessibility of tourism products through online sources may increase the number of visitors who purchase these products, thus creating an opportunity to reach more visitors. Also important is for visitors to rely on familiar online information sources (Lu *et al.*, 2016; Pirolli, 2018) or to use a multiplicity of sources (No & Kim, 2015; Xiang *et al.*, 2015a,b; Lu & Gursoy, 2015; Zillinger, 2019). By using multiple information sources, visitors can perform several activities on multiple devices, starting on one device and then transferring, repeating, or completing them on another device (Ko, 2018). They can also easily access different types of information that may help them make informed decisions and ultimately enhance the trip experience (Xiang *et al.*, 2015a,b; Choe *et al.*, 2017). Tourism businesses should also not ignore the role of online information sources in disseminating travel information; they should embrace them to target and connect with prospective visitors (Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019).

3.3.5 The influence on information sources on the travel process

In the pre-Internet era, visitors planned almost every aspect of their trips before leaving home, and so largely followed a pre-trip planned itinerary, using maps and other printed materials to guide their travel decisions. With technological advances, online information sources have transformed not only the nature of communication and interaction, but have also redefined the entire travel process and subsequent visitor behaviours (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). Online sources have changed how visitors search, collect, disseminate, and share travel information and experiences throughout the stages of the travel cycle (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Neuhofer *et al.*, 2015; Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019; Xiang *et al.*, 2015a,b). Visitors have become more demanding, active, independent, informed, and skilled. They have discovered new ways of searching for information, such as self-booking and recommending information to others (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Matikiti-Manyevere and Kruger (2019) found that social media sites such as Facebook and TripAdvisor are predominantly used in the during-trip planning stages in order to plan and make travel decisions. These sites are also used as e-WOM to share travel information at the post-trip stage (De Souza & Machado, 2017; Jadhav *et al.*, 2018;

Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019; Roque & Raposo, 2015). Millennials are now using Instagram to search for travel information during the dreaming and planning stages, and to share travel experiences after their trips using hashtags to attract others (Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019). In Table 3.1 below, Shen, Sotiriadis and Zhang (2020) show how visitors use smart technologies at different stages of their trips, and the influence that these technologies have on their experiences.

Table 3.1: Influence of smart technologies on visitors' trips

Trip stage	Use of smart technologies	Influence of technologies on visitors' experience
Prospective stage: pre-purchase	• Collecting information, opinions, and feedback from various sources • Getting information about tourism products and services • Searching tourism products and services • Planning the trip	• Searching and planning • Reducing decision risk • Increasing interest in building an understanding of tourism products and services
Active stage: on-site visit	• Reading online reviews and comments • Making short-term decisions • Mobile communication and transactions • Collecting and recording experiences	• Facilitating navigation and communication • Enhancing convenience and speed • Enhancing experience, flexibility, engagement, and enjoyment • Making short-term decisions • Recording, storing, and collecting memories
Reflective stage: post-visit	• Sharing videos, images, texts on social media • Sharing data and knowledge • Posting reviews and giving advice	• Recollecting memories • Sharing experiences • Evaluating, making recommendations and suggestions

Source: Shen *et al.* (2020:7)

While information search behaviour and the use of technologies is emphasised in some travel stages (Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019; Shen *et al.*, 2020), it is no longer limited to any one specific stage. Visitors can now continuously search and access information, create and share experiences, and make spontaneous decisions

throughout the entire trip (Choe *et al.*, 2017). In addition, they can postpone travel decisions until right before the moment of consumption, such as checking prices and opening hours, en route to their destination (Xiang *et al.*, 2015). This shows that information searches, including the collection of information and the choice of information sources, can take place spontaneously. Although visitors may decide on which information sources to use and how to use them in advance, they may decide to use the ones they find en route (Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). These changes require concerted efforts on the part of tourism practitioners, marketers, and VICs to understand the types of information source used by different visitor segments in order to influence their travel decision-making – and, on the other hand, to enhance their own marketing efforts. Moreover, as the patterns and use of information sources differ and change across the travel stages, it is important that destination practitioners, marketers, and VICs consider the factors that influence visitors' information search behaviour (Choe *et al.*, 2017).

3.3.6 Factors that influence information search behaviour

Several researchers indicate that visitors' use of information sources and their search behaviours are influenced by their individual socio-demographic and travel behaviour characteristics (Antunes *et al.*, 2018, Coromina & Camprubí, 2016; Draper, 2016; Kim, Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2015; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). However, there are differences over which characteristics exert the most influence.

3.3.6.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of visitors

- **Gender**

Gender has been found to be associated with the type of information source used and preferred by visitors (Luo, Feng & Cia, 2004). Coromina and Camprubí (2016) found gender to be a discriminating variable for the use of sources in searching for information. They found that males use a greater number of information sources, such as search engines, official websites, and tourism blogs, than do females.

Ramkissoon and Nunkoo (2012) indicated that gender identity is a determinant of visitors' search behaviour, with visitors displaying high femininity traits relying on internal and external information sources, and those with high masculinity traits relying less on these sources. In other studies, gender was found not to influence the tendency to use social media during a trip (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Yoo & Gretzel, 2016). However, adult men tend to contribute content more often than adult women do. Female university students were found to create more content than men in the same age group (Yoo & Gretzel, 2016).

- **Age**

Age influences how people decide whether or not to visit a destination and to plan their travel. Coromina and Camprubí (2016) found age to be a determining factor in information searches, with younger visitors more involved in information searches than older ones. Age also has a great influence on visitors' use of social media, with younger visitors using social media more often during a trip than the older group (Yoo & Gretzel, 2016). However, Pesonen, Komppula and Riihinen (2015) stated that older visitors tend to use online information sources that provide consolidated travel information in order to minimise search costs. On the other hand, the use of traditional sources of information such as word-of-mouth, brochures, and visitor guides tend to be influenced by age, with older visitors more likely to use these types of media (Bruwer & Thach, 2013; Draper, 2016).

With regard to creating and sharing content on social media, Yoo and Gretzel (2016) mentioned that younger users tend to participate more actively and create more content than adult users. Similarly, younger visitors are more likely to share content related to their experience than are the older ones. This tendency might be owing to a lower involvement and a lack of trust in online communities among the older age groups. Antunes *et al.* (2018) indicated that age only partially influences the propensity to generate content on social media, with the frequency to generate information decreasing in older users (above the age of 45 years). Antunes *et al.* (2018) also mentioned that age strongly influences the propensity to share photographs, as younger visitors are more predisposed to create user generated content (UGC).

Choe *et al.* (2017) found that older visitors (55 years or older) tend to be consistent in their use of social media channels across all the trip stages. Kim *et al.* (2015) found that younger visitors use a wide range of information channels to guide decisions throughout their trip, as they are exposed to more mobile devices.

- ***Education***

Coromina and Camprubí (2016) found that a lower level of education is more likely to increase the use of recommendations from friends and relatives and to increase the use of mass media and travel agencies. Higher levels of education were seen to increase the use of mass media and travel agencies. Choi *et al.* (2012) did not find any association between education and the amount of time visitors spend to search for information to plan their travel.

- ***Nationality***

With regard to nationality, Nunkoo, Ramkissoon and Gursoy (2013) revealed that the socio-cultural background of visitors has an impact on their information search behaviour. Similar findings were shared by Chiang, King and Nguyen (2012), as they found cultural differences in the information search behaviour of Japanese-, English-, and Chinese-speaking visitors to meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions/events (MICE) prior to and during their travel planning. Lu and Chen (2014) also discovered differences in information source usage among Japanese, Chinese, and American visitors to Taiwan. Coromina and Camprubí (2016) revealed nationality to be a discriminant variable, with international visitors more likely to use information sources such as search engines, official websites, and tourism blogs than are domestic tourists.

- ***Income***

Fodness and Murray (1999) found that the level of income affected the information sources that visitors used to search for information. Visitors with a lower household income used recommendations from friends and relatives more, and those with higher

incomes tended to use VICs to gather travel information. Luo *et al.* (2004) found household income to be significantly associated with visitors' preferences for information sources.

- ***Employment status***

Yoo and Gretzel (2016) indicated that visitors' employment status had an influence on the likelihood of contributing to content. Visitors in full-time employment were more likely to contribute to UGC than those in other occupational situations. This tendency might indicate that, owing to the routine conditions in which full-time workers tend to live, they are more likely to share moments that reflect their escape from work and everyday life's pressures (Yoo & Gretzel, 2016).

3.3.6.2 Travel behaviour characteristics

According to Coromina and Camprubí (2016), type of accommodation, length of stay, and familiarity are influential variables in information searches. They indicated that visitors who use hotels tend to consult more information sources, and are more likely to seek information using the Internet and search engines. Visitors having shorter stays tend to be influenced more by recommendations from friends and relatives and the mass media than those who have longer stays and use search engines, official websites, tourism blogs, and brochures.

Choi *et al.* (2012) found that the length of stay had positive relationships with the time spent on travel decision-making. Luo *et al.* (2004) confirmed these results by indicating that visitors who search for information on the Internet tend to spend more at their destinations than those who use other sources. Lehto, Kim and Morrison (2006) examined the effects of travel behaviour characteristics on information sources, and compared first-time and repeat visitors to measure prior experience at the destination and the frequency of searching general tourism-related websites. They found an association between the information sources (e.g., car rental agency, travel agency, local CVB, travel magazines) and the trip's purpose (pleasure, personal, business) and the travel party (alone, family, friends, others). They found that first-time visitors more frequently searched websites than repeat visitors did. Bruwer and Thatch (2013)

found that first-time visitors tend to use more sources (e.g., brochures, VICs) in wine destination than do repeat visitors. Other studies (Gursoy, 2003; Li, Pan, Zhang & Smith, 2009) found similar results, confirming that familiarity with a destination influences the type and degree of the use of information sources.

3.3.6.3. Prior knowledge and experience

Prior knowledge and destination experience have been found to have an influence on the information sources that visitors use to search for travel information (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004; Sharifpour, Walters, Ritchie & Winter, 2014). Gursoy and McCleary (2004) found that previous knowledge, which includes familiarity and expertise, influences external information searches and decision-making, and that the provision of better quality and highly targeted destination-related information increases the likelihood of visits being made.

Choi *et al.* (2012) found that previous visit experience had a positive relationship with less time spent on travel decision-making. Ramkissoon and Nunkoo (2012) revealed that prior product knowledge acquired through previous visits was a determinant of the use of external information sources. Visitors who had previously visited a destination were seen to consider external information sources such as travel agents, friends and relatives, and leaflets as being less important than first-time visitors do. Draper (2018) found that visitors with lower levels of travel experience prefer printed materials such as visitors guide from the local DMO or CVB. This may indicate that visitors with low levels of travel experience prefer to receive information from the “experts” who coordinate and market tourism of a destination rather than other sources.

Bruwer and Thach (2013) found that first-time visitors tend to use sources such as brochures and VICs more than repeat visitors, who rely more on word-of-mouth from family and friends and their own past experiences. Coromina and Camprubí (2016) also found similar results. Choi *et al.* (2018) mentioned that repeat visitors rely more on their familiarity with previously visited destinations and expertise during travel. Sharifpour *et al.* (2014) used both prior knowledge and visits to the destination as predictors of information searches. They found a significant relationship between prior

travel experience and information searches. However, Luo *et al.* (2006) did not find an association between information sources and the number of prior visits undertaken by first-time or repeat visitors.

For behavioural intentions, Morais and Lin (2010) found prior experience to be a significant predictor of intentions to revisit as well as recommending destinations among visitors. Draper (2016) found, similarly, that visitors' prior trips are the most important information sources, and that friends and relatives with experience of visiting a destination might provide information about new areas to visit. This finding indicates that visitors with experience of a travel destination are potentially influential information sources (Choi *et al.*, 2018).

Although there are differences about which socio-demographic and travel behaviour characteristics exert the most influence on visitors' information-searching behaviour, it is important for destination marketers and information dissemination organisations such as VICs to consider them in their strategies so that they can provide tailor-made information to meet the specific needs of different types of visitors. Although functional needs appear to be the most important in tourism information searches (Fodness & Murray, 1999), visitors also engage in information searches in order to satisfy their hedonic needs, such as seeking memorable experiences and emotions, novelty, creativity, aesthetics, enjoyment, and learning (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Lu *et al.*, 2016; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). These needs are considered important, as they might have an influence on the memorability of the trip experience (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017). The next sections focus on memorable tourism experiences and their effect on visitors' behavioural intentions.

3.4 MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCE (MTE)

According to Morgan, Lugosi and Ritchie (2010), society has undergone a profound shift in recent decades: people have abandoned the idea of buying products and services, but rather seek to buy experiences gained from the consumption of products and services. To expand on that: experiences are seen as central to visitors' choices and satisfaction because products such as accommodation, food services, and

transportation are less likely to provide a substantial visitor pull to specific destinations (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). These shifts led to the introduction of the experience economy, which Pine and Gilmore (1999, 2013) conceptualised as a transformation from the production of commodities and goods and the provision of services to the consumption of experiences. According to Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011), the experience economy is used as an overarching concept for the provision of high-quality experiences. The interest in the experience economy was particularly triggered by the importance of delivering experiences, as conventional products and services have become replicated, interchangeable, and commoditised (Morgan *et al.*, 2010). Satisfaction and quality alone are no longer considered adequate descriptions of destination performance and of the experience that visitors seek (Kim, 2018; Manthiou, Kang, Chiang & Tang, 2016). In fact, unique, personal, and memorable experiences that add value during travel represent what visitors aim to obtain (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Adding services that are distinct and beyond visitors' expectations seems to facilitate the creation of memorable experiences (Manthiou *et al.*, 2016). In this way, experiences portray the search for authentic experiences in contrast to unauthentic everyday life experiences as visitors strive for the experiences that are obtained from consuming tourism products and services (Morgan *et al.*, 2010; Taylor, Frost & Laing, 2017). However, Cornelisse (2018) showed that the increasing search for authentic tourism products in the experience economy does not imply a search for authenticity related to genuine artefacts alone, but also involves the search for constructed authenticity in existing and genuine places. MTEs therefore embody both tourism experience and the degree of the memorability of the experience, both of which are important in the search for authentic experiences (Cornelisse, 2018).

Providing visitors with memorable experiences is central to destination competitiveness (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016), because what makes a tourism destination truly competitive is its ability to provide visitors with satisfying memorable experiences (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). 'Satisfying memorable experiences' is the antecedent of attracting visitors and of ultimately providing competitive advantage over competing destinations (Kim, 2014). Therefore, in order to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in tourism, it is important for destination practitioners, marketers, and VICs to add value to visitors' travel by delivering products and services that perform better than those of other destinations and that are tailored

to deliver MTEs (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Chandralal *et al.*, 2015; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto, 2018).

3.4.1 The notion of ‘tourism experiences’

There is no universal definition of or agreement on what ‘tourism experiences’ are and what factors determine their formation (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). This lack of agreement stems from the complex nature of what is considered a tourism experience, as the term varies across visitors and tourism destinations (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2014). The subjective nature of a tourism experience, its formation, the different elements involved, and its impact on visitors add to this complexity (Taylor *et al.*, 2017; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Drawing on a wide range of definitions, Taylor *et al.* (2017) mentioned that researchers who have attempted to define a tourism experience have generally focused on a combination of different elements. In this way, a ‘tourism experience’ is seen as something that contrasts with the daily experience of the visitors’ usual environment. Tourism experiences are memorable events that engage each individual in a personal way (Pine & Gilmore, 2013); that take place before, during, and after tourist activities; that are unique to each individual; and that are internally produced (Taylor *et al.*, 2017). While a tourism experience is considered an activity-based process within a temporal sphere, it is also seen as a spatially and temporally multiphase phenomenon that encompasses a broad range of interconnected processes and dynamics in the different travel stages (Wang *et al.*, 2012). During travel, visitors derive memories not from only one travel stage, but from other stages too (Taylor *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, visitors’ experiences are not only affected by tangible products and experienced services, but also by how unforgettable and memorable they are (Cornelisse, 2018).

Memorable experiences are considered the most important experiences because they are exceptionally vivid and long-lasting (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Conversely, some researchers (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Park & Santos, 2017) have indicated that negative experiences are also a critical component of MTEs, because tourists often feel negative emotions during their tourism experience. These

emotions may be evoked by the occurrence of an accident, illness, or an unfavourable service experience (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). Offering memorable experiences is central to tourism as it involves creating lasting memories that visitors will recall and reminisce about (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014). In addition, memory is an important personal source of information that visitors use in making decisions to visit a destination or to influence their future behavioural intentions such as revisiting a destination (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017). Memorable experiences have therefore become an important source of information for making re-purchase decisions (Mahdzar, 2018).

The fundamental outcome of experiences is pleasure and having the memory of the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999, 2013; Sørensen & Jensen, 2015). In this way, an MTE refers to positive tourism experiences that are remembered and recalled after the event or activity has occurred (Kim, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2012). To Kruger, Viljoen and Saayman (2013), an MTE is one that the visitor not only remembers but also treasures long after the trip is over. MTEs therefore serve to strengthen and enhance the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998).

However, not all tourism experiences are memorable, because they are subjective and unique experiences that cannot be replicated (Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Zhang, Wu & Buhalis, 2017). MTEs are selectively constructed from a myriad of experiences based on visitors' unique assessment of their own experiences and perceptions of reality (Kim *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, visitors tend to have different experiences, even if they do the same thing in the same place (Kim *et al.*, 2012). The inherently personal nature of experiences means that visitors cannot have the same experience as other visitors: each experience is individually constructed. Given the subjective nature of MTEs, it is important for destination marketers to understand which specific components underlie the formation of MTEs. To understand MTEs better, several researchers (Kim, Hallab & Kim, 2012; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim, 2014; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011) identified and discussed the dimensions of MTEs. These are discussed in the next section.

As explained in Chapter 1, the concept of ‘visitor’ includes both same-day visitors and overnight visitors, often referred to as ‘tourists’. Therefore, in this study, ‘MTE’ includes both tourist and visitor experiences.

3.4.2. Dimensions of MTE

Several researchers have identified dimensions that are crucial to MTEs. In their seminal work on the experience economy, Pine and Gilmore (1999) identified four major realms of staged experience: aesthetics, entertainment, education, and escapism. Visitors’ level of involvement in the experience, and their participation – whether active or passive – were also identified as key factors that determine their experiences (Lu, Chi & Liu, 2015). On the other hand, Taylor *et al.* (2017) identified a range of factors that are influential in determining visitors’ experiences, such as their level of involvement, expectations prior to the visit, and the setting where the experience takes place, including its attributes and the events or activities (Taylor *et al.*, 2017). In this way, visitors are seen not as merely passive recipients of experiences, but as actively involved co-producers of their personal experiences. Co-creation is characterised as visitors’ active participation and interaction with other visitors and local residents during a tourism experience (Campos, Mendes, Oom do Valle & Scott, 2016), and it contributes to the memorability of the tourism experience (Campos *et al.*, 2016; Sthapit, Del Chiappa, Coudounaris & Björk, 2019).

With the proliferation of ICTs and new online platforms such as social media and mobile technologies, visitors use them not only for travel information searches and decision-making, but also to share and co-create new and personal experiences (Neuhofer, Buhalis & Ladkin, 2013), not only during the trip but also after the trip has ended (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017). Sharing positive experiences increases visitors’ positive emotions and leads to more positive trip evaluations. On the other hand, sharing unsatisfactory travel experiences also helps to reduce negative perceptions of the trip, which in turn enhances the post-trip evaluation (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

Considering that an MTE is positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred, Assaf and Josiassen (2012) identified the destination attributes of MTEs as

having the following ten dimensions: local culture, variety of activities, hospitality, infrastructure, environment management, accessibility, quality of service, physiography, place attachment, and superstructure. Chandralal *et al.* (2015) explored MTEs using travel blog narratives, and identified the following experiential dimensions: local people; life and culture; personally significant experiences; shared experiences; perceived novelty; perceived serendipity; professional guides and tour operator services; and affective emotions. Aiming to advance an understanding of MTEs, Seyfi, Hall and Rasoolimanesh (2020) identified prior perceived experience, significance of the experience, authenticity, engagement, cultural exchange, culinary attraction, and quality of service as key factors that affect cultural tourist experiences. Kim *et al.* (2012) argued that only the components of the tourism experience that strongly affect visitors and lead to memorability should be taken into consideration when conceptualising an MTE. These authors therefore proposed 16 experiential constructs as components of an MTE: hedonism, relaxation, stimulation, refreshment, adverse feelings, social interaction (local culture), happiness, meaningfulness, knowledge, challenge, assessment of value, assessment of service, unexpected happenings, involvement (personal relevance), novelty, and participation. With visitors' interests and needs becoming increasingly sophisticated, Kim *et al.* (2012) refined the measurement process used in the initial constructs and developed a scale to measure MTEs. The scale has seven dimensions – hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge – as well as 24 indicators that are described in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2: Memorable tourism experience dimensions

Dimensions	Description	Indicators
Hedonism	Pleasurable emotions and feelings of happiness and excitement.	• Thrilled about having a new experience • Indulged in the activities • Really enjoyed this tourism experience • Exciting
Novelty	Desire to experience something new and different from the usual environment.	• Once-in-a-lifetime experience • Unique • Different from previous experiences • Experienced something new

Dimensions	Description	Indicators
Local culture	Interaction and engagement with local culture and people.	• Good impressions about the local people • Closely experienced the local culture • Local people in a destination were friendly
Refreshment	The state of being refreshed, relaxed, and renewed.	• Liberating • Enjoyed sense of freedom • Refreshing • Revitalised
Meaningfulness	A sense of great value, significance, or fulfilment, physically, emotionally, or spiritually.	• I did something meaningful • I did something important • I learned about myself
Involvement	Active participation in tourism activities.	• I visited a place where I really wanted to go • I enjoyed activities that I really wanted to do • I was interested in the main activities of this tourism experience
Knowledge	The need to gain new insights, understanding, skills, and knowledge.	• Exploratory • Knowledge • New culture

Source: Kim *et al.* (2012:15 &18)

Kim *et al.* (2012) indicated that visitors who perceive a tourism experience as memorable recall the seven MTE dimensions. While these dimensions are likely to affect visitors' memory, the notion of experience may mean different things to different people and the memorability of a tourism experience might also differ across visitors (Cornelisse, 2018). Thus MTEs are created according to an individual's unique assessment and perception of their reality (Kim *et al.*, 2012). Different visitors may therefore have different experiences of the same activity. On this basis, the next section examines factors that may have an influence on MTEs.

3.4.3 Factors that influence MTEs

Demographic and travel behaviour characteristics have been found to have an effect on visitors' memorable experience, and in particular on Kim *et al.*'s (2012) dimensions of MTEs (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018; Sthapit *et al.*, 2019a).

- **Demographic characteristics**

According to Tung and Ritchie (2011), the formation and recall of memory is a non-uniform process that is influenced by the demographic background of an individual.

With regard to *gender*, Pillemer, Wink, DiDonato and Sanborn (2003) found that, in the construction and recollection of autobiographical memory, women recalled more specific life events than men did. They also remembered more positive and unique events, rated their autobiographical memories as more vivid, and attached greater significance to their experiences. Jonas, Radder and Van Eyk (2020) found that women find visits to marine protected areas more meaningful than men do. This could be attributed to the fact that women are believed to be more reflective than men, and take time to think about activities in which they have participated. Furthermore, women tend to be more selective than men, mainly participating in activities that hold meaning or that arouse their interest.

For *age*, Jansari and Parkin (1996) showed that older visitors recalled recent memories and recounted more specific details of their experience than younger tourists did. Dijkstra and Kaup (2005) suggested that older adults are more likely to retain memories with distinctive characteristics, such as self-relevant and emotionally intense memories. Jonas *et al.* (2020) found that young tourists perceived the whale-watching experience to be more novel and memorable than their seniors did. Tourists' stage of life could explain this finding, as seniors might have had more novel MTEs than younger visitors.

Jonas *et al.* (2020) found that tourists with different levels of *education* expressed differences over the meaningfulness, knowledge, and MTE of marine protected areas

they visited. Tourists with different levels of education also differed in respect of knowledge, novelty, social interaction, meaningfulness, and MTE related to whale-watching experiences. These differences may be attributed to tourists with a tertiary education being exposed to more information, knowledge, and experiences than others are.

In their *cross-cultural* investigation of MTEs, Ayazlar and Ayazlar (2017) found differences between Turkish and British tourists in their experience of hedonism, involvement, and local culture. Oliveira and Pereira (2008) found *nationality* differences in the importance placed on various destination attributes among tourists to Madeira. Jonas *et al.* (2020) found differences between South Africans and international visitors in their social interaction during visits to marine protected areas: South African visitors found the experience to be more socially interactive than foreign visitors did. This could be because language barriers prevent international visitors from interacting with participants who speak a different language. South Africans visitors also found visiting marine protected areas to be socially interactive because they travelled with family and friends.

With regard to rating MTE according to *visitor segmentation*, Horvat, Mijoč, Matković and Miftarević (2018) found demographic differences between different segments: those who described their experience as ‘not special’, ‘neutral’, or ‘special’. The authors did not find differences between the segments in terms of gender, employment status, and personal income. Differences were identified in relation to marital status and education. Married visitors rated their experience as ‘not special’, while single visitors described their experience as ‘special’. For education, visitors with lower levels of completed education described their experience as ‘not special’. Older visitors also rated their experience as ‘not special’, while younger ones rated their experience as ‘special’.

Regarding the application of dimensions of Kim *et al.*’s (2012) MTE scale, Sthapit, Coudounaris and Björk (2019) noted that the majority of studies conducted in this area focused on the direct replication of the scale in new contexts in order to validate prior MTEs. As a result, fewer studies have incorporated other factors, such as

demographic and travel behaviour characteristics, that might have an impact on the MTE dimensions. Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017) referred to their study as the first one to test empirically the moderating effects of gender, age, and nationality on the dimensions of MTE. They found that, while age, gender and nationality had a moderating effect on hedonism, involvement, and knowledge, these characteristics did not have an influence on meaningfulness. The moderating effects were identified among female tourists more than among male tourists, among older tourists more than among younger ones, and among European tourists more than among non-European tourists. Sthapit *et al.* (2019a), on the other hand, found that the relationship between novelty seeking and memorable local food experiences differed across gender and age. They found that the novelty-seeking effect on memorable local food experiences was more significant for older females than for younger male visitors.

- **Travel behaviour characteristics**

With regard to rating memorable tourism experience according to *visitor segmentation*, Horvat *et al.* (2018) found differences in travel behaviour characteristics between different segments: those who described their experience as ‘not special’, ‘neutral’, or ‘special’. They found differences on the accommodation that tourists used, with those who stayed at either four- or five-star hotels rating their experience as ‘not special’. Tourists who stayed at a visited destination for the first time rated their experience as ‘special’. There were no differences between the three clusters regarding tourists’ length of stay.

According to Sthapit *et al.* (2019a), most previous studies that used Kim *et al.*’s (2012) MTE scale did not incorporate travel behaviour characteristics to understand the effect they might exert on the MTE dimensions. In their study, Sthapit *et al.* (2019a) found that the relationship between novelty seeking and memorable local food experiences differed across travel behaviour characteristics. They found that the novelty-seeking effect on memorable local food experiences was more significant for repeat visitors than for first-time visitors. Repeat visitors’ exposure to local cuisine might have increased their motivation to taste other novel foods.

From the above discussion, the study proposes the following hypothesis and sub-hypotheses:

H₁: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences:

- H_{1a}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of hedonism.
- H_{1b}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of novelty.
- H_{1c}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of local culture.
- H_{1d}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of refreshment.
- H_{1e}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of meaningfulness.
- H_{1f}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of involvement.
- H_{1g}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of the knowledge they have gained.

Although Kim *et al.*'s (2012) study has been criticised for using data collected by convenience sampling among college students in one region in the USA, and so might not be generalisable to typical tourists (Chandralal *et al.*, 2015; Cornelisse, 2018; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017), it has been found to be valid and reliable in enhancing the MTE literature. As a result, dimensions of Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE scale were adopted in this study to measure the MTE dimensions that contribute to visitors' behavioural intentions (H₃). The next section therefore presents the literature relevant to this area.

3.5. BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS

‘Behavioural intentions’ refers to the likelihood that an individual will take part in a particular behaviour. It represents the level of effort that an individual is likely to exhibit a specific behaviour in future (Maduku, 2015). Behavioural intention involves desirable behaviours that tourists are likely to demonstrate in the future (Chen, Lee, Chen & Huang, 2011). Recommendation intentions and revisit intentions are the most common indicators used to measure tourists’ behavioural intentions or loyalty in tourism (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Gallarza, Saura & Moreno, 2013; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Yu *et al.*, 2019).

Recommendation intentions may be seen in positive behaviours that tourists display following a positive evaluation of a product, brand, or service (Chang, Yeh, Pai & Huang, 2018). For Chen, Cheng and Kim (2020), ‘recommendation intentions’ refers to tourists’ motive to make positive verbal recommendations to others after travel. ‘Revisit intentions’ is the embodiment of loyalty to a destination, and expresses a tourist’s possible repeating of an activity or their return to a destination (Chen *et al.*, 2020). ‘Repeat visit’ reflects the degree to which tourists perceive the destination as a place they would recommend to others, while ‘willingness to recommend a destination’ is an indicator for assessing destination loyalty (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017).

Some previous studies indicated that high levels of customer satisfaction and a positive customer experience lead to behavioural intentions (Lam, Lau & Cheung, 2016). The study by Wu, Li and Li (2018) found that perceived experience quality influences experience satisfaction and theme park image, and has a positive effect on behavioural intentions. Fodness and Murray (1999) considered the length of stay, the number of destinations visited, the number of attractions visited, and travel-related expenditure as behavioural outcomes of an information search.

In the context of VICs, which are the focus of this study, information that visitors receive from VIC staff may create an awareness of tourism attractions in the visited

destinations, and may result in their being satisfied with their visit and having memorable experiences in the visited areas (Draper, 2018; Ortega *et al.*, 2014; Tavares *et al.*, 2018). These memorable experiences may influence their behaviour, leading them to extend their length of stay, increase their expenditure at the destinations, and revisit the destinations and VICs in future (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Ortega *et al.*, 2014). The information may be shared with friends and relatives after the trip, and thus encourage them to visit the destinations (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2011; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014). In this study, therefore, 'behavioural intentions' is posited as a multidimensional construct consisting of the intentions to return to visited VICs, return to visited destinations, visit more places, spend more money, extend the length of stay, and recommend the visited destinations to family and friends. MTEs that lead to behavioural intentions are also examined in this study, and are discussed below.

3.5.1 MTEs that influence behavioural intentions

MTEs are the most influential determinants of behavioural intentions (Kim, 2014; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2019; Zhang *et al.*, 2017). They are an output of specific past activities such as accommodation, restaurants, and tours at a destination, and may also affect future behavioural intentions (Boavida-Portugal, Ferreira & Rocha, 2017). They are an important information source for making a revisit decision and spreading word-of-mouth (Marschall, 2012). As such, they are likely to lead to higher word-of-mouth recommendations and revisit intentions (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017). Also, Mahdzar, Shuib, Ramachandran and Afandi (2015) indicate that MTE in a destination is an important predictor of positive behavioural intentions that result in revisit intentions. For many destinations, repeat visitors are a desirable market segment because they tend to stay longer, be more satisfied, spread word-of-mouth, and participate in consumption activities more intensely than do first-time visitors (Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014). It is important, therefore, for destination practitioners, marketers, and VICs to create conditions that facilitate the realisation of MTEs and that enhance recommendation and revisit intentions as an important strategy for destination marketing and information dissemination (Chen *et al.*, 2020).

Previous studies examined the effect of MTE on behavioural intentions, loyalty, and revisit intentions in different contexts. For example, Kim *et al.* (2012) established a link between dimensions of the MTE scale and behavioural intentions. Tsai (2016) found that MTE has both a direct and an indirect effect through the moderating role of place identity and behavioural intentions. Semrad and Rivera (2018) indicated that a memorable festival experience has an influence on word-of-mouth. Manthiou *et al.* (2016) found that a memorable theme park experience influenced visitor satisfaction and recollection. Barnes, Mattsson and Sørensen (2016) suggested that remembered long-term experiences have a strong impact on destination revisit intentions, while Zhang *et al.* (2017) noted that only destinations that provide MTEs can attract more repeat visitors. These studies showed that MTEs have an influence on behavioural intentions. In addition to these studies, some researchers used the dimensions of Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE scale to examine their influence on behavioural intentions. These are discussed below.

- **Hedonism**

Kim *et al.* (2012) asserted that hedonism, as an integral part of a tourism experience, increases behavioural intentions. Kim and Ritchie (2014) found that visitors who experienced hedonism during their travel had high levels of behavioural intentions. Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) supported this finding by emphasising that hedonism influences behavioural intentions, while Yu *et al.* (2019) showed that it influences revisit intentions in particular.

- **Novelty**

With regard to novelty, Yu *et al.* (2019) found that, when visitors were merely seeking novelty-related experiences at a destination, they were less likely to revisit it. Their findings are consistent with those of Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013) – that visitors whose main purpose was to experience novelty were less likely to revisit a place, but that they would recommend it to other potential visitors. Sthapit (2013) found, however, that novelty influenced tourists' behavioural intentions towards a destination.

- **Local culture**

Kim and Ritchie (2014) indicated that visitors who engage with the local culture during their travel show high levels of behavioural intentions and, in particular, demonstrate a willingness to recommend the destination they visited to friends and to revisit it. These findings are similar to those of Kim *et al.* (2010) – that visitors who interact with the local culture construct a unique and memorable holiday experience and have high levels of behavioural intentions. Sthapit (2013) and Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) also found that local culture influences behavioural intentions, while Yu *et al.* (2019) found that it influences revisit and WOM intentions.

- **Refreshment**

Visitors who experienced a feeling of refreshment during their travels had high levels of behavioural intentions (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Similarly, Yu *et al.* (2019) found that refreshment positively influenced WOM intentions.

- **Meaningfulness**

Kim and Ritchie (2014) found that meaningfulness was not significantly related to behavioural intentions. Yu *et al.* (2019) also found non-significant relationships between meaningfulness and revisit intentions and between meaningfulness and WOM intentions.

- **Involvement**

According to Kim and Ritchie (2014), visitors who showed high levels of involvement in visiting a place they longed to see, and participating in activities that they wanted to do, displayed high levels of behavioural intentions. Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) found, similarly, that involvement influences behavioural intentions. Yu *et al.* (2019)

also found that involvement in destination activities influences revisit and WOM intentions, including a willingness to recommend it to friends and to visit again.

- **Knowledge**

Kim and Ritchie (2014) found that knowledge is not significantly related to behavioural intentions. They attributed this lack of a relationship to the likelihood of visitors being tired of seeking other means of happiness and/or learning while travelling. This shows that visitors who had already learned about and familiarised themselves with a destination may prefer to satisfy other experiences, such as novelty seeking, rather than seek knowledge. Similar to Kim and Ritchie's (2014) findings, Yu *et al.* (2019) found that the knowledge dimension exerted a significantly negative effect on visitors' WOM intention, indicating that acquiring knowledge was less important to visitors whose main purpose in visiting a destination was to relax and have fun. Thus visitors who rated knowledge higher were less likely to tell others to visit (Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017), on the other hand, found that knowledge gained in areas that have been visited has an influence on behavioural intentions.

Given the importance of delivering MTEs, destination marketers, practitioners, and VICs should aim to facilitate the provision of easy, accurate, and reliable information about the destination and its tourism products in order to enhance the probability of delivering these experiences to potential visitors. This information can help visitors to plan their trips better, and can thus help visitors to achieve experiences that are memorable. Tourism marketers, practitioners, and VICs should therefore allocate resources to, and focus their efforts on, developing practical guidelines and programmes to direct their operational activities so that they facilitate and create MTEs (Kim & Ritchie, 2014).

Although Kim *et al.*'s (2012) study has been criticised for using data collected by convenience sampling among college students in one region in the USA, and so may not be generalisable because students may not be representative of typical tourists (Chandralal *et al.*, 2015; Cornelisse, 2018; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017), they have been found to be valid and reliable in enhancing the MTE literature. As a result, the

scale was adopted in this study to measure the following hypothesis and sub-hypotheses:

H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.

- H_{3a}: Visitors' experience of hedonism contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3b}: Visitors' experience of novelty contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3c}: Visitors' experience of local culture contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3d}: Visitors' experience of refreshment contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3e}: Visitors' experience of meaningfulness contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3f}: Visitors' experience of involvement contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3g}: Visitors' experience of the knowledge they have gained contributes to their behavioural intentions.

3.5.2 Demographic and travel behaviour characteristics that influence behavioural intentions

While MTE is an important factor that influences behavioural intentions, Zhang *et al.* (2017) noted that the influence patterns of MTE dimensions may be different across visitors and environments. Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) suggested the need to integrate other relevant dimensions that might have an effect on behavioural intentions. However, Sthapit *et al.* (2019a) noted that fewer studies that used the dimensions of Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE to examine their influence on behavioural intentions incorporated other dimensions. While Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017) tested the moderating effects of other factors such as visitors' demographic characteristics (gender, age, and nationality) on MTEs, and Sthapit *et al.* (2019a) tested the effects of visitors' demographic characteristics (gender and age) and travel behaviour characteristics (first-time and repeat visitors) on memorable local food

experiences, the effect of these characteristics on behavioural intentions need to be examined.

Given that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics have an effect on MTEs, and that MTEs may further influence behavioural intentions (Sthapit, 2019b), the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H₂: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.

Understanding visitors' socio-demographic and travel behaviour characteristics is important to helping information dissemination organisations such as DMOs and VICs to direct and strengthen their information dissemination strategies and campaigns in order to facilitate MTEs and behavioural intentions according to the targeted visitor characteristics (Chen *et al.*, 2020).

3.6 CONCLUSION

The travel process is complex, and requires visitors to search for information and knowledge to help them to make informed decisions throughout their trips. Information dissemination organisations such as DMOs and VICs can therefore play an important role in providing information and using relevant information sources to meet the travel needs of visitors. However, to achieve this, these organisations should work with other stakeholders such as local tourism businesses and surrounding communities to meet the information needs of visitors, thereby enhancing memorable visitor experiences and influencing their behavioural intentions. Such collaboration should be formalised and undertaken in a more coordinated way so that stakeholders can explore socio-economic opportunities that might improve the quality of communities' lives and encourage their participation in tourism.

This chapter addressed 'information search' and 'memorable visitor experiences' in the travel process, and aimed to achieve research objective 2, as well as H₁, H₂, and H₃ through a literature review. The next chapter will address research objectives 3, 4,

5, and 6, as well as H₄, H₅, and H₆ by examining VICs as one of the most prominent external information sources used in the travel process. The chapter provides an overview of VICs from both global and national perspectives, highlighting information and knowledge provision in VICs and the roles and functions of VICs and their staff. Collaborations between VICs and their stakeholders are examined, including the social and economic opportunities that emanate from these collaborations. Based on the theoretical framework and the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3, the next chapter provides a conceptual framework that links the literature review chapters with the empirical phase of the study.

CHAPTER 4: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 reviewed the importance of information in the travel process in order to help visitors make informed travel decisions, and to enhance their experiences during travel. The chapter addressed ‘information search’ and ‘memorable visitor experiences’ in the travel process. Chapter 4 considers the views expressed in the previous chapter – that to enhance the quality of visitors’ experiences, information and knowledge provision is not only important during trip planning, but also when visitors are at their chosen destinations. With VICs being one of the external sources that provide information and knowledge to visitors at destinations, this chapter starts by defining VICs in section 4.2, and presenting an overview of VICs from a global perspective in section 4.3.

The role and functions of VICs are discussed in section 4.4, while the role of staff in the delivery of information and knowledge and the sources used in this regard are examined in section 4.5. Factors that influence the staff’s effectiveness in delivering memorable visitor experiences – in particular, structural and organisational conditions – are discussed in section 4.6.

Section 4.7 discusses the sources used to disseminate information and knowledge in VICs. Collaborations between VICs and their stakeholders, including visitors, other VICs, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities, are examined in section 4.8. More importantly, social and economic opportunities that arise from these collaborations are highlighted. This collaboration is expressed in a VIC information exchange model that is presented in section 4.9, and is examined to identify the stakeholders involved in the delivery and exchange of information and knowledge in VICs.

Following this global perspective, an overview of VICs in South Africa is provided in section 4.10, as this is the research context for this study. Several public sector

documents are reviewed to provide the context in which to understand the role and functions of VICs in South Africa. Section 4.11 attempts to integrate the literature reviewed in chapters 2, 3, and 4 with a view to developing hypotheses and a conceptual framework that identifies the important constructs that guided the empirical phase of the study. This framework attempts to link the literature review and the empirical phase. The conclusions derived from the literature reviewed in this chapter are presented in section 4.12.

4.2 DEFINITION OF A VIC

Tourism authorities and marketing agencies in many destinations have made various efforts to develop and implement VICs in order to provide tourism information (Lyu & Hwang, 2015). Several terms, such as welcome centre, tourist centre, visitor centre, orientation centre, interpretive centre, or information centre, are used to describe facilities that provide tourism information (Pearce, 2004).

There is no single definition of a VIC. However, Pearce (2004:8) offers the most widely used definition of a VIC as “a clearly labelled, publicly accessible, physical space with personnel providing pre-dominantly free of charge information to facilitate travellers’ experiences”. Fallon and Kriwoken (2002) define a VIC as a physical location that provides site-specific information to visitors who tour the location or local area. In South Africa, a VIC refers to a physical location that provides tourism information to visitors who tour in the vicinity of an area (National Department of Tourism, 2015). Although Pearce (2004) uses the term ‘personnel’ to refer to people who provide information in VICs, this study will use the term ‘staff’.

Two main deductions can be made from the definitions. First, a VIC is a physical facility that disseminates information to visitors. In this way, a VIC is different from other types of information centres, such as libraries or community information centres, as it aims to provide local area information to visitors. Second, the aim of disseminating information is to enhance visitors’ experiences. Inherent in the definitions is the role of the staff in disseminating information.

The main elements in the definitions are, therefore, the dissemination of information, the staff as disseminators of information, and the enhancement of visitors' experiences. This study regards these elements as important in understanding how the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences. However, the study goes beyond the demand side of providing information and knowledge to visitors, and includes other stakeholders in the supply side, such as the surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. Thus, in the context of the study, a VIC is a physical location that exchanges information and knowledge with different stakeholders in order to enhance memorable visitor experiences and generate socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism businesses.

4.3 VICS: A GLOBAL OVERVIEW

The origin of the concept of a VIC can be traced to the use of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (CVBs) in the United State of America (USA), which were part of the Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), and played a critical role in the marketing of their destinations (Lee, Lee & Jones, 2015). The development of VICs went through many transformations. Initially they were adopted as the first point-of-contact with visitors in order to disseminate information mainly through information brochures and leaflets (Lee *et al.*, 2015). With time, gifts, souvenirs, and other local products were added for sale to visitors (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Lyu & Hwang, 2015). In the modern technological world, steered by the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), online platforms, and mobile devices, VICs are encouraged to have more of an online presence in order to avoid becoming relics of the past (Lyu & Hwang, 2015). Also important for VICs is to incorporate these technologies into their information dissemination functions as visitors' expectations, needs, and search behaviours continue to change and to reshape the travel process (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Choe *et al.*, 2017; Khatri, 2019; Mannaa, 2019).

VICs vary in many respects, depending on the national context and the core purpose for which they were established (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003). For example, in the USA these facilities are commonly known as 'highway centers', 'welcome centers', or 'visitor

centers', and are located primarily in the border areas of each state (Pennington-Gray & Vogt, 2003). They are used to provide interstate highway visitors with various types of information, such as maps, discount coupons, and brochures associated with tourist attractions, accommodation, and restaurants in the area (Dimanche & Taylor, 2006). In countries such as Australia, South Korea, and South Africa, terms such as 'VIC' or 'tourist information centre' (TIC) are used to refer to facilities that provide information to visitors. The majority of VICs in these countries are located near tourist attractions such as national parks and historical and cultural sites, or near public transportation facilities such as bus terminals, train stations, airports, and harbours (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Chikati, 2019; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015).

VICs may be large or small, or differ in their architecture or design. They may have a nature, cultural, discovery, or adventure focus. Furthermore, VICs may have a commercial component, or they may be largely driven by community and civic imperatives (Pearce, 2004). They may offer a diversity of services and facilities such as visitor information, toilet and restaurant services, interpretive displays, activities, and guided tours (Lyu & Hwang, 2015). With regard to their management and governance, VICs may be privately or publicly owned, or may operate as a joint venture between the two. VICs may also be linked to tourist boards or DMOs, and may be part of a national visitor information network or accreditation scheme (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002). However, direct investment by the local government or state, and local governance through regional tourism organisations (RTOs), are the most common forms of funding (Pühringer, 2008).

The varied descriptions of VICs above show that there is no single type or model of VIC operation and funding, as these facilities are diverse and serve many different functions. However, all the descriptions relate to disseminating and providing information, which is the focus of the study.

4.4 THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF VICs

According to Pühringer (2008), VICs generally perform a multitude of functions, depending on the environment in which they operate. While some of these functions mainly serve visitors, others are directed at serving non-visitors such as surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. This section therefore highlights, first, the basic functions that most VICs perform; second, the commercial services offered in VICs; and third, the VIC functions related to providing information and knowledge, as this is the focus of the study.

4.4.1 Basic functions of VICs

Pearce (2004) identifies four basic functions that most VICs perform to serve visitors. Added to these functions is community integration, which is directed at surrounding communities, including their tourism businesses. The following are therefore regarded as basic VIC functions:

- A marketing and access function, which involves the active promotion of an area or a product. It entails providing information about activities such as what to do, how to get there, and where to stay, as well as booking services. This function is essentially about stimulating visitor demand, and often seeks to increase visitors' expenditure at the destination. In this way, VICs are an element in the marketing and promotional infrastructure of tourist destinations, since they serve as communication channels for visitors once they arrive at a destination. They act as intermediaries in providing visitor services, as they can market and sell the final service to visitors either on-site or online (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010).
- An enhancement and information provision function, which focuses on improving the quality of the visitor experience and enhancing the visitor's appreciation of the destination. This function entails more than simply stimulating visitor demand: it also involves directing the demand towards sensitive appreciation according to sustainable visitor behaviour principles.

- A control and filtering function, which helps to reduce visitor pressures on resources. Through this function, VICs play a role in reducing visitors' impact on fragile or environmentally sensitive locations by providing guidelines for visiting attractions or sensitising visitors to their potential impact.
- A substitution function, which involves a VIC serving as a substitute for attractions and activities that may be inaccessible or difficult to experience. In such situations, a VIC can provide an experience based on recreated feature displays and elements of the attraction. A VIC emphasising this function, such as a wildlife centre, is often called an interpretive centre.
- A community integration function, which includes VIC activities that do not involve visitors. Building on the work of Fallon and Kriwoken (2003), Pearce (2004) introduced the 'four plus' model of VIC functioning by adding 'plus' functions that do not serve visitors. According to Pearce (2004:9), these functions "present the goals of visitor centres in such directions as providing a community centre, displaying the pride and political achievements of the area and serving as the administrative and research home for local tourism management". This community function of VICs is important to helping them to achieve administrative, civic, and economic benefits for the whole community. Deery *et al.* (2007) found that VICs serve an important community function by providing employment and volunteer opportunities for local people. In remote areas, VICs may contribute to the social fabric of the community by serving as community facilities (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2004).

In addition to these basic functions, VICs also perform other functions, such as providing facilities of convenience to visitors, allowing them to use restrooms and to stretch their legs inside the VICs while taking a break from travelling (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009). Although these are not key reasons for visitors to visit VICs, they are nonetheless important aspects of the VIC experience, and highlight additional ways in which VICs can service visitors' needs and add value to their travel experiences (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009).

4.4.2 VIC functions related to the provision of commercial services

VICs have transitioned from reactive providers of information to centres of more proactive commercial, sales, and service-led business generation (SGS Economics and Planning Report, 2013). As a result, they play a role as booking or reservation centres, including providing ticketing services for tours and events (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2004; Connell & Reynolds, 1999; SGS Economics and Planning Report, 2013). As not all travel plans can be made before travelling to a destination, VICs can help visitors to plan and book activities (Draper, 2018). Information about the booking service aims to reduce the risk of visitors making a booking without recommendations from staff. In turn, local tourism businesses may generate some income when visitors make a booking based on staff recommendations.

VICs are also involved in the sale of local products refreshments, merchandise, gifts, and souvenirs (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Lyu & Hwang, 2015). In comparing VIC visitors' and non-VIC users' preferences for VIC attributes, Lyu and Lee (2015) found differences between the two. VIC visitors were most likely to use VICs to search for travel information, whereas those who have not visited VICs showed higher expectations that VICs would offer additional experiences – for example, the ability to buy commodities such as beverages, goods, souvenirs, and local products. Thus, to attract non-visitors, VICs need to create various opportunities for this market to use VIC commodities that meet their needs. A closer cooperation between VIC staff and stakeholders such as with surrounding communities and local tourism businesses might help them to reach more potential users (Lyu & Lee, 2015).

4.4.3 VIC functions related to information and knowledge provision

VICs are an external information source used by visitors to search for tourism information (Araña, León, Carballo, Gil, 2016; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Draper, 2018; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015). For many visitors, they are often the first place to visit in order to find information on tourism products, services, activities, advice, and any other information about a destination (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; National Department of Tourism, 2011). The information provided to

visitors covers a wide variety of travel-related areas, such as accommodation, restaurants, attractions, events, travel routes, safety, road conditions, water, and petrol services (Araña *et al.*, 2016). VICs also provide visitors with information on features of the local community, such as interpreting the flora, fauna, history, and culture that visitors might visit and experience (Draper, 2018). They provide information in order to direct visitors to the right place at the right time (Ispas *et al.*, 2014).

Information is provided to visitors not only at a particular stage of their travel, but also throughout the course of the trip – in the pre-, during-, and post-travel stages (Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014) – in order to meet the information needs of different types of visitors, both virtual and face-to-face (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010). VICs serve as important sources of information for visitors when deciding what activities to engage in before taking a trip. They provide an opportunity for visitors to learn about things about which they might not have been aware prior to reaching their destination or en route to it. At the destination, VICs provide information on tourism products and services that visitors might want to visit or access (Draper, 2018).

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the provision of knowledge is about more than providing information: it involves the dissemination of information that is combined with experience, context, interpretation, reflection, and perspective. Such knowledge adds a new level of understanding and insight (Jennex, 2017). It is this value-added knowledge (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002) that visitors require to make travel-related decisions, because it involves the deployment of competency, expertise, and experience to make information useable for effective decision-making and action (Cooper, 2018; Kim & Lee, 2013). In this regard, VIC staff use their experience and knowledge of tourism products to provide advice and recommendations that might not be available from other sources (Draper, 2018).

VIC staff are regarded as ambassadors for their areas (Buhalis, Leung & Law, 2011) and as in-destination gatekeepers or knowledge brokers owing to the role they play as expert informants (Wong & McKercher, 2011). They can connect visitors with local people who can share their knowledge about community sites, facilities, and events, and provide a cultural and authentic experience of the area (Araña *et al.*, 2016; De Ascaniis *et al.*, 2012; Edwards *et al.*, 2016). This local knowledge enables visitors to

make choices and to plan their travel based on informed staff recommendations – which are often absent when they have to search and plan their travel based on online sources only (Deery *et al.*, 2007). For the millennial market, a ‘tech-savvy’ and ‘always-online’ generation (KPMG, 2017), obtaining local knowledge allows them to search for novelty, gain new knowledge, and acquire authentic experiences (Cavagnaro, Staffieri & Postma, 2018; Ketter, 2019) instead of the typical pre-packaged tour (Bernardi, 2017). In their search for authentic experiences, millennials contribute to local economies, supporting small-scale and locally owned businesses (Bernardi, 2017; Cavagnaro *et al.*, 2018). Providing local knowledge empowers local people to serve as travel experts and ambassadors of their own areas to co-produce knowledge in order to supplement VIC information in areas such as food, attractions, and activities (Edwards *et al.*, 2016). Visitors and local people can also post and share their reviews and recommendations of tourism products they have visited on online review platforms such as Trip Advisor. Such reviews can serve as knowledge for potential visitors, and point VIC staff and tourism businesses to areas requiring improvements to help them remain competitive (Edwards *et al.*, 2016).

With VICs responsible for providing a wide variety of information and knowledge about local tourism products, services, and activities (Araña *et al.*, 2016; Draper, 2018) it is important that these resources are managed effectively. As discussed in Chapter 2, Knowledge Management (KM) is a systematic management process of identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, maintaining, and sharing an organisation’s information assets (Perry & Bernard, 2016; Omotayo, 2015). These assets can include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously uncaptured expertise and experience from individual workers (Meihami & Meihami, 2014). Using databases available in VICs, staff should share and make information accessible to visitors and different stakeholders such as surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. To meet the needs of these stakeholders, staff should take advantage of ICT applications to enable information searches and decision-making (Fairer-Wessels, 2014).

The different functions of VICs are undertaken at differing levels, depending on the unique characteristics and the environment in which each VIC operates. This shows that the role of staff may differ across VICs.

4.5 THE ROLE OF STAFF IN THE DELIVERY OF INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN VICS

VIC staff are critical in the dissemination of information and knowledge to visitors. The role that staff play in VICS is evident in the emphasis placed on the human element as a key factor in the dissemination of information and knowledge (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Draper, 2018; Wong & McKercher, 2011).

In their study to determine the VIC attributes most valued by visitors, Arãna *et al.* (2016) found that the human factor is an important aspect in designing VICS and in ensuring the quality of the experience and visitor satisfaction at VICS. The role of staff is emphasised as one of the key elements in the definitions of a VIC, as highlighted in section 4.2. This role is embedded in the functions of VICS, as discussed in section 4.4 above. Thus the main role of staff is to fulfil the purpose for which VICS are built, which is to provide information and knowledge to visitors with a view to enhancing their memorable experiences and encouraging their behavioural intentions (Wong & McKercher, 2011).

4.5.1 Enhancing memorable visitor experiences

VICS play a significant role in enhancing visitor experiences by providing quality information and a high level of customer service, as well as in making critical first impressions of service quality at the destination (Wong & McKercher, 2011). The perceived quality of the VIC information resources is a significant factor in facilitating visitor experience at VICS. This experience involves visitors' overall satisfaction with the VIC as an information service (Mistilis & D'Ambra, 2008). Chandralal *et al.* (2015) noted that, since information dissemination organisations such as DMOs and VICS are not directly involved in delivering experiential products for visitors, they have to play a facilitator role by enabling an ideal environment that enhances opportunities for visitors to have memorable experiences during their travels. Adopting the dimensions of understandability, reliability, and usefulness of information resources used at the Sydney VIC, Mistilis and D'Ambra (2008) found that visitor experience at the VIC was explained by the perceived information quality of these resources. Minghetti and

Celotto (2013) stated that how effectively VICs serve the needs of visitors depends to a large extent on the quality, accuracy, relevance, and usefulness of the information they provide.

As the first point of contact that visitors have with destinations, VICs often set the stage for visitors' memorable experiences in seeking novelty and a variety of experiences in the visited areas (De Ascaniis *et al.*, 2012; Tavares *et al.*, 2018). Fallon and Kriwoken (2002) added that VICs are more likely to enhance visitor experiences if they have distinctive signage, are located near attractions, and provide innovative services to the public.

From the above discussion, the following hypothesis and sub-hypotheses are formulated:

H4: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences.

- H4a: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of hedonism.
- H4b: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of novelty.
- H4c: The information and knowledge that is exchanged from VICs contributes to visitors' experience of local culture.
- H4d: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of refreshment.
- H4e: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of meaningfulness.
- H4f: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of involvement.
- H4g: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experiences of the knowledge they gain.

4.5.2 Influencing behavioural intentions

VICs represent a valuable resource for providing information on the spot; thus staff can favourably influence visitors' behaviour, choices, and optimal decision-making (Ispas *et al.*, 2014). Such information can influence visitors in several ways, especially when they arrive at destinations, as they may not be aware of the tourism products and services on offer (Choi *et al.*, 2012; Draper, 2018; Ortega *et al.*, 2014).

First, visitors could be influenced to alter their travel plans and their itineraries for current and future trips (De Ascaniis *et al.*, 2012; Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2011; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014; Tena & Raquel, 2014; Wong & McKercher, 2011). Second, staff could create an awareness of local tourist attractions, and thus positively influence visitors' behaviour to extend their length of stay and increase their expenditure at the destination (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Ortega *et al.*, 2014). Third, visitors could share the information received from VICs with their friends and relatives after the trip (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Hwang & Fesenmaier, 2011; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014).

These positive behaviours might result in visitors being satisfied with their visit and having memorable experiences that could influence the potential of their returning to the destination and recommending it to friends and relatives (Draper, 2018; Ortega *et al.*, 2014; Tavares *et al.*, 2018). This results in VICs being regarded as trustworthy sources of tourist information, even for visitors who have previously visited an area (Deery *et al.*, 2007). From the above discussion, the following can be hypothesised:

H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

Several factors, however, might influence staff's effectiveness in carrying out their roles, delivering memorable experiences, and encouraging behavioural intentions. These factors are discussed in the section below.

4.6 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE STAFF'S EFFECTIVENESS IN DELIVERING MEMORABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCES

Several factors influence staff's effectiveness in delivering memorable experiences at VICs and destinations. These are listed below.

4.6.1 Staff knowledge

Although recent trends in ICT make visitors less dependent on personal interaction (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Khatri, 2019), VIC studies report high levels of visitor satisfaction that is enhanced by friendly and knowledgeable staff (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Draper, 2018; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Smith & Holmes, 2012).

An important role of VIC staff is to provide information, knowledge, and recommendations about activities and events that visitors want to experience in visited areas (Draper, 2018). To do so, staff must be aware of and knowledgeable about tourism products and services such as attractions, events, and facilities. This is important when helping visitors who require information and advice on the existence of a wide variety of tourism products and services they may not have been aware of prior to travelling to or arriving at destinations (Choi *et al.*, 2012; Draper, 2018; Ortega *et al.*, 2014). In this way, VIC staff may be recognised as spanning knowledge boundaries and so playing a vital role in communicating information and knowledge to visitors on behalf of the destination and tourism businesses (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009).

Interactions with friendly and knowledgeable staff have been found to influence visitors' experiences and satisfaction, as well as the quality, accuracy, and relevance of the information, facilities, and services provided at VICs (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Wong & McKercher, 2011). In turn, this interaction and experience with staff tends to influence visitors' length of stay, expenditure, and repeat visits to destinations (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Deery *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, Wong and McKercher (2011) found that a deeper understanding of the meaning and significance of local tourism products played a critical role in enhancing visitors' experiences. Knowing tourism products in the local area presents staff with opportunities to work

with other VICs and surrounding communities. Such collaboration would allow local VICs and surrounding communities to display their brochures in one another's VICs, and expose visitors to products that are likely to enhance their experience not only of the visited area, but also of the broader region (Draper, 2018).

4.6.2 Staff competence and skills

According to Arãna *et al.* (2016), VICs should concentrate on using highly qualified staff to provide high-quality and varied information and knowledge about the attractions in the tourist destination and to provide booking facilities for these attractions. Arãna *et al.* (2016) identified the attributes that visitors prefer at VICs, such as (1) being attended to by staff who are qualified in the attractions of the destination and who speak the language of the visitors; (2) the quality of the information provided by VICs; and (3) providing booking facilities. However, staff should also use new automated information technologies to complement the design of VICs in order to add value to their services and to enhance the quality and depth of the information available to visitors (Arana *et al.*, 2016).

To play their role effectively, staff should be competent, skilled, and well-trained to disseminate up-to-date information about a destination and to enhance visitors' experiences (Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Wong & McKercher, 2011). Therefore, training in critical areas such as computer skills – particularly skills in accessing and disseminating information and knowledge, browsing the Internet, and using social media – is important to equip and enable them to provide better and quality information and services, even beyond visitors' expectations (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Wong & McKercher, 2011). Such training would enable staff to cope with and meet the ever-changing visitor needs brought by advances in ICT, online platforms, and mobile devices. It becomes important, therefore, for VIC management to adopt several approaches, such as those identified below, to help equip staff with the requisite skills:

- Regular familiarisation visits and tours to local attractions, events, facilities, and other venues (Draper, 2018).
- Staff exchanges with other VICs to provide a first-hand experience of other towns and products (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009).
- Access to the Internet, magazines, and brochures with information about regional products.
- Formal training opportunities in which the staff are awarded certificates. Staff could also be encouraged to attend workshops and conferences to equip them with new information and knowledge that is related to the requirements of their work (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Fairer-Wessels & Douglas, 2017).
- Induction and in-house training of new staff, as well as presentations and information-sharing sessions with local tourism businesses about their products and services.

4.6.3 Customer service skills

According to Deery *et al.* (2007), the importance of a human presence and of personal service shows that staff have a crucial customer service role to play in influencing visitor behaviour. Wong and McKercher (2011) found that visitors who had a positive experience at VICs felt that staff possessed high levels of customer service. They displayed positive service attitude and ethics, were courteous, were genuinely interested in addressing visitors' requests, and provided information that was relevant to the needs of the visitors. They also did not have pre-conceived ideas about visitors' needs.

Wong and McKercher (2011) found that the ability of VIC staff to do their jobs effectively does not depend only on product knowledge. Instead, successfully providing information is a function of developing a true service attitude, listening to visitors' requests without pre-conceived notions of what is best for them, and taking the time to satisfy those requests, even during busy times. How staff provide information – not necessarily the kind of information they disseminate – may affect visitors' satisfaction and experiences (Wong & McKercher, 2011). Customer care and

service is therefore a critical element that staff should consider in order to meet the needs of visitors.

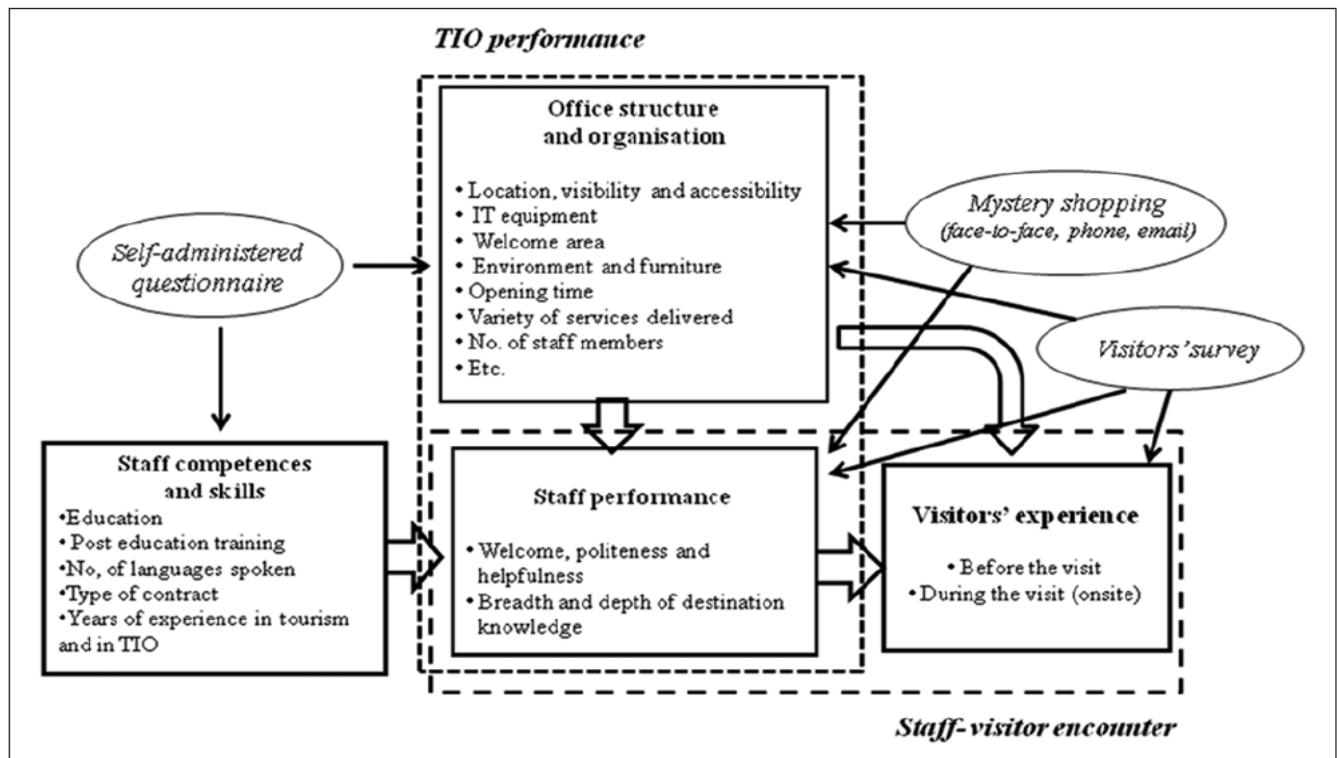
4.6.4 Structural, organisational, and contextual conditions in VICs

According to Minghetti and Celotto (2013), the conditions in which staff operate influence a visitor's experiences at the VIC. These authors found that visitors had satisfactory experiences when their encounter with staff took place at a time when the VICs were quieter and uncrowded. Poor VIC experiences were attributed to overcrowding, because staff could not attend to visitor queries. Similarly, Wong and McKercher (2011) found that the structural and organisational context and the conditions in which staff provided information could affect their performance – and thus visitors' overall satisfaction and experience.

In their model to measure overall VIC performance, Minghetti and Celotto (2013) identify the conditions that influence visitors' experiences at VICs. These are shown in Figure 4.1, and include:

- Staff competencies and skills such as their educational and post-educational training, local and foreign languages spoken, and years of experience;
- Structural and organisational factors such as the office's location, its visibility and accessibility, its ICT equipment, opening times, and number of staff members;
- The types of information exchange that take place between staff members and visitors, including all the main communication channels, such as face-to-face, telephone, and email, through which they make contact.

Figure 4.1: Model to measure VIC overall performance



Source: Minghetti & Celotto (2013:6)

The functions of VICs and the role that staff play to provide visitors with information, knowledge, recommendations, and other potential services throughout the course of the trip are important in meeting their needs (Draper, 2018). For staff, it is important to understand the characteristics of visitors who visit such facilities while travelling, as not all visitors do (Draper, 2018). This would help them to understand the types of visitor who use VICs, their reasons for doing so, and the areas of their own work that need to be enhanced or improved. In addition, this would help them understand how to go about providing information and knowledge, including the sources available to them, in order to meet the needs of visitors and enhance their memorable experiences (Draper, 2018).

4.7 SOURCES USED TO DISSEMINATE INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE IN VICS

In managing and disseminating information, VICS use a range of information sources, including traditional and online sources (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Draper, 2018; Lyu & Hwang, 2015). Traditional information sources such as maps, travel guidebooks, magazines, and brochures on local attractions and activities are used on-site to provide information to visitors through face-to-face communication (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Draper, 2018). Information sources such as desktop computers, touch screens, and online kiosks are used on-site, while telephone, email, and mailed brochures are often used to reach remote visitors (Deery *et al.*, 2007; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015).

In an information-intensive environment such as a VIC, the Internet is an important additional information source (Tanaka, 2011; Swart, 2016; Chikati, 2019) that visitors can use for travel planning purposes. In this regard, VICS have an online presence, offering web-based information and booking systems to connect with visitors prior to, during, and after their travel (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Tanti & Buhalis, 2016). Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and MySpace and applications associated with smartphones are used in VICS to provide information and services. Devices such as smartphones, mobile applications, touch screen information booths, interactive websites, interactive kiosks, interactive table top electronic maps, e-mails, tablets, and related communication services are available to enable visitors to access unlimited travel information (Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014; Tena & Raquel, 2014; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). The widespread availability of free Wi-Fi assists VICS to increase their information accessibility by enabling visitors to use their personal mobile devices to access this information (Lyu & Lee, 2015). This is in line with the mandate of VICS to offer accessible information to visitors and to increase the relevance of VICS (Deery *et al.*, 2007). However, VICS in South Africa still lag behind in the adoption of online and electronic information sources (Chikati, 2019; Swart, 2016). It is important for VICS, therefore, with support from local and national government, to take advantage of opportunities presented by these new online information sources to disseminate information and knowledge in order to enhance visitors' experiences in visited areas.

4.7.1 The impact of online information sources on VICs

Advances in the use of smartphones, tablets, smart technologies, and related mobile applications for travel purposes are affecting the operations of several travel information providers, including VICs (Lyu & Hwang, 2015). In fact, the increasing amount of travel information available through online platforms raises significant questions about the traditional functions of VICs, in which information is provided mainly in tangible (brochures, leaflets, and maps) and intangible (face-to-face contact) ways. A major concern is that technology could take over the functions of some staff because it is becoming more valued than their presence and expertise (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Lyu & Hwang, 2015). These concerns may make VICs relics of the past, threatening their survival (Lyu & Lee, 2015).

Globally there is less focus on brick-and-mortar VICs. Many cities across the world are closing down their physical VICs and adopting alternative initiatives to provide information using modern technologies. For example:

- VisitScotland (2017) decided to close 39 of its 65 VICs owing to changes in the ways in which visitors access information, with the majority using smartphones, tablets, and mobile applications to access the information they want, in the way they want, and when they want it.
- I-SITE VICs, which belong to a visitor information network in New Zealand, and provide domestic and international visitors and locals with information and a New Zealand-wide booking service for activities, attractions, accommodation, and transport, face increasing pressure, with several closing their doors as visitor numbers drop (<https://isite.nz>).
- Organisations in the United States and Canada, such as the Arlington Convention and Visitors Service (<https://stayairlington.com>), the Cowichan Lake District Chamber of Commerce (<https://www.islandcoastaltrust.ac>), and Discover Long Island (www.discoverlongisland.com), have adopted mobile VICs to disseminate information to a wider visitor population and to access potential visitors. Mobile VICs feature mobile technology, and are stocked with information that visitors expect to find at a VIC, including visitor guides and local maps.

- In South Africa, Cape Town Tourism (CTT) launched a mobile VIC named Thando (which means 'love' in isiXhosa) in 2014 in order to provide visitors and local citizens with real-time access to information, booking, and ticketing services wherever they are in the city. The mobile VIC also provide access to free Wi-Fi in its immediate vicinity (section 4.10.3: Initiative 2 - Mobile VIC: Thando 3).

Unlike traditional VICs, mobile VICs are set up in high traffic areas and are moved around to attractions, beaches, and events to provide information on local tourism products and services. They connect with visitors and locals in real time to enhance experiences, and increase business opportunities and revenue for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities, thereby boosting local economies.

In their study, Lyu and Hwang (2015) found that the use of the Internet to search for travel information decreased the demand to visit and use VICs. In particular, visitors who perceived mobile devices to be useful and easy to use were less likely to visit or use VICs. In contrast, Lyu and Hwang (2015) found that social network platforms (such as social media) that were available at VICs increased the frequency and probability of people visiting them. In this regard, staff could increase VIC visits and visitor satisfaction by making efforts to provide real-time travel information through social network platforms such as social media. Moreover, Lyu and Lee (2015) found that, rather than offering visitors access to extensive IT equipment, it might be more critical for VICs to provide free Wi-Fi hotspots.

Lyu and Hwang (2015) found that visitors with feelings of uncertainty about accessing travel information from mobile devices were more likely to visit a VIC. In this regard, visitors may be willing to use information and knowledge from VIC staff to augment and verify the quality and reliability of travel information they have already obtained through online sources (Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015). According to Arãna *et al.* (2016), the use of technology might be useful to complement the design of VICs, adding value to their services and enhancing the quality and depth of the information available to visitors at a destination. These findings show that, while significant progress has been made in the area of ICTs, smartphones, tablets, and related mobile applications, as conventional information provision facilities, VICs still play an important role in determining the quality of visitors' experiences and behavioural

intentions (Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015). However, VICs should find ways to harness and take advantage of the emerging technologies in order to meet the needs of visitors (Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015), both virtual and on-site (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010).

4.7.2 Visitors' characteristics and information sources

According to Draper (2018), it is important for tourism destination marketers to identify the characteristics not only of different types of visitors but also of those who use the services of a destination's facilities such as VICs. Draper (2018) found that VIC visitors are more likely to be older and retired, and thus to have more free time than non-users. They stop at VICs to find general information about the destination and to obtain information brochures. As the aging population tends to have more free time, staff could target them and influence their behaviour by providing information on tourism events and attractions they could visit while at the destination, as well as increase the likelihood of their returning to visited areas. In their study of the effectiveness of community-based VICs, Lee, Yoo and Gretzel (2016) found that VIC visitors were more likely to be first-time visitors, were more likely to visit the region in the form of a weekend getaway, and were less likely to visit family or friends. However, these authors did not find any significant differences in the demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, household income) of users and non-users, except for their place of residence.

As is evident in Figure 4.2, VICs can use different types of source to provide information to different types of visitor – that is, virtual visitors who require no human mediation, and on-site visitors who require human mediation (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010).

Figure 4.2: Taxonomy of information tasks at VICs

Table 1. A Taxonomy of Information Tasks at Visitor Information Centers

Dimensions of the Taxonomy		Virtual Visitors	Face-to-Face
Medium	Broadcast information	Computer-mediated	Human interface
Task	Experiential • Information	Goal-directed • Q&A • Transact Book and reservation Itinerary planning	Goal-directed • (Seeking) information • Q&A • Transact Book and reservation Itinerary planning
Motive	• Prepurchase deliberation • Build information bank • Opinion leader • Recreation	• Prepurchase deliberation • Task completion	• Prepurchase deliberation • Task completion
Information type	Static Customized	Static Customized	Customized
Technology and communication medium	• VIC Web site • Destination marketing system	• Interactive VIC Web site • Interactive destination system	• Counter staff • Tour guides • Virtual reality • E-kiosks • Television and video • Mobile and wireless applications

Source: D'Ambra & Mistilis (2010:210)

According to D'Ambra and Mistilis (2010), VICs can use destination marketing systems, and the Internet (emails, websites and virtual tours) to provide general information to virtual visitors. For visitors requiring specific information, VICs can use databases, interactive websites, web-based tourist guides, and interactive destination marketing systems that offer storage and retrieval functions. VICs can provide on-site visitors with information through more traditional face-to-face communication media and through information resources supported by ICTs, such as virtual reality, e-kiosks, interactive information and web-based kiosks, television and video, and mobile or wireless devices, and solutions such as mobile phones, Wi-Fi hotspots (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010).

By providing information targeting different types of visitors based on their characteristics, VICs can contribute to the social and economic well-being of local communities. They can contribute to the economic development of the local economy by directing visitors to the products of local businesses and surrounding communities, and encouraging them to experience local events and attractions (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Draper, 2018).

4.8. COLLABORATION BETWEEN VICS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Tourism is inherently collaborative because it is an amalgamation of various sub-sectors such as accommodation services, restaurants, passenger transport services, travel agencies and related services, attractions, cultural services, and sports and recreational services (TSA, 2019). Inter-organisation information and knowledge sharing, collaboration, and increased interdependencies among tourism organisations and various visitors, suppliers, partners, and other stakeholders is important, therefore, in enhancing the visitor experience (Sigala & Chalkiti, 2015). To add to this, Fallon and Kriwoken (2002) noted that the involvement of various key stakeholders is critical to the operation and sustainability of VICs. They therefore assert that the role of VICs in providing information to visitors while promoting local activities, products, and services has made these facilities popular with visitors, tourism operators, and governments (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002).

While stakeholder participation is regarded as a critical contributor to sustainability, the contribution that local businesses and communities can make to support sustainable VICs has often been overlooked. It is for this reason that VICs need to work with other stakeholders in order to fulfil their roles (Alonso & Liu, 2012). Collaborative relationships between different stakeholders who promote regional and local businesses can contribute to the long-term sustainability of VICs. It is also important to consider the needs of staff, local businesses, and communities when designing and establishing VICs, as doing so will help them to maximise their contribution to visitor satisfaction and to the promotion and competitiveness of destinations (Arãna *et al.*, 2016). To this end, different types of collaboration are evident in the VIC environment, as discussed below.

- **Collaboration with visitors:** As discussed in section 4.4, the main function of VICs is to provide information, knowledge, and other services to visitors to enable them to make informed decisions and enhance their experience of the destinations they are visiting. It therefore follows that staff should encourage visitors to extend their length of stay and increase their expenditure at destinations (Khatri, 2019; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014; Ortega *et al.*, 2014).
- **Collaboration with tourism organisations:** The success of tourism in a destination is closely related to the ways in which VICs collaborate with other regional sectors and bodies in a destination (Alonso & Liu, 2012). VICs should therefore work with national, regional, and local tourism organisations to supply information that visitors can access throughout their journey (Cox & Wray, 2011). Such collaborations are important to ensure the consistency of promotional messaging across the destination (Sava, 2015).
- **Collaboration among VICs:** Alonso and Liu (2012) suggested that a collaborative VIC network in which member VICs promote tourism products and services in adjacent regions is necessary to ensure that visitors receive a seamless and consistent experience across the different areas they visit during the whole trip. Such collaboration should involve VICs in both the public and the private sector.
- **Collaboration with local businesses and surrounding communities:** Fallon and Kriwoken (2002) emphasised the importance of VICs in ensuring that local businesses and surrounding communities are empowered and that they participate in the delivery of memorable visitor experiences. Such collaboration reflects various non-visitor functions that aim to generate social and economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities through marketing and promoting local areas. Moreover, collaboration with local tourism businesses and surrounding communities provides one way for VICs to go beyond the mere provision of information and knowledge and to improve local people's lives and boost the local economy. The social and economic opportunities mentioned below may arise from the collaboration between VICs and local tourism businesses and surrounding communities.

- ***Social opportunities***

First, VICs can serve as centres to host community meetings and events. They can also enable and encourage opportunities for community involvement in tourism (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2004; Pearce, 2004; Smith & Holmes, 2012). Second, VIC staff can work with surrounding communities to co-produce local knowledge such as storytelling, traditional cuisine, and basket weaving in order to supplement the VIC information that visitors require in visited areas (Edwards *et al.*, 2016; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). In this way, VICs can create a sense of community pride by promoting what makes the area special. Staff can work with local communities by designing programmes in which visitors experience authentic local culture, such as staying in a traditional type of accommodation and experiencing traditional cuisine. Surrounding communities can take visitors on local tours in which they observe and interact with local people and experience local culture, such as being taken to a local cultural market (Yu *et al.*, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014). Exposing visitors to local culture can enhance their connection with surrounding communities (Yu *et al.*, 2019).

- ***Economic opportunities***

The economic contribution of VICs is facilitated by the role they play in promoting local businesses, events, and community services to visitors. They can directly facilitate economic impacts in which surrounding communities and local tourism businesses display locally made products that visitors can purchase as gifts and souvenirs in VICs. Indirectly, staff can help to generate income for surrounding communities and local businesses by referring and recommending products that visitors can purchase (Lyu & Lee, 2015). However, staff are prohibited from providing recommendations to visit particular tourism businesses such as restaurants and accommodation establishments (Lyu & Lee, 2015). Through the information and advice provided to visitors and the sale of local products, VICs can have a positive impact on the overall visitor experience and influence their behaviour through increased visitor expenditure

and duration of stay (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Ortega *et al.*, 2014). VICs can also create employment and volunteer opportunities for local communities (Deery *et al.*, 2007; Smith & Holmes, 2012). However, in countries such as South Africa, where unemployment and poverty are high, volunteering might be a challenge, as most people might prefer to find paid employment in order to meet their basic socio-economic needs.

From the above discussion, the following can be hypothesised:

- H₆: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

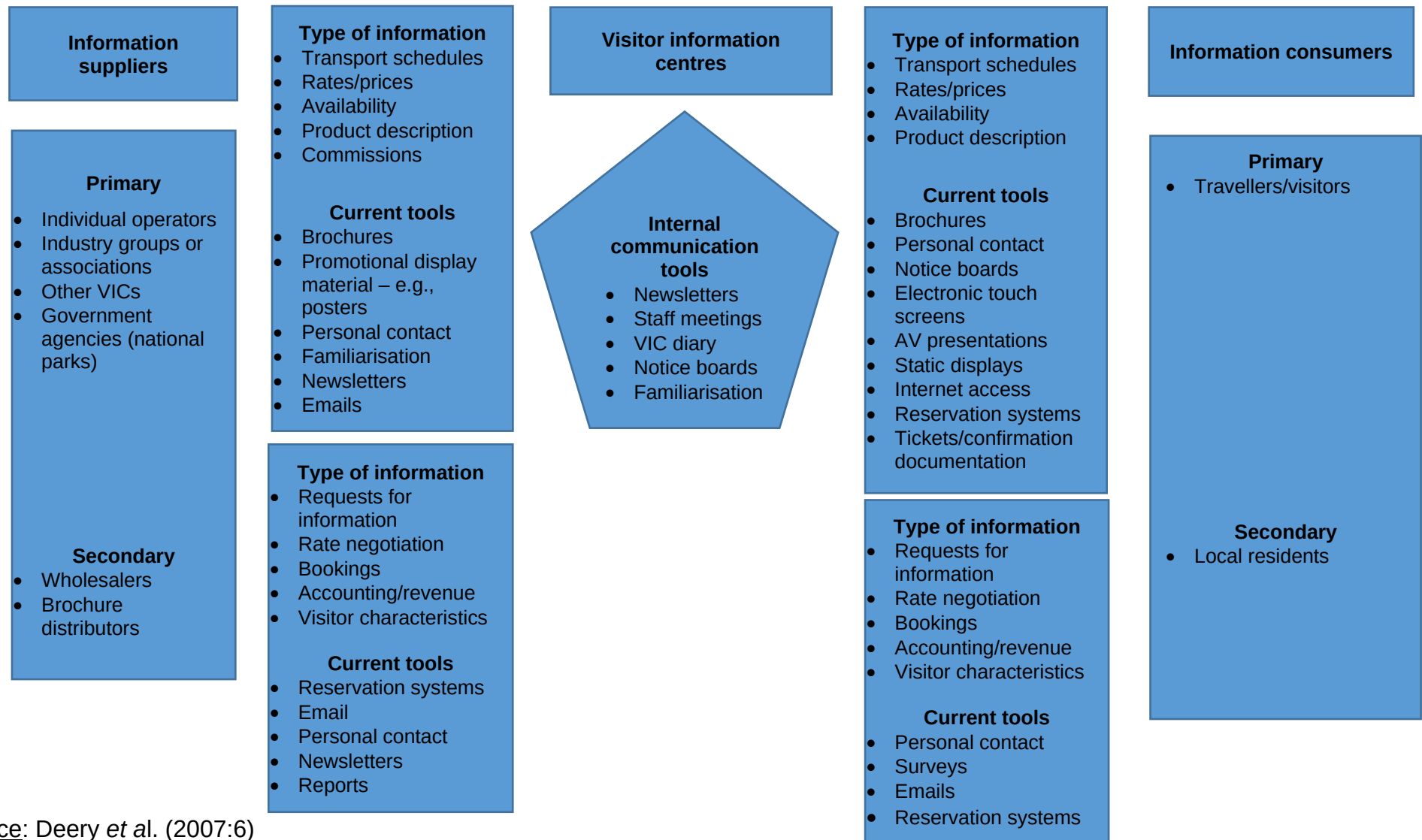
The collaborations that take place between VICs and various stakeholders, and the opportunities they create, form the basis on which this study is conducted. These collaborations may be seen in the VIC information exchange model that Deery *et al.* (2007) developed to focus specifically on VICs and their delivery of visitor-focused information.

4.9 THE VIC INFORMATION EXCHANGE MODEL

Chapter 2 emphasised the information and knowledge exchanges that take place in the tourism sector. A tourism information exchange model developed by Sheldon (1997) was used to locate information and knowledge exchanges in a tourism context. The model identifies various stakeholders who produce and receive information in the tourism sector, and the connections between them. Accordingly, information flows between suppliers, travel intermediaries, and visitors.

Using Sheldon's (1997) model, Deery *et al.* (2007) developed an information exchange model that is specifically based on VICs and their delivery of visitor information. The model identifies VICs as intermediaries in the information exchange process, with suppliers and consumers exchanging information using different information sources. The model is depicted in Figure 4.3 and discussed below.

Figure 4.3: VIC information exchange model



Source: Deery et al. (2007:6)

4.9.1 Information suppliers

The VIC information exchange model classifies information suppliers as primary or secondary, depending on the familiarity of the supplier with the VIC environment. Primary suppliers include individual operators and suppliers, sector groups or associations, other VICs, and government agencies such as national parks. They supply VICs with information such as schedules, rates/prices, availabilities, product descriptions, and commissions. Wholesalers and brochure distribution agencies are secondary suppliers, and supply VICs with information, rate negotiation, bookings, and visitor characteristics. Secondary suppliers may become primary suppliers when VICs have little or no contact with primary suppliers. This arrangement, however, is relatively uncommon in VICs located in capital cities and in those owned and operated by government or state tourism organisations (Deery *et al.*, 2007).

4.9.2 Information consumers

Deery *et al.* (2007) identify visitors to a region, regardless of the purpose of their visit, as primary consumers of information, while local residents are secondary consumers. The information required by visitors in the model can be categorised into a hierarchy of priorities relating to the geographic location of the VIC, with information on the immediate region being the most sought after, followed by information on the surrounding regions and other areas within the province, and lastly, inter-provincial information (Deery *et al.*, 2007).

4.9.3 Information sources (tools) used in the information exchange process

In addition to information suppliers and consumers, Deery *et al.* (2007) identify the information strategies as well as the sources used by each stakeholder in the exchange process. Internally, staff use face-to-face contact as the main method of information delivery among themselves. In this regard, internal information sources used by VICs include regular staff meetings, staff newsletters, staff notice boards, and front desk diaries kept as part of the staff's daily operating procedures. These

information sources are used to enable staff to disseminate information received from suppliers to visitors (Deery *et al.*, 2007).

The information exchange model identifies brochures, personal contact, familiarisation visits, and, where applicable, electronic reservation systems as tools used by VICs to obtain information from suppliers and in turn disseminate it to visitors. The personal contact element between staff and visitors is considered the most prominent, valued, and effective means used by VICs. In this regard, staff knowledge and friendliness play an important role in influencing visitor behaviour and promoting increased visitor activities, visitor expenditure, and repeat visits (Deery *et al.*, 2007). Other tools used in the model to provide information include visitor notice boards, electronic touch screens, looped audio-visual presentations, and static interpretive displays. Computers and Internet access are used in the reservation and booking processes, as well as providing access to the public (Deery *et al.*, 2007).

4.9.4 Feedback mechanism

An important aspect of the information exchange model is to facilitate feedback through mechanisms in which information can flow from suppliers to VICs and then to visitors and back to both VICs and suppliers. Such a flow of information is also important to facilitate services such as bookings and reservations. Furthermore, through mechanisms such as accreditation, VICs obtain research information on visitor's travel trends, patterns, and needs (Deery *et al.*, 2007). Tourism associations at national, regional, and local levels, as well as organisations at the global level – such as the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTCC) – collect and disseminate visitor information and statistical data that VICs can exchange with information suppliers in order to generate memorable visitor experiences.

Although the model identifies electronic sources used in the exchange of information, information sources have experienced significant changes since the time the model was developed owing to technological developments such as social media, mobile technologies, and smart technologies. These developments have changed information

dissemination and exchange behaviours. Furthermore, the model does not focus on opportunities that might arise from the exchange process. Despite these limitations, the information exchange processes emphasised in the model are still useful in guiding the conceptual framework of this study – in particular, the flow of information among different stakeholders in VICs. However, it is important that the operational context of VICs – such as their location, accessibility, and equipment, as well as staff knowledge, competence and skills – is taken into account (Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Wong & McKercher, 2011) when applying the model. This is particularly important in a developing country such as South Africa, owing to a range of socio-economic imbalances that are still evident across the country, including in areas where VICs are located.

4.9.5 Factors that influence the information exchange process in VICs

Deery *et al.* (2007) identify factors that influence the information exchange process in VICs. These are categorised into several broad areas, as follows:

- ***Human resources***

As explained in sections 4.5 and 4.6 above, the human presence is identified as an important feature of VICs – particularly face-to-face interaction with friendly and knowledgeable staff (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Draper, 2018; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014; Smith & Holmes, 2012; Wong & McKercher, 2011). Different staffing models, such as paid staff, volunteers, or a combination of the two, are evident in the VIC environment (Smith & Holmes, 2012).

The volunteer staff structure in particular, which is a major component of VIC staff structures globally, is a cost-effective means (Smith & Holmes, 2012) to supplement paid staff when economic viability is a concern for VICs that do not generate direct revenue or commissions (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003). However, the volunteer staff structure has been described as both a strength and a weakness in the information exchange process (Deery *et al.*, 2007). On the positive side, volunteers enable a high level of human interaction in VICs, and often have an extensive knowledge of the local

area that enhances visitors' unique and memorable experiences. Smith and Holmes (2012) found that volunteers play a critical role in reducing the visitor enquiry workload. Volunteering enables local communities to participate in VICs by sharing local knowledge with visitors, thereby enhancing visitors' memorable experiences in their area. Displaying local products provides volunteers with a sense of pride of their area. In addition, participation in VICs fosters a sense of community ownership, as the VICs are seen as part of the community. On the negative side, volunteers require constant retraining because their irregular shifts often affect their skill levels in providing good service to visitors (Deery *et al.*, 2007; Smith & Holmes, 2012). Furthermore, some volunteers have a greater resistance to change, and are often fearful of technology owing to the perception that it might take over their jobs. Volunteer recruitment presents challenges in more rural and remote locations, particularly among young people who would like to have paid jobs and to improve their lives (Smith & Holmes, 2012). As highlighted in section 4.8.4, high levels of unemployment and poverty in South Africa mean that volunteering might be a challenge, as most people might prefer to find paid employment in order to meet their basic socio-economic needs.

- **Information and communication technologies**

The use of technology in VICs was highlighted in section 4.7. For information exchange purposes, Deery *et al.* (2007) mention that the use of technology in VICs (such as electronic guest books, which operate in a similar way to touch-screen information kiosks) helps to deliver information to visitors. Technology also facilitates communication internally within VICs, and between VICs and information suppliers such as sector groups or associations, other VICs, government agencies, wholesalers, and brochure distribution agencies. In this way, technology plays a crucial role in the exchange of information, both within VICs and externally with stakeholders.

Deery *et al.* (2007) found that the uptake of technology varies across VICs, with older VICs relying more on traditional information sources such as brochures and personal contact with VIC staff, and facing barriers to the introduction and adoption of technology in their operations (Deery *et al.*, 2007). Also, a limited use of technology in the information and knowledge exchange process was evident in VICs where staff were technologically illiterate. Thus It is important for VIC staff to be informed about

the benefits to be derived from incorporating technology into their operations. Security concerns were also cited as a barrier to incorporating technology into VIC operations, with smaller kiosk-style centres not having computers owing to the risks of vandalism or theft (Deery *et al.*, 2007).

- **Accreditation**

Accreditation for VICs is a positive factor for the information exchange process, as it provides a minimum set of procedures that should be followed in operating a VIC. Although accreditation documentation has often been used as VICs' operational booklet, and has encouraged practices such as visitor surveying, it lacks specific strategies to assist VICs in the continuous improvement of information and knowledge exchange (Deery *et al.*, 2007).

- **Financial resources**

Financial considerations are seen as an important factor that influences the information exchange process: financially stable VICs operate with a better competitive advantage than those with limited financial resources. Deery *et al.* (2007) noted that these concerns could be overcome by justifying expenses, and by showing how expenditure contributes to improved service within VICs. Furthermore, VICs could be encouraged to strive for more effective visitor servicing, including the dissemination of information in innovative ways, to generate funds and to develop a business model of VIC operation.

- **Networking**

Deery *et al.* (2007) identified networking and the sharing of ideas at forums or meetings as a valuable way to improve information exchange processes at all levels in VICs. Such platforms present VICs and their stakeholders with an opportunity for continuous learning and improvement. Networking with other VICs also presents the opportunity to make improvements based on lessons learnt from others that would encourage the implementation of best practices, future collaboration, and maintaining the quality of their services.

While Deery *et al.* (2007) identified important factors that influence the information exchange process in VICs, these can differ, depending on the environment in which VICs operate, including their location and facilities. It therefore becomes important that the information and knowledge exchange process take the context in which VICs operate into account.

4.10. VICS AND INFORMATION PROVISION IN SOUTH AFRICA

A review of the relevant academic literature on VICs in South Africa revealed only limited research in this area. This was particularly true for research related to the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in order to enhance memorable visitor experiences or generate socio-economic benefits for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. However, several public sector documents discussed below provide the context in which to understand the role and functions of VICs in South Africa.

4.10.1 Government efforts to promote VICs

As this study focuses on publicly managed VICs, efforts by government to address the information needs of visitors through VICs are reflected in the various strategic documents that are discussed below.

- **National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS)**

In 2011, the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) was developed by the South African Department of Tourism to inspire and accelerate the responsible growth of the tourism sector from 2010 to 2020. It pointed out challenges related to the uncoordinated, fragmented, and inconsistent provision of tourism information in South Africa. As a result, the strategy identified VICs as important facilities to deliver tourism information (National Department of Tourism, 2011b). The strategy was reviewed in 2016 to determine improvements that needed to be made to initially set targets, given the changing domestic and international environment, emerging trends in global markets, and the strengths and weaknesses of the South African economy. This

review process culminated in a second iteration of the NTSS – that for 2016–2026 (National Department of Tourism, 2017) – as a ten-year strategy with new targets.

The strategy identifies five pillars of the inclusive quality growth of the South African economy. These pillars are effective marketing, facilitating ease of access, visitor experience, destination management, and broad-based benefits. The pillar relating to visitor experience identifies information provision as being critical to providing quality visitor experiences to both domestic and international visitors, in order to achieve customer satisfaction and inspire repeat visits (National Department of Tourism, 2017).

- **Study on best-practice VIC model for South Africa**

In preparing to host the FIFA World Cup in 2010 – which was seen as a way to unlock economic opportunities for South Africa – the then Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism commissioned a study to benchmark international criteria and conduct a national survey to develop a best-practice VIC model. The findings revealed three types of VICs:

- a fully-fledged VIC, which would have a number of functions;
- a satellite model, which would be a scaled-down version of the full VIC; and
- a kiosk, which could have an interactive screen (touch screen) and be placed in a strategic location.

The results of the study, which also considered the unique context of South Africa, were used to design and implement VICs that were launched in 2010. The VICs were established in Rustenburg in North West Province, Polokwane in Limpopo Province, Nelspruit in Mpumalanga Province, Bloemfontein in Free State Province, and Port Elizabeth in Eastern Cape Province. The main aim of establishing these VICs was to ensure the readiness of the tourism sector to enhance visitor experiences through providing information during and after the soccer tournament. Based on the findings of this study, a framework for VICs with recommended options for their standardisation was developed (National Department of Tourism, 2010).

- **National framework for VICs in South Africa**

Using the framework arising from the 2010 study on a best-practice VIC model for South Africa, the Department of Tourism developed a national framework for VICs in South Africa that sought to standardise tourism information offerings throughout the country. The framework aimed to assist the country to become internationally competitive in the information dissemination arena, so that it could position itself favourably for repeat visits (National Department of Tourism, 2011a).

The national framework identifies VICs as crucial in providing tourism information in order to enhance visitor experiences and to contribute to the local tourism economy. According to the framework, VICs play an important role in the tourism sector, as they often serve as vital first points of contact and provide value-adding information and services to visitors. In this way, VICs provide visitors with relevant information and knowledge about tourism products and services in the destinations they will be visiting (National Department of Tourism, 2011a). The framework also identifies the standardisation of tourism information provision as one of the key elements in the continued growth of the sector, and in changing the lives of all South Africans (National Department of Tourism, 2011a).

- **Domestic tourism growth strategy**

In keeping with the objectives of the NTSS, the Department of Tourism developed a domestic tourism growth strategy to stimulate and accelerate growth in domestic tourism (National Department of Tourism, 2012). The strategy aims to build a culture that will result in an increased awareness of tourism and of its value for the country, as well as increased levels of community participation in the tourism sector. As a result, an integrated approach to addressing the challenges of geographic spread and seasonality that offers opportunities for enhanced levels of domestic tourism is emphasised.

According to the strategy, a travel culture is lacking among South Africans, especially among previously disadvantaged communities (Black, Coloured, and Asian). This

stems mainly from the exclusion of the majority of Black South Africans from participating in leisure tourism activities during the country's apartheid years (National Department of Tourism, 2012). During this period, most South Africans, particularly Blacks, were not allowed to stay in the same hotels as Whites or even visit the same beaches as Whites. Domestic tourism under apartheid served the interests of the privileged White minority population. As a result of the limited marketing and information provided to every segment of the South African population, most Blacks never had an opportunity to undertake holiday travel within their own country. It is in this context that VICs are identified as critical to disseminating local tourism information and embarking on information dissemination campaigns in order to encourage and facilitate a culture of travel, and to make domestic tourism accessible to most people in the country.

- **Visitor information centres handbook**

In 2015 the Department of Tourism published a visitor information centres handbook as a practical guide to assist VIC staff in their daily operations and their interactions with visitors (National Department of Tourism, 2015). The handbook guides VIC officials on how best to run a VIC by considering its daily operations and administration, opening and closing procedures, database management, customer service provision, reporting procedures, branding, and staff capacity-building. The handbook also includes the operational policies and procedures that VICs are expected to follow at a local, district, or provincial government level (National Department of Tourism, 2015).

At a provincial level, different provinces and local municipalities are responsible for the implementation of their own strategies, policies, or frameworks for the operation of VICs, although these documents are guided by the national framework for VICs in South Africa (National Department of Tourism, 2011b). For example, the Gauteng Tourism Authority developed the Gauteng Visitor Information Services Strategy (2012) to ensure quality and integrated visitor information services across Gauteng Province. The strategy provides overall directions for the future of visitor information services in Gauteng Province, and covers all aspects of information provision and promoting the destination. This includes online information systems and collective visitor information

databases that each of the regions and the local tourism organisations (LTOs) can use to collect and manage product data and view visitor information statistics (Gauteng Tourism Authority, 2012).

The various strategic documents and frameworks reflect the significance of providing visitors with tourism information at all stages in order to enhance the quality of their travel experience. However, it is important that this information be provided efficiently, accurately, and timeously.

4.10.2 VIC functions

The framework for VICs in South Africa (National Department of Tourism, 2011a) states that VICs, as the first points of contact in providing information and value-adding services, should be positioned to undertake the following functions:

- To provide accurate information on the tourism product offerings that can be consumed by visitors in a destination.
- To support tourism growth by influencing visitor flow throughout the country.
- To create a user-friendly e-business platform that provides the necessary tools for information and reservation management and professional tourism services to visitors.
- To assist Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) development by facilitating the sale and promotion of their goods and services to the world market.
- To contribute to the local economic development of the region through facilitating higher spend by visitors to the area.

These functions are aligned with those of other VICs in the global context, as discussed in section 4.4. However, these functions are silent on what this study aims to investigate: how these functions may be achieved through a two-way exchange process between VICs and their stakeholders, not only from the VICs' perspective.

4.10.3 Information sources used in VICs

In response to emerging technological innovations, VICs use a combination of traditional and online information sources. Visitors can freely receive brochures or access the Internet in order to obtain travel information. In some VICs, visitors can use their personal mobile devices to download travel information from mobile applications or access free Wi-Fi (albeit limited) (National Department of Tourism, 2015). This situation is mostly true for VICs located in major cities such as Johannesburg and Cape Town. VICs located in rural municipalities still lag behind in leveraging technology for providing information to visitors. Chikati (2019) found that, even in Gauteng Province, ICTs have not been widely embraced, as most VICs still rely on the traditional platforms for communication, such as landline telephones, e-mail, and face-to-face communication.

Two initiatives that have been adopted to improve information and knowledge provision in VICs through technology are presented below:

Initiative 1: Nelson Mandela Square VIC

Joburg Tourism unveiled a VIC at the Nelson Mandela Square in Sandton with an updated interactive website and new mobile app in 2018. This is in line with technological trends to remain competitive in the digital space and to attract visitors to the City of Johannesburg.



Source: Joburg Tourism, 2018 (<https://www.joburg.org.za>)

The website provides online information and allows the VIC to be a one-stop shop for visitors to easily find information to navigate the City of Johannesburg. The new mobile app presents opportunities for tourism businesses to register and list their businesses on the Joburg Tourism database. Once listed, the listing appears on the website, mobi-site and mobile app. This is beneficial for tourism businesses to promote their offerings on all platforms and devices. Businesses can also verify their details and benefit from exposure on the site and other related marketing initiatives. Source: Joburg Tourism, 2018 (<https://www.joburg.org.za>)

Initiative 2 - Mobile VIC: Thando 3

In line with a more versatile, cost-efficient way to serve visitors, mobile VICs present a new initiative to meet and assist visitors. Cape Town Tourism (CTT) launched Africa's first mobile VIC in 2014 named Thando, which means 'love' in isiXhosa.

The City of Cape Town was featured in the UNWTO-World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCTF) City Tourism Performance Research as one of the 15 global destinations selected to share their success stories and enable other cities to observe and learn from them. Mobile Visitor Centres were therefore featured as one of the visitor services provided by CTT (UNWTO, 2017).

In response to global tourism trends of visitors' increased mobile connectivity, the mobile VIC provides CTT with an opportunity to meet visitors and local citizens wherever they are in the city. Although the service closed down at some point in 2014, Thando 3 was relaunched in March 2019 as an opportunity to merge technology with tourism knowledge to provide real-time access to information to visitors and locals wherever they are. Thando 3 offers the following services:

- Free information brochures regarding tourism in Cape Town and surrounding areas.
- Free distribution of the Cape Town Visitor's Guide that contains information on Cape Town's activities, hotspots and a variety of free vouchers to use at various places in the city. The vouchers are valid for a year.
- Booking services for accommodation, car-hire, tours, activities and transfers.
- SANParks reservations as well as My Green Cards and My Activity cards.

- Ticketing services such as Webtickets and Computicket.
- Free Wi-Fi in the immediate proximity of the mobile VICs.



Source: Cape Town Tourism (<https://www.unwto.org>)

The Thando 3 fleet consists of two panel vans, two scooters and two motorised bicycles. The vans follow responsible tourism principles, with solar panels and fuel-efficient features. The bicycles run on chargeable batteries and the scooters offer free Wi-Fi. The entire operations element of the unit is solar powered, thus emphasising the importance of responsible tourism development.

The staff operating the units are equipped with iPads to provide visitors with information and assist them in making real-time bookings for their stay or buying tickets for events and shows. An attractive relaxation area is available for visitors to access free Wi-Fi. An LCD screen displays elements of Cape Town and feature detailed maps. The Cape Town Visitor's Guide is available free, along with many other useful brochures, displayed on the inside of the open back doors of the van.

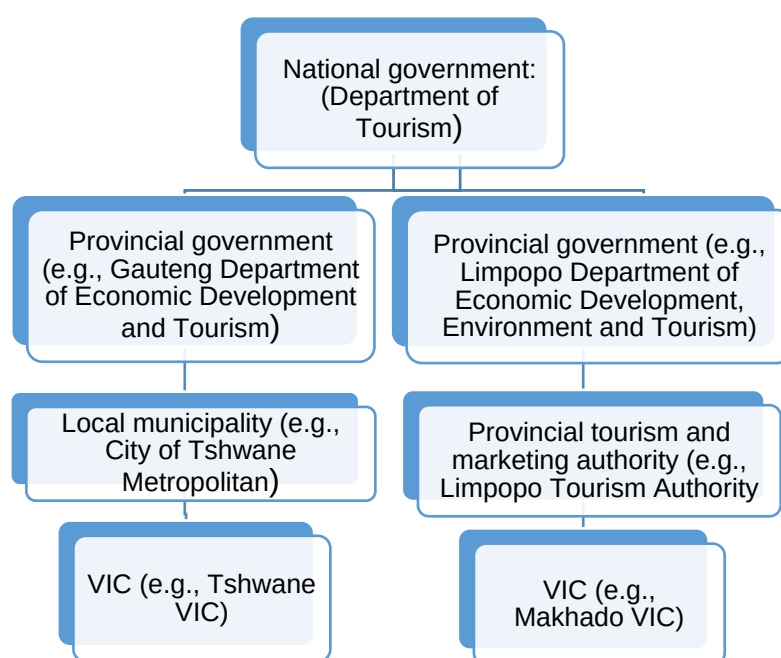
Source: Cape Town Tourism (<https://www.unwto.org>)

Although the two initiatives are technologically focused, the human factor in visitor services is still predominant, as some visitors may prefer personal assistance from staff rather than an automated process (Arãna *et al.*, 2016). This points to the importance of integrating online-to-offline (O2O) sources so that visitors can augment and verify the information obtained from different sources.

4.10.4 VIC Governance and management structures

VICs may be privately or government-owned, and some are operated as a joint venture between the two. Privately owned VICs, on the other hand, are directly owned and operated by an organisation other than a government institution. However, these VICs may receive partial funding from the local municipalities in which they are located. Government-owned VICs receive direct funding for their daily operations from local municipalities or tourism marketing agencies (National Department of Tourism, 2015). The three spheres of government (national, provincial and local) are also involved in the governance of government-owned VICs. Figure 4.4 shows the different governance structures in government-owned VICs e.g., a VIC governed by a local municipality and in one run by a tourism marketing agency or authority.

Figure 4.4: Stakeholders involved in government-owned VICs



Source: Researcher's own construction

The roles and responsibilities of these stakeholders are discussed below:

- **Department of Tourism**

The Department of Tourism is responsible for ensuring that VICs display and use a visible 'i-sign', which identifies the facility as an accredited VIC with qualified staff. The department is also responsible for developing and maintaining a national database of tourism products and services that is shared with VICs.

- **Provinces**

The main responsibility of provinces involves developing guidelines that are aligned with national guidelines; working closely with municipalities and other relevant stakeholders to identifying suitable locations for VICs; ensuring that VICs subscribe to the principles of job creation at local level; and ensuring that financial support is provided for the establishment, operation, and maintenance of VICs (National Department of Tourism, 2011a). According to the framework for VICs in South Africa (National Department of Tourism, 2011a), VICs must be located in areas that have the greatest potential for a positive impact in delivering information and services to visitors and the tourism sector. The location should be influenced by the availability and suitability of land for the specific type and size of VIC needed.

- **Provincial tourism and marketing agencies/authorities**

As the marketing arm of tourism in provinces, tourism agencies are responsible for engaging regularly with VIC management and staff by keeping and sharing a database of provincial tourism products and services. They also assist with the marketing and promotion of these products and services, especially those from disadvantaged communities. They are also responsible for alerting VICs to upcoming events and new initiatives in the province (National Department of Tourism, 2011a).

- **Local municipalities**

Because tourism takes place at a local level, municipalities are responsible for working with various Regional Tourism Organisations (RTO)s and Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) to identify suitable location sites for VICs; providing financial support to maintain VICs; maintaining an efficient ICT system; providing updated membership listings; and make trained staff available to operate VICs (National Department of Tourism, 2011a).

The discussions in this section indicate that, while some of the documents discussed above highlight the functions of VICs as assisting SMME development, they do not sufficiently address the role that surrounding communities and local tourism businesses should play in the demand for and supply of VIC information, nor do they mention the opportunities that surrounding communities and local tourism businesses might derive from the VIC environment. What is more, such communities and businesses – which should obtain or provide information and knowledge about local tourism products and services to visitors – are not mentioned as critical VIC stakeholders. This raises concerns, because one of the South African government's priorities relates to job creation and the empowerment of communities in the vicinity of government-funded utilities, including VICs. That is why this research emphasises the socio-economic opportunities that surrounding communities and local tourism businesses could derive from the information and knowledge exchanged in VICs.

4.11 DEVELOPING THE HYPOTHESES AND THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature reviewed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 was used to develop the study's hypotheses and conceptual framework. The model of tourism information flows (Sheldon, 1997) and the SET were discussed in Chapter 2 to lay the theoretical foundation for the study. In Chapter 3, the emphasis was placed on information searches and memorable experiences that visitors obtain during their travel. Visitors' behavioural intentions resulting from memorable experiences they had in visited areas were also discussed. Chapter 4 focuses on information and knowledge exchange in

VICs, and emphasises the collaborations that take place between VICs and various stakeholders. The VIC information exchange model, which was developed to focus specifically on VICs (Deery *et al.* (2007), was adopted to illustrate the exchanges that take place in VICs. In reviewing this literature, several research gaps were identified; these then informed the development of the study's hypotheses and conceptual framework. The research gaps are identified in each of the following main constructs.

- **Information and knowledge exchange in VICs**

Similar to the tourism information exchange model of Sheldon (1997) (Figure 2.2) and the VIC information exchange model of Deery *et al.* (2007) (Figure 4.3), the conceptual framework indicates that there is an exchange of information and knowledge between a VIC and information suppliers (local tourism businesses and surrounding communities). This information is passed on in turn to information consumers (visitors, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities). In the information exchange process, VICs are intermediaries, while local tourism businesses and surrounding communities are suppliers and consumers of information. Unlike the tourism information exchange model (Sheldon, 2011) and the VIC information exchange model (Deery *et al.*, 2007), the conceptual framework of this study includes the local knowledge that surrounding communities can supply to a VIC. Thus both information and knowledge are critical to contributing to memorable visitor experiences, visitors' behavioural intentions, and socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities.

- **Memorable visitor experiences**

While the role that VICs play in enhancing memorable visitor experiences is acknowledged (section 4.5.1), limited studies have addressed how information and knowledge that is exchanged through stakeholder collaboration in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences. According to Kim *et al.* (2012), an MTE is made up of seven dimensions: hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge. These MTEs dimensions are based on visitors' unique assessments and perceptions of their reality, as well as their demographic and travel

behaviour characteristics (section 3.4.3). The conceptual framework therefore hypothesises that:

- H₁: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences.
- H₄: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences.

- **Visitors' behavioural intentions**

Providing visitors with memorable experiences is central to enhancing their behavioural intentions. However, the behavioural intentions may differ according to visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics (section 3.5.2). In VICs, information and knowledge exchanged with stakeholders and provided to visitors can lead to memorable experiences which in turn could influence visitors to extend their length of stay, increase their expenditure at destinations, revisit VICs and destinations, and recommend them to friends and relatives (section 3.5.1). Based on this discussion, the conceptual framework hypothesises that:

- H₂: Visitors' demographics and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

- **Socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders**

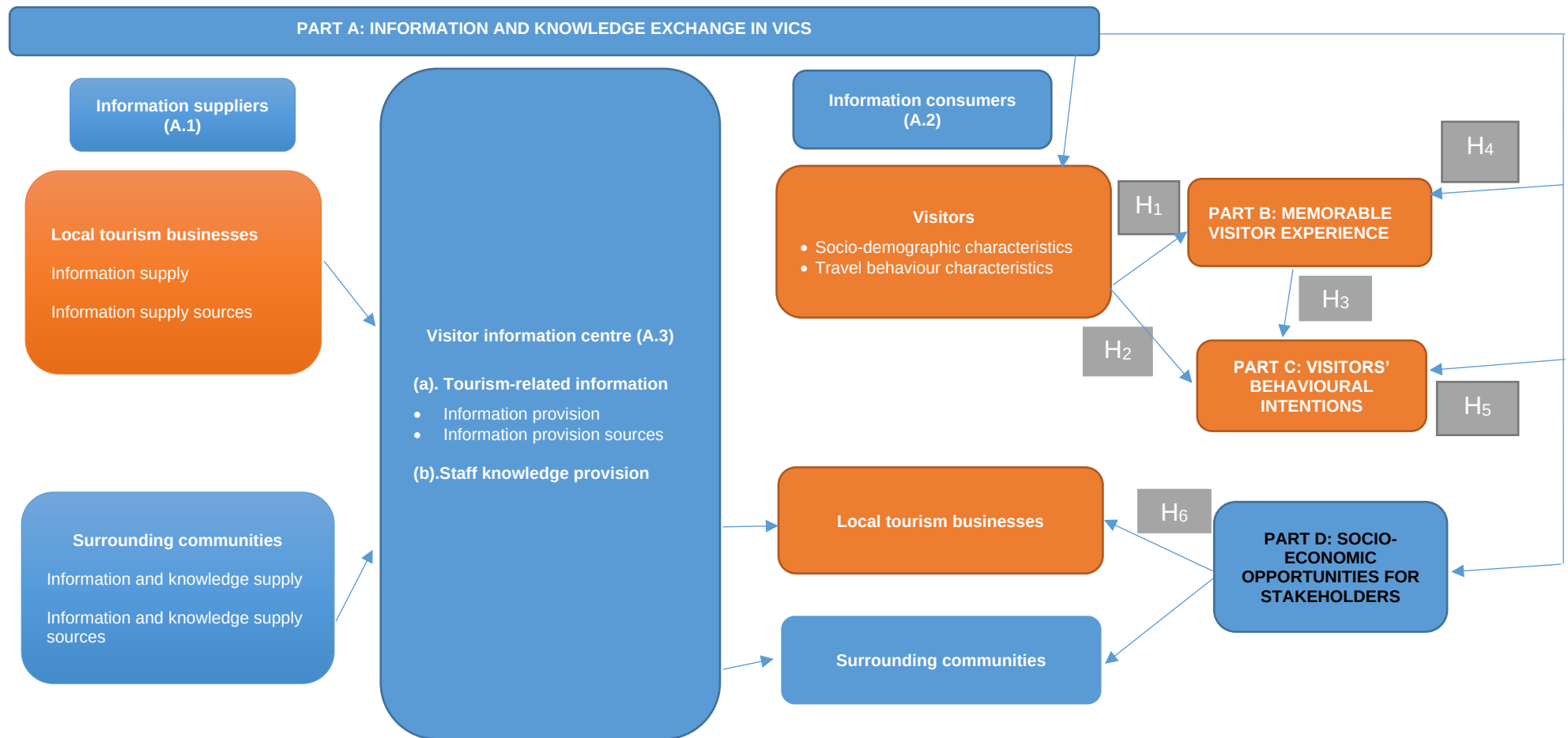
The Social Exchange Theory (SET) asserts that individuals engage in an exchange relationship when some future benefit is expected. Stakeholders such as surrounding communities and local tourism businesses show positive attitudes and support for the development of tourism if they perceive themselves as benefitting from it (section

2.8.3), and so might engage in an exchange relationship. The study therefore hypothesises that:

H₆: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

Following the discussion of the research gaps identified in the above constructs and the hypotheses that have been formulated, a conceptual framework is developed. The constructs form the main parts of the conceptual framework. Figure 4.5 depicts the conceptual framework, and shows the constructs and the relationships between them.

Figure 4.5: Conceptual framework – Information and knowledge exchange



The conceptual framework has four parts, described below.

PART A: Information and knowledge exchange in VICs

This part of the conceptual framework is highlighted in blue and white text in Figure 4.5 above. It was measured qualitatively through semi-structured interviews with VIC staff and through focus group discussions with surrounding communities. This part shows that there are different information suppliers (A.1) and consumers (A.2) in VICs. Local tourism businesses supply staff with information, using various sources to supply this information. In turn, VIC staff (A.3) use different sources to provide local tourism businesses with tourism-related information. In this way, local tourism businesses participate in VICs as both suppliers and consumers that exchange information with staff. Similarly, surrounding communities supply staff with information and use various sources to supply this information. In addition, they supply staff with knowledge of local tourism products. They are therefore suppliers and consumers that exchange information and knowledge with staff.

PART B: Memorable visitor experiences

This part of the conceptual framework is highlighted in orange and white text in Figure 4.5. It was measured quantitatively through a survey of visitors, and indicates that information and knowledge that staff exchange with local tourism businesses and surrounding communities is passed on to visitors to enhance their experiences of the areas they are visiting.

PART C: Visitors' behavioural intentions

Visitors' behavioural intentions are highlighted in orange and white text in the conceptual framework. They indicate that the information and knowledge that enhances memorable visitor experiences may in turn influence visitors' future behaviours. Visitors' behavioural intentions were measured quantitatively through a survey of visitors.

PART D: Socio-economic opportunities for local businesses and surrounding communities

This part of the framework highlights the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses and surrounding communities may derive from the information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs. These socio-economic opportunities are highlighted in blue and black text in the conceptual framework, and were measured both quantitatively (with local tourism businesses) and qualitatively (with VIC staff and surrounding communities).

Overall, the conceptual framework amalgamates four constructs, and provides a theoretical foundation that guides the study's research process. It is revisited in Chapter 9, based on the empirical evidence gathered to develop the final framework to guide tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

4.12 CONCLUSION

Although VICs play different roles, their main function is to provide information and knowledge about products in the local area. To do this, staff use a variety of sources – traditional and online – to provide this information. As owners of local products, local tourism businesses and surrounding communities collaborate with VICs to exchange the information and knowledge that is disseminated to visitors to enhance their experiences and behavioural intentions. It is important, however, that this exchange of information and knowledge generates socio-economic opportunities that improve the lives of surrounding communities and local tourism businesses.

This chapter examined the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs, and attempted to address research objectives 4, 5, and 6. In addition, having reviewed the literature in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, a conceptual framework with key constructs in the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs has been developed. The framework addresses research objective 3, and links the literature review chapters with the empirical phase of the study. Chapter 5 therefore focuses on the research

design and methodology that has been used to meet the research objectives of the study.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapters presented a literature review and a conceptual framework with key constructs in the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs. This chapter outlines the research paradigm and the research approach to address research objectives 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 from an empirical viewpoint. The chapter also provides a detailed description of the research design, sampling method, data collection, and data analysis processes that were followed. Challenges faced during the fieldwork, the aspects considered for the quality assurance of the data, and the research ethics are also discussed in this chapter.

Section 5.2 provides an overview of research paradigms, and discusses the philosophical assumptions and applications of the pragmatic philosophy that guided this study. In section 5.3, the broad research design and the mixed methods approach that were employed are described. The location and context of the study is highlighted in section 5.4. Emphasis is placed on the VICs that participated in the study and how they were selected. The pilot study to establish the feasibility of the main study and the refinements made to the research instruments are presented in section 5.5.

A detailed description of the quantitative research design used in conducting the surveys is provided in section 5.6 (focusing on visitors) and section 5.7 (concentrating on local tourism businesses). For the qualitative research design, section 5.8 focuses on the face-to-face in-depth interviews conducted with VIC staff, while section 5.9 gives attention to the focus group discussions held with surrounding communities. Section 5.10 highlights the research ethics applied in conducting the study, and section 5.11 draws all the sections together and concludes the chapter.

5.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

5.2.1 An overview of research paradigms

The process of undertaking research involves assumptions that researchers make about human knowledge and the nature of the realities they encounter in their research. Such realities shape the perspective that researchers take to understand their research questions, the methods they use, and the interpretations they make about their findings. This perspective reflects the research philosophy or paradigm with which researchers determine the approaches, frame of reference and research methods that will be used in their research projects, as well as how they will analyse and interpret the data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

Although different terms and definitions are used to describe the philosophical assumptions about what constitutes reality and knowledge, Neuman (2014: 96) views a paradigm as “a general organising framework for theory and research that includes basic assumptions, key issues, models of quality research, and methods for seeking answers”. Saunders *et al.* (2012) refer to ‘research philosophy’ as an overarching term that relates to the development of new knowledge and the nature of that knowledge in a particular field. Creswell (2014), on the other hand, uses the term ‘worldview’ to refer to a philosophical orientation towards the world and the assumptions that researchers bring to a study, the research design, and the specific methods or procedures of research. Thus a research paradigm signifies the assumptions, beliefs, and values that guide researchers when embarking on research to solve a problem and create knowledge in a particular field.

A research philosophy or paradigm can be thought of as the assumptions that researchers make on how they view the world. Saunders *et al.* (2012) argue that the philosophy that researchers adopt is influenced by the particular view of what acceptable knowledge is, and the process by which this knowledge is developed.

There are different ways of thinking about research paradigms.

- 'Ontology' relates to the belief about the nature of reality: whether there is one verifiable reality or multiple socially constructed realities.
- 'Epistemology' relates to ways of knowing. It raises questions about the nature of knowledge and truth.
- 'Axiology' relates to ethics and value systems that need to be considered when undertaking research. It involves the consideration of values relating to the different aspects of research, respondents or participants, data collection, and the audience to which the research results shall be disseminated and reported.
- 'Methodology' articulates the logic and flow of the systematic process to be followed in undertaking research in order to obtain knowledge about a research problem. It includes the research design, methods, and procedures used in a research project. The methodology includes data gathering, instruments, and data analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

These paradigmatic aspects help to determine the assumptions, beliefs, norms, and values that frame researchers' views of a research problem, the process to investigate it, and appropriate methods to use in order to answer the research questions. Different authors therefore identify and emphasise different research paradigms as being important to observe, to measure, and to understand social reality. For example, Corbin and Strauss (2014) emphasise positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism; Neuman (2014) identifies positivism, interpretivism, and critical social science; while Creswell (2014) classifies worldviews as post-positivist, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatist. Based on the different categorisations, five types of research paradigms are discussed below.

- Positivism is regarded as the dominant research paradigm. It is based on deterministic assumptions that there is a single reality, and that patterns, hypotheses, methods, procedures, measurements, mathematical calculations, predictions, and generalisations are ways of arriving at conclusions and of extending knowledge and human understanding. Thus positivism may be seen

as an approach that seeks to apply natural science models to explain social phenomena (Neuman, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

- Constructivism and interpretivism assert that reality is socially constructed. These paradigms aim to understand and interpret the subjective viewpoints, values, and meanings that people attach to social phenomena and the world around them, as well as the complexity and context of human experience (Creswell, 2014).
- Realism shares the principles of positivism and interpretivism, and accepts the existence of reality independent of human beliefs and behaviour while conceding that understanding people and their behaviour requires an acknowledgement of the subjectivity inherent in them (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).
- The critical/transformational paradigm situates research in social justice issues, and seeks to address the political, social, and economic issues that lead to social oppression, conflict, or power struggles. This paradigm holds that research needs to provide a voice for the marginalised and advance an agenda for change to improve the lives of marginalised individuals such as women, children, the elderly, and people living with disabilities (Mertens, 2010).
- Pragmatism emphasise that there are many different ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research; and that no single point of view may give a complete picture (Saunders, *et al.*, 2012). It advocates for practical and pluralistic approaches that allow the use of mixed methods to understand human behaviour (Creswell, 2014).

The different research paradigm are often presented as being fundamentally opposed and depicted on a continuum with positivism at one end, constructivism at the other end, and pragmatism in the middle (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009). This comparisons-based approach not only led researchers to identify alternatives research methods, but enabled them to ask different kinds of research questions, to mix quantitative and qualitative methods and to analyse both quantitative and qualitative data. In this way, pragmatism is regarded as an alternative that embraces both of the positivist and constructivist paradigms along with research questions that determine the extent to which quantitative and/or qualitative methods are used (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). It is different from other paradigms in that it is opposed to paradigms that adopts the

mono-paradigmatic orientation of research. It is not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality. To researchers adopting the pragmatic approach to research, it is not enough to access truth about the world using only a single method. This applies to mixed methods research in that researchers use pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge about the problem. (Creswell, 2014). They use many approaches for collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data rather than subscribing to only one method. Thus, pragmatism allows researchers to use multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions, as well as different forms of data collection and analysis. (Creswell, 2014).

Given the different research paradigms, it is important that researchers choose the paradigms that appropriately express their view of the world, along with their value systems, and with the literature and theoretical perspectives that exist in a particular field of study (Creswell, 2014). The next section discusses pragmatism and justify why this research philosophy is relevant for the study.

5.2.2 Pragmatism as the study's research philosophy

Pragmatism asserts that no single point of view can ever give the entire picture of reality, as there might be multiple realities. Thus pragmatists recognise that there are many different ways of interpreting the world and undertaking research (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Pragmatism allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. In seeking answers to research questions, pragmatic researchers use such experiences to construct and draw meaning from the phenomenon under investigation. The importance of pragmatism can be seen in using practical and pluralistic approaches to derive knowledge about a problem.

With regard to the paradigmatic elements, pragmatism advocates a relational epistemology, emphasising that relationships in research are best determined by what the researcher deems appropriate to a particular study. For ontology, pragmatism supports the view that there is no single reality and that individuals have their own and unique interpretations of reality, while a value-laden axiology is emphasised to conduct research that benefits people. Lastly, pragmatism emphasises a mixed methods

methodology, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in order to provide a complete picture of the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

Using Creswell's (2014) emphasis on the importance of integrating different worldviews in order to understand social phenomena and reality, pragmatism was adopted as the research paradigm to guide the study. It was best suited for this study to draw different perspectives from different participants in order to obtain a complete picture of the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. Visitors, VIC managers, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities were involved in the study to share their views and experiences on tourism information and knowledge exchange. Emphasising mixed methods research design, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the study to collect and analyse data and so to provide a complete picture and understanding of the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs, and of how this exchange may contribute to memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism businesses.

5.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

A literature review was conducted to gain a better understanding of information and knowledge exchange in VICs, particularly the socio-economic opportunities that may accrue to surrounding communities and local tourism businesses, as well as the memorable visitor experiences that can be enhanced by this exchange (Chapter 2-4). The insight gained from the literature review and the research objectives provided the conceptual framework that guided decisions about the research design.

An important step that follows the task of defining the research problem is the preparation of the research design. Decisions about what, where, when, how much, and by what means constitute a research design. In order to successfully carry out a study, it is important to outline the research design that will clearly articulate how the study will be conducted.

A 'research design' is defined as a framework for the collection and analysis of data to answer research questions and to meet research objectives, providing reasoned

justification for the choice of data sources, collection methods and analysis techniques, ethical issues, and constraints (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). The research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted. It is the blueprint for the measurement, collection, and analysis of data. A research design is necessary to facilitate the smooth running of a study. Thus designing a study requires making decisions about the type of sample to select, how to measure relevant constructs, and what data analysis techniques to employ (Creswell, 2014). To these, Leedy and Ormrod (2014) add considering a viable research problem, the data required to investigate the problem, and feasible ways of collecting and interpreting the data.

5.3.1 Types of research design

Researchers strive to collect empirical data systematically and to examine data patterns so as to understand and explain social life better. In this way, three approaches are used to understand and explain social life: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2014, Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Neuman, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). All these approaches are both useful and valid in tourism research. It is important to identify a research design that is suitable and appropriate to help achieve the objectives of the study. To differentiate between the approaches, Saunders *et al.* (2012) mention the choice between numeric and non-numeric data, which is often used as a distinguishing factor.

5.3.1.1 Quantitative research design

According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), quantitative research is often associated with positivism and a deductive approach, in which the focus is on using data to test a theory. It may also be inductive – that is, using data to develop a theory.

Quantitative research design involves any data collection technique or data analysis procedure that generates or uses numerical data such as percentages, frequency counts, or more sophisticated statistical indexes to make inferences about a population, based on the responses of the sample. Probability sampling techniques

such as simple random, systematic random, stratified random, cluster, and multistage are often used in quantitative research to ensure generalisability (Neuman, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Creswell (2014) adds that quantitative research is mainly used to examine the relationships among variables so that numbered data can be measured using structured instruments and analysed using statistical procedures. As data are collected in a standard manner, it is important to ensure that questions are expressed clearly so that all respondents understand them in the same way. Also important is to build in protections against bias to enable the generalisation and replication of the findings.

The quantitative element of this study focused on collecting data from closed-ended questions from two target populations – namely, visitors and local tourism businesses. Visitors provided data relating to their travel behaviour patterns and decisions they made to plan their trips. More importantly, they provided data about the information they received from VICs and their experiences at visited VICs and in local areas. Some information from open-ended questions about suggestions on how information and knowledge provision may be improved at VICs was also elicited. Local tourism businesses provided data relating to information and knowledge they received and supplied to VICs, as well as socio-economic opportunities they received from this exchange process. In addition, information from open-ended questions about suggestions on how this exchange process may be improved was extracted.

The process followed to elicit and analyse the data from visitors and local tourism businesses is described in sections 5.6 and 5.7.

5.3.1.2 Qualitative research design

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research is associated with the interpretive philosophy and an inductive approach, as researchers need to make sense of the subjective and socially constructed meaning expressed about a phenomenon that is being studied (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

A qualitative research design is typically used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals ascribe to a social or human problem from their point of view (Creswell,

2014). Data collection in a qualitative research design is non-standardised, and uses a variety of non-probability sampling and data collection techniques and analytical procedures, such as case study research, ethnography, and narrative research. During this data collection process, questions and procedures may alter and emerge as the researcher and participants engage in an interactive and naturalistic setting. The success of the researcher's role is dependent not only on gaining physical access to participants but also on building rapport and on demonstrating sensitivity to gain access to their information (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

A qualitative research design was used in this study to understand the meaning that participants who had an experience of the natural setting of the VIC environment ascribe to the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs. To explore participants' own viewpoints, in-depth interviews and focus groups were used to collect responses to open-ended questions. First, staff members with an extensive working knowledge of the VIC environment shared about the information and knowledge that they provide and receive from visitors and other stakeholders, including local tourism businesses, surrounding communities, embassies, and VICs, as well as students undertaking tourism-related studies. More importantly, staff highlighted how this exchange process contributes to memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for these stakeholders. Furthermore, through open-ended questions, staff shared their suggestions on how the exchange of information and knowledge may be improved between VICs and their stakeholders.

Second, a more structured focus group discussion approach, using a focus group schedule, was adopted to elicit information from surrounding communities. Open-ended questions were posed to participants about the information they need from VICs. Participants also shared about the information they received and supplied to VICs, and how this exchange process may contribute to memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. In addition, information from open-ended questions about suggestions on how the exchange of information and knowledge between VICs and surrounding communities may be improved at VICs was elicited.

The process followed to elicit and analyse the data from VIC staff and surrounding communities is discussed in section 5.8 and 5.9.

5.3.1.3 Multiple methods research design

While quantitative and qualitative approaches differ in significant ways with regard to their strengths and limitations, an understanding of both methods provides a comprehensive picture of the full range of social scientific research, as they can be used in complementary ways (Neuman, 2014). It is on this basis that the ideal perspective is to conduct a multiple method study that draws on the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

'Multiple methods research design' refers to the use of more than one data collection technique and analytical procedure to answer research questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). This research design is used to overcome the weaknesses associated with using only one method, and also provides scope for a richer approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation than either a quantitative or a qualitative approach alone. The research approach in multiple methods may be either deductive or inductive, and is likely to combine both approaches (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

Multiple methods are divided into multi-method research and mixed methods research. These methods are discussed below.

- **Multi-method research**

Multi-method research involves the use of more than one data collection technique with associated analysis procedures in either a qualitative or a quantitative research design. This might involve, for instance, using questionnaires and structured observation, and analysing the collected data using quantitative and statistical procedures, or using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and analysing the collected data using qualitative procedures (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

- **Mixed methods**

Mixed methods research, on the other hand, is used to combine both quantitative and qualitative research designs in order to provide a more complete understanding of a research problem, rather than using either research design alone. The mixed methods research designs may be combined in a variety of ways that range from simple, convergent forms to complex, fully integrated forms (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

To present a comprehensive understanding of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs from the perspectives and viewpoints of different stakeholders involved in the VIC environment, such as visitors, VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities, this study adopted a mixed methods research design and, in particular, the convergent parallel mixed methods approach.

The mixed methods research design and the convergent parallel mixed methods approach are discussed below.

5.3.1.4 The mixed methods research design

As discussed in section 5.2.2, pragmatism is a research paradigm that underpins and is appropriate to conducting mixed methods studies. With the study situated within pragmatism, the mixed methods research design was adopted as the main design with which to draw multiple views and perspectives from different participants and, more importantly, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of information and knowledge exchange in VICs. The choice of this design is also supported by previous studies on VICs (Arana *et al.*, 2016; Chikati, 2019; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Draper, 2016:18; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Swart 2016; Wong & McKercher, 2011) that also used the mixed methods design to understand information and knowledge provision at VICs.

The consideration of the research methodology takes into account that both qualitative and quantitative research are required to meet the research objectives and to test the hypotheses. A qualitative research design involves making sense of the subjective and socially constructed meaning expressed about a phenomenon under investigation (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). With tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs as the phenomenon under investigation, it was important to obtain and verify the views

and perspectives of those involved in conveying or acquiring information and knowledge in that context. As important stakeholders involved in the operation of VICs, staff and surrounding communities participated in the study. The type of information required from VIC staff and surrounding communities can only be obtained using qualitative research techniques. While measuring the exchange of information and knowledge, it is not the number of responses that matters, but rather their detail and richness.

By using qualitative techniques, the researcher not only investigates the actions of VIC staff and surrounding communities, but also tries to understand their views about and experiences of information and knowledge exchange in VICs. Such an extensive examination of information and knowledge exchange would not be achieved through a predetermined list of structured questions. Qualitative techniques are better implemented under conditions such as those in which the richness of the information is important. Another factor that leads to the use of qualitative research techniques is that the selection of the sample is related to the knowledge level of the respondents, making it difficult to achieve the research objectives with a small sample of participants. Not all the staff in VICs are involved in the dissemination of tourism information. Furthermore, VICs are found in a limited number of communities. This means that a non-probability, purposive judgement sample must be used. On the other hand, the type of information (such as the percentage of visitors or local tourism businesses who received extensive information from VICs) can only be obtained using a quantitative research technique such as a questionnaire, which generates nominal, ordinal, ratio, and interval data in order to test the hypotheses. Therefore, in order to solve the research problem satisfactorily, it is not only necessary to quantify some of the responses, but also to have an in-depth exploration of and probe into information and knowledge exchange in VICs. Thus a survey employing a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions was used to gather quantitative data from visitors and local tourism businesses. Semi-structured interviews using an interview schedule with open-ended questions were used to gather qualitative data from VIC staff, while focus group discussions employing a focus group schedule were used to elicit qualitative data from surrounding communities. The two methods were used to provide a comprehensive picture of the exchange process, and how it contributed to memorable

visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism businesses.

- ***Convergent parallel mixed methods approach***

Within the mixed method research design, this study primarily adopted a convergent parallel mixed methods approach. Creswell (2014) refers to this type of enquiry as one in which both quantitative and qualitative data are merged to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem, rather than using only one approach. To obtain a more complete understanding of a research problem, and to provide context and depth to the findings, both qualitative and qualitative methods were used in a parallel and complementary manner. Each set of data was collected, analysed and presented separately, and the information generated was integrated into the discussion and interpretation of the overall findings and the conclusions.

Although the convergent parallel mixed methods approach is most popular for use in a mixed methods design, it is probably the most challenging, given the expertise required to apply the methods or the contradictions that may arise if the quantitative and qualitative results do not match or differ significantly. Despite these challenges, the design was well-suited for this study owing to the value and insights that both quantitative and qualitative data provided in achieving the study's objectives. Moreover, combining the quantitative and the qualitative data facilitated triangulation and corroboration of findings, as tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs was investigated from multiple perspectives. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, triangulation was executed at four different levels: measure, observers, theory, and method (Neuman 2014).

First, the triangulation of measure, which involves multiple measurements of the same phenomenon, was undertaken by examining tourism information and knowledge exchange both from a quantitative perspective, using questionnaires, and qualitatively, using semi-structured interviews and focus group schedules.

Second, the triangulation of observers was employed in the study by examining tourism information and knowledge exchange from the different perspectives and viewpoints of multiple respondents such as visitors, local tourism businesses, VIC staff, and surrounding communities.

Third, the triangulation of theory, which requires examining a phenomenon from multiple theoretical perspectives, involved considering the viewpoints of different theories that guided and served as the basis on which this study was conducted. The Social Exchange Theory (SET), with its emphasis on the exchange of resources and the benefits that individuals might obtain from sharing information and knowledge, was important to understand how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs may contribute to socio-economic opportunities for VICs and for their different stakeholders, such as surrounding communities and local tourism businesses. The model of tourism information flows developed by Sheldon (1997) and the information exchange model created by Deery *et al.* (2007) highlighted important constructs in the flow and exchange of information among different stakeholders in VICs.

Lastly, with regard to the triangulation of methods, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in parallel and in a complementary manner to provide a more complete understanding of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

Given the varied experiences of the different respondents and participants regarding tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, the information elicited was not meant to be representative or to be generalised to others involved in the operations of VICs, but rather was meant to generate ideas, insights, and lessons that can be useful to other VICs in South Africa. The convergent parallel mixed methods approach helped to achieve this purpose.

5.4 STUDY LOCATION AND CONTEXT

To select relevant VICs to participate in the study, the Department of Tourism granted permission to use their VIC database, which categorises VICs according to geographic location (municipal, district, province) and ownership structure, indicating whether they are privately or publicly owned. In addition, the database reflects VICs that were

launched when South Africa was preparing to host the FIFA World Cup in 2010. Other information in the database relates to VICs that are funded from the Social Responsibility Implementation (SRI) programme. This is a job creation programme of the Department of Tourism that is funded by the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), one of the South African government's key programmes aimed at reducing poverty by creating work opportunities for unemployed persons. Through this grant, the Department of Tourism identifies and funds tourism initiatives such as VICs in order to contribute to job creation and community empowerment and development, particularly in rural areas.

VICs may be privately owned and may receive partial or direct funding from local municipalities, while government-owned VICs receive direct funding from local municipalities or provincial tourism and marketing agencies (National Department of Tourism 2015). As public utilities, government-owned VICs are expected to create socio-economic opportunities and improve the lives of people in their vicinity. This emphasis on socio-economic opportunities is in line with the research objectives of the study. Thus government-owned VICs were the main locations in which this research was conducted.

5.4.1 Target population of VICs

A 'target population' is the universe of units from which a sample is to be drawn (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Neumann, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). As explained above, this study focused on government-owned VICs. At the time of data collection in March 2017 to March 2018, there were 220 VICs in the database of the Department of Tourism, with 81 owned by the private sector and 139 owned by the public sector. Among the government-owned VICs, nine were funded from the SRI programme, of which five were funded following the 2010 FIFA World Cup. As a result, the target population for this study consisted of all the government-owned VICs in South Africa.

5.4.2 Sampled government-owned VICs

As depicted in Table 5.1 below, the provincial distribution of government-owned VICs shows that, as of March 2017, the majority were found in the provinces of Western Cape (36), KwaZulu-Natal (30), and Northern Cape (20) while the Free State (eight), North West (six), and Mpumalanga (three) had fewer VICs than other provinces. The Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and Limpopo provinces had 15, 11, and 10 VICs respectively.

Table 5.1: Provincial distribution of government-owned VICs

Province	Number of VICs
Western Cape	36
KwaZulu-Natal	30
Northern Cape	20
Eastern Cape	15
Gauteng	11
Limpopo	10
Free State	8
North West	6
Mpumalanga	3
Total	139

Source: Researcher's own construction

While these VICs are classified geographically in the database at municipal, district, and provincial levels, they are not distinguished as either urban or rural. This is mainly because the constitutional classification of municipalities in South Africa does not differentiate between municipalities in urban areas and those in rural areas (Palmer Development Group, as cited in National Treasury, 2011).

As illustrated in Table 5.2, the only distinction made outside of metropolitan cities (category A) is between local (category B-urban) and district (category C) municipalities.

Table 5.2: Classification of municipalities

Class	Characteristics
Metros (A)	Category A municipalities. Metros include large urban settlements with a high population density, complex and diversified economy, and a high degree of functional integration across a large geographic area.
Secondary cities (B1)	All local municipalities referred to as 'secondary cities'
Large towns (B2)	All local municipalities with an urban core. There is a huge variation in population sizes among these municipalities, and they have large urban dwelling populations.
Small towns (B3)	These municipalities are characterised by no large town as a core urban settlement. Typically these municipalities have a relatively small population, a significant proportion of which is urban and is based in one or more small towns. Rural areas in this category are characterised by the presence of commercial farms, as these local economies are largely agriculturally based. The existence of such important rural areas and the agriculture sector explains their inclusion in the analysis of rural municipalities.
Mostly rural (B4)	These municipalities are characterised by the presence of, at most, one or two small towns in their area, communal land tenure, and villages or scattered groups of dwellings, and are typically located in the former 'homelands'.
Districts (C1)	District municipalities that do not provide water services.
Districts (C2)	District municipalities that are water service providers.

Source: (Palmer Development Group, as cited in *National Treasury (2011)*)

It is important to note that many large urban municipalities, such as eThekweni Metropolitan and City of Tshwane Metropolitan, also contain areas that are functionally

rural in nature, thus making it difficult to classify the whole metro as urban. For this reason, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), which is responsible, among others things, for the governance of municipalities, has a method to differentiate between urban and rural municipalities (Table 5.2). This method considers the context in which municipalities operate. It uses variables such as size, population, settlement type (including the number of poor households), the proportion of households with access to services (water, sanitation and electricity), and information on capital and operating budgets in order to group municipalities.

In the typology outlined in Table 5.2, urban municipalities are those classified as B1 and B2, while rural municipalities are those in the B3 and B4 classes. All metropolitan cities are grouped under category A. This typology was adopted and applied in this study because classifying VICs in South Africa in this way is important to showing the variations that might exist between those located in urban municipalities and those in rural municipalities. This distinction is also important to helping address the urban–rural divide that has been created by imbalances of the past, when the economic development of rural areas was often ignored, along with the resultant lack of quality of life in those areas. It is for this reason that rural development and the improvement of the economy of rural areas in particular has been identified as one of the main priorities of the government in South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. This plan aims to eliminate poverty, reduce inequality, and create employment (South Africa, 2011) by activating socio-economic opportunities for the poor, particularly those in rural areas.

Classifying VICs at urban and rural level is important in order to examine, first, how those in urban areas, often with improved infrastructure, may provide support and good practice for those in rural areas to learn from; and second, how those in rural areas may be developed and resourced to raise the standard of living and create socio-economic opportunities for communities in their surroundings, thereby contributing to the improvement of local economies. In this way, VICs can contribute towards to the achievement of the NDP’s goal of an inclusive rural economy.

For the purposes of this research, urban VICs were considered as those located in municipalities classified as A, B1, or B2, while rural VICs were those located in

municipalities classified as B3 or B4. Table 5.3 below shows that the 139 government-owned VICs that were operational at the time of the study were located as follows: 22 in metropolitan cities (A), 40 in urban municipalities (B1 and B2), and 77 in rural municipalities (B3 and B4).

Table 5.3: Geographic distribution of VICs

Municipal category	Geographic location	Number of VICs	Total number of VICs	Provincial distribution
Group A	Urban	22	22	Eastern Cape (4)
				Free State (1)
				Gauteng (9)
				KwaZulu-Natal (3)
				Western Cape (5)
Group B1	Urban	16	40	Gauteng (1)
				KwaZulu-Natal (3)
				Limpopo (2)
				Mpumalanga (2)
				North West (3)
				Northern Cape (3)
				Western Cape (2)
Group B2	Urban	24		Eastern Cape (2)
				Free State (2)
				Gauteng (1)
				KwaZulu-Natal (10)
				Limpopo (1)
				Northern Cape (2)
				Western Cape (6)
Group B3	Rural	62	77	Eastern Cape (8)
				Free State (5)
				KwaZulu-Natal (5)
				Limpopo (4)
				Mpumalanga (1)
				North West (1)
				Northern Cape (15)
				Western Cape (23)
Group B4	Rural	15		Eastern Cape (2)

Municipal category	Geographic location	Number of VICs	Total number of VICs	Provincial distribution
				KwaZulu-Natal (8)
				Limpopo (3)
				North West (2)
TOTAL VICs	139			

Source: Researcher's own construction

5.4.3 Gaining access to VICs

Table 5.3 above was used as a sampling frame from which to select the VICs. To do this, permission to access the VICs was sought from the Department of Tourism. In addition, email and telephone discussions were held with different officials involved in the management and operation of VICs at both provincial and VIC level in order to obtain more information about the VICs. It was also important to explain the purpose of the study and to establish the possibility of conducting research at these VICs, based on the set criteria for selection and participation. The main criteria were: strategic location; and the purposes for which VICs were established to address some of the country's challenges, such as poverty alleviation, job creation, skills development, and SMME development. Owing to the exploratory nature of the study, VICs that yielded multiple stakeholder perspectives, such as those of visitors, staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities, were considered for participation in the study. Other considerations for participation were that the VICs must be providing information to visitors, be receiving adequate numbers of visitors who require information, and be operational at the time of the study.

Relevant documents outlining the purpose of the study – including an ethics approval letter from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria, and a letter signed by the Department of Tourism: Deputy Director General responsible for VICs – were sent to VIC officials to request their participation in the study. All the data collection instruments were also sent in subsequent communications to give more information about the study. During this process of negotiating entry to VICs, the researcher could

not reach all of them, as some of the emails bounced back as undelivered, indicating that some email addresses in the database no longer existed or had been captured incorrectly. Out of 139 VICs in the database, 84 could be reached by email and 12 could be reached by telephone. In the end, communication was maintained with 96 VICs.

5.4.4 Selection of participating VICs

Discussions with staff revealed that some VICs had closed down and were no longer operational at the time of the study. For example, while the VIC database of the Department of Tourism showed that there were six VICs in North West Province, discussions with the provincial coordinator revealed that only four were operational; one had closed down while the remaining one was being relocated to another building. Only one of the three VICs in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan was recommended for participation in the study because the other two were considered to receive too few visitors. These discrepancies showed that, although the database indicated that there were several VICs in a province, not all of them met the criteria for participation in the study. Some were not operational, or had low numbers of visitors, while others did not respond to the researcher's request for participation. It was only after the researcher had obtained this knowledge that 82 VICs formed part of the sampling frame. Non-probability sampling techniques were used to select the relevant VICs to participate in the study. In this type of sampling, the sample is selected based on the researcher's judgement, knowledge of the units under investigation, or the purpose of the study.

Equipped with knowledge of the challenges raised during discussions with staff, as well as the constraints of time, finance, and the capacity to collect and analyse data from four different target populations involved in the study (staff, visitors, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities), the researcher used her own judgement purposefully to consider a sample of VICs that best enabled the achieving of the research objectives. Purposive/judgemental sampling was therefore used to select the VICs, although there are also other non-random sampling techniques such as quota, snowball, deviant case, sequential, theoretical, adaptive, convenience, and volunteer sampling (Bryman, 2012; Neumann, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Since purposive

sampling emphasises the selection of informative cases with a specific purpose in mind (Saunders *et al.*, 2012), this technique was appropriate to use in the selection of VICs where the researcher knew that they were operational and were receiving visitors to whom they provided tourism information. The researcher purposefully identified different types of VICs that would yield different perspectives on the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The VICs were identified as described below.

First were VICs located in various strategic locations in both urban and rural municipalities. These were locations that draw a high number of visitors in each province, such as airports, shopping malls, beachfronts, libraries, historical attraction, museums, tourism routes, and tourist towns.

Second were VICs that received financial support through the Department of Tourism's SRI programme, as described in section 5.4.

Third were VICs that were launched when South Africa was preparing to host the FIFA World Cup in 2010.

The purposive sampling technique was also well-suited to this study, since its exploratory nature led to the selection of VICs that yielded multiple stakeholder perspectives – those of visitors, staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities. Following several engagements with VIC managers and staff, the VICs highlighted in Table 5.4 consented to take part, and formed the sample of the study. Except for the Western Cape Province, at least two VICs per province took part in the study.

Table 5.4: VIC sample per municipal category

Province	Name of VIC	Local municipality	Type of municipality	Type of VIC
Eastern Cape	Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism: Donkin VIC	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan	Urban: A	VIC in a tourist and historical town
	Cape St. Francis VIC	Koega Local Municipality	Rural: B3	VIC in a tourist town

Province	Name of VIC	Local municipality	Type of municipality	Type of VIC
Free State	Mangaung VIC	Mangaung Metropolitan	Urban: A	2010 SRI project
	Mangaung Tourist Information Centre (TIC)	Mangaung Metropolitan	Urban: A	VIC at a historical attraction
	Senekal Library	Setsoto Local Municipality	Rural: B3	VIC in a library
Gauteng	Tshwane VIC	City of Tshwane Metropolitan	Urban: A	VIC in the vicinity of a historical attraction
	Johannesburg VIC	City of Johannesburg Metropolitan	Urban: A	VIC in a shopping mall
KwaZulu-Natal	Durban Tourism: Tourist Information Centre (TIC)	eThekweni Metropolitan	Urban : A	VIC at beachfront
	Shelly Beach VIC	Ray Nkonyeni Local	Rural: B4	VIC in a shopping mall
Limpopo	Polokwane VIC	Polokwane Local Municipality	Urban: B1	2010 SRI project
	Makhado VIC	Makhado Local Municipality	Rural: B4	VIC on major national road to a world heritage site and the border gate to Zimbabwe
Mpumalanga	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency VIC	Mbombela Local Municipality	Urban: B1	VIC at airport
	Pilgrim's Rest VIC	Thaba Chweu Local Municipality	Rural: B3	VIC in a historical tourist town
Northern Cape	Kimberley VIC	Sol Plaatjie Local Municipality	Urban: B1	VIC in bus-ticketing complex
	Colesberg Museum	Umsombovu Local Municipality	Rural: B3	VIC in a museum
North West	Rustenburg VIC	Rustenburg Local Municipality	Urban: B1	2010 SRI project
	Pilanesberg VIC	Moses Kotane Local Municipality	Rural: B4	VIC in a national park

Province	Name of VIC	Local municipality	Type of municipality	Type of VIC
Western Cape	Cape Town Tourism (CTT): Burg Street VIC	Cape Town Metropolitan	Urban: A	VIC in a tourist and historical town

Source: Researcher's own construction

Table 5.4 shows that 18 VICs located across the different provinces formed a sample of the VIC population. Of VICs in rural municipalities, seven participated in the study, with two of them located in tourist and historical towns, while the others were found in a library, a shopping mall, a museum, a national park, and on national highways. As far as VICs in urban municipalities were concerned, eleven participated in the study, of which three were in tourist and historical towns; another five were in a shopping mall, a historical attraction, a bus-ticketing complex, a beachfront, and an airport; while three were funded from the SRI programme of the Department of Tourism.

While two types of VIC – urban and rural – were targeted in each province, the Free State Province presented an interesting case, as there were both a VIC and a Tourism Information Centre (TIC) in Bloemfontein; and so both were included in the sample of VICs located in urban municipalities in order to establish the differences between the two. The TIC is located in a bus-ticketing complex in order to encourage people to access visitor information while waiting for their transportation; while the VIC was established when the country was preparing to host the FIFA World Cup in 2010, and aims to provide information to visitors who might not be able to use the TIC in the bus-ticketing complex.

For Gauteng Province, only VICs in urban municipalities were included in the sample, as this province is made up of metropolitan municipalities or Category A municipalities that execute local government functions for large urban settlements called 'cities'. In the Western Cape Province, efforts to obtain a VIC located in a rural municipality proved to be difficult. Contact was established with these VICs through telephone calls and email communication. However, the researcher discovered that most of the VICs in the province were privately owned or were parastatals that were privately owned but receiving some funding from local municipalities. Following an extended period spent in trying to secure the participation of at least one VIC, the Malmesbury VIC

expressed its willingness to take part in the study. Although staff members were willing to participate in the study, it was difficult to recruit local tourism businesses or community members in the vicinity of the VIC. A similar challenge was experienced with a VIC in George, despite concerted efforts to solicit the participation of local tourism businesses or community members. Given these challenges, only one VIC located in an urban municipality in the Western Cape Province (Cape Town Tourism: Burg Street VIC, Cape Town Metropolitan) participated in the study. This created a limitation for the study, as qualitative information could not be gathered from staff and surrounding communities in a rural VICs.

5.5 PILOT STUDY

Before undertaking the main empirical study, a pilot study was carried out. As Bryman (2012) cautions, it is always desirable to conduct a pilot study before administering a questionnaire to a sample, in order to establish the feasibility of the planned study. A pilot study was undertaken to assess the feasibility of the approach that was intended to be used in the larger scale study. It was also important to test and refine the data collection methods, procedures, and instruments to ensure that respondents understood the questions in a consistent manner and that there were no problems in recording the data. The pilot also assessed the practical planning for the main study, such as access to respondents, administration of the data collection instruments, and logistical arrangements such as transport, finance, and time factors.

The pilot process involved first checking the data collection instruments with four staff members of the Department of Tourism who were responsible for the management of VICs at a national level, so that they could comment on irrelevant, redundant, or duplicate questions. They were also asked about how to improve the phrasing of questions to ensure clarity and to clarify understanding and reliability; and to remove any sector-related jargon that might not be fully understood by respondents. The comments they provided helped to refine the data collection instruments that were then piloted at two different types of VIC in Limpopo Province: Mopani VIC, situated in the rural municipality of Greater Tzaneen, and Mokopane VIC, located in the urban municipality of Mokopane. The pilot study was undertaken in December 2016.

The sections that follow highlight the challenges that were experienced for each target population during piloting, and how the challenges were overcome.

5.5.1 Visitors

In both VICs, the contact details of visitors, such as email addresses or telephone numbers, could not be established in advance to allow the researcher to invite them to participate in the study. The researcher found that some visitors did not provide or complete their contact details in the visitors' book or visitor forms, as they were not required to do so. In instances where email addresses were available and were used to invite respondents to participate in the study, some bounced back as undelivered, indicating that either they no longer existed or they were captured incorrectly. The initial plan in carrying out the pilot study was to request the contact details of visitors who had visited VICs three months prior to the study being conducted in order to allow them to recall their visit. However, only a few contact details were made available. A low response rate was also experienced, even when the request was extended to include visits that took place six months prior to the pilot study. Given this challenge, the period was extended to twelve months in the main study to allow for an improved response rate.

A total of ten questionnaires were emailed to visitors to the Mopani VIC; however, six failed to be delivered, leaving only four visitors to participate in the pilot study. For Mokopane VIC, the telephone numbers of VIC users were used to contact them, as their email addresses were not captured in the visitor book. Of the ten visitors who were reached telephonically, four had email addresses and were thus able to complete the questionnaires. Of the remaining six visitors, two asked to participate in telephone interviews, while the other four declined to participate in the study. With regard to the questionnaire, respondents found a question asking them to indicate the frequency of their use of information at the VIC unclear, or they did not understand it; so it was removed from the final visitor questionnaire. Owing to the low response rate, paper-based questionnaires that visitors could complete when they visited VICs were suggested to supplement the online questionnaires in the larger scale study.

5.5.2 Local tourism businesses

The pilot study revealed that, although VICs keep a database of local businesses, the contact details of these businesses are not updated regularly; thus most of the emails asking them to complete the survey bounced back as undelivered. Of the 10 questionnaires emailed to businesses in Mopani, four failed to go through, and six completed the questionnaires. For the Mokopane VIC, five of the 10 questionnaires failed to go through, while two businesses did not respond to several emails seeking their participation. Only three completed the questionnaires. Owing to the low response rate, paper-based questionnaires that VIC staff could email to local tourism businesses in their databases or that staff of businesses could complete when they visited VICs were suggested to supplement the online questionnaires in the larger scale study.

5.5.3 VIC staff

Interviews with two staff members, one from each VIC, revealed that the VICs are managed by different organisations. For example, the Mokopane VIC is managed by the local municipality, and, in addition to their VIC functions, staff perform other priority functions of the municipality that mostly relate to local economic development and the delivery of basic services such as water and electricity. The Mopani VIC, on the other hand, is managed by a Provincial Tourism and Marketing Authority, and so staff dedicate more of their time to working on VIC-related matters. Based on this finding, two questions were included in the final VIC staff interview schedule to discover any differences in the management of VICs. The first question was on the VIC ownership model, and the second on other roles and responsibilities that staff have besides those related to the operation and management of VICs.

5.5.4 Surrounding communities

Community members did not respond to the invitation placed at Mopani VIC, inviting them to participate in a focus group discussion. As a result, the VIC staff was requested to recommend a community member who could assist the researcher to

recruit participants for the focus group. Although it took a while to get a focus group together, only four of the initial seven recruited community members attended the focus group discussion. The approach of using a community member recommended by the VIC staff to help identify and recruit relevant surrounding communities to participate in focus group discussions was adopted in the main study.

All comments received from the pilot phase, as discussed above, were applied in the data collection phase of the larger-scale study that took place from March 2017 to March 2018. Sections 5.6 to 5.9 outline the primary empirical data collection phase for each of the four target populations of the study: visitors to VICs, local tourism businesses, VIC staff, and surrounding communities. Each section provides a detailed explanation of the target population, the sampling method, the data collection method, the data collection instrument, and the data analysis methods.

5.6 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: VISITORS TO VICS

5.6.1 Target population and sampling method

In this study, visitors to the 18 sampled VICs served as the target population from which to select respondents. VIC staff were requested to provide a list of the contact details of visitors who had visited the VICs in the twelve months prior to data collection. The researcher discovered that not all the VICs kept a record of visits. In some VICs, staff were reluctant to provide lists of visitors' contact details, raising ethical issues related to the lack of visitors' consent to allow the use of their details by third parties. In the end, only four VICs submitted lists. The lists differed in the variables that VICs use to report visits, with some reporting visitors' demographic characteristics for age, gender, country of origin, and purpose of visit to visited areas, while others only recorded the number of visitors during a particular period – whether daily, weekly, or monthly. These variations revealed a lack of standardisation in the recording and reporting of VIC visitors.

In the absence of a pre-existing visitor list, it was not feasible to compile a comprehensive list that could serve as a visitor population. This posed a limitation for the study, as actual visitor figures could not be determined in advance. A quota of twenty visitors was targeted in each of the 18 VICs, resulting in 360 visitors serving as the target population.

5.6.2 Sampling method

Sampling involves a process of using a subset of the population in order to draw conclusions about that population. It is a technique used to select suitable units of the population that represent and characterise the whole population (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormond, 2014; Neumann, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012). In the absence of a pre-existing visitor list or a visitor sampling frame, it was impossible to draw a representative sample of visitors or to determine a visitor sample size from the frame. Moreover, as this was an exploratory study, the objective was not to obtain a representative sample, as demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and educational achievement typically vary across visitors.

With a diverse visitor population, non-probability convenience sampling – which is primarily guided by what is convenient for the researcher, such as accessibility, geographic proximity, and known contacts (Kumar, 2014) – was used to involve visitors who were willing and available to participate in the study. In convenience sampling, there is no pretence about identifying a representative sample (Leedy & Ormond, 2014) or claiming that the findings can be generalised. Thus a convenience sampling method was adopted as suitable for the research, since it did not claim that any generalisation of the findings to visitors to other VICs would be possible. Furthermore, a convenience sampling strategy best suited the study, given the challenges raised by the lack of a sampling frame, the available resources, the costs, and the amount of time the researcher would need to visit sites, and to collect and analyse data in person.

5.6.3 Data collection method

Data collection is the precise, systematic process of gathering relevant data in order to achieve the research's purpose and objectives. Various methods, such as surveys and interviews, are used to collect quantitative data. In particular, a survey is the most often used method to gather information from a sample of respondents in order to learn about a large population (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormond, 2014; Neumann, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

A survey involves acquiring information from a sample of respondents about their characteristics, opinions, attitudes, or previous experiences (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Surveys are an appropriate way to learn about self-reported beliefs or behaviours. They are mostly used in exploratory, descriptive, and/or explanatory research in order to answer questions asked once, thereby measuring variables related to questions about 'what', 'who', 'where', 'how much', and 'how many'. In surveys, questions are asked in a standardised way that is applied equally and consistently to all respondents. This allows researchers to gather descriptive information, summarise responses, and then draw inferences about a particular population from the responses of a sample (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

This study used the survey research method to examine the views of visitors about the information they received from VICs, and how this information enhanced their experience of the VICs and local areas they visited. Several questions were posed to visitors in a standardised and consistent manner to elicit quantitative responses that were summarised as percentages and frequency counts. An exploratory and cross-sectional survey conducted at a single point in time was suitable for this purpose, to elicit different visitors' self-reported views and experiences in order to discover current and desired opinions of the phenomenon of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. Despite the advantages of employing survey research, this data collection method has its limitations. Critics assert that the nature of predefined and structured questions in surveys makes it impossible to probe for insights relating to the phenomenon under investigation (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). In the study, the aim of the visitor survey was to yield quantitative data in order to test hypotheses H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄ and H₅; thus the survey was well-suited to quantifying responses. Other qualitative

methods of data collection, such as interviews with VIC staff and focus groups with surrounding communities, were used to complement the survey research method in providing a complete picture of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), there are four different types of access that researchers can use to collect data: traditional, Internet-mediated, intranet-mediated, and hybrid.

- Traditional access involves face-to-face interactions, telephone conversations, correspondence, and visiting data archives.
- Internet-mediated access involves the use of different technologies (e.g., the web, email, instant messaging, and webcams). This type of access is well-suited for sending out online surveys.
- Intranet-mediated access involves gaining virtual access using an organisation's intranet.
- Hybrid access combines the traditional and; internet and intranet -mediated approaches.

The initial plan in carrying out the survey was to use Internet-mediated access. Owing to a low response rate, traditional access methods were subsequently used to improve participation. Hybrid access, which combines both traditional and Internet-mediated approaches, was used. Each type of access used is explained below.

Internet-mediated access was used to reach visitors who were not physically present at VICs at the time of the data collection. Self-completed online questionnaires were distributed through Qualtrics, an online survey tool that manages responses and records data.

An online link (https://pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eKYujdZTQqkB7W5) was created and distributed to visitors whose email addresses were sourced from VIC staff. CTT: Burg Street VIC also asked if they could distribute the online link directly to their visitors through the CTT online system. As the focus of the study was on visitors who had visited VICs twelve months prior to data collection, Internet-mediated access

provided respondents with the convenience to complete the survey anywhere and at any time. Thanks to these capabilities, visitors were able to complete the survey outside the VIC environment.

Although it was hoped that Internet-mediated access would reach a sufficient number of the target visitor population (360 visitors), only 13 usable questionnaires were fully completed through Qualtrics, while 21 questionnaires were completed by visitors to the CTT: Burg Street VIC through that organisation's online system. Owing to this low response, ethical clearance was sought to use traditional access methods to complement Internet-mediated access and to encourage visitor participation. Paper-based questionnaires (20) were posted to and left at each of the 18 participating VICs from October 2017 to March 2018. Visitors were requested to choose from the following options:

- To complete the questionnaire and leave it at the VIC.
- To complete the questionnaire outside the VIC environment when it was convenient to do so, and to email it back to the researcher.
- To leave an email address at the VIC so that for the researcher could email the questionnaire directly to them.

These traditional access methods were useful in addressing some of the limitations associated with Internet-mediated access, such as possibly inhibiting respondents from directly engaging the researcher for clarity-seeking purposes, or excluding those without Internet access. A combination of the two access methods resulted in a hybrid access that yielded 34 questionnaires that were completed online (through Qualtrics and the CTT online system) and 118 usable questionnaires that were posted back to the researcher. The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria granted approval to use an incentive to encourage participation. As shown in Table 5.5, 152 visitor questionnaires were collected from eight provinces – that is, all except Gauteng Province.

Table 5.5: Number of visitors per VIC (n=52)

Province	Name of VIC	Number of visitors
Qualtrics		13
Eastern Cape	Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism: Donkin VIC	18
	Cape St Francis VIC	5
Free State	Mangaung VIC	7
	Mangaung TIC	
	Senekal Library	14
Gauteng	Tshwane VIC	0
	Johannesburg VIC	0
KwaZulu-Natal	Durban Tourism TIC	8
	Shelly Beach VIC	0
Limpopo	Polokwane VIC	0
	Makhado VIC	9
Mpumalanga	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency VIC	7
	Pilgrim's Rest VIC	23
Northern Cape	Kimberley VIC	8
	Colesberg Museum	13
North West	Rustenburg VIC	0
	Pilanesberg VIC	6
Western Cape	CTT: Burg Street VIC	21
Total questionnaires		152

Source: Researcher's own construction

The study was exploratory in nature, and did not aim to obtain a representative sample. The varied views and experiences of the 152 visitors provide a first attempt at generating ideas, insights, and lessons to understand tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, and how this exchange might contribute to the creation of memorable visitor experiences.

5.6.4 Data collection instrument (APPENDIX C)

As mentioned in section 5.3.1, quantitative research is conducted in a systematic and controlled way using standardised measures and predetermined procedures. To test

the theoretical and conceptual frameworks in quantitative research, the instruments to measure constructs must be appropriate and rigorous.

Measurement is important in quantitative research in order to accurately describe, quantify, and represent the constructs of interest in a study (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2014) so that different perspectives are condensed into a limited number of predetermined responses to which numbers are assigned. Measurement therefore provides an important tool with which data may be inspected, analysed, and interpreted so that the meaning behind that data may be probed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014).

A questionnaire was used to collect data from visitors. According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), a questionnaire is a data collection tool with which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order. Questionnaires may therefore take different forms, depending on how they are delivered, returned, or collected. These forms may include the following:

First, self-completed questionnaires are usually completed by respondents, and may be delivered electronically using the Internet (Internet-mediate or Web-based questionnaires) or the Intranet (Intranet-mediated questionnaires). This type of questionnaire may also be posted to respondents who may return them by post after completion (postal or mail questionnaires), or be delivered by hand to each respondent and collected later (delivery and collection questionnaires).

Second, interviewer-collected questionnaires and telephone questionnaires are recorded by the interviewer, based on each respondent's answers.

A structured questionnaire that was delivered both electronically through the Internet and hardcopies for visitors to complete when they visited VICs was used to allow visitors to respond to a range of topics related to information and knowledge exchange and their experiences at the VICs and local areas they visited. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions that elicited structured, fixed, and numerical responses. The questions aimed to achieve objective 6: to assess how the exchange

of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions.

The Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) scale (Kim *et al.*, 2012) was used to measure visitors' experiences at visited areas. The scale was appropriate for the study, as the concept of 'tourist' included both overnight and day visitors. As discussed in chapter 4, the term 'MTE' is used synonymously with 'memorable visitor experience'. Using a five-point Likert-type response scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree"), visitors were asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each of the 24 scale items. The scales to measure all the constructs were developed from the literature. The questionnaire comprised different sections. The scales used to measure the constructs are highlighted in each section of Table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Measurement of constructs in the visitor questionnaire

Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
Section 1: Socio-demographic characteristics	q1.1: Country of residence	Open-ended	Section 3.2.3; 3.3.6 4.7.2
	q1.2: Province of SA residents	Nominal	
	q1.3: Gender		
	q1.4: Age	Open-ended	
	q1.5: Population group	Nominal scale	
	q1.6: Highest level of education	Ordinal scale	
	q17: Employment status		
	q1.8: Monthly income	Ratio	
Section 2: Information provided to visitors at VICs	2.1: Purpose of visiting the VIC	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)	Section 4.4.1–4.4.3
	2.2: Information search at VIC	Nominal scale	
	2.3: Level of information search at VIC • Extensive information search • Useful information searched	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale: • 1 = not extensive at all and 5 = very extensive • 1 = not useful at all and 5 = very useful	
	2.4: Preferred VIC information	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)	
	2.5: Information sources at VIC: • Extensive information source • Useful information source	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale: • 1 = not extensive at all and 5 = very extensive) • 1 = not useful at all and 5 = very useful	Section 4.7

Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
	2.6: Preferred VIC information source	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)	
Section 3: Visitor experience at VICs	q3.1a: Information provision q3.1b: Information quality q3.1c: Information resources q3.1d: ICTs q3.1e: Staff knowledge q3.1f: Customer service	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)	Section 4.5.1 4.6.1–4.6.3
	q3.1g: Behavioural intentions	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)	Section 4.5.2
Section 4: Travel behaviour characteristics	q4.1: Main trip purpose	Nominal scale	Section 3.2.3
	q4.2 Travel companions	Nominal scale	
	q4.3: Number of travel companions	Ordinal scale: 1 = alone and 5 = more than four people	
	q4.4: Mode of transport	Nominal scale	
	q4.5: Visited area during trip	Nominal scale	
	q4.6: Other visited areas during trip	Open-ended question	
	q4.7: Duration of stay	Interval scale	
	q4.8: Type of accommodation	Nominal scale	
	q4.9: Previous area visits	Nominal scale	
	q4.10: Number of previous area visits	Interval scale	
	q4.11: Previous VIC visits	Nominal scale	Section

Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
	q4.12: Behavioural intentions based on VIC information q4.13: VIC usage during travel q4.14: Importance of VIC information during travel	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)	4.4.1–4.4.6
Section 5: Decision-making and pre-trip planning	q5.1: Trip planning duration	Ordinal scale: 1 = less than a week and 6 = more than a month	Section 3.3.3; 3.3.6
	q5.2: Trip planning information search • Extensive trip planning information search • Frequency of trip planning information search • Useful trip planning information search	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale • 1 = not extensive at all and 5 = very extensive • 1 = never and 5 = always • 1 = not useful at all and 5 = very useful	Section 3.3.1–3.3.3
	q5.3: Trip planning information sources • Extensive trip planning information source • Frequency of trip planning information source • Useful trip planning information source	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale • 1 = not extensive at all and 5 = very extensive) • 1 = never and 5 = always) • 1 = not useful at all and 5 = very useful)	Section 3.3.4–3.3.6
Section 6a: Memorable visitor experience	q6.1: Attractions visited	Nominal scale	Section 3.2.3
	q6.2: Number of attractions visited	Open-ended question	

Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
	q6.3: Memorable visitor experience • Hedonism • Novelty • Local culture • Refreshment • Meaningfulness • Involvement • Knowledge	Ordinal scale: five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree)	Section 3.42; 3.4.3
Section 6b: Improvements in information and knowledge provision in VIC	q6.4: VIC information provision improvement	Open-ended questions	Section 2.3; 2.4 4.4–4.8
	q6.5: VIC knowledge provision improvements	Open-ended questions	Section 2.5; 2.6 4.4–4.8

Source: Researcher's own construction

Although a five-point Likert-type response scale with values ranging from 1 to 5 was used to rate items in the questionnaire, responses were collapsed into three values to allow for a clearer graphical or tabular observation of emerging patterns. The scale groupings used in the graphical and descriptive analysis of the results are reflected in Table 5.7. However, the original scale responses were used in the exploratory factor analysis and subsequent inferential analysis.

Table 5.7: Scale grouping

Scale	Scale grouping
1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly agree	“strongly disagree” and “disagree” reflected as “disagree” “neutral” “agree” and “strongly agree” reflected as “agree”
1=Not extensive at all 2=Extensive 3=Neutral 4=Extensive 5=Very extensive	“not extensive at all” and “not extensive” reflected as “not extensive” “neutral” “extensive” and “very extensive” reflected as “extensive”
1=Not useful at all 2=Not useful 3=Neutral 4=Useful 5=Very useful	“not useful at all” and “not useful” reflected as “not useful” “neutral” “useful” and “very useful” reflected as “useful”.
1=Not important at all 2=Unimportant 3=Neutral 4=Important 5=Very important	“not important at all” and “unimportant” reflected as “unimportant” “neutral” “important” and “very important” reflected as “important”
1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Always	“never” and “rarely” reflected as “rarely” “sometimes” “often” and “always” reflected as “often”

5.6.4.2 Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

Leedy and Ormrod (2014) mention that, regardless of the type of instrument used in a study, all data collection instruments must demonstrate that they are both valid and reliable. The validity and reliability of measurement instruments influence the extent to which the researcher can learn something about the phenomenon under investigation, the probability of obtaining statistical significance in any data analysis, and the extent to which the researcher can draw meaningful conclusions from the data. Therefore validity and reliability are important in establishing the truthfulness, credibility, or believability of research results (Neuman, 2014). To do so, the quality of the instruments used to collect data is critical because the conclusions drawn in a study are based on the information obtained from these instruments.

- *Validity*

The ‘validity’ of a measurement instrument refers to the extent to which it measures what it is intended to measure, while ‘reliability’ deals with the ability of the instrument consistently to measure a construct and how well its items fit together conceptually. This shows that validity suggests truthfulness, and reliability deals with the consistency, dependability, and replicability of results (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Hair *et al.*, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Neuman, 2014). As Leedy and Ormrod (2014) note, validity and reliability take different forms, depending on the nature of the research problem, the methodology being used to address the problem, and the nature of the data that are collected. This means that the validity or reliability of an instrument is specific to a particular situation. The following three types of measurement validity (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014) are discussed to reflect their relevance and use in this study.

Face validity refers to the extent to which, on the surface, a measuring instrument appears to be measuring a particular characteristic. It involves the researcher’s subjective assessment of the presentation and relevance of the measurement instrument as to whether the items in the instrument appear to be relevant, reasonable, unambiguous, and clear (Oluwatayo, 2012). It is considered to be the easiest validation process to undertake, although it is the weakest form of validity (Neuman, 2014) because it evaluates the usability rather than the reliability of a measurement.

To assess face validity in the study, four VIC content experts in the Department of Tourism were requested to assess the questionnaire for accuracy, relevance, and comprehensibility.

Content validity pertains to the degree to which items in the measurement instrument adequately measure the construct under investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). It is therefore important that a measurement instrument represent all aspects of the conceptual definition of a construct. This is achieved through three steps: specifying the content in a construct, explaining all aspects of the definition of the construct, and developing indicators that explain all areas of the definition (Neuman, 2014).

To demonstrate the content validity of the questionnaire, an extensive literature review was conducted to develop the scales. In addition, the relevance of the constructs to the study's research objectives was tested with four VIC content experts in the Department of Tourism. The supervisors of this study at the University of Pretoria's Division of Tourism Management guided the content of the questionnaire to ensure its accuracy and relevance. The questionnaire was also pre-tested at two VICs. A question asking respondents to indicate the frequency with which they used information at the VIC was eliminated from the final visitor questionnaire, as respondents found it unclear or could not understand it.

Construct validity refers to the degree to which a measurement instrument measures a theoretical construct. It ensures that abstract concepts are measured adequately and logically, and that relationships between variables are identified on the basis of theory and operational definitions. Construct validity is important for empirical measures and hypothesis testing, and is based on the relationships among variables. When a variable consists of multiple items, factor analysis is used to determine construct validity (Hair *et al.*, 2014; Neuman, 2014).

In the study, the questionnaire was developed in alignment with the theoretical underpinnings of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. In particular, the SET, the model of tourism information flows (Sheldon, 1997), and the VIC information exchange model (Deery *et al.*, 2007) formed the theoretical framework of this study. Furthermore, exploratory factor analysis was used to determine the

construct validity of the factors related to tourism information and knowledge exchange and the dimensions of memorable visitor experiences. Construct validity was confirmed, and the factors were used in further analysis.

Criterion validity measures the extent to which a measuring instrument correlates or compares with another existing measurement on similar constructs. It uses some standard or criterion to indicate a construct accurately. There are two types of criterion validity: concurrent validity measures correlations that occur concurrently, while predictive validity assesses the ability of an instrument to forecast future events, behaviour, or outcomes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Neuman, 2014).

The biases that are commonly encountered during measurement development were controlled. Measurement bias which involves changes made to the way data are collected was avoided by applying standardised measures and predetermined procedures. A predetermined list of questions was used in which respondents were asked the same set of questions in a consistent manner. To ensure that respondents provide honest answers, social desirability bias which happens when respondents distort answers to conform to popular social norms (Neuman, 2014; Bergen & Labonté, 2020) was avoided. Different types of closed-ended questions, including list, category, ranking and rating questions allowed respondents to consider alternative responses from which to choose.

- *Reliability*

'Reliability' refers to the consistency with which an instrument measures a given variable every time it is used under the same conditions with the same respondents (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Hair *et al.*, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2014; Neuman, 2014). The internal consistency (reliability) of the items was determined using Cronbach's alpha for the constructs under investigation. As the study was exploratory in nature, Cronbach's alpha values of between 0.5 and 0.6 were considered acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003) to measure the internal consistency of the information and knowledge exchange related factors and the dimensions of MTE scale. Furthermore, combining both the quantitative and qualitative data facilitated the triangulation and corroboration of the findings. To avoid participant bias which may

induce false responses in completing paper-based questionnaires, visitors were allowed to choose from the following options: complete the questionnaires and leave them at the VICs; complete the questionnaire and email them back to the researcher or request the researcher to email the questionnaires directly to them and return them to the researcher.

5.6.5 Data analysis

Data analysis involves examining data in ways that reveal relationships, patterns, and trends in order to provide meaningful conclusions. This is important, as quantitative data in its raw form, such as numbers or frequencies, convey very little meaning (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). To be meaningful, data need to be analysed and interpreted. Data analysis therefore involves a process of transforming data into meaningful information that is useful to help answer research questions. To transform data in this way requires the use of quantitative analysis techniques.

As indicated in section 5.6.3, different platforms were used to distribute the questionnaires: electronically through Qualtrics and the CTT online platform, and physically at VICs. To have one data set, a data sheet was created in Microsoft Excel. Both online and paper-based questionnaire were captured in the same data sheet. This was necessary to detect multiple capturing of responses from online and paper-based questionnaires. After cleaning the data, 152 completed questionnaires (online and paper-based) were coded and computed in Microsoft Excel, and then imported into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v24 for analysis and interpretation. All responses from the 152 questionnaires were analysed simultaneously.

SPSS v24 is a software package used for statistical analysis. This software was chosen because of its ability to handle and analyse different amounts of data. SPSS was therefore used to analyse the data descriptively and inferentially. Statistical analyses such as frequencies, descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and hierarchical regression analysis were performed to test empirically the study's research objectives (2 and 6), which related

to how the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs contributed to memorable visitors' experiences.

- ***Frequency analysis***

The first step in data analysis involved an analysis of the descriptive statistics in order to express the frequency of survey responses. A frequency count and valid percentages were calculated for each question, and were used to describe, analyse, and present data patterns. In addition, standard and stacked bar charts were used to describe the categories of the data in a graphical format.

- ***Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)***

The second step in data analysis involved conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to explore the relationships between the factors. According to Hair *et al.* (2014), factor analysis is an interdependent technique used to define the underlying structure of variables in the analysis. It provides researchers with tools to analyse the structure of the interrelationships among a large number of variables by defining sets of variables that are highly interrelated. These sets of variables, known as factors, are assumed to represent dimensions within the data.

Two main techniques are used in factor analysis. First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) attempts to confirm hypotheses based on the instruments that have been established in the research and have not been adapted. Second, EFA attempts to uncover complex patterns and relationships between the measured variables by exploring the dataset and testing predictions (Child, 2006; Hair *et al.*, 2014). To explore how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs may contribute to memorable visitor experiences, an EFA was conducted on the factors related to tourism information and knowledge exchange and the dimensions of memorable visitor experiences. Since the scales were developed from the literature and had not been used before, an EFA was performed. The MTE scale (Kim *et al.*, 2012) was applied in a new context (VICs) – hence the use of an EFA.

The first step in the EFA involved checking the suitability of the data for factor analysis. According to Hair *et al.* (2014), data are considered suitable for factor analysis if Bartlett's test of sphericity, which is a statistical test for the overall significance of all correlations within a correlation matrix, shows a statistically significant value – that is, less than 0.05. In such a case, the variables are sufficiently highly correlated to provide a reasonable basis for factor analysis.

Using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin criterion, the second step involved considering factors based on the criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1.0 (Field, 2013). Once the number of factors had been identified, the third step was to determine the pattern of the items loading for each factor. Only factors with a loading greater than 0.5 were considered for further analysis.

- ***Reliability analysis***

The third step in the data analysis involved assessing the reliability of the factors used in the study. Cronbach's alpha values were used to assess the internal consistency (reliability) of the factors to ensure consistent measurement across various items in the questionnaire. A large alpha value indicates that a large proportion of the variance in the test is attributable to general and group factors (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

To measure the reliability of the factors – i.e., the extent in which visitors responded to similar questions in similar ways –, the Cronbach's alpha of each factor was determined. Although a good reliability score (alpha) is considered to exceed a threshold of 0.7, George and Mallery (2003) note that a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.5 is generally accepted in exploratory studies. Thus factors with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.5 and 0.6 were also considered acceptable, as they were deemed important for this study, and were retained in further analysis (Field, 2013).

- ***Descriptive analysis of factors***

The fourth step involved conducting a descriptive analysis of the identified factors from the EFA. Descriptive statistics involving means, standard deviation, and frequencies

were used to outline the main characteristics of each factor-based variable. The mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, as well as the minimum and maximum of the reliable factors that were retained after conducting factor analysis and reliability testing, were determined (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

- ***Correlation analysis***

The fifth step in data analysis involved conducting a correlation analysis to measure the relationships between the factors. According to Hair *et al.* (2014), 'correlation' refers to the statistical process to discover whether two or more variables are in some way associated with one another. Saunders *et al.* (2012) add that correlation analysis is a statistical technique that is used to establish whether a change in one variable is accompanied by a change in another. Koop (2013) says that correlation analysis is employed if the research objective is to investigate and measure the relationship between two quantifiable variables or between pairs in a collection of variables. While correlation analysis allows the researcher to determine whether there is co-variation between the variables, it does not allow ascribing it to causation (Bryman, 2012).

Although numerous correlation statistics are used to determine a relationship among variables, the Pearson product moment correlation, sometimes called Pearson's r , is mostly used. The coefficient of determination, which is the square of the Pearson r (R^2), determines how much of the variance is accounted for by the correlation (Hair *et al.*, 2014). When the variables are bivariate normal, Pearson's correlation provides a complete description of the association. The resulting statistics, called correlation coefficients, measure the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two continuous random variables.

As Saunders *et al.* (2012) mention, the correlation coefficient enables a researcher to quantify the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two ranked or numerical values. The coefficient, represented by the letter r , is indicated by a positive or negative sign, and ranges between -1 and +1. A perfect positive correlation is reflected as +1, indicating that the two variables are precisely related and that, as the values of one variable increase, the values of the other variable also increase. A perfect negative correlation is reflected as -1, indicating that the two variables are

precisely related; however, as the values of one variable increase, the values of the other variable decrease. The absence of an association produces a correlation close to zero.

In this study, a correlation coefficient measured the strength and direction of a linear relationship between the dimensions of memorable visitor experience (the dependent variable) and the VIC information-related factors (the independent variables). The correlation, which measured the size of the linear relationships, was interpreted according to the guidelines of Cohen, Cohen, West and Aiken (2003) as follows:

- Small/weak correlations: < 0.3 ($r = 0.10$ to 0.29 : small rho)
- Moderate correlations: $0.3-0.5$ ($r = 0.30$: medium rho)
- Strong correlations: >0.5 ($r = 0.50$ to 1.00 : large rho)

As it has been proven that the Pearson correlation coefficient is robust against deviations from normality (George & Mallery, 2003), the correlation analysis conducted in the study was valid for all the factors studied.

- ***Hierarchical regression analysis***

The sixth step involved using hierarchical multiple regression analysis to test the study's hypotheses. Hierarchical multiple regression is a data analysis technique that is used to determine the magnitude of direct influences that each factor has on the other variables that follow it in the presumed causal order. By applying hierarchical regression, it is possible to estimate the strength of each path relationship while controlling for the necessary variables. Petrocelli (2003) stressed the importance of reporting the results of each model in a hierarchical regression equation, as this provides a better understanding of how the entry of new variables changes the predictive power of the existing variables. Furthermore, Petrocelli (2003) suggest that demographic and socio-economic variables are good to include as control variables.

In this study, the hierarchical multiple regression procedure was employed to test the following hypotheses, depicted in Figure 5.1:

H₁: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences.

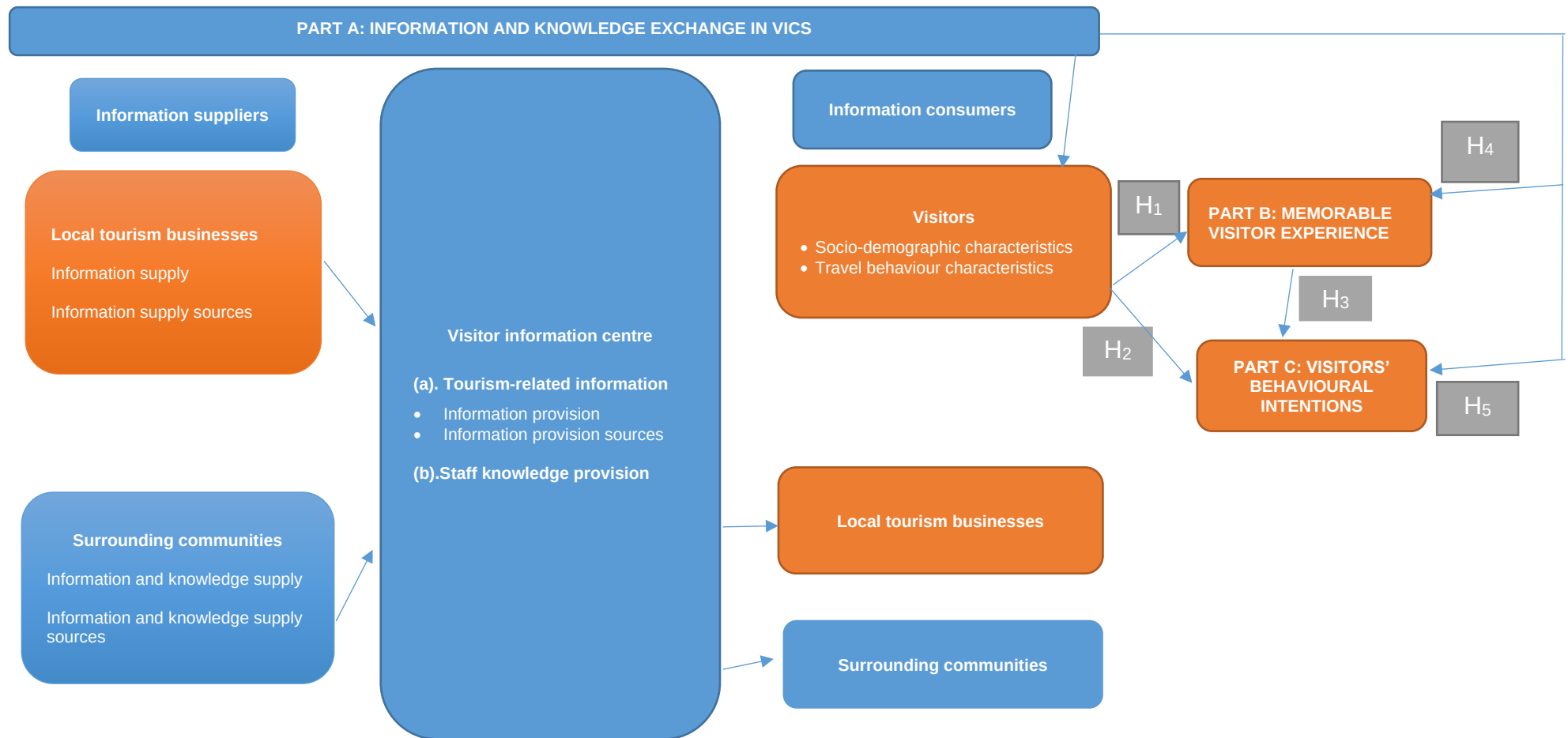
H₂: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.

H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.

H₄: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable visitor experiences.

H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

Figure 5.1: Conceptual framework – visitors



LEGEND

- Orange and white text: quantitative
- Blue and white text: qualitative

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The following process was followed to model the hierarchical regression in order to test the five hypotheses (H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄ and H₅ depicted in Figure 5.1.

- **Model 1** entailed only regressing the demographic and travel behaviour characteristics. The reason for first running a separate regression was to be able to decrease the number of variables, since covering the seven original demographic and travel behaviour characteristics variables necessitated the creation of dummy variables, resulting in a set of 18 variables to be included in the analysis. Multicollinearity was also investigated at this stage to identify any variables that needed to be excluded.
- **Model 2** included selecting only statistically significant variables from the first regression, and checking whether the adjusted R^2 had improved. The set of statistically significant variables identified in this step was then included in the hierarchical regression model.
- **Model 3** entailed a hierarchical regression that included the variables identified in model 1 and model 2. Key independent variables were added, and multicollinearity was investigated to identify any variables that needed to be excluded.
- **Model 4** involved the resulting model after the multicollinearity variables has been excluded. This is the regression model that was used as the basis for obtaining a best-fitting model.
- **Model 5** involved running the regression models iteratively, deleting variables, first where their significant value was above 0.6, then above 0.3, and lastly above 0.1. After a set of variables has been deleted owing to their significance values, the models were tested to see if the deletion improved the adjusted R^2 . The point at which the deletion no longer increased the adjusted R^2 was the best-fitting regression model that provided the set of variables that were used to optimally explain the dependent variable.

5.7 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: LOCAL TOURISM BUSINESSES

5.7.1 Target population and sampling methods

As one of the objectives (objective 5) of the study was to examine how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs may contribute to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses, it was important to include local tourism businesses as another target population. Given the ethical issues raised by some VIC staff, such as the lack of consent to provide the contact details of their stakeholders to third parties, it was not feasible to compile a comprehensive frame that could serve as a population of local tourism businesses. A quota of 10 local tourism businesses listed in VIC databases was targeted in each of the 18 VICs, yielding 180 businesses as the target population of businesses.

5.7.2 Sampling methods

In the absence of a pre-existing list of local tourism businesses or actual business population figures from which to draw a representative sample and give each an equal opportunity to participate, non-probability purposive sampling techniques were used to involve local tourism businesses listed in the VIC databases. Staff were requested to solicit the participation of these VICs and to include those whose purpose is to serve the needs of visitors in the different tourism subsectors such as accommodation, food and beverage services, attractions, events and special interest offerings, transport services, and packages and tours.

5.7.3 Data collection method

A survey was used to examine the views of local tourism businesses about the information they received from and supplied to VICs, and how this information contributed to their obtaining socio-economic opportunities. An exploratory and cross-sectional survey conducted at a single point in time was therefore best-suited to eliciting local tourism businesses' self-reported views and experiences on tourism

information and knowledge exchange in VICs. As a result, local tourism businesses were asked several questions in a standardised and consistent manner to elicit quantitative responses that were summarised as percentages and frequency counts and analysed inferentially.

Internet-mediated access was used to reach local tourism businesses listed in the databases of 18 VICs. Self-completed online questionnaires were distributed to local tourism businesses whose email addresses were sourced from VIC staff. An online link (https://pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPjvVMYeA4A6bMV), created through Qualtrics, was used to distribute the questionnaires. The online link was also sent to the CTT: Burg Street VIC for distribution through the CTT online system to local tourism businesses listed in their databases. Internet-mediated access provided the convenience of participating in the study and completing the survey anywhere and at any time.

A total of 55 respondents completed the online questionnaire; nine did not complete all the questions. These questionnaires were deemed unusable and were eliminated from any further analysis to avoid statistical bias. This resulted in 46 usable questionnaires: 34 completed through Qualtrics and 12 completed through the CTT online system. With only 46 usable questionnaires, ethical clearance was sought to use traditional access methods to complement the Internet-mediated access and to encourage participation by requesting VIC staff to distribute paper-based questionnaires to local tourism businesses that were willing to participate in the study. Thus 10 paper-based questionnaires were posted and left at each of the 18 participating VICs from October 2017 to March 2018 for local tourism businesses to complete and to leave at the VICs or email back to the researcher. This approach yielded 29 usable questionnaires, which resulted in 75 questionnaires (46 completed online and 29 completed through hard copies) for use in the data analysis. Table 5.8 shows the number of questionnaires collected from local tourism businesses in each VIC.

Table 5.8: Number of businesses per VIC (n-75)

Province	Name of VIC	Number of businesses
Qualtrics		34
Eastern Cape	Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism: Donkin VIC	13
	Cape St Francis VIC	0
Free State	Mangaung VIC	0
	Mangaung TIC	
	Senekal Library	0
Gauteng	Tshwane VIC	0
	Johannesburg VIC	0
KwaZulu-Natal	Durban Tourism TIC	0
	Shelly Beach VIC	0
Limpopo	Polokwane VIC	0
	Makhado VIC	5
Mpumalanga	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency VIC	0
	Pilgrim's Rest VIC	4
Northern Cape	Kimberley VIC	0
	Colesberg Museum	7
North West	Rustenburg VIC	0
	Pilanesberg VIC	0
Western Cape	CTT: Burg Street VIC	12
Total questionnaires		75

Source: Researcher's own construction

Because only five out of the nine provinces were represented, the views of the local tourism businesses that participated in the study did not allow for any generalisations of the findings. The exploratory nature of the study, combined with the views of staff and surrounding communities, constituted a first attempt to understand tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs better, and how this exchange contributes to socio-economic opportunities.

5.7.4 Data collection instrument (APPENDIX D)

A structured questionnaire with close-ended or forced-choice questions, which provided a number of alternatives from which local tourism businesses were asked to choose, was used as a measurement instrument to elicit quantitative data. The questions aimed to achieve objective 5: to assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

The content of the questionnaire and the measurement of the constructs were adopted from past literature. The questionnaire comprised different sections with scales that were used to measure the constructs (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9: Measurement of constructs in the business questionnaire

Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.			
Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
Section 1: Socio-demographic information	q1.1: Gender	Nominal scale	Section 2.8 Section 4.8
	q1.2: Age	Open ended	
	q1.3: Population group	Nominal scale	
	q1.4: Highest level of education	Ordinal scale	
	q1.5: Tourism subsector	Nominal scale	
	q1.6: Position in business	Open ended	
Section 2: Visits to the VICs	q2.1: VIC awareness	Nominal scale	Section 4.8
	q2.2: VIC visit		
Section 3: Information provided by VICs to local tourism business	q3.1: Information received from VIC		
	q3.2: Information from VIC • Extensive information • Frequency of receiving information • Useful information	Ordinal scale: 5 point Likert scale • 1= not extensive at all and 5= very extensive • 1=never and 5=always • 1=not useful at all and 5=very useful	Section 2.4 (Figure 2.2) Section 4.4 Section 4.8
	q 3.3 Preferred VIC information	Ordinal scale: 5 point Likert scale -1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree	
	q3.4: VIC Information sources: • Useful information source • Satisfaction with information source	Ordinal scale: 5 point Likert scale 1=not useful at all and 5=very useful 1= Very dissatisfied and 5= very satisfied	Section 4.7 Section 4.9 (Figure 4.3)
	q 3.5: Preferred VIC information sources	Ordinal scale: 5 point Likert scale -1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree	
	q4.1: Information supplied to VICs	Nominal scale	

Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.			
Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
Section 4: Information supplied by local tourism businesses to VICs	q4.2: Information supply • Extensive information supply • Useful information supply	Ordinal scale: 5 point Likert scale • 1= not extensive at all and 5= very extensive • 1=not useful at all and 5=very useful	Section 2.4 (Figure 2.2) Section 4.8 Section 4.9 (Figure 4.3)
	q4.3 Feedback from VIC	Nominal, open-ended	
	q4.4: Information supply challenges	Nominal scale	
	q4.5: Information supply challenges	Open-ended	
	q4.6: Information supply challenges	Ordinal scale: 5 point Likert scale – 1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree	
Part 5: Socio-economic opportunities from exchanging information with VICs	q5.1: Information exchange benefits-Social opportunities	q5.1: Nominal scale	Section 2.8.3 Section 4.8
	Economic opportunities	Ordinal scale: 5 point Likert scale – 1= strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree	
Section 6a: Knowledge supplied to VICs	q6.1and q6.2: Knowledge supply	Nominal scale, open ended questions	Section2.5 Section 2.5 Section 2.8.3
	q6.3: Knowledge supply challenges	Nominal scale, open ended questions	
	q6.4: Knowledge supply benefits	Nominal scale, Open ended questions	
Section 6b: Improvement on information and knowledge exchange in VIC	q6.5: Information and knowledge exchange improvements	Open-ended questions	Section 4.8

Source: Researcher's own construction

As in the visitor section (section 5.6), the five-point Likert-type responses were collapsed into three values to allow for a clearer graphical or tabular observation of emerging patterns. The scale groupings used in the analysis of the results are reflected in Table 5.10. The original scale was used for the EFA and the subsequent inferential analysis.

Table 5.10: Scale grouping

Five-point Likert type scale responses	Scale grouping responses
1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly agree	“strongly disagree” and “disagree” reflected as “disagree” “neutral” “agree” and “strongly agree” reflected as “agree”
1= Not extensive at all 2= Not Extensive 3= Neutral 4= Extensive 5= Very extensive	“not extensive at all” and “not extensive” reflected as “not extensive” “neutral” “extensive” and “very extensive” reflected as “extensive”
1= Not useful at all 2=Not useful 3=Neutral 4=Useful 5 =Very useful	“not useful at all” and “not useful” reflected as “not useful” “neutral” “useful” and “very useful” reflected as “useful”.
1=Not important at all 2= Unimportant 3=Neutral 4=Important 5=Very important	“not important at all” and “unimportant” reflected as “unimportant” “neutral” “important” and “very important” reflected as “important”
1= Very dissatisfied 2= Dissatisfied 3=Neutral 4=Satisfied 5=Very satisfied	“very dissatisfied” and “dissatisfied” reflected as “dissatisfied” “neutral” “satisfied” and “very satisfied” reflected as “satisfied”.
1=Never 2= Rarely	“never” and “rarely” reflected as “rarely”

Five-point Likert type scale responses	Scale grouping responses
3=Sometimes	"sometimes"
4=Often 5=Always	"often" and "always" reflected as "often"

Source: Researcher's own construction

5.7.4.2 Validity and reliability of the questionnaire

Four types of measurement validity, as described by Leedy and Ormrod (2014), were used to assess the extent to which the questionnaire measured what it intended to measure, and its ability to measure consistently of the constructs under investigation.

- *Validity*

Similar to the visitor questionnaire, *face validity* for the business questionnaire was achieved by requesting four VIC content experts in the Department of Tourism to assess the questionnaire for accuracy, relevance, and comprehensibility. To demonstrate the content validity of the questionnaire, an extensive literature review was conducted to develop the scales. The relevance of the constructs and the content of the questionnaire to the study's research objectives was also tested with VIC content experts in the Department of Tourism. Moreover, the questionnaire was pre-tested on nine local tourism businesses listed in the database of two VICs that participated in the pilot study.

To assess *construct validity*, the questionnaire was developed in alignment with the theoretical underpinnings concerning tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. In particular, the SET, the model of tourism information flows (Sheldon, 1997), and the VIC information exchange model (Deery *et al.*, 2007) formed the theoretical framework of this study. Furthermore, an EFA was used to determine the construct validity of the factors related to tourism information and knowledge exchange and socio-economic opportunities. Only factors with a loading greater than 0.5 were considered trustworthy; thus construct validity was confirmed, and the constructs were used in further analysis.

The biases that are commonly encountered during measurement development were controlled. A predetermined list of questions was used to avoid measurement bias. Respondents were asked the same set of questions in a consistent manner. On the other hand, social desirability bias was avoided by providing respondents with alternative responses from which to choose.

- *Reliability*

To establish reliability, Cronbach's alpha, as a measure of the internal consistency of the factors under investigation, was determined. As the study was exploratory in nature, Cronbach's alpha values of between 0.5 and 0.6 were considered acceptable for this study (George & Mallery, 2003) to measure the internal consistency of the factors of information and knowledge exchange in VICs and socio-economic opportunities. Furthermore, combining both the quantitative and the qualitative data facilitated the triangulation and corroboration of the findings. Businesses were allowed complete the questionnaires and leave them at the VICs or email them back to the researcher. Alternatively, they could request the researcher to email the questionnaires directly to them and return to the researcher.

5.7.4 Data analysis

In most surveys, an examination of the data is vital, and is the main purpose of many studies. Data analysis requires an understanding of the basic principles of the analysis process. All the data gathered from online and paper-based questionnaires were consolidated in one data set and exported to Microsoft Excel. After cleaning the data, 75 completed questionnaires were captured, coded, and computed in Microsoft Excel, and then imported into SPSS.

A frequency count and valid percentages were used to describe, analyse, and present data patterns. In addition, standard and stacked bar charts were used to describe the categories of the data in a graphical format. Statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics, factor analysis, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis were performed to compute the data and to test research objective

6. While these statistical techniques were also described in the section on visitors (section 5.6), it is important to point out how they were used to analyse the responses provided by local tourism businesses as a different stakeholder with which VIC staff exchange information and knowledge.

- ***Frequency analysis***

The first step in the data analysis involved an analysis of the descriptive statistics in order to express the frequency of the survey responses. A frequency count and valid percentages were calculated for each question, and were used to describe, analyse, and present data patterns. In addition, standard and stacked bar charts were used to describe the categories of data in a graphical format.

- ***Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)***

The second step involved conducting an EFA to explore the relationship between VICs' information-related factors and the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with VICs. The EFA was conducted on information-related factors, using principal axis factoring and promax rotation to determine the dimensionality (the underlying data structure of the observed data) of each of the factors. The scores from the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy were above the recommended threshold of 0.5, and those from Bartlett's test of sphericity were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) in all the factors, indicating that a factor analysis was appropriate for each of the factors. The factor analysis was based on the criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1 (Field, 2013).

- ***Reliability analysis***

The third step involved assessing the reliability of the factors used in the study. The Cronbach's alpha value was used to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the factors to ensure consistent measurement across time and across the various items in the questionnaire. Although a good reliability score (alpha) should exceed the threshold of 0.7, George and Mallery (2003) note that a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.5

is generally accepted in exploratory studies. Thus the factors with Cronbach's alpha values between 0.5 and 0.6 were considered acceptable, and were retained for further analysis.

- ***Descriptive analysis of factors***

The fourth step involved conducting a descriptive analysis of the factors identified from the EFA. Descriptive statistics involving means, standard deviation, and frequencies were used to outline the main characteristics of the collected data. The mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis as well as the minimum and maximum of the reliable factors, were determined after the factor analysis and reliability testing has been conducted.

- ***Correlation analysis***

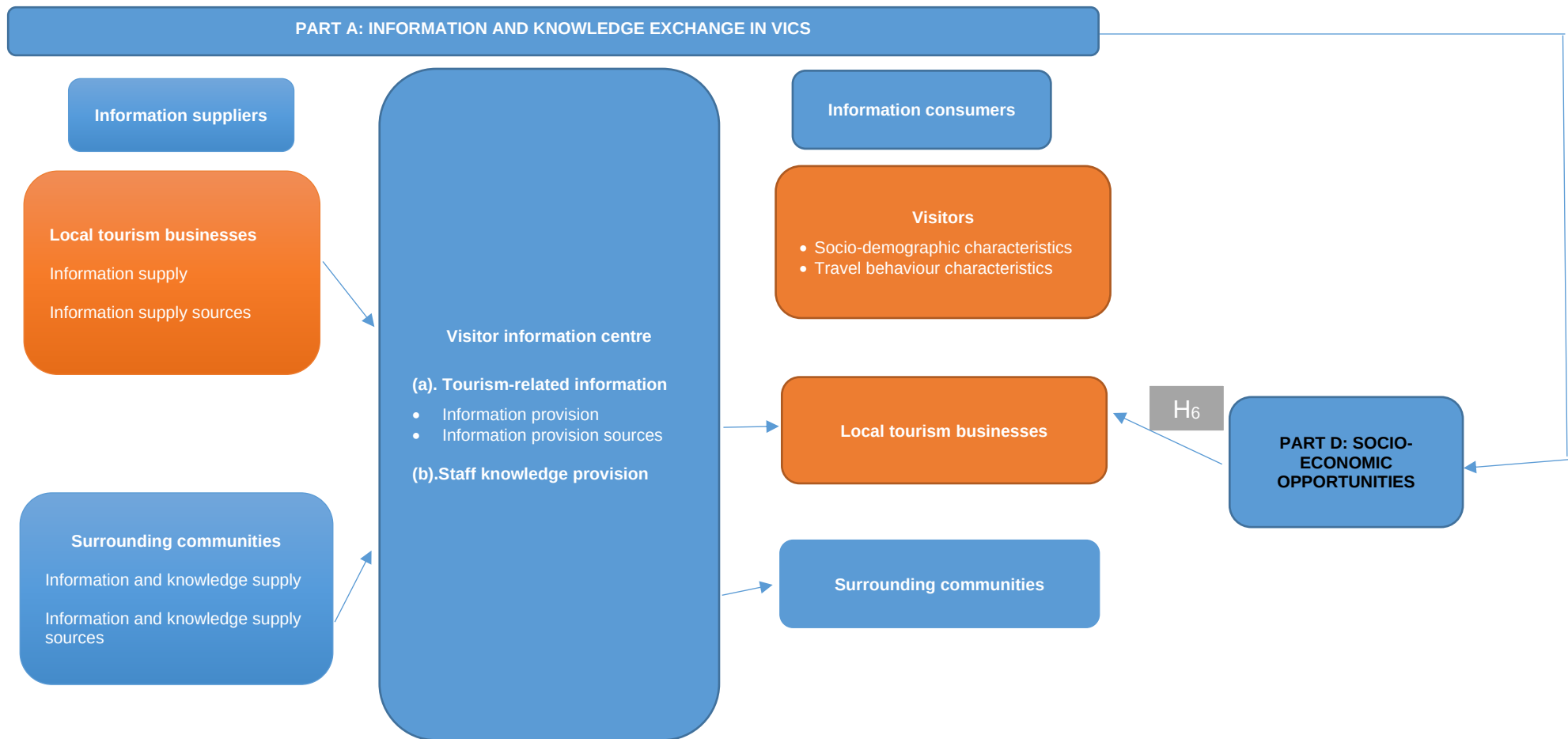
A correlation analysis was conducted to measure the relationships between the factors. A correlation coefficient measured the strength and direction of a linear relationship between the information-related factors (the independent variables) and the factors for the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received (the dependent variable). The correlations, which measured the size of the linear relationships, were interpreted according to the guidelines of Cohen *et al.* (2003) as follows:

- Small/ weak correlations: <0.3 ($r = 0.10$ to 0.29 : small rho)
- Moderate correlations: $0.3-0.5$ ($r = 0.30$: medium rho)
- Strong correlations: >0.5 ($r = 0.50$ to 1.00 : large rho)

- ***Multiple linear regression analysis***

The fifth step involved conducting a multiple linear regression analysis to determine the relationships between the VIC information-related factors and the factors for the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received (H_6), as shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: Conceptual framework – local tourism businesses



LEGEND

- Orange and white text: quantitative
- Blue and white text: qualitative
- Blue and black text: both quantitative and qualitative

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The process followed in the multiple regression analysis involved starting with all the independent variables in the model. Based on the results, the non-significant variables were taken out of the analysis and the regression model was recalculated. The optimal regression model to be created was the model with the highest adjusted R^2 and F value, indicating which set of information-related factors in the model were statistically significant predictors of the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received.

The results from the quantitative part of the study were used to draw conclusions and to determine whether the study's objectives 2, 5, and 6 were achieved. However, to obtain a complete picture of information and knowledge exchange in VICs, the qualitative process followed in the study is important; so this process is discussed in the next section.

5.8 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: VIC STAFF

The focus of the qualitative part of this research study was to explore and understand the different lived experiences of VIC staff and surrounding communities in relation to how tourism information and knowledge is exchanged and how this exchange may generate socio-economic opportunities. Given the varied experiences of the different participants, information elicited from them was not meant to be representative or to be generalised to other participants involved in the operations of VICs, but rather to generate ideas, insights, and lessons that could be applied in other VICs in South Africa.

5.8.1 Target population

This study emphasised the importance of obtaining the views of those involved in the demand side of VIC information and knowledge provision, such as visitors, and of those on the supply side, whose views are often ignored. As suppliers of VIC information, staff members were included as a target population to obtain their views on tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

5.8.2 Sampling method

According to Neuman (2014), the purpose of qualitative research is not necessarily to have a representative sample drawn from a huge number of cases. A non-probability sample better fits the purpose of a qualitative study, as the researcher does not have to determine a representative sample or sample size in advance. Unlike probability sampling, which requires a pre-planned approach based on mathematical theory to achieve representability or generalisations, non-probability sampling aims to generate ideas, insights, and lessons that can be useful to others.

A purposive sampling technique was used in the study to identify and purposefully select staff members of the 18 VICs that participated in the study. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to use her discretion to determine the selection of participants. The selection of staff members was based on their extensive working knowledge and involvement in tourism information and knowledge provision in VICs. Only one staff member in each VIC, particularly in the frontline of tourism information provision, was targeted for participation. Heterogeneous sampling was also applied to include staff with diverse characteristics in order to gain maximum range in respect of the data being gathered (Saunders, 2012).

Email and telephone discussions were held with staff to schedule appointments for the interviews. In some VICs, additional staff members took part in interviews when the targeted member did not feel fully able to answer certain questions. For example, staff at supervisory and managerial levels were perceived to have more background information, particularly on the ownership structures and position of VICs in relation to the broader organisational structure of local municipalities or tourism marketing agencies. In addition, research staff were seen to be more appropriate in shedding light on how visitor statistics are collected and analysed. As a result, 27 staff members (Table 5.11) indicated their availability to participate. Numerous telephone calls were made and electronic mails sent to these staff members to negotiate appointments at a date and time convenient to them. Once appointments had been confirmed, an interview schedule was emailed to the staff members to familiarise them with the topic under discussion.

Table 5.11 below shows the total number of staff members who participated in each of the 18 VICs.

Table 5.11: Number of staff per VIC (n=27)

Province	Name of VIC	Number of staff interviewed
Eastern Cape	Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism: Donkin VIC	2
	Cape St Francis VIC	1
Free State	Mangaung VIC	2
	Mangaung TIC	2
	Senekal Library	1
Gauteng	Tshwane VIC	1
	Johannesburg VIC	2
KwaZulu-Natal	Durban Tourism TIC	1
	Shelly Beach VIC	2
Limpopo	Polokwane VIC	1
	Makhado VIC	1
Mpumalanga	Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency VIC	2
	Pilgrim's Rest VIC	1
Northern Cape	Kimberley VIC	2
	Colesberg Museum	1
North West	Rustenburg VIC	2
	Pilanesberg VIC	1
Western Cape	CTT: Burg Street VIC	2
Total		27

Source: Researcher's own construction

As shown in Table 5.11 above, 27 VIC staff members across all the provinces participated in the study. The views of the 27 staff members provided a first opportunity to understand the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The researcher noted that, after having conducted interviews at the 12th VIC, similar answers, themes, and patterns continued to reappear, while little new information and few new insights were gathered. For example, the information provided to stakeholders, the sources that provided information, and a limited exchange of

information and knowledge with surrounding communities were some of the topics that were reported in almost all the interviews with staff. This pointed to data saturation. According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), data saturation occurs when the collected data provides little, if any, new information or suggests few new themes. However, six additional interviews were conducted to re-confirm saturation and to ensure that no new information would emerge.

5.8.3 Data collection method

According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), in-depth and semi-structured interviews are used to collect information in qualitative research. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher uses a list of themes and possibly some key questions to guide the interview. However, depending on the flow of the interview, the order of questions may be varied, and additional questions may be explored. In-depth interviews, also referred to as 'informant interviews', are used to explore a theme in depth. In these types of interview, the researcher does not use a predetermined list of questions, as the flow of the interview is mostly directed by the interviewee's perception of the theme under investigation. Both semi-structured and in-depth interviews are well-suited for use in exploratory studies (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

Because the study was exploratory in nature, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method to explore themes and to engage staff in an in-depth discussion of their views and opinions of the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. A considerable amount of time was spent to set up appointments for interviews with the 27 VIC staff. Numerous telephone calls were made and emails were sent to these staff members to negotiate appointments for interviews at a date and time convenient to them. Care was taken to ensure that activities in VICs where only one staff member was responsible for providing information and managing the VIC were not disrupted. Once appointments had been confirmed, an interview schedule was emailed to the VIC staff so that they could familiarise themselves with the information that was needed for the study and prepare for the semi-structured interviews.

All the semi-structured interviews were personally conducted by the researcher at each of the 18 VICs. Using an interview schedule with open-ended questions, the interviews were conducted with the VIC staff on the scheduled dates from March 2017 to January 2018. These interviews were conducted on a face-to-face level to allow the researcher to establish personal contact and rapport with the staff. The interviews were conducted in English, as all the staff members were conversant with it. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher introduced herself and the purpose of the study, and then asked the staff members to introduce themselves.

All the aspects of ethical research, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality were explained to the staff before the interviews started. This introductory conversation helped to establish rapport and to facilitate communication throughout the interviews. Once the staff understood the aims of the research, the researcher sought their permission to record the interviews in order to capture the entire discussion and still be attentive to them. The request was granted in each case, and so all of the interviews were audio-recorded.

The interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to introduce, probe, and phrase issues while allowing the staff to ask for clarity and to elaborate on their viewpoints where necessary. Such flexibility provided detailed and contextual data on tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. In this way, detailed and rich data from the semi-structured interviews complemented the quantitative data such as the percentages and frequencies elicited from the surveys conducted with visitors and local tourism businesses. Interview notes were also taken during the interviews to help the researcher to probe for clarification. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

5.8.4 Data collection instrument (APPENDIX E)

A measurement instrument is a tool that is used to collect primary data. Saunders *et al.* (2012) argue that the type of data collection instrument to be used is determined by the purpose of the study and the research strategy. It therefore follows that the

selection of a data collection instrument should only be made after the research design has been clearly articulated.

With the study being exploratory in nature, an interview schedule with multiple open-ended questions was used to gather information from the VIC staff members. The interview schedule aimed to examine tourism information and knowledge exchange in these VICs. Of particular interest was to examine how this exchange contributes to the creation of memorable visitor experiences and the generation of socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism businesses.

The interview schedule was used to ensure that themes were covered in a systematic and comprehensive way, from broad to more specific. However, owing to the flexible nature of qualitative research, probing was also used during the interviews in order to maximise and improve the quality of the information collected. The content of the interview guide was mainly adopted from the previous literature. Details of the sources used to develop the interview schedule are provided in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12: Measurement of constructs in the staff interview guide

Objective 4: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.			
Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.			
Objective 6: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions.			
Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
Section 1: Socio-demographic information	q1.1: Gender q1.2: Age q1.3: Highest level of education q1.4: Population group q1.5: Staff position q1.6, q1.9, q1.10 and q1.11: Staff work experience	Open-ended questions	Section 4.6
	q1.7 and 1.8: Staff roles and responsibilities		Section 4.4.1–4.4.3 4.5.1–4.5.2 4.6; 4.8
Section 2: Background information on VICs	q2.1: VIC custodian/ownership	Open-ended questions	Section 2.4 4.4.1–4.4.3 4.5.1–4.5.2 4.8; 4.10
	q2.2, q2.4, q2.5 and q2.6: VIC functions (users, visits and purpose of use)		
	q2.3: VIC operating times of VIC		
	q2.7 and q2.9: Relationship with neighbouring VICs and tourism marketing authorities		
	q2.8: VIC staff complement		

Objective 4: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.			
Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.			
Objective 6: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions.			
Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
Section 3: Information provided by VICs to visitors	q3.1: Information provision: trip planning • Type of VIC information • Preferred information • Information provision challenges • Feedback on information provision	Open-ended questions	Section 2.4 4.4.1– 4.4.3 4.5.1–4.5.2 4.6; 4.8; 4.9
	• VIC information sources • Preferred information sources		Section 4.7; 4.9
	q3.1b: Information provision at VIC • Type of VIC information • Preferred information • Information provision challenges • Feedback on information provision		Section 2.4 4.4.1–4.4.3 4.5.1–4.5.2 4.6; 4.8; 4.9; 4.10
	• VIC information sources • Preferred information sources		Section 4.7; 4.9
Section 4: Information provided by VICs to their stakeholders	q4.1 Information provision to stakeholders • Type of information • Preferred information • Information provision challenges • Feedback on information provision	Open-ended questions	Section 2.4 4.4.1–4.4.3 4.5.1–4.5.2 4.6; 4.8; 4.9; 4.10
	• Information provision sources • Preferred information sources		Section 4.7; 4.9

Objective 4: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.			
Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.			
Objective 6: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions.			
Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
Section 5: Information and knowledge provided by stakeholders to VICs	q5.1a: Stakeholder information provision to VICs • Type of information • Information provision sources • Information provision challenges • Feedback on information provision • Framework to guide information exchange	Open-ended questions	Section 2.4 Section 4.8; 4.9
	q5.1b: Stakeholder knowledge provision to VICs • Type of knowledge • Knowledge provision sources • Knowledge provision challenges • Framework to guide knowledge exchange		Section 2.5–2.8 4.4.1; 4.4.3
	• Socio-economic opportunities related to information exchange • Socio-economic opportunities related to knowledge exchange		Section 2.8.3 4.8; 4.10

Objective 4: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.			
Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.			
Objective 6: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions.			
Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
	q5.2: Information flow from stakeholders to visitors		Section 2.4
	q5.3: Network with information suppliers		4.4.1–4.4.3
	q5.4: Framework to guide knowledge exchange		4.8; 4.9
Section 6: Information and knowledge worker skills	q6.1 and q6.2: Staff information and knowledge skills	Open-ended questions	Section 2.7
	q6.3: Staff capacity building training		4.6
	q6.4: ICT-related information exposure		
	q6.5: Information exchange improvements		Section 2.3; 2.8.3
	q6.6: Knowledge exchange improvements		4.4–4.8
			Section 2.6; 2.8.3
			4.4–4.8

Source: Researcher's own construction

- ***Credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the interview schedule***

In all research, it is important to establish the validity and reliability of all measurements. In qualitative research, 'validity' and 'reliability' do not have the same connotations as they do in quantitative research (Creswell, 2014).

According to Creswell (2014), the concept of 'validity' corresponds with the concepts of credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity in qualitative research. It is based on determining whether findings are accurate or true, not only from the standpoint of the researcher, but also from that of the participants in and the readers of the study. Reliability, on the other hand, corresponds with the concepts of dependability and auditability in qualitative research, and involves establishing whether the process of the study is consistent over time and across different researchers and different methods or projects. It follows, therefore, that data collection instruments should also be credible and consistent.

To ensure the credibility of the interview schedule, an extensive literature review was conducted to conceptualise clearly the themes of importance to the study. Different data sources were triangulated by examining information from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for the themes. Experts in the Department of Tourism provided comments and suggestions about the accuracy, relevance, and comprehensibility of the constructs and the questions in the interview schedule.

Similar to the quantitative part of the study, a pilot study was undertaken at two different VICs to test empirically the content of the interview schedule for accuracy. This ensured that the interview schedule was administered consistently across the different VICs and staff that participated in the study. Furthermore, themes that were generated from the interviews were triangulated and corroborated with those generated from other stakeholders, such as visitors, surrounding communities, and local tourism businesses, for accuracy and credibility. To make the findings more realistic and richer, direct quotes were used to express the perspectives of the staff.

An important consideration throughout the research process was the bias that the researcher might bring to the study and that might compromise the quality of the research findings. According to Saunders *et al.* (2012), there are three types of potential bias that researchers should consider when conducting interviews. First, interviewer bias occurs when the researcher's verbal and non-verbal behaviour creates bias in how they ask questions and how interviewees respond to the questions being asked. This type of bias may be shaped by the researcher's background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socio-economic origins (Creswell, 2014). It was important, therefore, for the researcher to use an interview schedule to guide the questions being posed to the staff.

Second is the interviewee or response bias. This type of bias may be caused by perceptions that interviewees have about the interviewer. This may occur in the case of semi-structured or in-depth interviews in which interviewees are expected to provide an in-depth explanation of their responses. In such situations, interviewees may choose not to discuss a topic that would reveal sensitive information. The interviewee may therefore provide a partial response to the question being asked (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). In the present study, the researcher created an atmosphere in which rapport was established with the interviewees at the start of the interview in order to gain their confidence. Informed consent to participate and to have the interviews recorded was sought, and the confidentiality of the information they shared was assured.

The third type of bias, participation bias, may result from the nature of the participants. Owing to the time-consuming requirements associated with the interview process, interviewees may discontinue their willingness to participate in the interviews. This may result in a reduction in the number of interviewees, and may bias the sample from whom data are collected. The researcher addressed this challenge by maintaining regular communication with the staff, and kept them updated of developments about pre-interview processes to which she had to adhere, such as compliance and ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria.

5.8.5 Data analysis

In order for the collected data to make sense and to be useful, it needs to be analysed. According to Neuman (2014), 'data analysis' refers to a process of systematically organising, integrating, and examining data in order to search for patterns, trends, and relationships. It allows researchers to improve understanding, expand theory, and advance knowledge. Unlike numbers, qualitative data analysis is concerned with summarising the mass of data collected, placing it into logical and meaningful categories, and presenting it in a holistic fashion in order to uncover the emerging themes, patterns, concepts, insights, understanding, and meaning embedded in the data (Neuman, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

Content analysis in particular involves an analysis of the content of a text in order to identify emerging themes. It may be conducted either quantitatively or qualitatively (Neuman, 2014). Quantitative content analysis involves an objective and systematic counting and recording procedure to produce a numerical description of the content of a text. As no physical counting of data is involved, qualitative content analysis is concerned with what is meant, inferred, or implied in the text (Neuman, 2014). For Leedy and Ormrod (2014), 'content analysis' is a detailed and systematic examination of the content of a particular body of material in order to identify patterns, themes, or biases. It enables researchers to identify topics, extract meaning, provide new insights, and increase their understanding of a particular phenomenon (Krippendorff, 2018). This systematic examination requires researchers to take measures to ensure that the process of data analysis is as objective as possible. Leedy and Ormrod (2014) therefore identify the following steps as being important in content analysis:

- Identify the specific body of material to be studied. If the material is relatively small, the researcher may study it in its entirety, while a larger body of material may require a sample to be selected and studied.
- Define the characteristics or qualities to be examined in precise and concrete terms.
- In the case of complex or lengthy material to be analysed, such as interview transcripts, items of the material may be broken down into small, manageable segments and analysed separately.

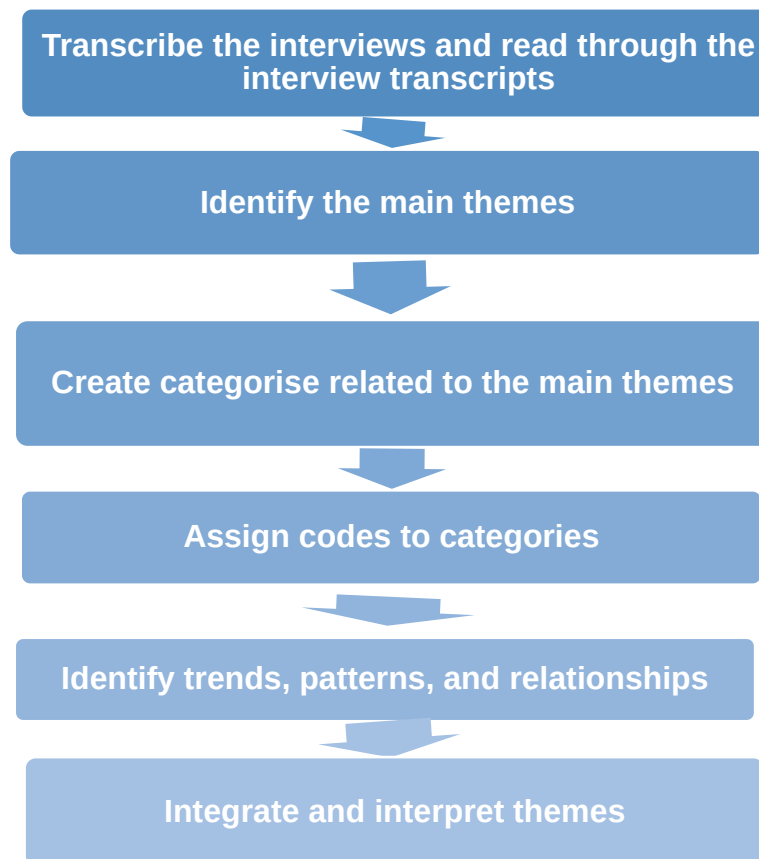
According to (Kumar, 2014), content analysis includes the following steps:

- Identify the main themes.
- Assign codes to the main themes.
- Classify responses under the main themes.
- Integrate themes and responses into the text of the report.

Adopting Kumar's (2014) approach to qualitative data analysis, content analysis was used to analyse the content of the interviews conducted with the staff. While advancements in computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as ATLAS.ti, HyperRESEARCH, MAXqda2, QSR NVivo, QDA Miner, and QSR N6 help researchers to organise, sort, and search for information in text (Creswell, 2014; Saunders *et al.*, 2012), they still need to go through each line of text and assign codes (Creswell, 2014). Owing to this additional work, the researcher analysed the interview data manually. This was meant to allow the researcher to familiarise and immerse herself in the data. Unlike in some quantitative research, qualitative research usually lacks a division of labour between data collectors and analysts; thus most qualitative researchers analyse their own data (Basil, 2003). As data analysis in qualitative research is a continuous process that does not only start when the data collection has been completed (Creswell, 2014; Neuman, 2014), manual analysis allowed the researcher to identify and gain a deeper understanding of patterns and relationships while collecting the data.

The interviews were analysed following the protocol of Kumar (2014). The steps followed in analysing the data are illustrated in Figure 5.3 and discussed below.

Figure 5.3: Steps in the data analysis of semi-structured interviews



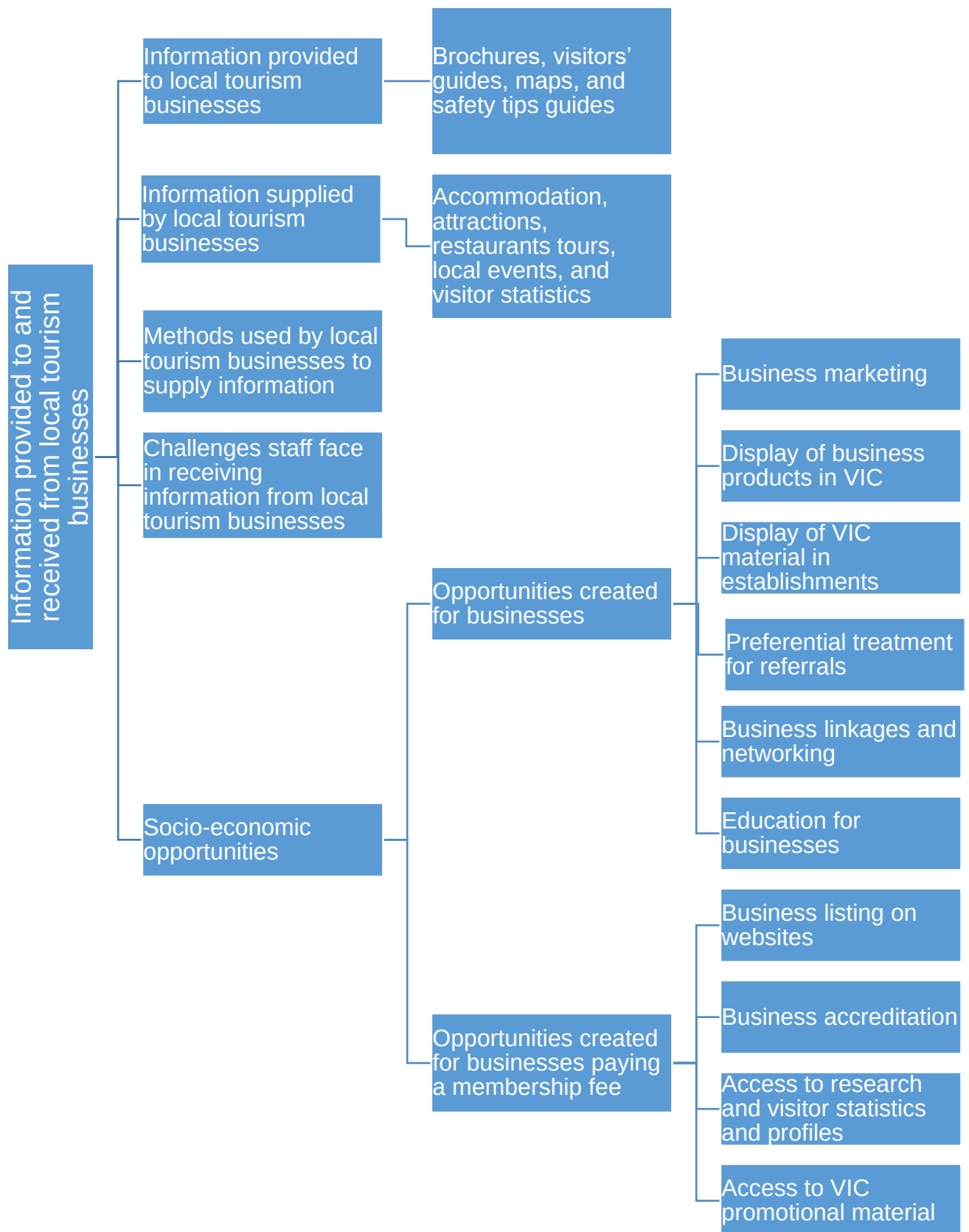
Source: Researcher's own construction

Step 1: Transcribe the interviews and read through the interview transcripts

All the interviews were conducted in English and transcribed verbatim in Microsoft Word. It was only when parts of the interviews were held in an African language that translations were made. Audio-recording is considered valuable because it allows the researcher to concentrate on questioning and listening during interviews. After conducting interviews, audio-recording allows the researcher to listen again to them and to use direct quotes when reporting their findings (Saunders *et al.*, 2012).

All the transcripts were studied in their entirety to obtain a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. This step was followed by the identification of themes, categories, relationships, and codes. The themes were later integrated and interpreted. An example of how an identified theme was broken down into categories and assigned codes is shown in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4: Categories and codes: information to and from businesses



Source: Researcher's own construction

Step 2: Identify the main themes

The main themes that emerged from the transcripts and were identified are shown below:

- VIC ownership and management
- Staff roles and responsibilities
- Information provided to visitors
- Information provided to and received from local tourism businesses
- Information and knowledge provided to and received from surrounding communities
- Information provided to and received from institutions of learning
- Information and knowledge provided to and received from other stakeholders
- Sources used by VICs to provide information
- Factors that influence information provision at VICs

Step 3: Create categories related to the main themes

The themes identified in step 2 were broken down into small manageable segments (categories). The staff's responses were categorised and analysed according to the main themes. Figure 5.4 above illustrates how the theme of 'information provided to and received from local tourism businesses' was broken down into the following categories:

- Information provided to local tourism businesses
- Information supplied by local tourism businesses
- Methods used by local tourism businesses to supply information
- Challenges staff face in receiving information from local tourism businesses
- Socio-economic opportunities

Step 4: Assign codes to categories

Coding is the process of organising data by bracketing segments of text or images and writing a word representing a category in the margins (Rallis & Rossman, 2012). This involves segmenting sentences into categories and labelling them, often in the verbatim language of the participant, called an 'in vivo' term (Creswell, 2014). As shown in Figure 5.4, the category of 'socio-economic opportunities' is represented by different codes and sub-codes.

Opportunities created for businesses:

- Business marketing
- Display of business products in VICs
- Display of VIC material in establishments
- Preferential treatment for referrals
- Business linkages and networking
- Education for businesses

Opportunities created for businesses paying a membership fee:

- Business listing on websites
- Business accreditation
- Access to research and visitor statistics and profiles
- Access to VIC promotional material

The biases that are commonly associated with one researcher involved in assigning the same codes to the same themes and categories consistently across the different transcripts were controlled. Intrarater reliability which refers to consistency in how the same person codes data at multiple time points was avoided. Instead, inter-coder reliability which is often used interchangeably with interrater reliability and refers to a measure of the agreement between different coders regarding how the same data should be coded was encouraged (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). To promote the consistent application of codes, the identified codes were discussed with supervisors to ensure that they attach the same meaning, understanding and interpretations. This provided a level of reliability in that consensus was reached about the meaning of each

code and ensured that codes were applied consistently and in a uniform way throughout each transcript.

Step 5: Identifying trends, patterns, and relationships

Both similar and different responses to a theme were identified among the VIC staff members. In some instances, the responses were viewed against the staff's profile and responsibilities or the location of VICs.

Step 6: Integrate and interpret themes

The staff's responses and views were integrated and interpreted based on the main themes. All the other information that was generated from the interviews but that was not directly linked to the objectives of the study was not used in the analysis process. The analysed data were then interpreted in order to draw conclusions and meaning, and they were compared with the information derived from the literature (Creswell, 2014).

In order to obtain a complete picture of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, the methodology that was followed to collect data from surrounding communities is discussed in the next section.

5.9 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES COLLECTION METHODS

5.9.1 Target population

In South Africa, rural communities often lag behind in their socio-economic development owing to imbalances created by the policies of the apartheid era. Poverty, unemployment, and the poor delivery of basic services often characterise rural areas. To address these challenges, rural development is identified as one of the main priorities of South Africa's National Development Plan: 2030, which aims to

eliminate poverty and reduce inequality (South Africa, 2011) by creating socio-economic opportunities for people in rural areas.

Given government's priority of improving the quality of people's lives in rural areas, communities in the vicinity of VICs located in rural municipalities were invited to participate in the study. As the beneficiaries of development in their areas, these communities were included as one of the target populations in the qualitative component of the study in order to examine how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge might create socio-economic opportunities for them.

5.9.2 Sampling method

In qualitative research, the sampling of relevant cases to be included in a study is based on non-random selection and the subjective judgement of the researcher (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used deliberately to involve communities in the vicinity of VICs that are located in rural municipalities. The inclusion of these communities in the study was to examine how publicly funded tourism-related initiatives such as VICs fulfil some of their mandate to create socio-economic opportunities and contribute to the empowerment and development of rural communities. For this reason, only communities in the vicinity of VICs that are located in rural areas – based on the purposes for which they had been established – were included in the sample. Since seven of the 18 VICs in the study were located in rural municipalities, the surrounding communities served as a sample from which to draw participants who could examine how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge contributes to creating socio-economic opportunities for them. Table 5.13 below shows the VICs and municipalities from which the seven surrounding communities were drawn. Seven out of the nine provinces were represented in the sample.

VIC staff were requested to suggest people in the community who might be willing to assist the researcher in recruiting community members who could participate in focus group discussions. Recruitment assistants were supplied with invitation letters to use when inviting community members to focus group discussions. The initial idea was for

recruitment assistants to identify community members residing in the vicinity of VICs who might have exchanged information and knowledge with the VICs. However, once it became clear that it was difficult to find community members who fitted this criteria, the idea was abandoned. Purposive sampling was used to enable the researcher to use her discretion to determine the selection of participants. Recruitment assistants were requested to identify and purposefully recruit community members in the vicinity of VICs who were aware of or may have visited the VICs in their areas. These community members were deemed relevant to engage in discussions or share suggestions on themes of importance to the study owing to their awareness of the operations of the VICs. Heterogeneity, where participants displayed various appropriate characteristics, particularly gender and age, was an important criterion in the sampling process in order to gain maximum range in respect of the data being gathered (Saunders *et al.*, 2012). Between six and ten community members participated in each focus group, as shown in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13: VICs in rural municipalities

Province	Name of VIC	Local municipality	Number of participants
Eastern Cape	Cape St Francis VIC	Kouga Local Municipality	6
Free State	Senekal Library	Setsoto Local Municipality	7
KwaZulu-Natal	Shelly Beach VIC	Hibiscus Local Municipality	6
Limpopo	Makhado VIC	Makhado Local Municipality	7
Mpumalanga	Pilgrim's Rest VIC	Thaba Chweu Local Municipality	10
Northern Cape	Colesberg VIC	Umsombovu Local Municipality	6
North West	Pilanesberg VIC	Moses Kotane Local Municipality	8

Source: Researcher's own construction

As highlighted in section 5.4.4, the participation of a VIC located in a rural municipality in the Western Cape could not be obtained; so a focus group discussion with surrounding communities was not conducted in this province. The proposed sample of eight focus group discussions was therefore not realised.

5.9.3 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

With one of the research objectives (objective 4) of the study examining tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs and how this exchange contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities, it was important to understand this phenomenon from the perspectives of the people who are supposed to benefit from it. According to Neuman (2014), a focus group discussion is a qualitative research technique in which groups of people are encouraged to describe their experiences, opinions, wishes, and concerns freely in a natural setting, on a specific phenomenon that is clearly and precisely defined. The aim of a focus group discussion is to generate discussion or debate about a research topic that requires collective views, experiences, and beliefs, and the meanings that lie behind those views (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee, 2018).

The focus group discussion was considered to be an appropriate method for gathering a variety of views and experiences from community members in the vicinity of VICs about the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The aim was to understand this phenomenon based on the dynamics, interactions, and relationships that take place during the focus group discussion. In this way, focus group discussions can yield more insights than individual interviews (Nyumba *et al.*, 2018). As one of the important stakeholders that are supposed to benefit from public sector-funded projects, surrounding communities were engaged to share their varied views and experiences. Focus group discussions presented an opportunity to understand the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs from a ground level perspective, from those deemed to benefit from this exchange. Moreover, information elicited from the discussions was useful to triangulate, complement, and corroborate that which was received from other stakeholders such as local tourism businesses and

VIC staff, thereby providing a comprehensive picture of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

Focus group discussions were held at different times from April 2017 to November 2017 – during the same period when interviews with VIC staff were held. This approach provided a quick and cost-effective way to obtain information through in-depth and probing discussions with several community members at the same time. This saved the time and cost that could have been incurred if face-to-face interviews had been conducted with individual community members. The researcher facilitated all seven focus group discussions, which consisted of between 6 and 10 community members, as indicated in Table 5.13. They were conducted in the language with which participants were most comfortable. The focus group discussions held in communities in the vicinity of the Shelly Beach VIC and the Makhado VIC were facilitated in English, while those held in the Rustenburg VIC, the Pilgrim's Rest VIC, and Senekal Library were conducted in an African language. While discussions with communities in the surroundings of the Cape St Francis VIC and the Colesberg VIC were mainly held in English, both the researcher and the participants used African languages to seek clarity or to emphasise issues under discussion.

The focus group discussions with communities in the vicinity of the Cape St Francis VIC, the Pilanesberg VIC, and the Shelly Beach VIC were held outside the VICs; the other four focus groups discussions were held at the VICs' premises. Prior to the discussions, the researcher requested permission from the participants to use an audio-recorder to capture all the discussions with a view to transcribing them later. An atmosphere of trust and openness was created through introductory comments from the researcher and the participants. The researcher also set the tone for the discussion by outlining the purpose of the discussions and reassuring participants about anonymity and confidentiality. The discussions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Field notes were taken to complement the information from the discussions.

5.9.4 Data collection instrument (APPENDIX F)

The research study adopted a more structured focus group approach, in which a focus group schedule with several open-ended questions was used to elicit information from community members residing in the vicinity of the seven VICs in rural municipalities. A focus group schedule was used to probe for insights and clarification, and to ensure that broad themes were covered in a more systematic and comprehensive way.

The focus group discussions aimed to examine tourism information and knowledge exchange between VICs and surrounding communities. Of particular interest was to examine how this exchange contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities. The content of the focus group schedule was mainly adopted from the previous literature. Details of the sources used to develop the focus group schedule are provided in Table 5.14 below.

Table 5.14: Measurement of constructs in the focus group guide

Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
Section 1: Demographic information	q1.1: Gender	Open-ended questions	
	q1.1: Age		
Section:2 Information needed by surrounding communities from VICs	q2.1: VIC awareness	Open-ended questions	Section 2.8.3 4.8, 4.9
	q2.2 and q2.3: VIC visits and purpose of visit		
	q2.4 and q2.5: Information needs and information search		
Section 3: Information provided by VICs to surrounding communities	q3.1, q3.2 and q3.3: Information received from VIC q3.5: Frequency of receiving information q3.6.1: Satisfaction with information received q3.7: Challenges experience in getting information q3.9: Preferred VIC information q3.10: Information provision improvements.	Open-ended questions	Section 4.8; 4.9
	q3.4: VIC information provision sources q3.6.2: Satisfaction with information source		Section 4.7–4.9
	q3.8: Perceived socio-economic opportunities		Section 2.8.3 4.8
Section 4: Information and knowledge supplied by	q4.1: Information supplied to the VIC • Type of information supplied • Frequency of supply	Open-ended questions	Section 4.9

Constructs in questionnaire section	Factors measured, with corresponding question number	Scale	Source: corresponding chapter section
surrounding communities to VICs	• Challenges in supplying information • Feedback on information supply		
	• Information sources		Section 4.7; 4.9
	• Socio-economic opportunities		Section 2.8.3 4.8
	q4.2: Knowledge supplied to the VIC • Type of knowledge supplied • Frequency of supply • Challenges in supplying knowledge • Feedback on knowledge supply		Section 2-5–2-8 4.4.1; 4.4.3
	• Knowledge sources		Section 4.6.1; 4.8
	• Socio-economic opportunities		Section 2.8.3 4.8

Source: Researcher's own construction

- ***Credibility and trustworthiness of the focus group schedule***

As highlighted in section 5.8.4, qualitative data collection instruments should be credible and consistent in the same way that quantitative ones should be valid and reliable. The credibility and reliability of the focus group schedule was maintained in the study. To do so, the process followed was similar to that outlined in section 5.8.4 as both the interview schedule and the focus group schedule were qualitative in nature.

An extensive literature review was conducted to conceptualise clearly the themes of importance to the study. Different data sources were triangulated by examining information from the sources, and this information was used to build a coherent justification for the themes. Similarly, themes from the focus group discussions were triangulated and corroborated with those from other stakeholders, including staff, visitors, and local tourism businesses, for accuracy and credibility. Experts in the Department of Tourism provided comments and suggestions about the accuracy, relevance, and comprehensibility of the themes and the questions asked in the focus group schedule. In addition, a pilot study was undertaken at Mopani VIC in Limpopo Province to test empirically the accuracy of the content of the focus group schedule. To ensure reliability, the focus group schedule was administered consistently by ensuring that the main themes were discussed with each of the different focus groups.

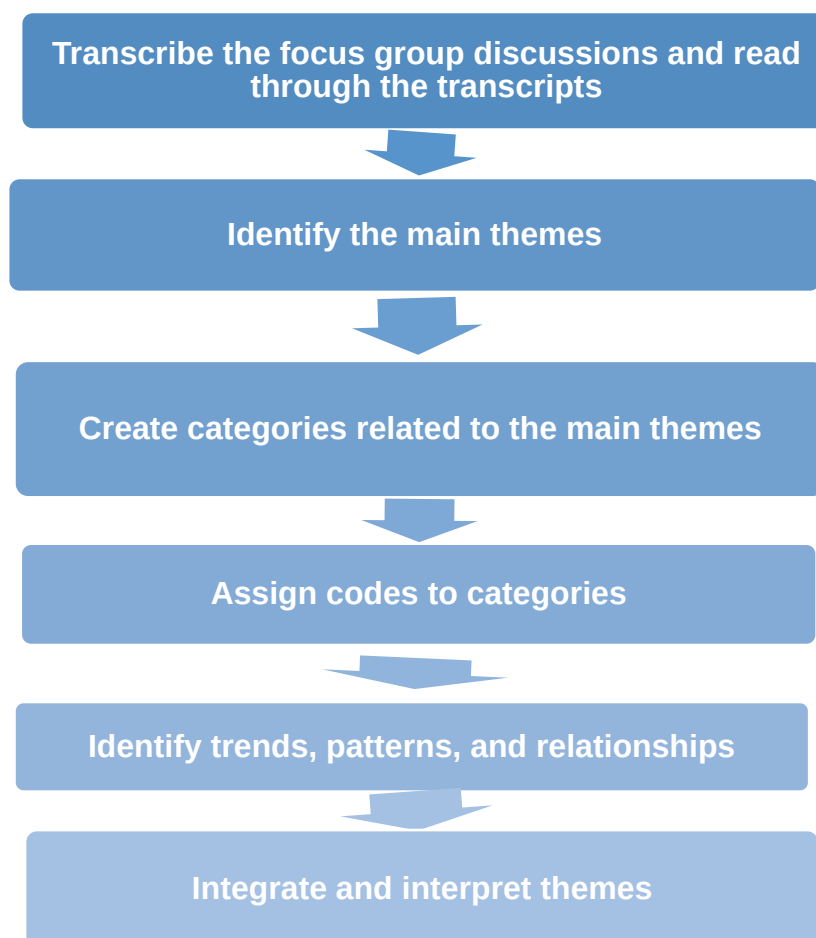
Because a focus group discussion is a group-based technique, the biases that are commonly encountered in a group setting were controlled. These included the dominance effect (a dominant individual shapes the discussion), the halo effect (the perceived status of a group member influences the discussion), and groupthink (members tend to think similarly to maintain group cohesion) (Mukherjee, Huges, Sutherland, McNeill, Van Opstal, Dahdouh-Guebas & Koedam, 2015). Conformity pressures (members adjust their own contributions to match those of others) and social desirability pressures (members provide information or present themselves to meet the perceived expectations of the facilitator or other participants (Bergen & Labonté, 2020) were also addressed. The researcher was conscious of these biases, and made every effort to create an atmosphere of openness for group members to voice their opinions without fear or prejudice. She also emphasised her interest in

hearing their different views and experiences. This helped to build rapport, and encouraged open expression among the participants. A focus group schedule was used to guide the questions posed to the focus group members.

5.9.5 Data analysis method

Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the focus group discussions. All information emerging from the focus groups was transcribed verbatim. The collected information was then analysed by breaking it down into small and manageable segments, identifying and categorising the most important concepts, themes, or quotations that related to the same phenomenon, and labelling them in order to identify patterns and relationships. Content analysis was used to analyse the data by following the protocol of Kumar (2014), as illustrated in Figure 5.5.

Figure 5.5: Steps in the data analysis of focus group discussions

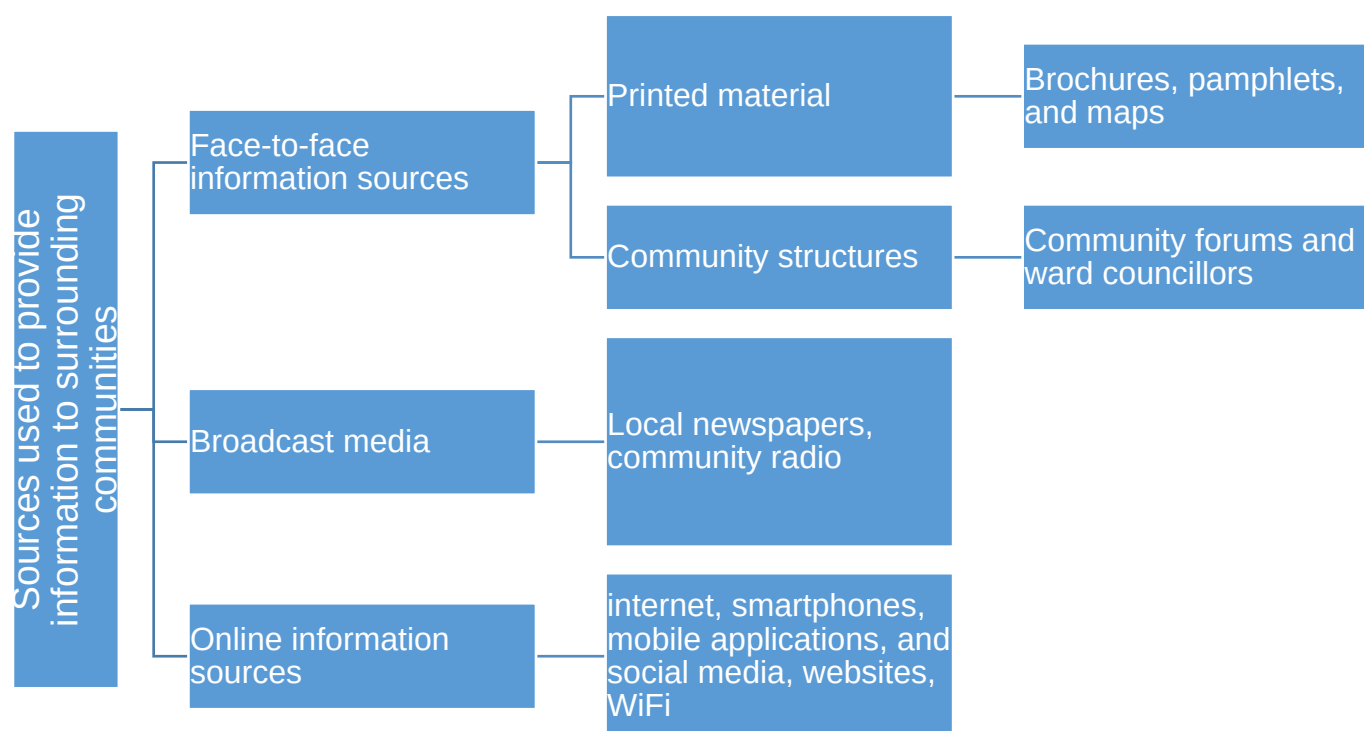


Source: Researcher's own construction

Step 1: Transcribe the focus group discussions and read through the transcripts

All the transcripts from the focus group discussions were studied in their entirety with the aim of obtaining a general sense of the information and having an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. This step was followed by the identification of themes, categories, relationships, and codes. The themes were later integrated and interpreted. An example of how a theme was broken down into categories and assigned codes is shown in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6: Categories and codes of socio-economic opportunities



Source: Researcher's own construction

Step 2: Identify the main themes

The main themes emerging from the transcripts were identified, as shown below:

- Awareness of and visits to VICs
- Information that surrounding communities received from VICs
- Sources used to provide information to surrounding communities

- Information and knowledge supplied by surrounding communities
- Socio-economic opportunities

Step 3: Create categories from responses under the main themes

Themes identified in step 2 were broken down into small manageable segments (categories). The responses from the community members were categorised and analysed according to themes related to the research objectives. Figure 5.6 above illustrates how the theme 'sources used to provide information to surrounding communities' was broken down into three categories:

- Face-to-face information sources
- Broadcast media
- Online information sources

Step 4: Assign codes to categories

As shown in Figure 5.6, the category of face-to-face information sources was assigned two codes: printed material (brochures, pamphlets, and maps) and community structures (community forums and ward councillors).

Step 5: Identifying trends, patterns, and relationships across participants

Both similar and different responses on a particular theme were identified among the various members of surrounding communities. Responses were also viewed against the locations of the VICs.

Step 6: Integrate and interpret themes

The responses and views on the themes expressed in the focus group discussions were integrated, based on the main themes. All the other information that was generated from the focus group discussions but that was not directly linked to the objectives of the study was not used in the analysis process. The analysed data was

then interpreted in order to draw out their meaning in comparison with the information derived from the literature review.

Having outlined the research design, the sampling method, and the data collection and data analysis processes that were followed in the study, the final section in this chapter outlines the research's ethical considerations.

5.10 RESEARCH ETHICS

According to Neuman (2014), 'ethics' defines what is legitimate or not, and what moral research involves; and therefore ethical issues are the concerns, dilemmas, and conflicts that arise over the proper way to conduct research. Emphasising the importance of ethics in research, Neuman (2014) notes that researchers have a moral and professional obligation to be ethical, even when respondents are unaware of or unconcerned about ethics. Thus ethical issues require researchers to balance two values: the pursuit of scientific knowledge, and the rights of those being studied or those of others in society.

5.10.1 Pursuit of scientific knowledge

According to Bryman (2012), discussions about the ethics of social research revolve around the role of values and of professional bodies in the research process. It is for this reason that Mouton (2001) asserts that these values could be achieved by developing a code of conduct or ethics that researchers should abide by. Such codes are enforced through professional associations, institutions of higher learning, and research funding agencies.

To ensure that there was no violation of the ethical rules of conduct associated with the administration of this research, several precautionary measures were taken. Compliance with ethical procedures outlined by the University of Pretoria and other relevant procedures set out by the Department of Tourism and participating VICs was followed. The Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria gave ethical approval for the study

on 2 December 2016 (Appendix A), while the Department of Tourism furnished the researcher with a letter signed by the Deputy Director General responsible for VICs (Appendix B), allowing the researcher access to participating VICs. All written approvals from these institutions were granted to the researcher prior to any part of the research being undertaken.

5.10.2 Rights of research participants

Without ethical codes, the rights of both respondents and researchers may be violated; thus the ethical aspects of informed consent, voluntary participation, avoidance of harm, deception of respondents, anonymity, and confidentiality were honoured and applied throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the procedures involved in the research study, and were required to give their informed consent to participate in the research. They were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided.

The duration of the interviews and focus groups was clearly stated when appointments were negotiated and scheduled. The duration of surveys with visitors and local tourism businesses was clearly highlighted on the first page of the questionnaire, which provided information about the study.

5.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the research paradigm and design for the study, including the data collection instruments, the methods, and the analysis used. An overview of the research sites where the study was conducted was provided to set the context for the study.

A mixed methods research design, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, was adopted for this study. This design was appropriate to providing a comprehensive understanding of the tourism information and knowledge exchange at VICs from the perspectives and viewpoints of visitors and local tourism businesses that participated in the quantitative components, and from the VIC staff and surrounding communities

who took part in the qualitative component of the study. The convergent parallel mixed methods approach was adopted, in which both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in tandem and in a complementary manner to collect and analyse data and to present the findings. Combining the two methods facilitated the triangulation and corroboration of the findings and conclusions reached in the study.

A total of 18 VICs participated in the study, with seven located in rural municipalities and 11 in urban municipalities. In all of the VICs, a survey used both self-completed online and paper-based questionnaires to derive information from visitors and local tourism businesses. In addition, face-to-face semi-structured and in-depth interviews were held with staff of the 18 VICs. For the VICs in rural municipalities, focus group discussions were held with surrounding communities to examine how the exchange of information and knowledge might generate socio-economic opportunities for community members.

Ethical principles were applied to ensure that participants were protected from any harm and that the research was conducted in an ethical manner. A pilot study was undertaken at two different VICs to test and refine the data collection instruments, methods, and procedures. The validity and reliability of the data collection instruments were observed in accordance with the exploratory nature of the study.

The quantitative data were analysed to reveal relationships, patterns, and trends, while the qualitative data analyses provided rich and contextual information. The quantitative results and qualitative findings were used in a complementary way to draw meaningful conclusions about how the exchange of information and knowledge contributes to memorable visitor experiences and to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities.

The next chapter address objectives 3 and 4, and presents the qualitative findings of the focus group discussions conducted with surrounding communities.

CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS: VIC STAFF AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the research paradigm and the research approach that were followed in the study. The chapter provided a detailed description of the research design, sampling method, data collection, and data analysis processes. The challenges faced during the fieldwork, the aspects considered for the quality assurance of the data, and research ethics were also discussed. This chapter presents the qualitative findings to address objectives 3, 4, and 5 – namely:

Objective 3: To discuss tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs and to develop a conceptual framework to guide this exchange. The conceptual framework was developed in Chapter 4.

Objective 4: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.

Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

These objectives were addressed through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with VIC staff members. The findings from these interviews are presented in sections 6.2 – 6.12. Objectives 3 and 4 were also addressed through focus group discussions held with communities in the surrounding areas of seven VICs located in rural municipalities. The findings from these focus group discussions are presented in sections 6.13 – 6.20.

As explained in Chapter 5, a set of predetermined questions was formulated in the interview schedule and the focus group schedule. In addition, content analysis was used to analyse the content of the interviews conducted with staff and the focus group discussions conducted with surrounding communities. The verbatim responses of staff

and community members are enclosed in quotations marks, and are identified by a description assigned to each participating VIC, staff member, or community member. The verbatim responses are used to emphasise key themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews. For example, 'ST1VIC1' represents the first staff (ST1) member of VIC1 (VIC 1); while 'CM1VIC4' represents the first community (CM1) member who participated in the focus group discussion held in the vicinity of VIC4 (VIC 4).

6.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ANALYSIS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Because the study was exploratory in nature, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain the views of staff about the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The interviews afforded the researcher an opportunity to probe and to rephrase issues of importance in the study while allowing staff to ask questions for clarity and to elaborate on their viewpoints where necessary. In this way, rich and detailed information from the semi-structured interviews complemented the numerical data, such as percentages and frequency counts, elicited from the surveys conducted with visitors and local tourism businesses. Interview notes were also taken during the interviews to help the researcher to probe for clarification.

6.3 PROFILE OF VIC STAFF (N=27)

Staff were asked to provide their socio-demographic information. As shown in Table 6.1, not all provided the required information, particularly their level of education and their years of experience at VICs. Therefore the analysis of the staff's profile is based only on the information that was provided.

Table 6.1: Socio-demographic information of VIC staff

Name of VIC	Participant code	Gender	Age	Population group	Level of education	Position at VIC	Years of experience at VIC
Mangaung VIC: (VIC1)	ST1VIC1	Male	47	Black	Grade 12	Tourism officer	7 years
	ST2VIC1	Female		Black		Tourism officer	
Bloemfontein VIC: (VIC2)	ST1VIC2	Female		White		Tourism officer	
	ST2VIC2	Female		Black		Tourism officer	
Cape Town Tourism VIC: (VIC3)	ST1VIC3	Female	36	Coloured	Tertiary education	Information and reservation consultant	4 years
	ST2VIC3	Female	30	Coloured	BCom	Research Manager	3 years
Cape St Francis VIC: (VIC4)	ST1VIC4	Female		White	BCom	VIC manager	3 years
City of Johannesburg VIC: (VIC5)	ST1VIC5	Male	33	Black	B. Com Honours: Tourism Development	Information officer	3 years
	ST2VIC5	Male	32	Black	Diploma: Tourism Management	Information officer	7 months
City of Tshwane VIC: (VIC6)	ST1VIC6	Male	41	Black	National Diploma in Graphic Arts	Director: Visitor services	3 years
Colesberg VIC: (VIC7)	ST1VIC7	Male		Black	National Diploma in Fine Arts Certificate in Tourism and Local Economic Development	Museum curator/ Tourism manager	9 years
Durban Tourism VIC: (VIC8)	ST1VIC8	Female		Black	Diploma: Tourism Diploma: Public Management and Marketing	Senior supervisor:	9 years
Kimberley VIC: (VIC9)	ST1VIC9	Male		Coloured		Senior tourism information officer	
	ST2VIC9	Female	30	Black		Tourism information officer	10 years
Makhado VIC: (VIC10)	ST1VIC10	Male		Black			7 years
Mpumalanga International Airport VIC: (VIC11)	ST1VIC11	Male	33	Black	BTech Tourism Management BCom Business Management	Information officer	4 years
	ST2VIC11	Female		Black		Information officer	
Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism Information Office: (VIC12)	ST1VIC12	Female		White		Information manager	21 years
	ST2VIC12	Male		White		Researcher	13 years

Name of VIC	Participant code	Gender	Age	Population group	Level of education	Position at VIC	Years of experience at VIC
Pilanesberg VIC: (VIC13)	ST1VIC13	Female	56	Black	National Diploma: Public Relations	Sales and information officer	9 years
Pilgrim's Rest VIC: (VIC14)	ST1VIC14	Female	49	Black	Grade 12	Information officer	
Polokwane VIC: (VIC15)	ST1VIC15	Female	35	Black	National Diploma: Tourism Management	Tourism information officer	9 years
Rustenburg VIC: (VIC16)	ST1VIC16	Male	42	Black	National Diploma: Tourism and Hospitality	Sales and information officer	9 years
	ST2VIC16	Female		Black		Sales and information officer	
Senekal Library VIC: (VIC17)	ST1VIC17	Female		Black		Librarian and information officer	22 years
Shelly Beach VIC: (VIC18)	ST1VIC18	Male		White	Geography Graduate	CEO: South Coast Tourism	4 years
	ST2VIC18	Female	35	Black	BA Culture and Heritage Tourism	VIC Supervisor	10 years

Source: Researcher's own construction

Table 6.1 shows that, of the 27 staff members who participated in the semi-structured interviews, 16 were females and 11 were males. Furthermore, 19 of these 27 staff members were black, while five were White and three were Coloured. There were no Indian staff members. Although 14 staff members did not provide their ages, the ages of the 13 who did ranged between 30 and 56 years.

With regard to the positions that staff members occupy, 14 were information officers who are directly involved in VIC information provision, eight were at supervisory and managerial levels, while five performed both functions of providing information and managing the operations of the VICs, as they were the only staff members at their VICs. The remaining two staff members were researchers working directly with information officers to analyse VIC visitor statistics.

The majority of the staff reported that experience in visitor services is a requirement for appointment as an information officer to work in a VIC environment. However, some emphasised that a tertiary qualification is an added advantage. Thus, of the 27 staff members, nine had a tourism-related qualification and 16 had been working at their VICs for more than three years. In addition, some staff members reported that they had worked in other tourism-related sub-sectors, with arts and culture, hospitality, food and beverages, attractions, tour operating, and tourist guiding as the most often cited sub-sectors. Some staff mentioned that they have also worked in units of provincial and local municipalities, tourism departments, or tourism marketing agencies that work closely with VICs, such as marketing and sales, business development, or product development. This shows that the staff are qualified to work at the VICs and are experienced in and familiar with the VIC operational environment.

All staff reported that they were appointed on a full-time basis and that VICs do not recruit volunteers as assistants. The main reason given is that volunteers often expect to be placed in permanent positions after working there for a while. Staff members from 17 of the 18 VICs mentioned that, instead of recruiting volunteers, their VICs provide a learnership programme to student-interns studying tourism-related fields as part of the requirement that they obtain a qualification, or provide in-service training to student-interns who have already obtained a tourism-related qualification and need to gain practical work-related experience. The purpose of the learnership or internship

programme was mainly described as providing students with real work experience of the functions of the VIC related to information provision, and equipping them with skills such as verbal and written communication skills. Staff of only five of the 17 VICs that provide a learnership or internship programme (ST1VIC1, ST1VIC2, ST1VIC13, ST1VIC16, and ST1VIC17) indicated that they did not have interns at the time of the study. In marketing agencies with several VICs, such as the municipality to which ST1VIC12 and ST2VIC18 report, interns are rotated among the VICs in order to expose them to the different functions of VICs. Thus ST1VIC18 reported: “*We rotate the interns so that they can have a feel of the different VICs*”. They are paid a stipend mainly to cover their commuting costs during their time of training. ST1VIC4 mentioned that, although they have not had an intern in the three years that she has worked at the VIC, they have an assistant she trained to perform information-provision responsibilities when she herself is out of the office. In this way, interns and assistants can assist staff in carrying out other operational functions in the VICs.

6.4 VIC OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Staff described diverse VIC ownership and management models under which their VICs operate. The models are described in Table 6.2 below:

Table 6.2: VIC ownership and management

Ownership and management model	VIC	
	Urban	Rural
VICs located within provincial tourism marketing agencies that report to and receive funding directly from these agencies.	VIC11 and VIC16	VIC10 and VIC13
VICs located within provincial Departments of Sports, Arts and Culture to which they report and from which they receive direct funding.		VIC14 and VIC 17
VICs located within local municipalities. The VICs report to and receive funding directly from local municipalities.	VIC1, VIC2, VIC5, VIC6,	VIC7

Ownership and management model	VIC	
	Urban	Rural
	VIC9 and VIC15	
A VIC located within a tourism marketing agency of a local municipality. The agency reports to and receives the majority of its funding from a local municipality.	VIC8	
VICs located within tourism marketing agencies of local municipalities. The agencies report to and receive the majority of their funding from local municipalities. The agencies also generate additional funding by offering membership to local tourism businesses or other businesses not in the tourism sector. The agencies are governed by and report to a board of directors.	VIC3.	VIC18
A VIC located in a non-profit organisation (NPO) that generates the majority of its funding from offering membership to local tourism businesses or other businesses not in the tourism sector. The NPO is governed by and reports to a board of directors. The NPO also receives partial funding from and reports to a local municipality.		VIC4
A VIC located in an NPO that receives the majority of its funding from a local municipality. The NPO also generates additional funding from offering membership to local tourism businesses or other businesses not in the tourism sector. The NPO is governed by and reports to a board of directors. Because it receives funding from the local municipality, the NPO also reports to the municipality.	VIC12	

Source: Researcher's own construction

The findings show that, although the reporting mechanisms differ among the 18 VICs, the organisations to which they belong receive some government funding, either at a local or a provincial level. Two of the VICs (VIC3 and VIC12) that report to

organisations that offer membership programmes are found in municipalities located in urban areas, while the other two (VIC4 and VIC18) are located in rural municipalities. These four VICs engage in private sector partnerships in order to generate additional funding for their organisations. To account for this function, the tourism marketing agencies and NPOs are governed by and report to a board of directors. With the exception of VIC4 and VIC18, all the other VICs located in rural municipalities (VIC7, VIC10, VIC13, VIC14, and VIC17) receive almost all of their funding from government sources.

6.5 STAFF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Staff reported that they perform numerous operational and administrative activities in order to support their main roles and responsibilities of providing information, both tourism-related and non-tourism related, to different stakeholders. This includes visitors, domestic and international visitors, local tourism businesses, surrounding communities, and the general public. These roles and responsibilities are discussed below.

6.5.1 VIC daily operations

Staff reported that they perform different activities that relate to the day-to-day operations of VICs to ensure that they are fully functional. They mentioned that their daily activities mainly involve keeping stock of brochures and ensuring that they are neatly displayed on the brochure stands. As brochures are one of the main sources used by staff to disseminate information to stakeholders, section 6.11.2 provides suggestions for how staff can use them effectively. Staff also have to ensure that all the equipment, such as furniture and computers, that is used in information provision is operational at all times and regularly maintained to enable stakeholders to use them when needed.

VIC staff also reported that they were involved in the compilation and record-keeping of statistics and building a visitors' profile. In two-thirds of the VICs (12), staff mentioned that they use a visitors' book to capture the profile of visitors who physically

visit VICs. The information captured and the formats used differ across VICs and include contact details such as names, telephone numbers, and email addresses. Staff of the 12 VICs indicated that visitors are also requested to provide comments on their satisfaction with the information or service they have received. Some staff (ST1VIC3, ST1VIC4, and ST1VIC8) regard the visitors' book as ineffective, as visitors are not compelled to provide their details. Another reason cited by some staff members is that the visitors' book is an outdated method of collecting compliments, complaints, and feedback from visitors.

Some staff members (ST1VIC1, ST1VIC2, ST1VIC3, ST1VIC10, ST1VIC12, ST2VIC17, and ST2VIC18) mentioned that they do not use a visitors' book, but instead use forms/questionnaires to capture information on visitor statistics and VIC visits. Visitors' demographic characteristics such as gender, age, country of origin, purpose of visit to the VIC, and type of information enquired were cited as the most common information to be captured. ST1VIC3, ST1VIC10, ST2VIC12, and ST2VIC18 stated that they also request visitors to provide other socio-demographic information such as educational level, employment status, and occupation. While ST1VIC1, ST1VIC2, and ST1VIC17 indicated that they only capture the total number of visitors using VICs, ST1VIC3, ST1VIC10, ST1VIC12, and ST2VIC18 stated that they also capture visitor travel behaviour characteristics such as country of origin, purpose of visiting the province, travel companion(s), length of stay, accommodation used during stay, daily expenditure, and trip-planning information sources. The information is provided to marketing agencies to consider in their marketing strategies. ST1VIC3, ST1VIC10, ST1VIC12, and ST2VIC18 in particular indicated that the information is submitted to their research units to compile market intelligence on the needs of visitors, monthly visitor statistical reports, and an overall tourism performance report of the province.

The different types and formats of information used in VICs indicate a lack of standardisation in capturing and reporting of tourism indicators and visitors statistics that could be used to help compare and monitor tourism trends and performance at the local and provincial levels. Measuring tourism performance is important to identify changes that may be traced over time to make predictions that could help policy-makers to make informed decisions that could benefit both the public and the private sector. More importantly, findings from the analysis of tourism performance could

provide market intelligence to help in the design and development of tailor-made tourism products and services to meet the needs of visitors, thereby enhancing memorable experiences. It is evident that concerted efforts are required at a provincial level to agree on visitor indicators that could be used to measure tourism performance in a standardised way. This would require a commitment on the part of the different stakeholders involved with visitor services such as destination marketing agencies, provincial marketing agencies, and VICs. The Department of Tourism at a national level could play a leading role in mandating relevant indicators to be used in measuring tourism performance at a local and a provincial level that are aligned with the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS), focusing on the growth and development of the sector in an inclusive way.

6.5.2 Information provision

The main roles and responsibilities of staff were identified as providing information, both tourism-related and non-tourism related, to different stakeholders, including domestic and international visitors, local tourism businesses, surrounding communities, the general public, and nearby VICs. The majority of staff revealed that they also provide information to institutions of learning. ST1VIC4 added that the VIC has formed relationships with nearby embassies, and that they exchange both tourism and non-tourism related information with each other. To determine the information that VIC staff provide to each of these stakeholders, the detail outlined below was requested.

First, the information and knowledge that the VIC staff provide to visitors during pre-trip planning and while visitors personally visit a VIC – and, in particular, the type of information and knowledge that staff provide, how they provide it, how visitors prefer to receive it, and any challenges they experience in providing the information and knowledge.

Second, the information and knowledge that staff provide to the different stakeholders: how they provide it, how these stakeholders prefer to receive it, and any challenges experienced in providing the information and knowledge.

Third, the information and knowledge that staff had mentioned that stakeholders provide to VICs. Fourth, the socio-economic opportunities that result from exchanging information and knowledge with the different stakeholders, as perceived by staff.

Responses to these questions are provided in sections 6.6 – 6.12.

6.5.3 Collaboration with other internal units

In order to carry out their responsibilities effectively, the majority of staff mentioned that they work closely with different sections in their organisations. In the main, they stated that they work with marketing units that are responsible for marketing and promoting local areas. These marketing units keep and maintain a database of tourism products and services that they use to market and promote local areas. The marketing units also share the database with other units, such as VICs that are involved in providing information and knowledge about tourism products and services. Staff of most VICs also revealed that they work with product or business development units to develop tourism businesses and to conduct familiarisation and site visits to understand the challenges and complaints, improvements, or support that businesses may require. These visits were seen to help staff to assess the readiness of new businesses to receive visitors. The visits also help staff to ascertain whether businesses in the databases are still operational and so can still be recommended to visitors.

6.5.4 Challenges affecting staff responsibilities

Most staff reported that they experience challenges when carrying out their roles and responsibilities. These mainly relate to a shortage of human and financial resources. The challenges seem to be severe in VICs located in rural municipalities (VIC 7, VIC 10, VIC 13, and VIC 17). Staff of these VICs mentioned that they are the only staff member in the VICs, and that they therefore perform managerial functions and provide front-desk information. For example, ST1VIC7 said: *“... I am also the museum curator, so I also assist people when they come to the museum to find historical information. All in all, I am managing the office, tourism issues and the museum”*.

Almost all staff mentioned financial shortages as the main challenge that affects their operational activities. This may be seen in ST1VIC15's explanation: "...*We experience financial constraints to courier our brochures to other information offices or receive from them... Without finances we are unable to exchange brochures.* To add to this, ST1VIC7 stated: "...*the challenge that we experience is funding for development of new brochures... We have a limited budget from the municipality... We do not have a budget to go to trade shows*".

6.6 INFORMATION PROVIDED TO VISITORS

6.6.1 Tourism-related information

The interviews revealed that the main function of VICs is to provide information on the activities and sites for visitors to see in the local areas. Accordingly, staff mentioned that they provide information that visitors require to make decisions and choices throughout their trips, both before and while at visited areas. Staff emphasised that they provide tourism-related information mainly on accommodation, restaurants, attractions, tours, events, sports, adventure, transport, car rentals, flight schedules, maps, travel reservations and bookings, safety tips, and emergency numbers such as those for the police, ambulance, and hospital, as well as general enquiries. The other types of information mentioned were the information that visitors receive en route to their prospective areas. This is mostly information on activities in areas they plan to visit. As ST1VIC4 stated: "...*we have passers-by, people coming from Cape Town, saying we are on the route to Port Elizabeth, so they need information further on*". This type of en route information was cited by staff (e.g., ST1VIC17) who regard their VICs as mostly serving "...*visitors travelling to their main destinations*". These findings show that information is not only provided during a particular stage of a trip, but is also offered throughout visitors' trip in order to help them make informed decisions and enhance their experiences.

Staff also reported that they mostly provided visitors with information on activities they might not have been aware of when they were making their plans to travel. ST1VIC3 mentioned that "...*they [visitors] just want add-ons on what they have already planned*

for in terms of attractions". In this regard, the requests that were most often mentioned included information on attractions, shopping, restaurants, sports, adventure, and nightlife. The information is seen by most staff as being helpful in making visitors aware of other things they can do and see in visited areas. The VIC therefore provides additional pre-trip information to visitors.

Most staff stated that, in addition to information about their areas, they also collect information on other areas and provinces in the country. This information was perceived as important to visitors travelling to or extending their trips beyond more than one area or province. ST2VIC9 said: *"...We have information about other provinces which we collect at exhibitions that we attend, and we then build relations with other provinces to send us their information, because we do get visitors who are looking for information about other provinces"*. ST2VIC16 added: *"Tour operators also assist us to bring information and brochures when they are out attending trade shows. They bring us information from other provinces and take our information to other provinces. So we do exchange information with other provinces and regions, and tour operators assist us a lot in this regard"*. This shows that an exchange of information takes place in VICs – in this instance, among staff of different VICs as well as between staff and other stakeholders in tourism sub-sectors.

Visitor safety was perceived by most staff as an important factor to consider when marketing an area and ensuring that visitors enjoy their stay in the area. They stated that they mostly provide safety information and tips to alert visitors about safe or unsafe areas; also where they may report incidents of crime should they find themselves in such situations. ST1VIC5 reported that *"...we have a problem of tourist safety. We get a lot of tourists coming to report being mugged"*. Most VICs therefore provide leaflets and brochures with safety tips and emergency numbers such as those of the police, ambulance, hospital, or clinic, and that alert visitors to be vigilant should they find themselves in unsafe and distressing situations. Some staff (ST1VIC16 and ST1VIC17) reported that, even though they do not have safety brochures, they keep safety numbers, which they can give out to VIC users on request. Given the emphasis placed on visitors' safety, it may be necessary for staff to enter into a contract with relevant law enforcement agencies, such as the police, that have expert knowledge

and skills in public safety and investigating criminal activities, in order to exchange safety-related information and knowledge.

6.6.2 Reservations and booking services

Staff from only two VICs (ST1VIC3 and ST2VIC18) reported that, in addition to providing information, they also offer some form of reservation and booking service. Both mentioned that they provide booking, reservation, and ticketing services for transport and events. ST1VIC3 mentioned: *“... We do bookings for buses and selling tickets for shows... It is the actual service that we offer, like the bookings, confirmation of a certain event or tour”*. ST2VIC18 reported that the VIC is involved in providing a booking service for a variety of activities. This staff member stated: *“We do reservations and bookings for accommodation, car rentals, events, tours... and attractions, mostly attractions in the city and surroundings... We provide information about bus services, fares, timetables, airline schedules”*. In addition, ST1VIC3 said that the VIC has a desk and staff dedicated to making bookings for visitors who want to visit any of South Africa’s national parks (SANParks). The revenue from these services generates additional income for both VICs.

Staff in other VICs mentioned that, as government-owned and funded entities, they are not allowed to receive commission for the services that they provide. ST1VIC13 noted that *“...we don’t provide service where we get a commission out of it”*. Most staff, including those that provide a booking and reservation service, emphasised that they provide visitors with possible options for tourism products and services from which they can choose. To emphasise their role in this regard, ST1VIC15 mentioned that *“...we as officials are not allowed to single out an establishment and recommend it to visitors. What we do is, we ask a visitor what kind of an accommodation he is looking for and, based on their needs and budget, we can give them a list of establishments that are in line with their needs, and they can choose the establishment ... and make bookings directly with the establishment. We can only recommend establishments that are star-graded.”*

Staff mentioned that, to be able to recommend tourism products and services, they keep a database especially of accommodation establishments from which visitors can choose. ST1VIC7 mentioned that they also keep a record of the availability of accommodation establishments. The staff member said: *“...On a regular basis, particularly during peak periods, we circulate a standard template that businesses have to complete to indicate availability of their businesses... When tourists want accommodation and want to do bookings, they first call our office, asking for contact numbers of guest houses that are available, especially during school holidays and December holidays. So we know which guest houses are fully booked and which ones are available because we communicate with them and also refer tourists to them”*. Staff stated that the database of tourism products and services enables them to obtain knowledge of available, credible, and trustworthy businesses in their local areas to which to refer visitors. This knowledge assists staff in encouraging visitors to book directly with these establishments.

The discussions show that, while the main function of VICs is to provide tourism information in order to support visitors during their travel, on-site practices show that they also provide non-tourism-related information to different stakeholders. As staff are already carrying out the function of providing non-tourism-related information, it might be necessary for VIC management to consider formalising this function by including it in their information provision mandate as a way to meet the needs of different stakeholders.

6.7 INFORMATION PROVIDED TO AND RECEIVED FROM LOCAL TOURISM BUSINESSES

Staff mentioned that they provide information to local tourism businesses and, in turn, these businesses supply them with information. This exchange process presents opportunities for local tourism businesses. Findings related to the exchange of information are provided below.

6.7.1. Information provided to local tourism businesses

According to the majority of the staff, they provide local tourism businesses with different types of printed material. In the main, local tourism businesses receive information such as information brochures, pamphlets, leaflets, magazines, posters, booklets, visitors' guides, maps, route guides, and safety tips guides. Some staff (ST1VIC3, ST1VIC4, ST1VIC12, and ST2VIC18) mentioned that their tourism marketing agencies generate additional revenue, profits, and commission by offering membership not only to local tourism businesses but also to other non-tourism-related businesses such as petrol stations, chemists, cinemas, Internet cafés and health-related organisations such as clinics and hospitals. ST1VIC18 noted that *"... We also have what we call likeable locals, which may essentially be a chemist or a plumber. We do not have them as in the forefront of tourism and leisure; we have them in a directory, almost like a chamber of business"*.

The membership fees differ among the marketing agencies; ST1VIC18, for example, referred to a membership fee of R570 a year, while ST1VIC4 indicated an annual membership of R350. ST1VIC12 referred to differentiated membership fees among businesses as a way to encourage them to take up membership, and mentioned that *"... Our membership fees are quite reasonable... Because of the smaller emerging businesses, we scaled down and tried to make the [basic] membership fees more affordable for R60 a month [R720 a year]... We have another category called 'primary membership', and that is basically for your larger establishments, boardwalks, hotel chains, etc... and it's R1440 [a year] in total"*. To encourage membership, ST1VIC12 also mentioned that small tourism businesses are placed on a mentorship programme to learn how membership can present them with economic opportunities. ST1VIC3 also mentioned differentiated membership fees, indicating that *"... it depends, if you are a tour operator, it depends on how many vehicles you have, how big your business is. It's the same with accommodation: it depends on the type of accommodation, how many rooms you have. It is different prices for different businesses. There is, however, a joining fee and an annual fee"*.

Despite the different membership programmes, ST1VIC3, ST1VIC4, ST1VIC12, and ST2VIC18 mentioned that they provide members with specific information related to

the benefits generated from the membership programme. While the benefits differ among the VICs, these staff members stated that they are mainly focused on helping local tourism businesses to access potential visitors who could purchase and use their services. The benefits emerging from the membership programme are discussed in section 6.7.5.2, addressing objective 5 on how the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

6.7.2 Information supplied by local tourism businesses to VIC staff

Staff mentioned that local tourism businesses provide them with a variety of information. First, they mentioned that local tourism businesses mainly provide information on their products, such as accommodation, attractions, restaurants, and tours. Second, some provide visitor statistics and occupancy rates that staff then submit to their research units, which compile monthly visitor statistical reports. ST1VIC3 stated: *"... We request stats from businesses in terms of the number of people who visited, when, how many, where they come from, profile of the visitors for our record-keeping"*. ST1VIC10 added: *"...On a monthly basis they [local tourism businesses] provide us with statistics of their visitors"*. Third, most staff indicated that they receive information on events that local tourism businesses plan to host, and use it to compile a calendar of events taking place in the local area. Fourth, information on special offers by local tourism businesses is least reported.

6.7.3 Methods used by local tourism businesses to supply information

Staff reported that local tourism businesses use a variety of methods to supply information to VICs. The most common method involves supplying the information in person through physical visits and the delivery of brochures, pamphlets, and leaflets to VICs. Some supply the information telephonically, particularly if staff require clarification or additional information. Businesses also use email to inform staff of issues such as upcoming events or changes, improvements, and developments at their business sites. ST1VIC7 mentioned another way in which they receive information from local tourism businesses, which involves collaboration with other

Local Tourism Organisations (LTOs) and Community Tourism Organisations (CTOs). The staff member noted: *“We work together with the Umsombovu Tourism Association, Brochure Management Company, and Guest House Association. They supply us with the brochures of their members”* (ST1VIC7).

While the delivery of brochures was emphasised as the main method used to supply information to VICs, ST2VIC2 mentioned that *“...most businesses no longer budget for brochures because tourists now use the Internet to Google [search] for accommodation or places of interest they would like to visit”*. ST2VIC4 added that *“What we have on our [marketing agency] website is that you [visitors] can link straight to the businesses’ websites... to check availability... and make bookings”*. These responses show that some local tourism businesses are active on online platforms and engage directly with visitors. Therefore, to receive information from such businesses, staff might have to devise ways to link their systems directly with the websites of businesses.

6.7.4 Challenges staff face in receiving information from local tourism businesses

Staff reported that, although there is regular communication with local tourism businesses, the main challenge is *“...getting the information [visitor statistics] or getting it late when our due date to compile and submit monthly reports has already passed. So it [the challenge] is delays to send us the information”* (ST1VIC5). For ST1VIC15 the main challenge is that *“...some businesses do not want to give us their brochures or get brochures from us... because they say that they never get business from us, that we do not refer visitors to them”*. This is an area of concern that staff should consider, as it might undermine the VICs’ role in creating opportunities for local tourism businesses.

For staff whose marketing agencies offer a membership programme to tourism businesses (ST1VIC3, ST1VIC4, ST1VIC12, and ST2VIC18), their main challenge relates to members who do not make full use of their membership. They pointed to members who do not attend meetings, dialogues, and networking sessions. In

addition, members do not regularly and timeously update any changes, improvements, and new developments at their businesses, such as additional rooms or events they intend to host. These challenges were voiced by ST1VIC4, who indicated that *“.../ battle to get members to share what is happening in their businesses. So the main challenge is to get people to really send me the information. Maybe people are busy, or they forget what their membership can do for them, but later they will ask what the membership is doing for them”*. ST1VIC12 mentioned that *“One of the challenges that we experience is that members do not regularly update their own details on the website”*.

Such delays, reluctance, and failure to supply updated information make it difficult for VIC staff to provide members with the best service to expose and market their businesses. Furthermore, a failure to update business information can lead to staff providing visitors with inaccurate or obsolete information. Given these challenges, staff emphasised the importance of improving communication with their members so that they do not miss any opportunity that might arise that helps to grow their businesses – and facilitates access to potential visitors who can purchase and use their services. Overcoming these challenges will help to facilitate the exchange of information that might create socio-economic opportunities for businesses.

6.7.5 Socio-economic opportunities

Most staff mentioned that they work mainly with the marketing units of their organisations to update and maintain databases of tourism products and services. The aim of the database is to market the products and services of local businesses, whether tourism- or non-tourism-related. As ST2VIC11 maintained, *“We market the businesses because most businesses do not have the know-how to market themselves; hence being listed in the database is a publicity, promotion, marketing platform for them that they get for free”*.

Staff mentioned that the majority of businesses in the tourism products databases are accommodation establishments. However, some are tourism businesses such as restaurants, travel services, and individuals and companies offering tourist guiding and

tour operating services; others are non-tourism-related businesses such as petrol stations and chemists.

According to staff, being listed in the database presents several socio-economic opportunities for local businesses, irrespective of whether they are tourism- or non-tourism-related, or whether or not they have subscribed to a membership programme. In addition, local businesses that are subscribed to a membership programme are presented with certain marketing opportunities. The opportunities created for the two groups of local businesses – those with membership and those without – are presented below.

6.7.5.1 Opportunities created for businesses

Businesses (with or without membership) listed in databases are presented with the following opportunities:

- ***Business marketing***

Staff mentioned that, in consultation with marketing units, businesses receive an opportunity to market their products on different platforms, including social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. They receive information on different local and international tourism events such as consumer and trade shows and campaigns where they can market, display, exhibit, and showcase their products. They can also form part of the marketing agencies' delegations that attend these events, and market their products and services at no cost. In addition, local businesses can promote their events in the VICs' calendar of events, and also obtain information on local events such as festivals and conferences so that they can prepare and make all the necessary arrangements to provide services to visitors, such as accommodation, transport, and food and beverage services.

- ***Display of business products in VICs***

Businesses are allowed to display their products (i.e., brochures) inside VICs on brochure stands. Furthermore, as ST1VIC4 indicated, businesses can place their event posters inside the VIC. ST1VIC10 added that businesses can display their posters and market their arts and craft products inside the VIC for visitors to buy.

- ***Display of VIC material in establishments***

Most VIC staff mentioned that they provide businesses with visitors' guides. This is a publication with tourism products in their local area, such as attractions, accommodation establishments, and restaurants. The guides also include maps and safety information. Businesses are encouraged to place the visitors' guides in their reception areas or rooms so that visitors can access information on products offered in the local area.

- ***Preferential treatment for referrals***

Credible and trustworthy local businesses that are listed in databases receive preferential treatment for any referrals or recommendations that staff make to visitors.

- ***Business linkages and networking***

Businesses are invited to dialogue and networking sessions. To emphasise this point, ST1VIC8 mentioned that the main purpose of these networking sessions is *"...to ensure that tourism businesses make linkages and work together. So we give them a platform to network... We encourage these linkages in the different sub-sectors"*.

- ***Education for businesses***

Staff reported that they host different sessions, such as workshops, meetings, or dialogues, in which local businesses are provided with different types of information in order to capacitate them. First, staff reported that members are invited to meetings

where they are provided with information about the functions of different units in the organisations, including VICs. These meetings aim to educate businesses on the information and services that might benefit them. Second, businesses receive sector information and insights from subject experts and specialists who are invited to address them on current and topical issues that might have an impact on their businesses and on the tourism sector in general. As ST1VIC12 pointed out: “...*We have members’ breakfast [and]...dialogue sessions where members are invited, and we have a guest speaker who can address them on something relevant to them. They have an opportunity to get a bigger picture of what is happening in the tourism industry*”. Third, businesses are alerted about training sessions, workshops, and funding opportunities that might help them to grow. In addition, local businesses receive information on public or private sector funding opportunities and educational and training workshops to equip them with the requisite skills on how, for example, to compile business proposals, use social media, or participate in tourism events. Staff mentioned that all such workshops are provided at no cost to the businesses.

As part of staff training, ST1VIC4 mentioned that, together with their marketing units, they accompany businesses on excursions to familiarise and expose them to other tourism products and services, “...*so that they should know what to say if people ask them, and where to send them to, because not all tourists come to the VIC*” (ST1VIC4). In this way, the staff of local businesses will be able to attend to visitors’ enquiries or refer them to relevant local products and services.

6.7.5.2 Opportunities created for businesses paying a membership fee

In addition to the opportunities created for all the businesses listed in the databases of local tourism products, the staff of VICs that are located in tourism marketing agencies (VIC3 and VIC18) and in NPOs (VIC4 and VIC12) and that offer a membership programme mentioned other opportunities that businesses paying a membership fee receive. These benefits differ across the marketing agencies and NPOs, and are based on the type of membership to which businesses subscribe.

- ***Businesses listing on websites***

Staff of VIC3, VIC4, VIC12, and VIC18 indicated that businesses get online exposure through free listings on the VICs' websites. As ST1VIC12 mentioned, "...*they [members] get their own page, they get their own unique login name and password, they can access their page on our website, they can upload their images and description of their products*". Potential visitors can access the websites of businesses, and make direct bookings or purchase products directly from them. ST1VIC4 stated that members pay an additional fee if they want to advertise on the VIC's website.

- ***Business accreditation***

Both ST1VIC3 and ST1VIC12 mentioned that members receive certification to identify them as credible businesses that visitors can trust. ST1VIC12 added that members also receive a membership logo they can display on their marketing material and websites in order to enhance the credibility of their products.

- ***Access to research and visitor statistics and profiles***

Members receive visitor statistics and country profiles that provide market intelligence on potential visitors. Businesses can use such insights to tailor-make their products to meet the needs of visitors. Members are also eligible to receive research reports that include statistical information such as tourist arrivals, occupancy rates, spend, length of stay, and purpose of visit. ST2VIC5 indicated that "...*we would provide businesses with visitor profiles and stats because we do compile monthly visitor stats... in terms of the number of people who visited, when, how many, where they come from, profile of the visitors for our record-keeping*".

- ***Access to VIC promotional material***

According to ST1VIC12, members may buy space and advertise their products and services, including special offers and discounts, at subsidised rates in the visitors' guide. Members also receive other promotional material such as CDs and electronic

presentations (ST1VIC18 and ST2VIC12). ST1VIC18 emphasised that “...*members get presentations they can load on their flash disks, take them to their establishments, and play them on their TVs, showing attractions [in the area]*”. ST2VIC12 Stated: “*What we have done with the app, we have created a printable pdf they [members] can put in their guest folders*”.

Although VIC7 does not offer membership, ST1VIC7 indicated that businesses are provided with brochure stands to place in their reception areas so that visitors can access information on products offered in the local area. ST1VIC7 emphasised that the arrangement presents opportunities for both visitors and businesses. First, visitors acquire information on the tourism products and services available in the local area. Equipped with this information, visitors may be encouraged to visit these products and use the available services during their stay. Second, visiting more products and using more services in visited areas can influence visitors to extend their stay and spend more money, which can benefit local businesses and boost the local economy. They may also be encouraged to return to visited areas and to recommend them to family and friends.

The discussion in this section shows that there is an exchange of information between staff and local tourism business. In most VICs, staff also provide and receive information from other local businesses that are not necessarily part of the tourism sector. However, most of the businesses with which staff exchange information are in the accommodation sub-sector. This might require staff, together with the marketing units of tourism marketing agencies, to improve their recruitment strategies to get businesses in other tourism sub-sectors, such as attractions, food and beverages, and transport services, listed in their databases. It would be important to emphasise the opportunities that businesses might receive from being listed in the databases. Furthermore, with the wide proliferation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), mobile technology, and social media, it might be important for VIC staff and their marketing units, where membership is not offered, to encourage businesses to pay a nominal fee so that they are exposed to online platforms. This may help businesses to expand their access to potential visitors.

6.8 INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE PROVIDED TO AND RECEIVED FROM SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

6.8.1 Information and knowledge provided to surrounding communities

When asked about information they provide to surrounding communities, most staff members mentioned that they do not have any specific information that is dedicated solely to surrounding communities. However, as part of surrounding communities, local tourism businesses, learners, and students receive information from VIC staff. The majority of the staff mentioned that they also provide general and non-tourism-related information that anyone using VICs might need in their daily lives. They indicated that, although the main role of VICs is to provide tourism information, surrounding communities in particular use VICs mainly to obtain general and non-tourism-related information. For example, information about sports clubs, music schools, immigration issues, employment in the tourism sector, or starting a business was most often mentioned. As some VICs are part of local municipalities, staff in such VICs also mentioned that they provide information related to municipal services, such as *“buying or refilling municipal bus tickets in the VIC”* (ST1VIC6).

The majority of the staff indicated that the provision of general information is mainly influenced by how different stakeholders perceive VICs. First, they mentioned that both visitors and surrounding communities perceive and expect staff to be knowledgeable and familiar with general products and services in their areas of operation, and able to respond to enquiries related to these products. Second, they indicated that learners and students perceive VICs as places where they can obtain information to help them compile tourism-related assignments and research projects. ST1VIC11 stated that *“...school groups... come here and they do their homework, assignments, their research, and where they want information we are able to assist them, give guidance”*.

Staff mentioned that they do not always have all the required general information at hand, and refer users to relevant places for further assistance: *“...even if there is a phone number that you can refer them to”* (ST1VIC8). To emphasise this point,

ST1VIC18 said: *"Sometimes you get people who come down here, and that they want to set up a business here... so we refer them to the municipalities that are issuing business licences"*. Since VICs have computers and Internet access, most staff mentioned that they also conduct Internet searches for information required by visitors. Interestingly, a few staff (ST1VIC8, ST1VIC12) stated that they developed initiatives such as a reference guide that they use for ease of reference whenever they have to respond to general enquiries. In this regard, ST1VIC8 stated: *"...I have even drafted a reference guide where I felt that we needed to have a reference guide on some of the things that people ask about – e.g., bookshops, art déco buildings, sport clubs, music school, immigration office, etc."*

To emphasise the importance of providing general information, ST2VIC16 distinguished between a VIC and a tourist information centre (TIC) by indicating that *"...we refer to the centre as a VIC. Previously we called it a tourist information centre, but had to change that because it only catered for the needs of tourists who are staying overnight and spending money in the area. Local people who came just to get general information were not catered for. What we [now] do is that we provide them with any type of information... not just tourism information about tourism products and activities"*. It is on this basis that most staff mentioned that they also provide general information to VIC users. Moreover, the Department of Tourism recognises the term 'VIC' in order to consider the information needs of both overnight and day visitors, who might include surrounding communities. This study also adopted the term 'VIC' in order to include other types of information that staff provide to stakeholders.

The findings show that the information that staff provide to stakeholders is used for various purposes. While visitors use it for travel or tourism-related purposes, surrounding communities predominantly use it to meet their everyday needs; and learners and students also use it mostly for educational purposes. With regard to preferred information, staff mentioned that stakeholders prefer to receive any information that addresses their needs. These findings suggest that the information and knowledge that staff provide should be multi-functional and directed to meet the specific needs of different stakeholders, irrespective whether it is tourism-related or general information.

6.8.2 Information and knowledge received from surrounding communities

None of the staff members reported having received information or knowledge from individual members of surrounding communities, except through local businesses or institutions of learning. VIC18 (ST1VIC18 and ST2VIC18) presented an interesting initiative through which staff are directly involved with local communities. The staff members mentioned that they work with LTOs that are elected to represent and bring surrounding communities' tourism-related needs to the attention of the marketing agency and the local municipality. The committees consist of local businesses and other local structures such as local councillors, the South African Police Service (SAPS), community policing forums, and CTOs involved in tourism product development and promotion and in the dissemination of tourism information in communities. VIC staff provide secretarial support in committee meetings, and are responsible for communicating community needs to the marketing agency. This can be seen in what ST2VIC18 said: *"...I sit in the meetings, take down minutes, arrange meetings. I see what are the needs of the whole area so that I can take them to our head office [the marketing agency]"*. This engagement with communities is important to helping the marketing agency and the municipality to implement initiatives and decisions about which surrounding communities as beneficiaries were consulted, and to which they were given an opportunity to provide input. Working with local area committees helps staff to understand the information needs of surrounding communities and to develop programmes that are geared to address these needs, in collaboration with other sections in the marketing agency and the local municipality. Furthermore, in rural areas where there is a shortage of community centres, such as in the area of VIC4 and VIC17, staff mentioned that surrounding communities are allowed to use VIC boardrooms to host their meetings.

As public utilities receiving funding from government, it is important that VICs' role of information provision also contributes to government's wider plan of improving the lives of people. This requires staff to develop initiatives that encourage community engagement in the work of VICs. This may include working closely with different local structures in surrounding communities, as well as identifying and linking skilled and

talented people such as artists, crafters, and arts and cultural groups with visitors so as to encourage visitors to buy their products and services. In this way, VICs will play a critical role in improving the lives of surrounding communities, creating employment and growing local economies, particularly in rural areas often characterised by poverty and unemployment.

6.9 INFORMATION PROVIDED TO AND RECEIVED FROM INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING

Institutions of learning were identified as important stakeholders to which staff provide information in order to help learners and students in their tourism-related studies. Staff in all the VICs mentioned that learners and students use VICs to access information they require to complete assignments and research projects. For example, ST1VIC14 said: *“We get a lot of students, and we give them whatever information they are looking for their assignments or research projects”*. Teachers also *“...come to ask for material and brochures, pamphlets, maps, etc. that we are not using. This is mostly to assist them in their teaching”* (ST2VIC5).

To meet the needs of learners and students, ST1VIC9 indicated that *“...we encourage the teachers to come to the VIC rather than the students so that they can get all the information they think their students will need, either for the [first] six months or [the] year...we engage the teachers at the beginning of the year so that they can tell us what they are going to need”*. This arrangement helps staff to make the necessary preparations to set aside relevant information to ensure that teachers can access it with ease whenever they visit the VICs.

Depending on the tasks to be carried out, staff mentioned that they provide information mostly on a face-to-face basis to afford teachers, learners, and students an opportunity to outline their requests and expectations clearly. This information is provided mainly in the form of brochures they can take away to help them complete their assignments and conduct research projects at no cost. Some VICs use other methods to help learners and students access information. ST1VIC15 stated that they have *“...set aside a brochure stand specifically dedicated to brochures for students... in a situation*

where we have a lot of students looking for the same brochures, we take the brochures to the school for students to share, as we might not have enough for everybody". With the VIC located in a library, ST1VIC17 mentioned that they have several computers that learners and students can use on their own to search for information. Owing to the limited availability of computers, ST1VIC7 said that learners and students can use staff computers to search for information, or the staff can conduct an Internet search on their behalf. However, setting aside time and resources to assist learners and students in this way tends to interfere with the daily operations of the staff who mainly work alone in their VICs.

Some staff, particularly ST1VIC12 and ST1VIC18, mentioned that they facilitate data collection for postgraduate students conducting research projects by participating as respondents or circulating their research questionnaires electronically via email to potential respondents. For example, ST1VIC12 mentioned that, *"...for students doing their research studies, depending on the nature of the research, we would allow them to do their research at the VICs or leave questionnaires in the VICs, or we can email the questionnaires with an electronic link"*.

To expose students to the tourism sector, most staff mentioned that they have an intake of students who are studying tourism-related fields, involving them in a learnership or internship programme. In addition, ST1VIC7 mentioned that they work with institutions of learning to help identify accommodation establishments where students studying tourism and hospitality courses can be placed for in-service training. Most staff mentioned that, together with other sections in their organisations (such as marketing, business development, or community participation), they also participate in school awareness programmes. They form part of the team that presents and displays brochures at career exhibitions and school events and organises tours and excursions for learners in order to raise awareness about tourism. In addition to the information provided to learners and students, ST1VIC16 indicated that they also provide schools with local area information that they could use when planning excursions to other areas. ST1VIC16 indicated that *"...schools outside Rustenburg normally call to request information when planning trips to visit the region, wanting to know places of interests they can visit in the area"*.

The discussion shows that there is an exchange of information between staff and institutions of learning, mainly to help learners and students to complete assignments and research projects. It was interesting to find that all the VICs participate in providing information to learners and students. This finding shows that VICs are not only used to provide information to visitors. In fact, the work of staff also includes information provision to other stakeholders. As a result, such work should be included in the business plans and operational plans of VICs so that it is not undertaken on an ad hoc basis, but receives the attention it deserves.

6.10 INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE PROVIDED TO AND RECEIVED FROM OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

6.10.1 Surrounding VICs

The interviews with staff revealed that there is an exchange of information, mostly in the form of brochures, among staff of different VICs, in both the public and the private sector. ST1VIC6 mentioned that “... *we have marketing material about other provinces and cities because, at the end of the day, we are all trying to sell our country. We are also trying to create relationships with other cities and other VICs to try and cross-sell each other*”. ST1VIC3 noted that “...*further down the street, there is another VIC... They are private, but we do get a lot of business from them as well for bookings, because we have more brochures and information than them, they are a smaller office*”. This exchange of information is undertaken, however, in an uncoordinated and ad-hoc way.

Besides the strategic and business plans and handbooks that guide the roles and responsibilities of VIC staff and the key daily operations and management of VICs, including how to interact with visitors, staff reported that they do not have any frameworks or strategies to guide the exchange of information and knowledge. They therefore suggested that it is important that the exchange of information among VIC staff be formalised to enable visitors to receive information of interest on any area in the country. This should involve staff sharing brochures or convening regular

meetings, workshops, or discussion forums to enable networking, sharing, and exchanging of ideas and information, challenges, improvements, and best-practice solutions. Staff exchange programmes were also suggested to provide learnings for staff in the different VICs. Such platforms would help to avoid any duplication in the provision of information to visitors, but would help to standardise information and service provision, thereby enhancing memorable visitor experiences throughout the visitors' journey.

6.10.2 Nearby embassies

Although only ST1VIC8 identified nearby embassies as one of their important stakeholders, the work undertaken in partnership with them is highlighted in this section, given the role that VICs have to play in improving the quality of lives of people in their vicinity. ST1VIC8 reported that the incidents of xenophobic attacks in the informal economy, mainly related to socio-economic survival, that often engulf South Africa created a need to work closely with nearby embassies. The aim is to improve relations among businesses owned by South Africans and foreign nationals in the tourism sector. In this regard, ST1VIC8 mentioned that they embarked on a programme “...to work together with embassies as a form of awareness raising ... be it [only] for brochure distribution purposes because, [with] the embassy, we have that relationship where we [are] able to [display our] brochures [at their offices] and they can also put their brochures in the VIC”. The brochures are also exhibited and distributed to visitors at different events, mainly to raise awareness about tourism offerings in different countries. This exchange of information shows the importance of working with other stakeholders that are involved in information provision as a way to address other local economic development challenges taking place in their own surrounding areas.

6.11 SOURCES USED BY VICS TO PROVIDE INFORMATION

Staff mentioned that they use different sources and formats to communicate internally in their VICs and to provide information to different stakeholders. These are discussed in the sections below.

6.11.1 Internal information sources

Staff mentioned different sources that they use to keep themselves updated and familiar with current and topical issues in the tourism sector. The Internet was mentioned as the main source that they use to search for information. Newspapers, including local newspapers, were also mentioned by some staff as a way to keep themselves updated on issues happening in the community. Local events, in-house training, internal newsletters, educational programmes, and familiarisation visits to tourism businesses also provide staff with an opportunity to obtain first-hand information on what is happening in their environment, as well as experience of tourism products. With regard to communication among staff, staff meetings and emails were cited as sources that are mainly used internally in VICs.

6.11.2 Sources used to provide information to stakeholders

- ***Printed material***

Printed material in the form of brochures, pamphlets, leaflets, magazines, posters, booklets, visitors' guides, maps, and route guides containing information on tourism products were cited as the main sources used to provide information to all stakeholders and to anyone using the VICs. Leaflets containing safety tips are also provided to stakeholders. Staff mentioned that these materials are displayed on the VICs' brochure stands. They are mainly provided through face-to-face contact with stakeholders, and are available free of charge to anyone who physically visits VICs. Those who are unable to visit VICs may receive the information telephonically, or it can be emailed to them. Some staff mentioned that they used to post the information to stakeholders; however, financial constraints mean that they mostly provide this information via email. Printed material is also exhibited at tourism events such as local and international consumer and trade shows and awareness campaigns in order to provide information to visitors and to market local tourism products.

Several other methods are used to distribute printed material. The staff of VICs in coastal provinces, particularly ST1VIC8 and ST1VIC12, mentioned that they provide

an information service on board cruise ships: “...we also try and provide an info service or hospitality desk when we have cruise-liners docking... We arrange temporary desks on board”, while ST1VIC8 stated that “...we attend cruise-liners and have a hospitality desk on board...We just go and give the information on board” (ST1VIC12). Only ST1VIC15 mentioned that they exhibit and distribute printed material to the local community: “...during imbizos [community meetings] of the municipality. We do exhibitions and display our information so that they must be aware of tourism and the offerings in the city and province”.

- **Electronic and online information sources**

In addition to printed material, staff mentioned the Internet and email as the main sources they use to provide information. The Internet in particular is mainly used to source the latest tourism-related information that stakeholders are interested in. CDs and electronic presentations are others sources that are used by VICs to provide information to stakeholders on-site. These sources are seen to be useful, as information from them can be saved and used anywhere and anytime when it is convenient for stakeholders to do so. Only ST1VIC8 mentioned that that they provide visitors with free Wi-Fi, “... even though it is limited. People use their social media with passwords to access the Wi-Fi, but [it] is limited, you can be able to do small things like change your flight schedule, etc.”.

The interviews revealed that VICs do not have or use electronic sources such as visitors’ notice boards to provide information to stakeholders on-site. They also do not have their own websites, mobile applications, or social media platforms that they could use to provide information. Staff mentioned that online enquiries are handled by other units, such as those responsible for communications and marketing. In VICs that have electronic sources, staff reported several challenges with the availability and use of these sources. These challenges are described below

First, staff from VICs that were established in 2010 when South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup (that is, VIC15 and VIC16), reported having information kiosks and touch screens that visitors could use after hours. As indicated by ST1VIC15: “...we have a touch pad screen outside the VIC. The touch screen operates 24hrs; even if we are

closed, the tourists can still access our information". However, none of the kiosks were operational at the time of this study because, as ST1VIC16 mentioned, "...the touch screens have not been working for a long time, but we used them during the 2010 World Cup". Moreover, staff reported that they do not have maintenance plans to fix these kiosks when they break down. The touch screens are also seen to be expensive to maintain.

Second, other electronic resources were also not operational at VIC16 at the time of the study, and this affected information provision. For instance, ST1VIC16 pointed out that "...our computer is not working, our printer is also not working. We currently have one computer that is operational. We sometimes experience problems with our telephones lines, especially when it has rained a lot, had storms, etc. So most of our challenges are mostly technological".

- **Broadcast media**

The staff of VIC12 and VIC18 mentioned that, together with staff from other units in their organisation, they are often invited to local community radio stations, where they present information and services offered by their organisations, including their own VICs. ST1VIC12 mentioned that "We [marketing agency] also do radio, but that is more from our marketing department... We also do radio, TV, and newspapers", while ST1VIC18 indicated that "We work closely with the community radio station, in isiZulu and English. We have two weekly programmes, talking tourism, tourism awareness, safety". These responses show that radio, and community radio in particular, is still relevant in disseminating and sharing local information in local languages that most rural community members understand. In this way, staff can use community radio to complement other sources to provide information to rural communities.

Despite the challenges and the limited use of electronic and online information sources in VICs, staff emphasised the importance of incorporating them into information provision, given the impact that they have on the tourism sector. These sources were seen to hold potential benefits for visitors and staff alike. Staff mentioned that they assist visitors during their travel by facilitating information searches and the dissemination and accessibility of tourism information at their convenience, as well as

providing a platform to share online reviews and travel experiences. Most staff mentioned that online sources are essential to keep them informed of new developments not only in their local areas, but also in the tourism sector in general, both locally and internationally. ST1VIC12 emphasised the introduction of mobile VICs as an innovative way to facilitate the provision and accessibility of travel information by combining both traditional and online information sources. This staff member mentioned that *“...mobile VICs can provide an information service at big events... distribute brochures, allow visitors to use Wi-Fi to search for information, do their bookings”*. Staff from VIC3 (ST1VIC3 and ST2VIC3) in particular mentioned that they operate mobile VICs that have *“...Wi-Fi facilities, the whole electronic set-up in it, so you can do live bookings, so it is really a mobile VIC that offers both brochures and electronic information as well as on-site live bookings at events with the widest reach”*.

6.11.3 Visitors’ preferred information sources

Staff mentioned that the preference to use specific information sources depends to a large extent on the nature of the enquiry made, as well as the type of visitor making the enquiry. In this regard, ST1VIC15 mentioned that *“...it actually depends – the walk-ins prefer printed material like brochures, maps that they can take with [them] from the VIC. Those who call or send email enquiries prefer electronic copies to be emailed to them”*.

Electronic and online sources of information provision were seen to be popular among young people, while traditional methods of providing information through face-to-face contact were perceived to be prevalent among and preferred by the older generation. As a result, *“...younger ones [visitors] do not like going to the VIC”* (ST1VIC8) but prefer to *“...access our website and use their smartphones”* (ST1VIC15). Staff reported that, while some older visitors might make telephone or email enquiries and receive the requested information electronically when planning their trips, they still prefer to visit the VIC, *“...although the information is readily available on the website”* (ST1VIC7). Furthermore, when they are in the area they still want to *“...speak to the person who sent them the information. Some just come to verify the information or even see the face of the person”* (ST1VIC8). This interaction with staff shows that

some visitors prefer to rely on the trustworthiness and credibility of staff's knowledge of the local area.

When asked how local tourism businesses prefer to receive information from VICs, most staff mentioned that they use various methods, both traditional and online. As ST1VIC12 emphasised, *"I don't think there is only one method. What they are interested in is to receive information that provides access to potential visitors and capacitates and equips them with skills to grow their businesses. However, with the advent of new electronic and online information sources, some businesses prefer to receive information through these platforms"*.

To summarise, the interviews with the staff showed that traditional, electronic, and online information sources are perceived to be important in information provision in the VIC environment. These sources should be used so that they target specific stakeholders, including differentiating between young and older visitors. Based on the findings, it is important that the current model of VIC operation, which mostly provides information through brochures, should be reviewed to incorporate new ways of information provision such as social media, mobile applications, Wi-Fi, and mobile VICs in order to help meet the changing needs of visitors and other stakeholders.

6.12 FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE INFORMATION PROVISION AT VICS

An analysis of the information that staff provided reveals several factors that largely influence the type of information they provide. These factors are discussed below.

6.12.1 Location of VICs

Table 6.3 shows that the VICs that participated in the study are located in different settings, and that their location determines the type of information provided and their operational times. Each of these issues is discussed below.

Table 6.3: Location of VICs

Type of facility	Location of VIC
Tourist attractions	Game reserve: VIC13 Museum: VIC7 Historical attraction: VIC1, VIC6, VIC12 Tourist town: VIC3, VIC4, VIC14 Beachfront: VIC8
Precincts	Shopping mall: VIC 5, VIC16, VIC18 Library: VIC17 City park: VIC15
Transport facilities	Bus terminal: VIC2, VIC9 Airport: VIC11 National highway: VIC10

Source: Researcher's own construction

- **Location-based information**

The findings show that the VIC located at the airport tends to be used for enquiries related to transport, directions, and flight schedules, while enquiries at VICs in the vicinity of tourist attractions tend to focus on offerings, amenities, and services and other neighbourhood activities. The VIC located along the national highway mainly provides information on tourism products along or near the highway.

In areas where VICs are the only facilities providing information, staff reported that they provide not only tourism information, but also general information to anyone using the VIC. This is particularly true for the VICs located in rural municipalities. ST1VIC17 mentioned: “...We have information on business information services, on how you can go about compiling a business plan. We also have information provided by GCIS, which is government information... for people looking for information about things like budget speech, State of the Nation Address (SONA). This is information mostly requested by learners as part of their research. We also provide any information that people might want to know about – e.g., social grants, land claims, municipal services. As a library, we give out any information”.

An example of how location determines the type of information that visitors require may be reflected in what a staff member responsible for managing three VICs in one city pointed out: *"...each VIC has different enquiries. Donkin VIC is focused more around historical information, while Boardwalk is on activities because we have all the accommodation establishments along the beachfront. The airport is more along transport enquiries"* (ST1VIC12). Staff working in VICs located near precincts such as a shopping mall or a transport facility reported that their main focus is to draw visitors to use VICs when visiting the facilities in the precinct. As ST2VIC18 shows, *"We are also in a very popular shopping mall, so all those who are around are able to see our office and walk in and enquire"*. ST2VIC9 mentioned that, *"...because there is a bus ticketing service in the complex, when people are waiting for their transportation, they can come to the VIC, it gives them a chance to look at the information we provide"*.

A VIC at a historical site presents an interesting case regarding the location of a VIC. ST1VIC1 mentioned that *"Most people who come here want to know the history of Bloemfontein. ... The VIC on its own has history because there is history of where it is located... Where we are now used to be a horse stable and clinic during the war between Afrikaners and English. So when [visitors] come here they want us to give them the history of where Bloemfontein, started because the word 'Bloemfontein' comes from a fountain where there were flowers on the site. The street where the VIC is built, President Street, is where Bloemfontein originated. The museum that is in front was a presidential house where previous presidents of the Orange Free State Province stayed"*. The discussion shows that visitors to this VIC are attracted not only by the information that staff provide, but also by other attractions in the immediate vicinity of the VIC.

The location of VICs is also important in determining their continued operation. Most staff reported that it is important that VICs are located in or near convenient and accessible facilities for them to receive visitors. To show how location might affect the operation of a VIC, ST1VIC18 shared a decision that the marketing agency took to close down a VIC that was not receiving enough visitors because *"...it was in a wrong location, the feed [flow of visitors] wasn't going through... there was no return on investment made"*. ST1VIC6 also presented a case of a VIC not receiving visitors because *"...the municipality had VICs in properties that they own to try and avoid*

things like rental. The challenge with such offices is that they are not in places where there is traffic of tourists... because you will find that in a month, you will have barely seen 100 visitors. It is under-utilised because the number of visitors is low". These responses show that the location of VICs should be carefully considered at the time that decisions are made to establish them.

- ***Location-based operational times***

Although staff in most of the VICs reported that they are operational during the week, with the majority open during the standard operating hours between 08h00 and 17h00, their location seems to determine their operational times. The results show that VICs located inside other facilities – such as in a shopping mall (VIC18), airport (VIC11), or national park (VIC13) – were reported to be aligned with the facilities' standard operating hours. This included the operational times of VICs being extended during the host facilities' peak periods, such as during public, school, festive, and Easter holidays. Similarly, VICs in host facilities that do not operate over weekends, such as the museum (VIC7) and the library (VIC17), were also not open at these times, thus limiting visitors' and other stakeholders' access to information at their convenience.

It is therefore important that staff consider how the location of VICs affects their accessibility and usage. Such considerations should be made at the planning and design phases of VICs to ensure that they are in locations that are accessible to visitors and to other users, such as surrounding communities, learners, and students, as this will facilitate their usage. More importantly, a convenient location can create a competitive advantage for VICs that target specific stakeholders and provide information that is tailor-made for their needs. In this way, VICs may increase their demand and usage and, in turn, enhance visitors' memorable experiences.

6.12.2 Staff skills and competencies

The staff identified different skills and competencies as being important to providing stakeholders with information and knowledge that meet their needs. In the main, most staff identified customer care, service excellence, and communication as being

important. Customer care and service excellence were mentioned as mainly important in enhancing visitors' experience. As a result, staff emphasised that VIC staff should be able to listen to and understand the needs of visitors. In addition, friendly staff were frequently mentioned as being at the centre of facilitating customer care and satisfying visitors' needs and expectations. Interpersonal and communication skills in particular were reported as soft skills that are important to communicate efficiently and effectively with stakeholders. Computer literacy skills were cited as being necessary when searching for online information and compiling reports. When combined with staff's expertise and product knowledge, customer service and interpersonal skills can enhance visitors' memorable experiences and influence their future behaviours. It is important, therefore, that VIC managers consider equipping staff with the requisite skills and competencies by exposing them to different training programmes.

6.12.3 Staff training

Staff mentioned training programmes they had attended in the past, and also identified their future training needs.

- ***Training attended***

The staff mentioned that they had undergone different types of training, including training related to the broader mandate of their organisations. The most often cited training programmes they have attended were for service excellence, customer care and service, telephone and communication etiquette, computer literacy, and MS Word and Excel. The staff of VICs providing a booking and reservation service or selling souvenirs (ST1VIC3 and ST2VIC18) mentioned that they have been trained in sales, marketing, and financial management.

While most staff mentioned that they also received training relevant to VIC operations and management at the time when the country was preparing to host the FIFA World Cup in 2010, that training was seen to be generic and not tailor-made to information and knowledge provision in a VIC environment. Furthermore, three staff members (ST1VIC5, ST1VIC7, and ST1VIC15) referred to the VIC training programme that they

had attended, offered by the Department of Tourism through the University of Pretoria. While the training was perceived to be relevant to the operations of VICs, it was seen to have been offered over a short period. Moreover, staff mentioned that they did not receive feedback on areas requiring improvement or those they might continue to do in their respective VICs. ST1VIC15 therefore mentioned that *“...we ended up not knowing areas where we did well or where we still need to improve, because we only got a certificate of competence that does not highlight areas where you have to make improvements”*. These limitations point to improvements that should be considered in future training programmes.

- ***Future training needs***

In addition to training they have received, staff identified training they still require to help them carry out their responsibilities, but mainly to keep them updated on current issues because, as ST2VIC18 mentioned, *“...things change very fast, especially now that there is social media. If you spend a day not being on Facebook, you will find that a lot has happened”*. Training on how to use social media in their daily work was frequently cited as an area in which they mainly need training. ST1VIC84 stated: *“...We need training on how we can leverage on the opportunities presented by social media. People want convenience, to be able to do things anywhere, as long as it suits them... Young people are forever on Facebook, Twitter, wanting to know what is going on in the world. We have the Internet, Wi-Fi but we also need social media”*. Staff from VICs that provide membership to local tourism businesses (ST1VIC3, ST1VIC4, and ST1VIC18) emphasised that they require further training in membership and stakeholder management so that they can provide a good service to their members.

Staff reported language barriers as the main challenge that they experience when communicating with visitors who are not conversant with English. They indicated that they often experience communication challenges when providing information to foreign visitors because, as ST2VIC9 stated, *“...you just never know, when they leave [the VIC], whether they received the right information”*. To address this challenge, some staff reported that they work closely with tourist guides who are familiar with foreign languages, or use Google Translate to translate the request into English. Furthermore, training in foreign languages such as French, Russian, Chinese,

German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese was often cited as important to help enhance visitors' positive experiences at VICs. However, the type of foreign language training required differed across the VICs. Most staff mentioned that they require training to help them communicate with international visitors from their source markets. For example, ST1VIC1 mentioned that *"...most of them [international visitors] are Germans, Netherlands, and their reasons of visiting Bloemfontein is that they can relate to the history of Bloemfontein. Others have relatives in South Africa"*. These staff members emphasised that training in the languages spoken by these visitors would be relevant to help staff communicate and meet the needs of visitors from these countries.

With tailor-made training for the VIC environment in areas such as information and knowledge provision, social media, and foreign languages having been identified as a priority area, staff should be encouraged to include it as part of their personal development plan when signing performance agreements with their supervisors. The training should identify the specific needs of each VIC, and make recommendations based on areas that need to be improved or strengthened in each VIC. Such training is important to ensure that visitors receive the best possible memorable and consistent service and experience throughout their trips.

Having discussed the views of VIC staff regarding information and knowledge that they provide and receive from visitors and other stakeholders, the next section presents the findings of focus group discussions conducted with surrounding communities in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs and mainly to achieve objective 4: to assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.

6.13 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS WITH SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

Given that the study was exploratory in nature, focus group discussions were used to obtain the views of surrounding communities about the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs. The focus group discussions afforded the researcher an opportunity to probe and to rephrase issues of importance, while allowing communities to ask for clarity and to elaborate on their views of the role of VICs where necessary. Such flexibility provided detailed and contextual information on information and knowledge exchange in VICs. Detailed and rich information from the focus group discussions complemented the findings from the semi-structured interviews with VIC staff and the numerical data, such as percentages and frequency counts, elicited from the surveys conducted with visitors and local tourism businesses.

Since 50 community members participated in the focus group discussions, only the verbatim responses that clearly articulate key themes related to information and knowledge exchange in VICs are used. To maintain consistency, similar descriptions assigned to the VICs whose staff took part in the semi-structured interviews were also used to denote the VICs whose surrounding communities participated in the focus group discussions. For example, Cape St Francis VIC is designated as VIC4 both in the interviews held with staff and the focus group discussions with surrounding communities (Table 6.3). Thus 'CM1VIC4' represents the first community member who participated in the focus group discussion held in the vicinity of VIC4.

This second part of the chapter provides the profile of community members who participated in the focus group discussions, followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from the data analysis. The summative discussion at the end of the chapter looks at the contribution that the exchange of information and knowledge can make to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities.

6.14 PROFILE OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The demographic information of participants is illustrated in the table below.

Table 6.4: Profile of community members

Name of VIC	Participant code	Gender	Age
Cape St Francis VIC: (VIC4)	CM1VIC4	Female	30-
	CM2VIC4	Female	34
	CM3VIC4	Female	42
	CM4VIC4	Female	40
	CM5VIC4	Female	38
	CM6VIC4	Female	32
Colesberg VIC: (VIC7)	CM1VIC7	Female	35
	CM2VIC7	Male	36
	CM3VIC7	Female	33
	CM4VIC7	Female	45
	CM5VIC7	Male	50
	CM6VIC7	Female	38
Makhado VIC: (VIC10)	CM1VIC10	Male	30
	CM2VIC10	Male	28
	CM3VIC10	Male	28
	CM4VIC10	Male	37
	CM5VIC10	Male	33
	CM6VIC10	Male	37
	CM7VIC10	Male	40
Pilanesberg VIC: (VIC13)	CM1VIC13	Female	21
	CM2VIC13	Female	21
	CM3VIC13	Male	28
	CM4VIC13	Female	20
	CM5VIC13	Male	22
	CM6VIC13	Male	30
	CM7VIC13	Male	22
	CM8VIC13	Female	28
Pilgrim's Rest VIC: (VIC14)	CM1VIC14	Female	28
	CM2VIC14	Female	31
	CM3VIC14	Female	52
	CM4VIC14	Male	27
	CM5VIC14	Female	25
	CM6VIC14	Female	30

Name of VIC	Participant code	Gender	Age
	CM7VIC14	Male	44
	CM8VIC14	Male	35
	CM9VIC14	Female	40
	CM10VIC14	Female	41
Senekal Library: (VIC17)	CM1VIC17	Male	22
	CM2VIC17	Male	27
	CM3VIC17	Female	30
	CM4VIC17	Female	23
	CM5VIC17	Female	33
	CM6VIC17	Female	27
	CM7VIC17	Female	25
Shelly Beach VIC: (VIC18)	CM1VIC18	Male	45
	CM2VIC18	Male	38
	CM3VIC18	Female	36
	CM4VIC18	Female	38
	CM5VIC18	Female	40
	CM6VIC18	Male	43
Total		Male: 21 Female: 29	

Source: Researcher's own construction

As illustrated in Table 6.4 above, almost an equal number of females (58%) and males (42%) participated in the focus groups discussions. The ages of these participants ranged between 20 and 52 years.

6.15 AWARENESS OF AND VISITS TO VICS

Community members expressed divergent views when asked whether they were aware of VICS in their vicinities and whether they had ever visited one. Of the 50 community members who participated in the focus group discussions, 45 said that they were aware of the VICS in their surrounding areas, while five were unaware of them. However, only 20 of the 45 community members who were aware of the VICS had actually visited them. Several aspects seemed to have influenced community members' awareness of VICS.

6.15.1 Location of VICs

The locations of the seven VICs within the communities that participated in the focus group discussions are indicated in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Location of VICs

Type of facility	Location of VIC
Tourist attractions	Game reserve: VIC13 Museum: VIC7 Tourist town: VIC4, VIC14
Precincts	Shopping mall: VIC18 Library: VIC17
Transport facilities	National highway: VIC10

Source: Researcher's own construction

The focus group discussions revealed the following main aspects that influenced awareness of the location of the VICs.

First, community members were aware of VICs because they are located in facilities that are popular with visitors. CM1VIC13 said: *"I know that there is an information centre [VIC] in the Pilanesberg Game Reserve. The reserve is one of the biggest reserves in the country, and tourists come to the reserve to see animals"*. Community members in the vicinity of VIC14 mentioned that they were aware of the VIC mainly because visitors are drawn by the attractions in the area. For example, CM2VIC14 mentioned that *"I know the VIC very well because this place gets a lot of tourists from different places... They [visitors] want to see the museums that are around here"*.

Second, community members were aware of VICs because they are located inside or near central facilities where they go about their daily lives, such as grocery stores, shopping malls, banks, restaurants, and entertainment areas. CM5VIC18 mentioned that *"I know the VIC because it is on my way to Checkers [grocery store], and this is where a lot of people go to do their groceries"*, while CM3VIC18 pointed out that *"...the VIC is well located... because if I go there I have four to five things to do, including [going to] the bank"*. Although some VICs are located inside or near facilities that are

often used by visitors, some community members had never visited them because they were not aware of the work of VICs. For instance, CM1VIC13 mentioned that *“...I passed the information centre for a year, but did not know what it was about and how it can help me, until one day I went in to see what they are doing at the centre”*. For VIC17, three of the seven community members who participated in the focus group mentioned that, despite being regular users of the library where the VIC is located, they were not aware of the VIC section or of the brochure stand in the library. CM3VIC17 said: *“I do not have much information about tourism information that is available in the library”*; CM4VIC17 indicated that *“I don’t know much about tourism information that the library provides”*; while CM5VIC17 said: *“I have not seen the stand”*. Although the other four community members were aware of the brochure stand, none had used any of the displayed information. In fact, CM2VIC17 said: *“I don’t know how the brochures can help me, I am not aware how that information can help me”*.

Third, the accessibility of the facilities in which VICs are located influenced community members’ awareness of these VICs. CM1VIC18 mentioned that, *“...with the Shelly Beach VIC being in a shopping mall, many people know about it and can easily access it”*.

Although most community members were aware of the VICs, they reported that they had not used those that were not accessible by public transport. This is mainly because rural communities often rely on public transport as a way to access facilities such as shopping malls or banks. This was emphasised by community members near VIC4; CMVIC4 mentioned that *“...the VIC is in a shopping mall that most people from the township do not visit, so that is why they would not know about it”*. CM2VIC4 added that *“the VIC is also situated very far from public transport... It is in a shopping centre that is too far from public transport”*. Community members residing near VIC17 pointed out that transport costs to the VIC were the main challenge making it inaccessible to the surrounding communities. In this regard, CM4VIC17 mentioned that *“...the library is in town, and most people from the township would not use it to find information because they would require transport to travel to it”*.

For CM1VIC17, even though he had not used any of the information from the VIC section of the library, he saw some value in it because he noted: *“I think the people who can benefit more are the students who are doing research on tourism because they can get information about other places, how people there live, history of the place, their food”*. The value that this community member attached to VIC information should encourage staff to embark on initiatives to raise awareness of the functions of VICs. More importantly, the initiatives should focus on how VIC information can benefit different community members, such as youth, women, local businesses, or other cultural and heritage groups.

The responses on the location of VICs are critical for staff to consider the issue: they show that an awareness of VICs is not enough to guarantee usage. In the interviews with staff, they emphasised the location of VICs in convenient and accessible facilities as being important to their usage and continued operation. They emphasised that a convenient location can create a competitive advantage for VICs that target specific stakeholders and provide information that is tailor-made for their needs. In this way, community members emphasised that it is important that staff understand the needs and challenges that make it difficult for them to use VICs, and then devise initiatives to reach out to them in their own localities. Moreover, it is important that the location of VICs be carefully considered during the planning and design phase so that they are easily accessible for both visitors and surrounding communities to use. They should also be located in central facilities where community members can access multiple services that are important in their daily lives, such as shopping malls and banks, rather than spend money on travelling just to obtain information. Such a central place was also seen by community members to be important for visitors to receive the different services they might require. CM6VIC18 emphasised that *“...they [visitors] need a focal point where they would go and get every information they need”*.

6.15.2 Operational times of VICs

The operational times of VICs were found to have an influence on their usage. VICs located inside other facilities, such as in a shopping mall that is open over weekends and public holidays, were seen to be convenient for community members. CM3VIC18

even compared the operational times of VIC18 with those of a neighbouring VIC, stating: *“...there is a VIC in Margate, but though it is closer to where I work, I have never been to it because, by the time I knock off from work, they are already closed; but the Shelly Beach VIC is always open because it is in the shopping mall”*.

The operational times of VICs were also stressed by VIC staff as important to their usage. Findings from the interviews showed that VICs located in facilities with extended operational times that are also open during peak periods, such as public, school, festive, and Easter holidays, allowed visitors and other stakeholders to access information at their convenience. It therefore follows that, in order to meet the needs of their stakeholders, VICs must consider the convenience of their operational times for their stakeholders.

6.15.3 Information and services offered by VICs

The information and services offered by VICs were found to have influenced community members' awareness of the VICs in their vicinity. Most community members mentioned that they were aware of the VICs in their local areas because of the different types of information they provide. Most mentioned some general information such as business licences, the contact details of local schools, colleges, and universities, and emergency numbers such as those for the police, ambulance, and local clinics. As a student, CM3VIC13 mentioned that *“...I knew about the VIC when I was doing research for my studies”*.

With regard to services, community members of VIC17 in particular referred to services offered by the library, rather than the VIC, such as making photocopies, using the Internet to search for jobs or access email, or reading newspapers and magazines. As CM5VIC17 explained, *“Most of the people do not use it [the library] to search for tourism information, but mostly to get information for assignments, to use the Internet, to look for jobs”*. CM1VIC17 added that *“You will never find a person using the library to search for information when making preparation to travel, to know the weather of the place they want to visit”*. These responses show that community members could not relate to the library's function of providing tourism information. The findings support

those from the interviews with staff that surrounding communities use VICs mainly to obtain general and non-tourism-related information. Furthermore, they also confirm that students are among the main stakeholders who use VICs for educational purposes to obtain information that will help them to complete their assignments and research projects. It is important that staff embark on campaigns to create awareness of the tourism-related function of VICs, and how the local community could benefit from this function.

6.15.4 Visible signage

Visible signage to and at VICs was seen to create awareness of their existence and of the information and services they provide. Visible signage was mainly emphasised by community members near VIC18 and VIC10 as being important to direct visitors to those VICs. For VIC18, community members were happy with signage to and at the VIC, as it is visible from a distance. To emphasise the importance of visible signage, CM5VIC18 compared this VIC with another neighbouring VIC that was not part of the study. She pointed out that *“the information centre [VIC18] is very visible, it is clear to see that it is an information centre... so you can't miss it... the problem with the Margate VIC is signage, it is on the beach... but when you drive around, the signage is not visible... so somebody might just miss it”*. Community members residing near VIC10 also expressed concern about signage to the VICs. CM1VIC10 stressed that *“...It is not visible. A visitor can even pass it without even knowing that it is an information centre. It is just a piece of a signage”*. This community member further suggested that *“...you can put a big sign like a billboard ...because it attracts. Everyone who passes can see that this is a place where you can get information”*.

Referring to the security and safety of visitors, CM1VIC18 emphasised how visible signage could direct those who find themselves in distressed situations to know where to obtain assistance, *“...because a lot of people come here, they don't know the area. I think the VIC should have good signage. There must be a big tourism sign, the big i sign that people can see it, so they can go there and explain that they had been mugged and request that they be assisted with a telephone number or contact person to report a crime”*. Visitor's safety was perceived by most staff members as an

important factor to ensure that visitors enjoy their stay in the area. Thus the VIC must provide safety leaflets and brochures to alert visitors to particularly unsafe areas.

Branding is related to signage at VICs – especially standardised branding, so that all VICs are branded in the same way. This issue was also emphasised in the interviews with staff (ST1VIC6, ST2VIC12, ST1VIC13) as being important not only to direct visitors to VICs but also to assure them of the quality of the information and service they might expect at the VICs. ST1VIC6, ST2VIC12, and ST1VIC13 in particular raised concerns about the lack of branding at their VICs. ST1VIC13 stated that *“I have a problem with my information centre because it is not well-branded. So some people are unable to identify this facility as an information centre because there is no “i” sign... that is visible to tourists... that it is an information centre that operates according to standards of the VIC”*. The main issue raised by this community member is that *“...it [the VIC] is at an entry point, so it should be visible to everybody. Everyone who enters through the Park’s gate should be able to see it from a distance... It must have that attraction... I would really appreciate to see the VIC branded with the “i” sign”*. For ST1VIC6, *“...the challenge is that we... do not have a tourism brand for the VIC, so whenever we market ourselves, we use the corporate brand, which is also not the right way to go because all the leading cities ... have a brand that they market themselves with”*.

The concerns about the lack of VIC branding raised by staff members corroborates those raised by community members on signage, highlighting the need for VICs to be clearly labelled so that they are easily identifiable and be recognised by users. The emphasis placed on visible signage and the branding of VICs is important to distinguish them from other information centres, such as libraries, including differentiating the information and services they provide. Also important is that associating VICs with a particular sign and brand will help users to know what to expect, and assure them of the credibility of the information and services they will receive. However, to provide a similar quality of information and services across VICs would require some form of standardisation. The Department of Tourism, at a national level, could play a leading role in guiding such standardisation to which all branded VICs would be expected to adhere.

6.16 INFORMATION THAT SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES RECEIVED FROM VICS

Community members were asked about the information they received from VICS. The responses provided by those who had visited VICS indicated that they received different types of information for different purposes. The following responses reflected community members' different uses.

First, CM4VIC18 received information not only to plan his trip but also on other things he and his family (resident in the surrounding community) could do in the visited area. This shows that staff provide information relevant to visitors at the different stages of their journey; thus CM4VIC1 mentioned that *"...we were planning to go [to the] Kruger [National Park], and wanted some information before we go there, especially about accommodation closer to Kruger [National Park], where we can sleep, and what other things we can do when we were there... They gave us information that we needed, and that helped us a lot, even when we were there, we knew where to go"*.

Second, CM3VIC13 received tourism-related information she wanted to use for educational purposes. She mentioned that *"...I studied tourism in high school. So I used to go there to look for information to do assignments"*.

Third, CM3VIC10 received general information, indicating that *"I have never used it [the VIC] for tourism purposes, but came here asking for information on how I can also get a stall here [near the VIC] to sell my crafts and how I can register my business. So they referred me to the local municipality"*.

As highlighted in section 6.15, only 20 of the 45 community members who were aware of VICS actually visited them. Thus most of community members had not received information from their local VICS. A limited engagement between staff and surrounding communities was cited as the main reason for not visiting VICS. Although most focus groups pointed out this lack of community engagement, it was most strongly emphasised by community members near VIC13. For example, CM6VIC13 mentioned that *"...what I have observed about the information centre is that they do not engage*

a lot with the community because most of the community members here do not know about it. They [VIC staff] do not go to the community and inform them about the centre or what they do, they don't work together with the community". CM7VIC13 described this lack of community engagement: "What I have observed is that the information centre does not engage us as the community and inform us about what happens inside the park. That is why we do not know about facilities in the park, accommodation or activities you can do in the park, entrance fees, food prices". To emphasise this point, CM6VIC17 said that "The problem is that the staff do not talk to the community. Most people don't know that they can get information on tourism in the library".

It is interesting to note that this lack of community engagement was also emphasised by community members who had visited VICs, as they did so out of sheer curiosity or on their own initiative. CM1VIC13 stated: *"I don't think they [VIC staff] are doing enough to engage the community to know about them, unless you take the initiative to go and visit the centre... The only time I got to know about the information centre is when I took the initiative to visit because I passed that building [the VIC] every time I went to work". CM4VIC4 added that "I was in the bakery and just saw the brochure stand there, so I just went in because there is no door between the bakery and the office, and they told me that they provide information about places of interest, so I took some brochures and pamphlets".*

The lack of community engagement might be a reflection of what most staff mentioned: that, besides local tourism businesses and learners and students, they do not have any specific information solely dedicated to surrounding communities. This suggests that staff still have to embark on initiatives to involve surrounding communities and create socio-economic opportunities that will improve their lives. However, this is different from the role that the staff of VIC18 (ST1VIC18 and ST2VIC18) play in their surrounding communities, working closely with local area committees to bring communities' tourism-related needs to the attention of the marketing agency and the local municipality. Other VICs might learn from VIC18 how public entities such as VICs could benefit communities in their surrounding areas. This point was emphasised by CM2VIC13: *"...they [staff] need to engage the community, we are the beneficiaries of developments and things that happen in our vicinity".* On this basis, community

members suggested various sources of information they would like to receive from staff, as discussed below in section 6.17.

6.17 SOURCES USED TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

When asked how they would like to receive information, similar to the sentiments echoed in the interviews with staff, community members emphasised that staff should use various traditional and online methods and formats, both on-site and off-site. The suggested sources and methods for providing information are discussed in detail below.

6.17.1 Face-to-face information sources

Community members identified different ways in which information should be provided through face-to-face communication. In this regard, printed material such as brochures, pamphlets, and maps were mostly mentioned.

First, on-site, they mentioned that staff should provide information to community members who physically visit VICs. For example, CM1VIC13 mentioned that *“There should also be a person available at the information centre to help you with information you are looking for”*.

Second, off-site, staff should provide information telephonically to community members who are unable to visit VICs.

Third, community members residing near VIC13 emphasised that, off-site, *“...information that should benefit the community should be communicated through community structures and forums, ward councillors”* (CM6VIC13). CM8VIC13 added that *“...each ward in the community can nominate people who can serve as focal points to engage the information centre, because it is not everyone in the community who will be able to go to the information centre”*.

Community members emphasised that face-to-face communication would allow them to outline fully the information they required, and to reach clarity on any issues they might have. They also emphasised that such face-to-face interaction would enable staff to provide information and suggest other activities and places of interest in the local area.

Despite the presence of staff being mentioned by community members as important in information provision, older community members were more inclined to emphasise a human presence than were young people, who were seen to prefer online information sources such as social media. As CM1VIC18 mentioned: *"...We must never get off the idea that, yes, young people these days want to use social media, but it is vitally important to still have that one-on-one contact with a person to talk to, moan, complain, and whine to".* CM2VIC18 added that *"...young people do not have time to pick up this piece of paper and read it, no, no"*. Similarly, the use of printed brochures was emphasised by older community members (CM4VIC18): *"I still believe that people still like to pick up a nice glossy magazine, they still like to use a map, even though there is a GPS. There is still a lot of us from that generation that are still comfortable with pamphlets. We still like to pick up and read books, magazines, newspapers, so the VIC has to provide these to people like us so that we can take them home"*.

6.17.2 Broadcast media

Traditional media such as local newspapers and community radio stations were suggested as sources that staff could use to provide information to surrounding communities. Although these sources may be seen as outdated, given the prominence of social media, they were emphasised as being relevant to reach communities in rural areas. Young people residing near VIC13 also emphasised the relevance of these sources in providing information in local languages to their rural communities. For example, CM1VIC13 mentioned that *"It [the information] should actually be through local newspapers and community radio... We have a community radio here; information could also be communicated through the community radio. I think the community radio is able to reach up to 60% of community members. So the information*

centre can use the community radio". CM5VIC18 mentioned that "...*the community radio can also help the VIC to create awareness about what they are doing, because a lot of people in the rural areas still listen to radio*". The use of local newspapers and community radio as information sources to reach rural communities were also emphasised during the interviews held with the staff of VIC16 and VIC18. These media are used to disseminate and share local information in local languages that most rural community members understand.

6.17.3 Online information sources

With regard to online information sources, community members in the focus group discussions acknowledged the widespread use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the dissemination of tourism information. They mainly cited the Internet, smartphones, mobile applications, and social media platforms as sources that VICs should use to disseminate information.

To emphasise this, CM2VIC18 mentioned that "...*this is a generation of social media, you can't run away from it*". Given the prominence of social media, this community member added: "...*VICs have to be on social media... because that is the only thing that sells today*". In particular, community members acknowledged that, in order to cater to the needs of young people, VICs should also disseminate information through social media; CM1VIC13, for example, pointed out that "...*the information should be disseminated through social media, especially because young people are very much into social media*".

While the advantages associated with using these new information sources, such as providing different types of information to a number of people at the same time and at their convenience, were discussed in all the focus groups, they were emphasised more in the focus groups with younger community members, such as those near VIC10 and VIC13. For example, CM6VIC10 mentioned that "...*young people are busy. They will not come here [to the VIC], but if you post anything on Facebook, that is where you will get them*". CM2VIC13 mentioned that "*Most young people are on social media, so if the information centre can capitalise on that, they will be able to reach a lot of young*

people. It is rare that you will find a young person who is not on Facebook. We are all active there because this is where we get to know what is going on around us in the world”.

The availability of free Wi-Fi was identified as an important resource that VICs could use to attract users. This view was emphasised by CM3VIC13: *“...the information centre should also offer free Wi-Fi... It can attract young people to use the information centre”*. In addition, *“...Wi-Fi can help our children to do their assignments. We [parents] can also be able to search for jobs”* (CM5VIC4).

The websites of marketing agencies were also identified – mainly by community members near VIC17 – as important sources that staff could use to provide information to surrounding communities. They emphasised that these should be updated and maintained regularly in order to provide up-to-date information. This suggestion follows a concern raised by CM2VIC17, who *“...went into the Setsoto local municipality website and found that it still has old information, which shows that it is not updated regularly”*. It is on this basis that CM5VIC17 emphasised that current and updated information *“...might make them [visitors] to come and visit Senekal”*, while CM2VIC17 noted that *“...the municipality needs a dedicated person to update the website so that there is recent information about all the things that Senekal has to offer, accommodation, B&Bs, restaurants that are available here. I think the website of Senekal should be updated”*.

In relation to maintaining technological resources, community members in the vicinity of VIC10 raised concerns that *“...some of the information kiosks are not working, because they were built specifically to provide information to visitors during the 2010 FIFA World Cup; but now the visitors are gone, they are white elephants because, when they were built, they did not consider how they should be maintained in order to continue to support local businesses”* (CM2VIC10). Similar concerns about information kiosks that were not operational and about the lack of maintenance plans were also raised in the interviews with the staff of VIC15 and VIC16.

The discussion on information sources showed that, to be effective, staff must use a variety of information sources – face-to-face, broadcast media, and online – in a

complementary and targeted manner. This would enhance their role and relevance in the community – as CM3VIC10 argued: “...*there is still a role [for the VIC] but it has to somehow move with the times, be technologically advanced*”. CM1VIC emphasised that VICs should be transformed into “...*technologically advanced centres, as not everyone in the community has a cell phone or data to use the Internet, given the high cost of data charged by network providers*”.

6.18 INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE SUPPLIED BY SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

From the focus group discussions, it was evident that community members had not supplied VIC staff with any information or knowledge. Although community members emphasised the importance of a reciprocal relationship of information exchange between themselves and VIC staff, some members emphasised the importance of supplying staff with knowledge on “...*things that are in the community that staff do not know about, like youth groups doing cultural dances, which visitors may like to see. We have a lot of things, like traditional food*” (CM2VIC13). This knowledge may not be available in brochures or pamphlets, but may be sourced from specific individuals in the surrounding communities owing to their experience of having lived in the area for a long time. An example of such information may be seen in what CM2VIC10 said: “...*we have bird fanatics, so staff [with information from surrounding communities] can tell tourists about the different types of birds in this area, where can they find them, because once a year in winter, there is a flock of birds to this area because our area is warm in winter. That information you can’t find it here [in the VIC]*”. This information relates to knowledge that could be passed on to VIC staff by the surrounding communities.

Most community members also emphasised the role of tourist guides in providing local knowledge. They mentioned that VIC staff could also acquire knowledge about local tourism products from tourist guides, given the extensive knowledge they gather from taking visitors on organised tours to these products. In addition, tourist guides could link staff with community members, such as storytellers who might share their extensive indigenous knowledge of the history, culture, and traditions of the local

areas. As CM1VIC7 stated: *“... tourist guides and tour operators from the community must also be involved in the VIC, because those are the people who know much about the community, so the VIC should link the tourist guides and tour operators with tourists”*. Tourist guides and tour operators could also link VIC staff with arts and cultural groups that can entertain visitors. As CM1VIC13 mentioned, *“...we have cultural groups, artists, taverns, etc., that can actually provide tourists with a different experience of what they are not used to. This is an experience that is unique and can only be found in our area”*. CM4VIC13 added that *“There are many cultural groups in the community who can entertain tourists, give them a real experience of African dance and culture”*.

To emphasise further the importance of supplying information and knowledge, community members in the vicinity of VIC13 and VIC18 emphasised that surrounding communities should also take initiatives and participate in programmes and events organised by VICs. In fact, to derive socio-economic opportunities from the VICs or the wider tourism sector, CM6VIC13 said: *“I think that it is important that we as community members should not be ignorant about things that happen around us. We therefore have to also go out and ask about things in our vicinity, about the park. We know that September is Tourism Month, we should also attend events that are organised during Tourism Month, during Heritage Day”*.

To emphasise the initiatives that community members should take, CM6VIC13 said: *“As much as we go out to go to malls to get information about banks, it is necessary that we also visit the park to know more about their offerings, information centre, lodges in the park”*. In addition, CM2VIC18 mentioned that *“As the community... we must be able to go to the VIC and say this is who we are and this is what we are doing; by doing that we will also be empowering that centre to be alive and be a focal point for our area”*. CM3VIC18 emphasised: *“So at the end it is about businesses [in the local community] also taking the initiative to engage the VIC on their initiatives, new things, even challenges, because we don't want visitors to be inconvenienced when they come here”*.

These responses show that community members acknowledge the importance of exchanging information and knowledge with VIC staff. While they recognise that the

information and knowledge they exchange with staff might generate socio-economic opportunities, they also acknowledge that it could facilitate visitors' experiences, as they will be exposed to authentic products and experiences that staff might not be able to provide.

6.19 SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Although none of the community members mentioned that they had supplied the VICs with information or knowledge of any kind, they identified the information and knowledge they would like to receive and supply to VICs that might create socio-economic opportunities for them. This is information, first, to create awareness about the functions of VICs; second, to create economic opportunities for surrounding communities; third, to list local businesses and other entrepreneurs in the databases of marketing agencies; fourth, to educate and empower communities; and last, to assist learners and students. However, this information differs across the VICs, and depends largely on their location and on the needs of communities.

- **Create awareness about the functions of VICs**

Some community members indicated that, even though they were aware of VICs in their surrounding areas, they were not aware of the work of VICs, and had not visited them. Community members residing in the vicinity of VIC17 in particular mentioned that, although they had used the services of the library, they were not aware of the VIC section or the brochure stand in the library. In this regard some community members suggested that VIC staff embark on campaigns to create awareness of their services and information, and encourage surrounding communities to visit and use the information and services they offer. This may be seen in what CM3VIC13 said: *"I think the community should be trained on the importance of tourism and how it can benefit them. The people who are trained would therefore go out and inform others... because most of the people do not have a culture of travelling, do not know the attractions around, museums, nature, fauna and flora, they just don't have any information about tourism-related issues"*. Engaging community members in this way could help to

expose them to the work of the VIC and the tourism sector in general, and to the opportunities that might be available in the sector.

- **Create economic opportunities**

Community members mentioned that VIC staff should provide information that contributes to job creation and community empowerment and development, thereby improving the quality of their lives. This point was emphasised by community members residing near VIC13. Most of them were young and unemployed, and thus they emphasised issues that could improve their lives. CM5VIC13 mentioned that *“...since the park is located in the community... we need information on how the park can benefit the community”*. For CM8VIC13, *“...It [the park] should engage the community and provide jobs for young people from the nearby community. I think this will also reduce unemployment in the community”*. CM8VIC13 stated: *“...most importantly is for the community to know about the benefits they can get from tourists; I think this will also reduce unemployment in the community”*. It is in this regard that CM3VIC13 suggested that *“...the community should be trained on the importance of tourism and how it can benefit them. The people who are trained would therefore go out and inform others... Because most of the people do not have a culture of travelling, do not know the attractions around, museums, nature, fauna and flora, they just don't have any information about tourism-related issues”*.

Similarly, in the other focus groups community members emphasised information they could get from the VIC in order to help create job opportunities for young people, given the high unemployment rate in the country. CM2VIC14 stated that *“We have our children here, so we request the information centre [VIC] to involve them and help to create job opportunities for them, even if it is a two days' work. We are asking the information centre manager to consider our children when there are events”*. Other community members, such as those in the vicinity of VIC4 and VIC17, emphasised information about job advertisements. With unemployment, particularly among young people, seen as the main challenge facing rural communities, VICs can play a role in providing information that directs people to opportunities that may be available, not only in the VIC environment, but also generally in the tourism sector. Fulfilling this role would require VICs to work closely with surrounding communities. It is on this basis

that the staff of VIC18 (ST1VIC and ST2VIC18) emphasised the role they play in bringing the needs of surrounding communities to the attention of the marketing agency and the local municipality.

- **Create a marketing platform for local businesses**

Most community members emphasised the importance of providing staff with information and knowledge about local products in their communities. As CM1VIC13 noted, “... *There are many people who are talented in the community, they are not exposed, they do not have a platform to expose their talent, they are far from people who can expose them to tourism*”. CM1VIC7 added that “...*most businesses do not have the know-how to market themselves*”. For CM6VIC18, “*The VIC can actually help those who are doing crafts in the villages because they do not have the money to market their businesses; the VIC can do it for them; they need to be exposed on what they are doing*”. Community members therefore suggested that local businesses and other skilled people submit their profiles to VICs so that they could be alerted to business opportunities or linked to visitors. This suggestion was emphasised by CM2VIC4, who mentioned that “*there is a knitting project where people are knitting jerseys, scarf, etc. There is another one where they do crafts, baskets, pottery. So the VIC can inform tourists about those projects so that they can go and purchase those products*”.

Most VIC staff indicated that their marketing units keep a database of the profiles of local businesses. Being listed in databases could create a marketing platform for businesses to connect with visitors for the possible purchase of their products, and so enable the businesses to earn an income from the sale of their products. Staff would create a platform for other small businesses, such as arts and crafts, to enter the marketplace to reap the socio-economic opportunities that are enjoyed by big businesses such as hotels and restaurants. Furthermore, as staff emphasised, the database could help to facilitate networking, collaboration, linkages, and working together among the different businesses in the surrounding communities.

- ***Preferential treatment of local businesses listed in VIC databases***

Community members suggested that local businesses that submitted their business profiles for registration in the databases should receive preferential treatment when staff make recommendations about possible goods and services that visitors might want to purchase. Some community members added that these businesses should receive preferential treatment to exhibit, display, and showcase their locally made products inside the VICs. They particularly emphasised preferential procurement from businesses owned by disadvantaged groups such as youth, women, and people living with disabilities. They suggested that staff develop and implement a procurement plan that emphasises the preferential patronage of businesses owned by these disadvantaged groups. This would create new market-related opportunities to support the development and empowerment of disadvantaged groups, as many are marginalised when trying to participate in the procurement process.

- ***Tourism events hosted in surrounding communities***

Hosting tourism events in local areas and not in the VIC environment was suggested as another way in which staff could create socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities. CM7VIC13 suggested: “... *the information centre should, during September when they have tourism events, to have these in the community and not necessarily inside the park... I think the community will learn much about how they can benefit from the park*”. CM4VIC13 added: “...*if there can be events that take place in our villages, a lot of people who have talents, artists, cultural dance groups can be able to access information on how they can expose their talents*”.

Tourism events, such as those hosted during Tourism Month to highlight the importance of tourism and to promote domestic tourism, were mentioned as examples of events that could be hosted in local areas. Most community members suggested that local businesses showcase their products and services at the events for possible purchase by attendees. Some suggested that VIC staff create job opportunities for surrounding communities by working with them to plan and make logistical arrangements to host the events. As emphasised by CM7VIC13: “*They can employ*

people to work in the event, during that time when the event is held. There is a lot that we can do even before the event. We can clean the venue before and after the event, we can help to get equipment from the community, set it up, we can do catering and prepare food". With events hosted in their own areas, community members would feel a sense of pride and ownership, and would acquire new skills, such as planning and organising skills they could use later for their own and their community's benefit. These are social opportunities that surrounding communities could receive from being involved with VICs.

Other community members suggested that local businesses and other community members be involved in exposing visitors to unique, authentic, and memorable experiences of the local culture, such as events, serving traditional cuisine, and selling locally made products such as arts and crafts. They could also expose them to a homestay experience in which they obtain insight into the local lifestyle and culture from the family hosting them. Through participating in the local culture, visitors could co-create memorable experiences with local communities. For surrounding communities, participating in tourism events could help to generate an income to improve their lives.

In the interviews with staff, they mentioned that local businesses supply them with information about events they plan to host. Besides indicating that the information on local events is used to compile a calendar of events, staff did not mention their involvement in the hosting of local events or in any opportunities that local businesses derive from supplying information; their involvement was limited to an emphasis on providing local businesses with an opportunity to market and showcase their products at national and international events.

- ***Education and empowerment of communities***

Community members emphasised the role that staff should play in providing not only tourism-related information, but also other general information, to address the needs of surrounding communities. The VIC was even likened to a library with regard to the different types of information staff should provide. As CM1VIC13 emphasised: *"...it [VIC] should really be pretty much like a library, have information that would not only*

benefit tourists but also the surrounding community". CM1VIC4 even insisted: *"...the VIC must work with the library because all of them provide information"*.

Although some general information – such as safety information, emergency numbers, and advertisements on vacancies – was emphasised in most focus group discussions, community members also identified specific kinds of information that VICs in their surrounding areas should provide, such as those discussed below.

First, communities near VIC13, which is located inside a provincial park, emphasised that *"...they [staff] should be able to provide any information about the park and surrounding areas... They should be able to give you information, activities, facilities, restaurants, accommodation, other lodges in the park"* (CM2VIC13). In addition to park facilities, community members mentioned that they require information that will educate them. CM2VIC13 stressed this point: *"We also need information about the animals in the park, about conservation... People know very little about the park... we know very little about animals"*.

Second, some community members residing in the surrounds of VIC13 mentioned that *"...the information centre should also provide information about our heritage... about life before the park, because it used to be a huge village before the park was established; there is also a cemetery inside the park"* (CM2VIC13).

Third, communities residing in tourist towns near VIC4 and VIC14 were mainly interested in information on how to be hospitable to visitors. For example, CM2VIC4 said: *"...the VIC must be about everything around us...when there are tourists we should be able to tell them where they can go, like [in the local area]"*. For CM1VIC14, *"...the information centre staff can workshop the community on how to look after the tourists, how to engage them, how to make them feel safe"*.

The responses about the type of information required by community members point to the need for the education and empowerment of surrounding communities. As part of their research work, VIC staff could start by identifying community needs, and use the intelligence gathered to conduct intervention workshops to meet community needs. This might involve staff directly conducting lectures and workshops, or collaborating

with other educational institutions to offer educational programmes that are tailor-made for the needs of surrounding communities. Considering the comment made by CM1VIC13, staff could also offer programmes in which trained community members train others as well – i.e., train-a-trainer programmes. The community member (CM1VIC13) indicated that *“We have 32 wards, and if there can be one person from each of these wards who is trained, within six months they would have spread the word about the information centre, and that would encourage the community to visit and use the information centre”*.

Just as staff mentioned that local businesses receive information aimed at educating and empowering them, community members also emphasised that they would like to obtain information that would capacitate them on issues that might benefit them.

- ***Information and resources to assist learners and students***

In most focus group discussions, community members identified learners and students as those who should benefit the most from the information provided by staff. Staff also identified them as being among the main users of VICs. Community members therefore identified several areas in which staff could assist learners and students.

First, most community members mentioned that staff could assist learners and students studying tourism-related studies by providing them with material such as the brochures and pamphlets they require to complete assignments and research projects. For example, although CM4VIC14 was not aware of the VIC brochure stand in the Senekal library, he suggested that *“...the people who can benefit more are the students who are doing research on tourism, because they can get information about other places, how people there live, history of the place, their food”*.

Second, community members emphasised that, owing to high unemployment levels among graduates, it is important that staff have information available on bursaries, learnerships, and internship programmes, not only in the tourism sector but also in other sectors of society such as education, health, or information technology, that could be provided to learners and students from surrounding communities. Such

information is important to expose students to opportunities that could equip them with the critical skills, such as planning, organising, communication, project management, and good writing skills, that are required in the job market.

Third, owing to the lack of libraries or facilities offering public access to computers in some communities, CM4VIC4 suggested that “...*the VIC should be able to help learners who do not have computers, especially if they have to do assignments, because in Cape St Francis, the little library that is there is not open every day for the public*”. Moreover, learners and students who are required to do assignments and research projects might benefit from using facilities in the VIC, such as printers, photocopying machines, scanners, and Wi-Fi.

Fourth, community members emphasised that staff could make VIC boardrooms available for learners and students to use when compiling their assignments and research projects. Furthermore, these boardrooms could serve as meeting venues for various groups in the surrounding communities, such as youth, women, political parties, or arts and culture organisations.

The discussion in this section showed that, despite staff not being supplied with information or knowledge, most community members pointed to the importance of doing so. As a result, they identified information and knowledge that they think might present socio-economic opportunities that would improve their lives. Most of the information they suggested was mentioned by staff as benefits that local businesses receive from being listed in the databases of their marketing units. In this way, community members supported the views expressed by the staff, although they emphasised information that could create employment opportunities and improve their lives. It is also important to point out that community members highlighted several information needs; yet most staff members mentioned that they are already providing such information. For example, community members identified non-tourism-related information, information and resources to assist learners and students, and working with local businesses as areas they would like staff to pay attention to. These areas were emphasised by the majority of the staff as part of their roles and of the information they provide. This suggests that there is a communication gap and limited engagement between the staff and surrounding communities. It is therefore important that staff

intensify their awareness and outreach programmes, and work with community structures such as CTOs that are already operating in tourism-related activities with local businesses in communities.

6.20 IMPROVEMENTS TO INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE SUGGESTED BY SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

The suggestions provided by community members indicate that the functions of VICs should go beyond the mere provision of tourism-related information, as is the case in most VICs. In fact, VICs should extend their functions to address the needs of different people in surrounding communities: not only local tourism businesses, but also learners and students, for example. In this way, VICs would become multi-functional information centres that contribute to the upliftment of the surrounding communities in which they are located. To achieve this role, community members emphasised the importance of the skills needed to provide information and knowledge. They mentioned that, similar to frontline staff in other service sectors such as in restaurants or hotels, VIC staff – as the first point of contact with most visitors – “...are critical, as they can make or break the visitors’ experience” (CM1VIC18). They therefore identified the required skills and some form of experience in tourism-related studies as being critical to working in the VIC environment, and to providing information and knowledge that meet the needs of visitors. Like the staff, community members mentioned that VICs require staff who are friendly, customer-service oriented, computer literate, passionate about tourism, and willing to help people; have good interpersonal and communication skills; and are able to speak different languages. Community members also emphasised knowledge of local products, which staff could obtain from them. They mentioned that staff should also have a wide knowledge, be familiar with local products, and “...must know the area like the palm of their hands” (CM3VIC10). They should have the skills to use different sources to search for information that is not at their disposal, and know where to obtain that information or knowledge that would enhance visitors’ experience. Community members in almost all the focus groups emphasised the importance of staff training. In this regard, CM4VIC18 stated that “staff needs to be empowered and be taken to training courses

in order to sharpen their skills of providing information... and be able to use different means of providing information using social media, brochures, and pamphlets”.

Training in social media was also emphasised by the staff as necessary to enable them to participate in social media and remain relevant in an era driven by technology. Such positive services might encourage visitor's behavioural intentions so that they revisit the areas, recommend the areas to their friends and relatives, extend the length of their stay, and spend more money in the areas they visit.

6.21 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed research objectives 3, 4, and 5, which relate to the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs and the opportunities presented by this exchange. The findings reveal that different types of information are exchanged between VIC staff and the various stakeholders involved in the operation of VICs, such as local tourism businesses, institutions of learning, surrounding communities, nearby VICs, and nearby embassies. However, this exchange is carried out in an ad hoc and uncoordinated way without a standardised framework to guide the exchange process. The exchange is mainly with local tourism businesses and institutions of learning, and not so much with general community members. As a result, local tourism businesses receive economic opportunities, and learners and students are given opportunities related to their studies. However, there is a limited exchange of local knowledge with other stakeholders; and this mainly results from a limited engagement with surrounding communities that possess knowledge of local products. Furthermore, there seems to be a communication gap and limited engagement between the staff and surrounding communities as most of the information needs highlighted by communities were already provided by staff.

Through the information and knowledge exchanged with different stakeholders, staff could be empowered to pass it on to visitors to give them authentic and memorable experiences of the local area, and encourage visitors' behavioural intention and loyalty. Sharing local knowledge could connect surrounding communities with visitors who might purchase local products, thus generating an income for them. It is therefore important for staff to intensify their awareness and outreach programmes, and work

with various community structures such as CTOs that are already operating in tourism-related activities as well as different stakeholders in different sub-sectors, in both the private and the public sector. This is necessary to help VICs to become relevant public utilities that contribute to government's wider plan of improving the lives of people and growing the economy of the areas in which they are located. It is also important for VICs to embrace technological advancements to assist them in meeting the needs of their users. The adoption of technology, together with community engagement, might alter the current operation of VICs, particularly those located in rural municipalities, making them relevant to their users.

The next chapter presents the empirical quantitative analysis, addressing objective 5 to assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses (H₆).

CHAPTER 7: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH RESULTS: LOCAL TOURISM BUSINESSES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature reviewed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 was used to develop a conceptual framework in Chapter 4. The research design and methodology that were followed were discussed in Chapter 5 while chapter 6 presented the qualitative findings of in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with VIC staff members and focus group discussions held with surrounding communities. Chapter 7 presents the quantitative findings of a survey undertaken with 75 local tourism businesses operating in the vicinity of the 18 VICs that participated in the study. The chapter addresses research objective 5, and also test whether the information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses (H_6), as highlighted in the conceptual framework developed at the end of Chapter 4 (Figure 4:5).

Section 7.2 describes the sample and questionnaires completed by 75 local tourism businesses, while section 7.3 provides information on the profile of the respondents from the local tourism businesses. Section 7.4 indicates their VIC awareness and visits. The information provided by VICs to local tourism businesses is provided in section 7.5, while the information supplied by local tourism businesses to VICs is provided in section 7.6.

The findings on the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with VICs are presented in section 7.7. Section 7.8 explores any local knowledge they might have supplied to the VICs. Section 7.9 presents an inferential analysis that was conducted to test the study's H_6 , which relates to whether the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for the businesses. The conclusions about how research objective 5 was achieved and how H_6 was tested, as well as the managerial implications for achieving socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses, are provided in section 7.10.

7.2 SAMPLE, AND COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES

Details of the sample and of the questionnaires completed by the local tourism businesses that participated in the study are provided in this section. The tourism businesses that were listed in the databases of the 18 VICs that participated in the study were initially proposed as a sampling frame from which a sample of businesses would be selected. However, only four VICs submitted their databases. While some VIC staff raised concerns about providing the contact details of their stakeholders to third parties, others asked to engage directly with local tourism businesses listed in their databases. Given the challenges, it was not feasible to compile a sampling frame from which to select a representative sample of local tourism businesses. Furthermore, it was impossible to determine the sample size of local tourism businesses that would participate in the study from the population of local tourism businesses in the databases.

Using the email addresses of tourism businesses in the supplied lists, an online link (https://pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPjvVMYeA4A6bMV) was sent to 18 VICs to invite tourism businesses to complete an online survey or to complete the survey in a hard copy and email it back to the researcher. A total of 55 questionnaires were completed online, while 29 were completed on paper. Nine of the 55 respondents who logged into the online questionnaire did not complete all the questions. These questionnaires were deemed unusable, and were eliminated from any further analysis to avoid statistical bias. After eliminating the unusable questionnaires, 75 (46 online and 29 on paper) were retained for further analysis.

As shown in Table 7.1, a five-point Likert-type response scale was used to measure the constructs in the questionnaires.

Table 7.1: Scale grouping

Scale	Scale grouping for graphical purposes
1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree	“strongly disagree” and “disagree” reflected as “disagree” “neutral”

Scale	Scale grouping for graphical purposes
5=Strongly agree	“agree” and “strongly agree” reflected as “agree”
1= Not extensive at all 2= Not Extensive 3= Neutral 4= Extensive 5= Very extensive	“not extensive at all” and “not extensive” reflected as “not extensive” “neutral” “extensive” and “very extensive” reflected as “extensive”
1= Not useful at all 2=Not useful 3=Neutral 4=Useful 5 =Very useful	“not useful at all” and “not useful” reflected as “not useful” “neutral” “useful” and “very useful” reflected as “useful”.
1=Not important at all 2= Unimportant 3=Neutral 4=Important 5=Very important	“not important at all” and “unimportant” reflected as “unimportant” “neutral” “important” and “very important” reflected as “important”
1= Very dissatisfied 2= Dissatisfied 3=Neutral 4=Satisfied 5=Very satisfied	“very dissatisfied” and “dissatisfied” reflected as “dissatisfied” “neutral” “satisfied” and “very satisfied” reflected as “satisfied”.
1=Never 2= Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Always	“never” and “rarely” reflected as “rarely” “sometimes” “often” and “always” reflected as “often”

Source: Researcher’s own construction

The scales were used in their original five-point Likert-type response format to conduct the factor and subsequent regression analyses. However, to allow a clearer graphical observation of emerging patterns in the descriptive analysis, responses were grouped into three options, as shown in Table 7.1 above. These scale groupings are in the descriptive analysis of the results. It is also important to point out that some values in the descriptive analysis in Tables 7.2 to 7.8 do not add up to exactly 100% owing to the rounding of percentages in SPSS v25.

The researcher presented the descriptive statistics of the main constructs in stacked bar charts that reflect the responses indicated in the frequency tables. The mean (average) was not used because the information was ordinal data, for which that kind

of interpretation is not feasible, as two points on an ordinal scale are not at equal distances from each other. A case in point is the interpretation of a mean of '3' when using the five-point Likert-type response format. This could either indicate a tendency to report "neutral", or it could have been that half of the respondents responded with "agree" or "strongly agree" and the other half with "disagree" or "strongly disagree". Thus the information is only known through the frequency tables.

7.3 PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

To provide a descriptive profile of local tourism businesses that participated in this study, the demographic characteristics of the respondents from these businesses were analysed, and are presented in Table 7.2¹ below.

Table 7.2: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n=75)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Position in business (n = 56)		
Owner/co-owner	27	48.2%
Director/manager/supervisor	15	26.8%
Tourist guide	7	12.5%
Tour operator	1	1.8%
Driver	2	3.6%
Caterer	1	1.8%
Crafter	1	1.8%
General staff	2	3.6%
Gender (n = 75)		
Male	41	54.7%
Female	34	45.3%
Population group (n = 75)		
Black	27	36.0%
Coloured	11	14.7%
Indian	8	10.7%
White	29	38.7%
Highest level of education (n = 75)		

¹ Owing to rounding by SPSS v25, the values for 'position in business' and 'population group' each add up to 100.1%.

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Some high school education	2	2.7%
Grade 12/Standard 10/Matric	22	29.3%
Diploma/Certificate after Grade 12	30	40.0%
Bachelor's degree	15	20.0%
Postgraduate degree (e.g. Honours, Master's, PhD)	6	8.0%
Tourism sub-sector (n = 75)		
Accommodation	34	45.3%
Business tourism/MICE	5	6.7%
Food and beverage	8	10.7%
Tour operator	4	5.3%
Tourist guides	12	16.0%
Transport services	6	8.0%
Other	6	8.0%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Staff members in different positions in local tourism businesses completed the questionnaires. The results show that 56 staff members (74.6%) of the 75 local tourism businesses indicated their positions in these businesses. Of those 56 staff members, 48.2% were business owners, followed by 26.8% in management or supervisory positions, 12.5% were tourist guides, 3.6% were drivers, and 3.6% were general staff members. There was only one receptionist (1.3%), caterer (1.3%), crafter (1.3%), and tour operator (1.3%). The remaining 19 respondents (25.3%) did not indicate their positions.

The profile of the respondents shows that 54.7% were females, while 45.3% were males. Their population groups indicate that 38.7% were Whites, followed by 36.0% Blacks, 14.7% Coloureds, and 10.7% Indians. The educational level of the respondents shows a relatively high educational attainment, with 40.0% holding a Diploma/Certificate after Grade 12, followed by 29.3% with a Grade 12 certificate, 28.0% with a university qualification, while two respondents (2.7%) had some high school education.

With regard to the tourism sub-sector classification of businesses, 45.3% of the respondents operate in the accommodation sub-sector, 16.0% in tourist guiding, 10.7% in food and beverage, 8.0% in transport services, 6.7% in business

tourism/MICE, and 5.3% in tour operating. The remaining 8.0% were in other sub-sectors such as crafts and fashion design. It was expected that accommodation establishments will be in the majority in the study. Accommodation, or lodging, is by far the largest sub-sector within the tourism sector (Nelwamondo, 2009). It is considered the core and dominant part of tourism. (Poudel, 2013). Moreover, the dominance of these establishments is in line with the composition of the database of tourism businesses which was used as a sampling frame in a baseline study conducted to determine the state of transformation in the tourism sector (Department of Tourism, 2016). This is the same year in which the current study commenced. The report of the study shows that the database was dominated by accommodation establishments, with 47% of the 56 980 businesses operating in this sub-sector, followed by 28%% in attractions, 8% in restaurants and 17% in other sub-sectors.

7.4 VIC AWARENESS AND VISITS

This section reflects local tourism businesses' awareness of and visits to VICs.

Table 7.3: VIC awareness and visits

Are you aware of a VIC in this area? (question 2.1)		
Have you visited the VIC in the area before? (question 2.2)		
VIC awareness	Frequency	%
Yes	72	96.0%
No	3	4.0%
VIC visits		
Yes	70	93.3%
No	5	6.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

When asked whether they were aware of VICs in their local areas, 96.0% were aware and 4.0% were not. Of the 96.0% that were aware, 93.3% had actually visited the VICs and 6.7% had not.

7.5 INFORMATION PROVIDED BY VICS

This section discusses the information that local tourism businesses received from VICS. They were asked about the type of information they received from VICS. In particular, they were asked to rate the type of information they received from the VICS with regard to the extensiveness of the information received, the frequency of receiving the information, and the usefulness of this information to their businesses. With regard to information sources, local tourism businesses were asked to rate the usefulness of the information sources used by VICS to provide information to their businesses, and their satisfaction with the information sources.

7.5.1 Information that local tourism businesses received

The questions about the information that local tourism businesses received from VICS are shown in Table 7.4.

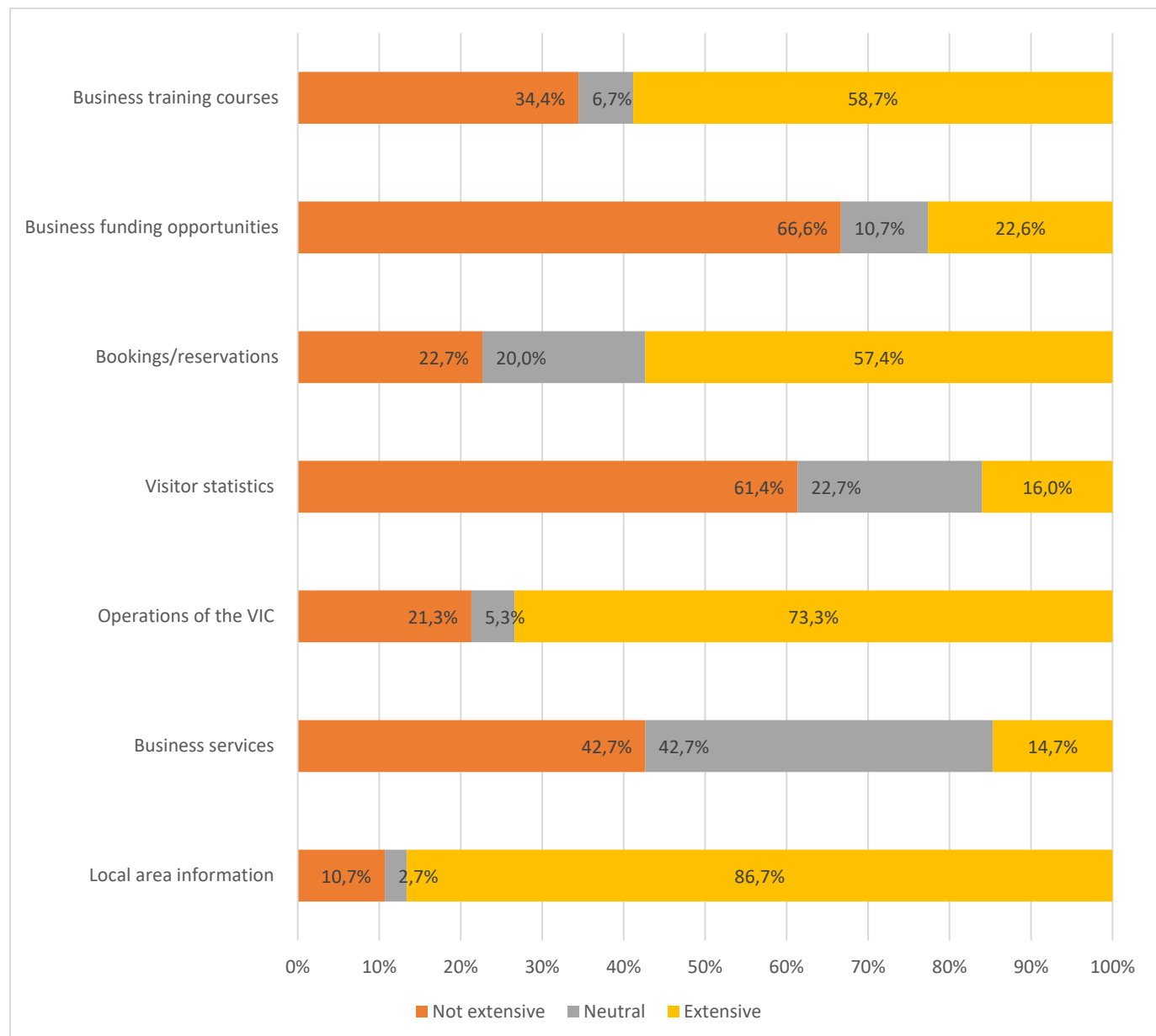
Table 7.4: Information that local tourism businesses received

Construct	Questions
Information provided by VICS (section 3)	Has your business received any information from the VIC? (question 3.1)
	Please rate the type of information you received from the VIC with regard to: (question 3.2): • extensiveness of information received • frequency of receiving information • usefulness of information for your business
	Please rate level of agreement with information you would like to receive from the VIC (question 3.3)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

All 75 local tourism businesses indicated that they received information from VICS. The responses to the above questions are represented graphically in Figures 7.1 to 7.4.

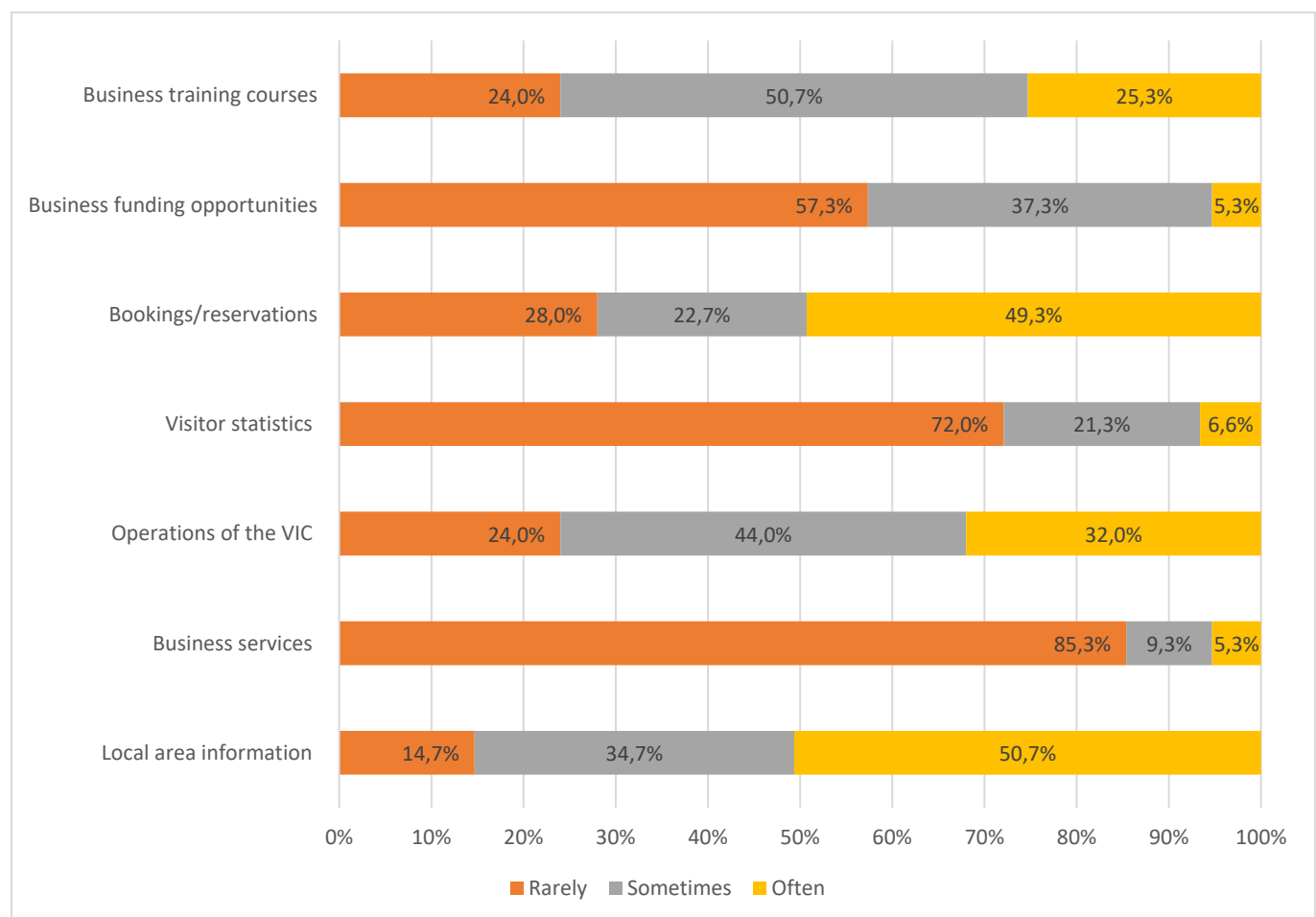
Figure 7.1: Extensive VIC information (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the local tourism businesses reported having received extensive information on the local area (86.7%), the operations of VICs (73.3%), business training courses (58.7%), and bookings/reservations (57.4%), while the information received on business funding opportunities (66.6%) and visitor statistics (61.4%) was reported as being not extensive. For the information on business services, 42.7% of the local tourism businesses indicated that this information was not extensive; the same proportion of local tourism businesses (42.7%) remained neutral.

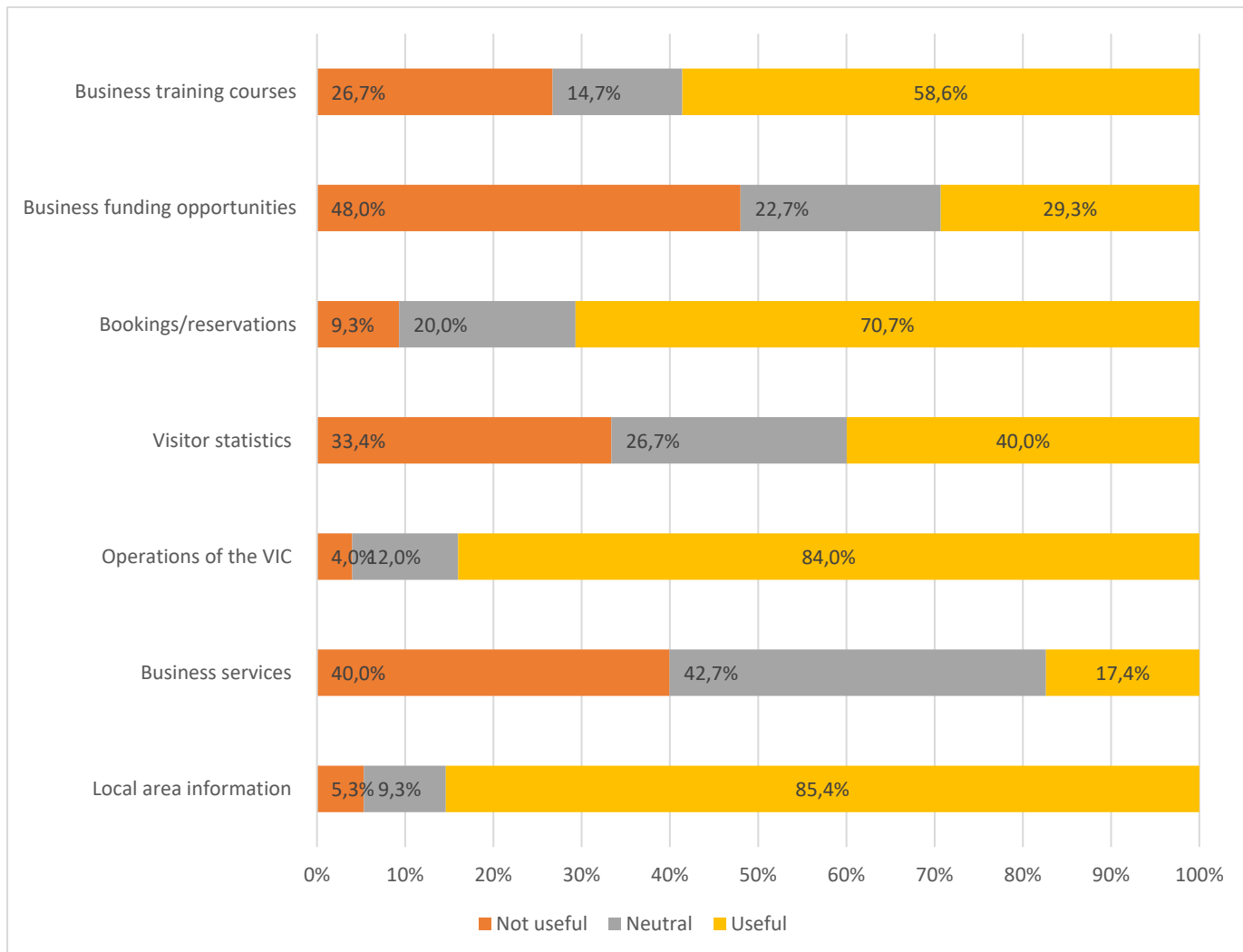
Figure 7.2: Frequency of receiving VIC information (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

When asked about the frequency of receiving information from VICs, 50.7% of the local tourism businesses indicated that they often received information on the local area, followed by bookings/reservations (49.3%). The majority of the local tourism businesses indicated that they rarely received information about business services (85.3%), visitor statistics (72.0%), and business funding opportunities (57.3%). Around half (50.7%) of the local tourism businesses reported having sometimes received information about business training courses. Similarly, 44.0% sometimes received information about the operations of VICs. Responses with regard to information about business training courses were quite even on both sides of the scale, with 25.3% indicating that they often received the information and 24.0% receiving it rarely. Furthermore, 32.0% of the local tourism businesses indicated that they often received information on the operations of VICs, while 24.0% received it rarely.

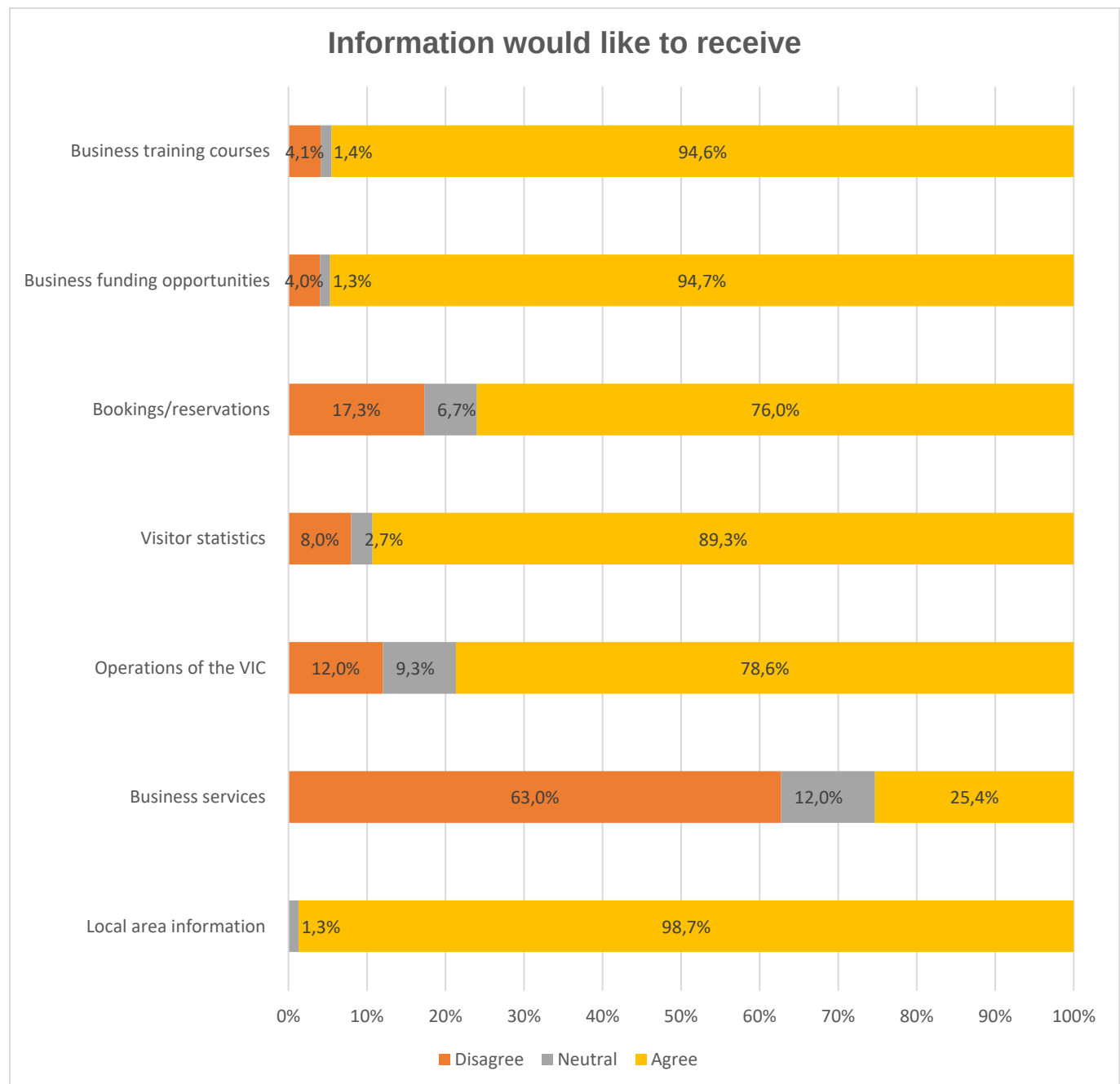
Figure 7.3: Useful VIC information (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the local tourism businesses found information about the local area (85.4%), the operations of VICs (84.0%), bookings/reservations (70.7%), and business training courses (58.6%) to be useful, while the modal category indicated that information about business funding opportunities (48.0%), business services (40.0%), and visitor statistics (33.4%) was not useful. Responses with regard to business services showed that, while 40.0% of the local tourism businesses indicated that this information was not useful, an almost equal number remained neutral in their responses (42.7%). Responses with regard to information about visitor statistics indicated that 40.0% found this information useful, with 33.4% reporting this not being the case.

Figure 7.4: Preferred VIC information (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The results show that an overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that they would like to receive information about the local areas (98.7%), followed by business training courses (94.6%), business funding opportunities (94.7%), visitor statistics (89.3%), the operations of VICs (78.6%), and bookings/reservations (76.0%) from VICs. However, 63.0% of the local tourism businesses disagreed that they would like to receive information about business services.

Although the local tourism businesses reported that they sometimes received information about business training courses and the operations of VICs, they still rated it as information that they would like to receive. Similarly, information about visitor statistics and business funding opportunities was reported as information that they would like to receive, despite it being reported as not extensive, rarely received, and not useful. This is different for information about business services. Although it was also described as not extensive, rarely received, and not useful, only 25.4% of the local tourism businesses agreed that they would like to receive it. These results point to the information needs of local tourism businesses, and so serve as important pointers to where VIC staff should direct their efforts in information provision. Understanding the information needs of different local tourism businesses would help them to devise target-specific information provision strategies that are tailor-made for specific information needs.

7.5.2 Information sources used by VICs

Questions about the sources used by VICs to provide information to local tourism businesses are shown in Table 7.5.

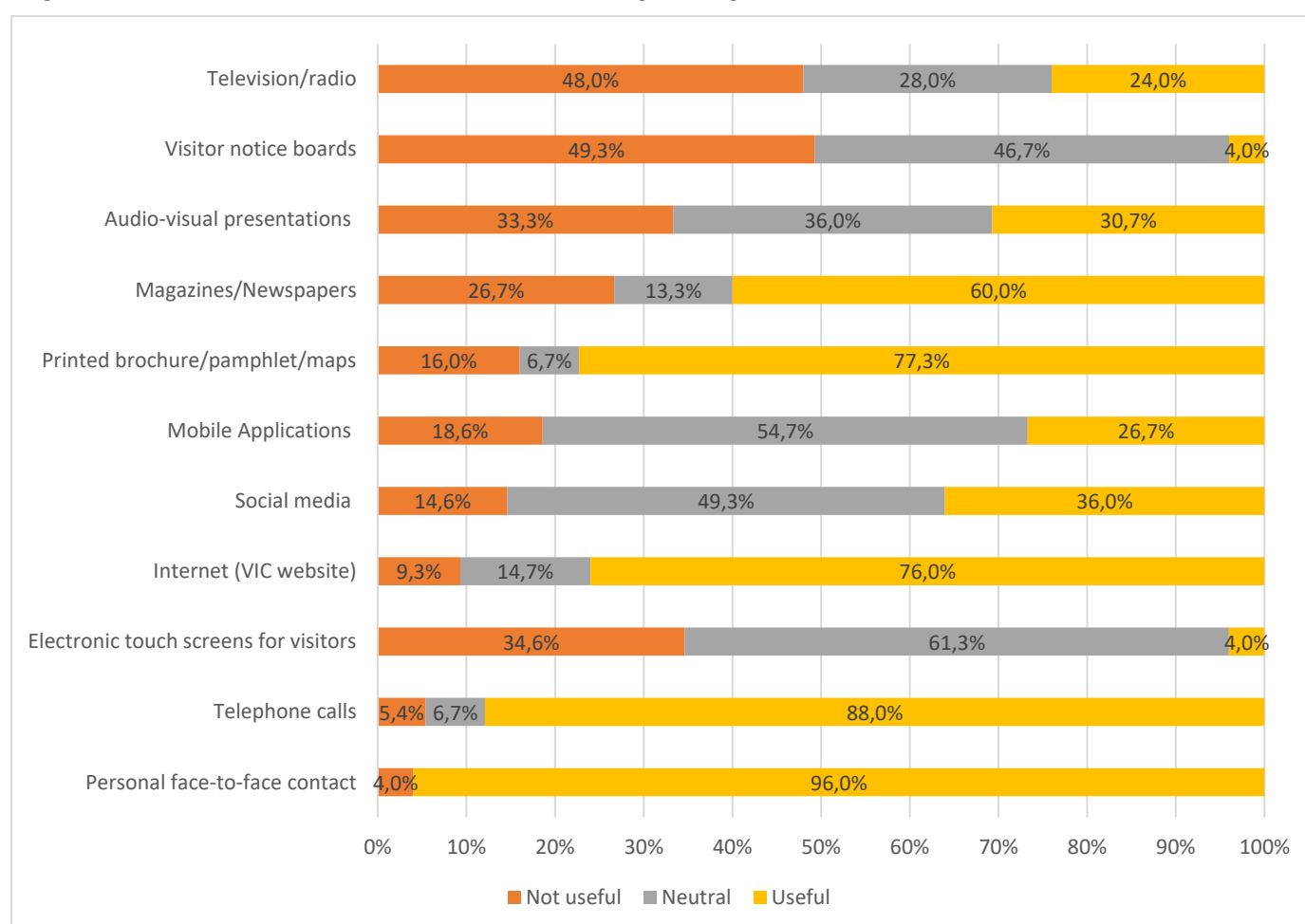
Table 7.5: Questions: information sources used by VICs

Construct	Questions
Information sources used by VICs (section 3)	Please rate information sources used by VIC to provide information to your business with regard to: (question 3.4) • usefulness of information source • satisfaction with information source •
	Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with information sources you prefer to receive information from a VIC (question 3.5)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The responses in respect of the above questions are represented graphically in Figures 7.5 to 7.7.

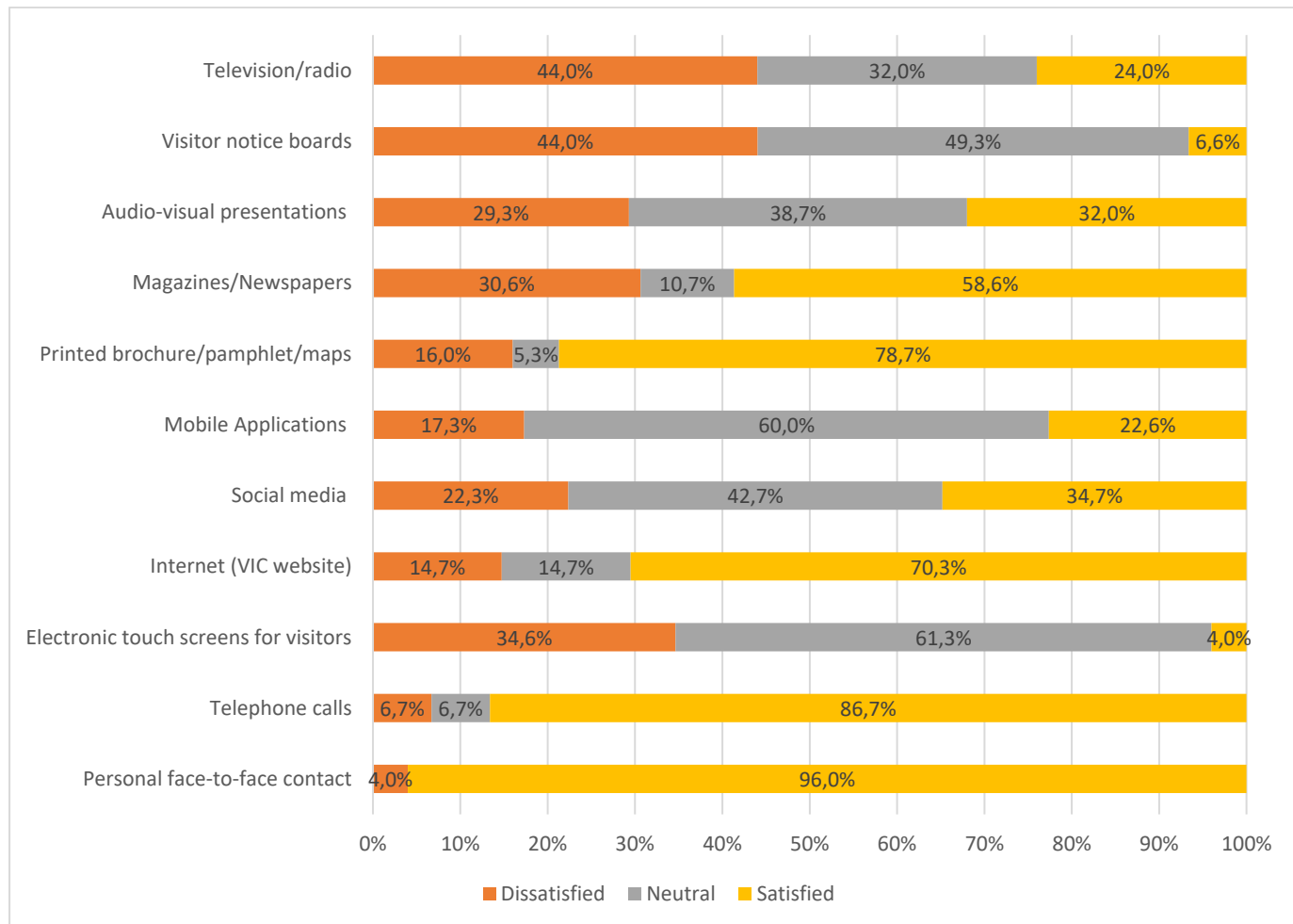
Figure 7.5: Useful VIC information sources (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the local tourism businesses mentioned personal face-to-face contact (96.0%), telephone calls (88.0%), printed brochures (77.3%), the Internet (76.0%), and magazines (60.0%) as useful information sources that VICs use to provide information to their businesses. A fairly high proportion (a third to almost half) reported that visitor notice boards (49.3%), television/radio (48.0%), electronic touch screens (34.6%), and audio-visual presentations (30.7%) were information sources that they found not useful. Responses on the usefulness of audio-visual presentations were quite even on both sides of the scale, with 31% indicating these sources to be useful and 33.3% not useful, while 36.0% remained neutral. Furthermore, the local tourism businesses were neutral (modal category) in their opinions on the usefulness of electronic touch screens (61.3%), mobile applications (54.7%), social media (49.3%), and visitor notice boards (46.7%).

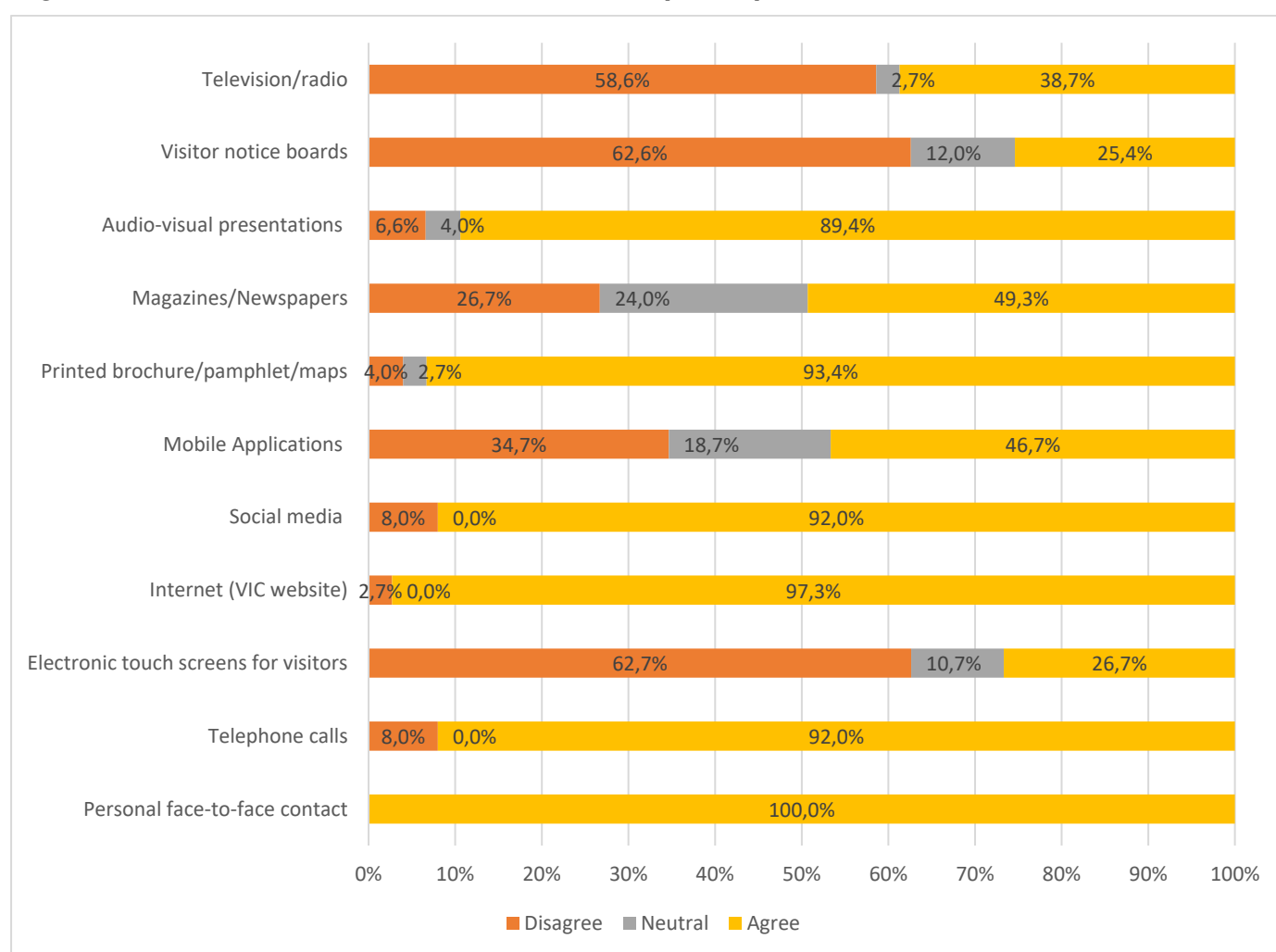
Figure 7.6: Satisfaction with VIC information sources (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the local tourism businesses indicated that they were satisfied with personal face-to-face contact (96.0%), telephone calls (86.7%), printed brochures (78.7%), the Internet (70.3%), and magazines (58.6%) as information sources used by VICs to provide them with information. An equal number of the local tourism businesses were dissatisfied with visitor notice boards (44.0%) and television/radio (44.0%) as information sources used to provide them with information, followed by electronic touch screens (34.6%). Responses on satisfaction with audio-visual presentations were quite even on both sides of the scale, with 32.0% indicating that they were satisfied and 29.3% that they were dissatisfied, while 38.7% remained neutral. Furthermore, the local tourism businesses felt neutral (modal category) about their satisfaction with electronic touch screens (61.3%), mobile applications (60.0%), visitor notice boards (49.3%), and social media (42.7%) as sources used by VICs to provide information to their businesses.

Figure 7.7: Preferred VIC information sources (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

All the local tourism businesses agreed that they prefer to receive information through personal face-to-face contact (100%), followed by the Internet (97.3%), printed brochures (93.4%), social media (92.0%), telephone calls (92.0%), and audio-visual presentations (89.4%). More than half disagree that electronic touch screens (62.7%); visitor notice boards (62.6%) and television/radio (58.6%) are information sources through which they prefer to receive information. The results show that 46.7% of the local tourism businesses agreed that they prefer to receive information through mobile applications, while 34.7% disagreed, and the remaining 18.7% felt neutral. Similarly, just less than half (49.3%) agreed that they prefer to receive information through magazines/newspapers, while 26.7% disagreed, and 24.0% were neutral in their responses.

It is interesting to note that businesses identified social media and mobile applications as sources through which they would like to receive information from VICs. These technologies provide a convenient platform to communicate and to share information and experiences in real time. In the VIC environment, the information might not only be beneficial for businesses' growth and development, but could assist them to share experiences, network with other businesses, and access potential visitors.

The negative results on the extensiveness, frequency, and usefulness of information on business funding opportunities, visitor statistics, and business services might indicate that some of the VICs that participated in the study do not provide this information. Similarly, the negative results on the usefulness, satisfaction with, and preference for electronic touch screens, visitor notice boards, and television/radio might indicate that some of the VICs do not have or use these sources to provide information. Furthermore, these are sources that are available on-site for visitors to use when they visit VICs, and might not be as relevant to local tourism businesses. It is important to point out that the questionnaire did not have a "not applicable" option; thus these are assumptions that the study is making.

7.6 INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY LOCAL TOURISM BUSINESSES

This section reflects the information that the local tourism businesses supplied to VICs. They were asked to rate the type of information they supplied to the VICs regarding how extensive the information was, and the frequency of supplying the information. They were also asked to indicate whether they have received any feedback from the VICs about the usefulness of the type of information they had supplied, and whether they experienced challenges in supplying the information to the VICs.

7.6.1 Information that local tourism businesses supplied

The questions about the information that local tourism businesses supplied to VICs are shown in Table 7.6.

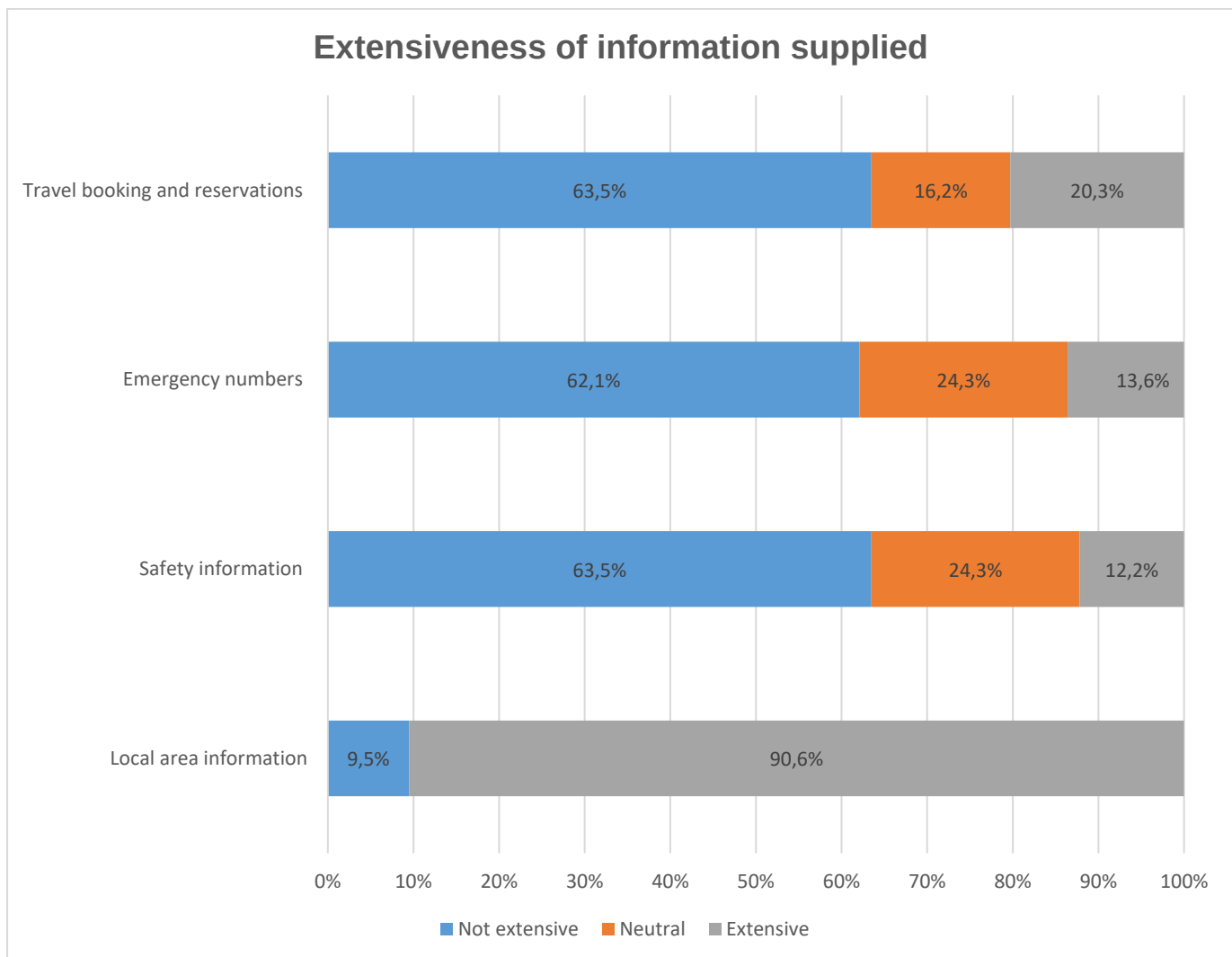
Table 7.6: Questions: information supplied by local tourism businesses

Construct	Questions
Information supplied by local tourism businesses to VICs (section 4)	Have you supplied the VIC with any information? (question 4.1)
	Please rate the type of information you supplied to VIC with regard to: (question 4.2): • extensiveness of information supplied • frequency of supplying information
	Did you receive any feedback from the VIC regarding the usefulness of the type of information you supplied (question 4.3)
	Have you experienced challenges in providing the VIC with information about your business? (question 4.4)
	What challenges did you experience in providing the VIC with information about your business? (question 4.5)
	Please rate the level of agreement with challenges you experienced in providing the VIC with information about your business? (question 4.6): • Challenges from the business side • Challenges from the VIC side

Source: Researcher's own contribution

All 75 local tourism businesses indicated that they have supplied VICs with information. Their responses to the above questions are represented graphically in Figures 7.8 to 7.13. Of the 75 businesses, 74 responded to the question about the extensiveness of the information they supplied (Figure 7.8), while 59 indicated the challenges they experienced in providing the information, from both the business and the VIC side (Figures 7.12 and 7.13). The same number of businesses also responded to each of the statements in each of these questions.

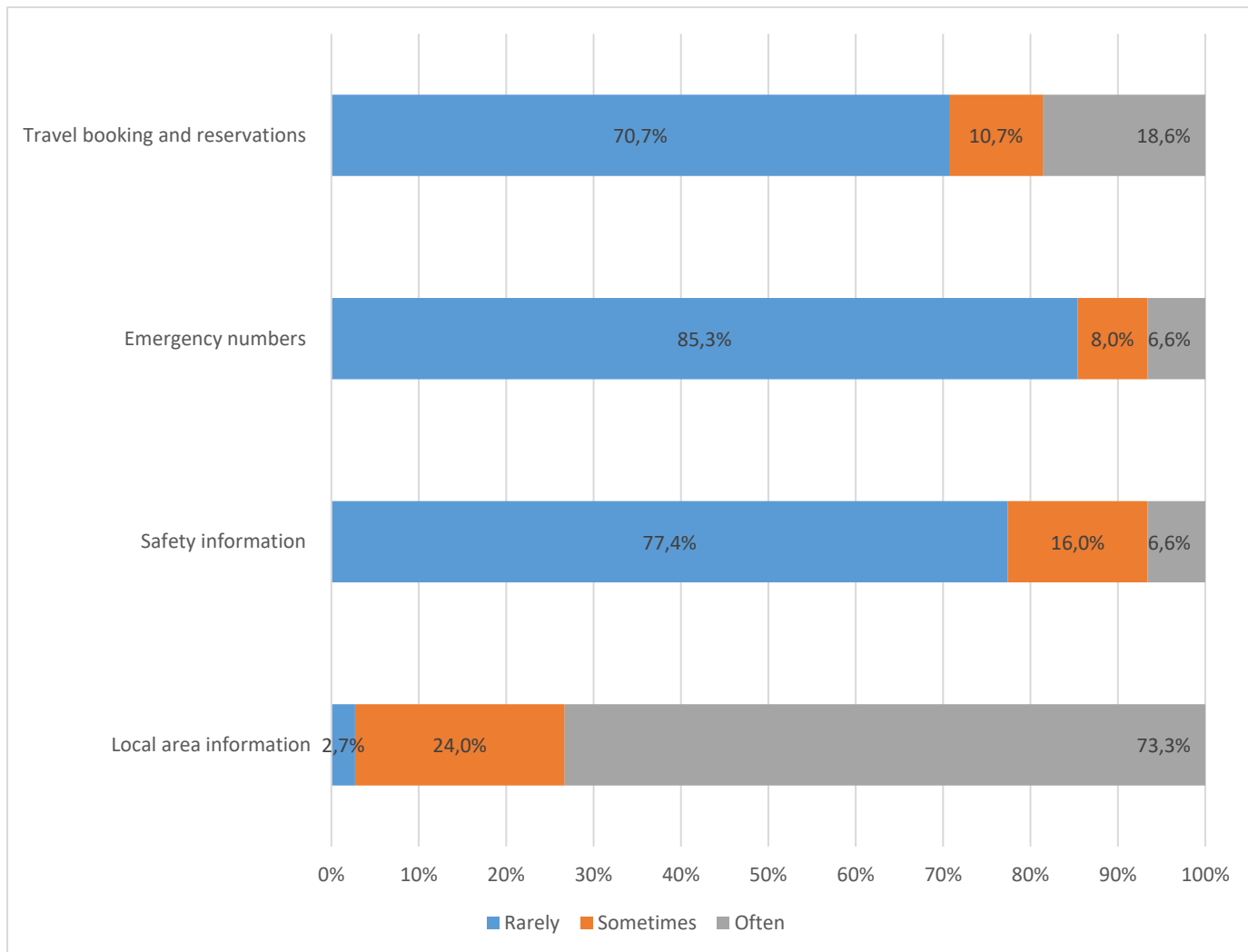
Figure 7.8: Extensive information supplied (n = 74)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the local tourism businesses reported that they have supplied VICs with extensive information about their local areas (90.6%), while their information about safety (63.5%), travel bookings and reservations (64%), and emergency numbers (62.1%) was not extensive. Nearly a quarter (24.3%) of the local tourism businesses were neutral about the extensiveness of both the safety information and the emergency numbers they supplied.

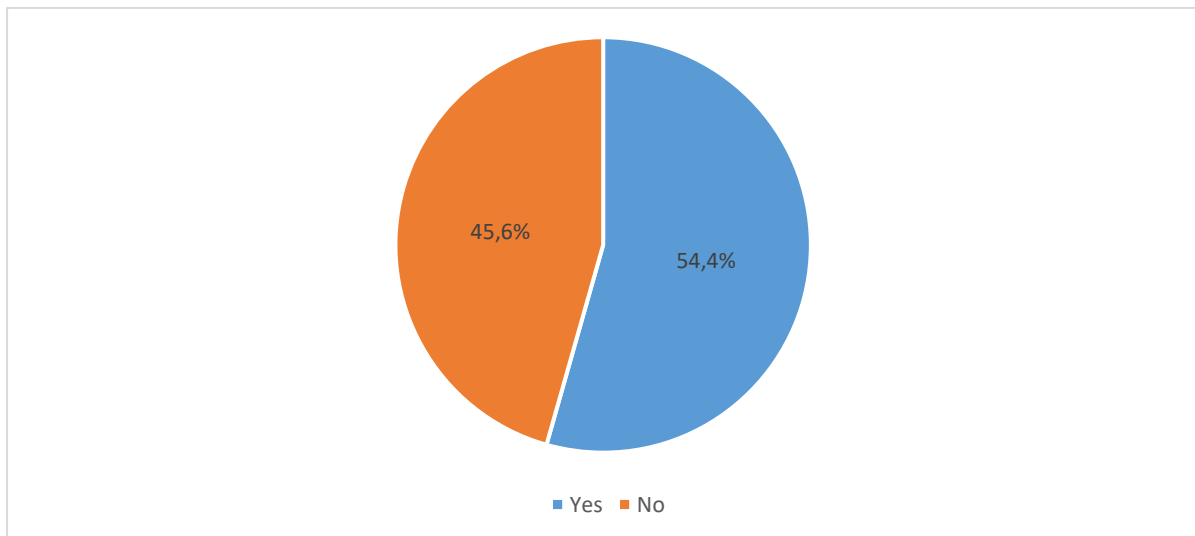
Figure 7.9: Frequency of supplying information (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

Almost three-quarters of the local tourism businesses (73.3%) indicated that they often supplied VICs with local area information, while information about emergency numbers (85.3%), safety (77.4%), and travel bookings and reservations (70.7%) was rarely supplied.

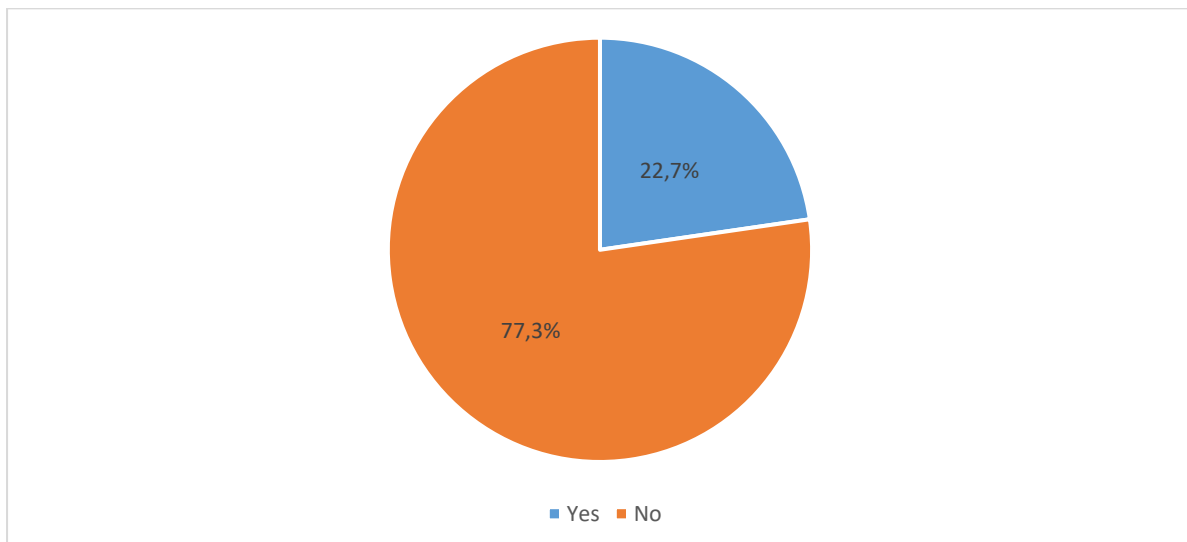
Figure 7.10: Useful information supplied to VICs (n = 68)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

Over half (54.4%) of the local tourism businesses received feedback about the usefulness of the information they supplied to VICs, while 45.6% received no feedback. This indicates the importance of maintaining regular engagement with local tourism businesses about the type of information that is useful to meet their needs.

Figure 7.11: Challenges in supplying information (n = 75)

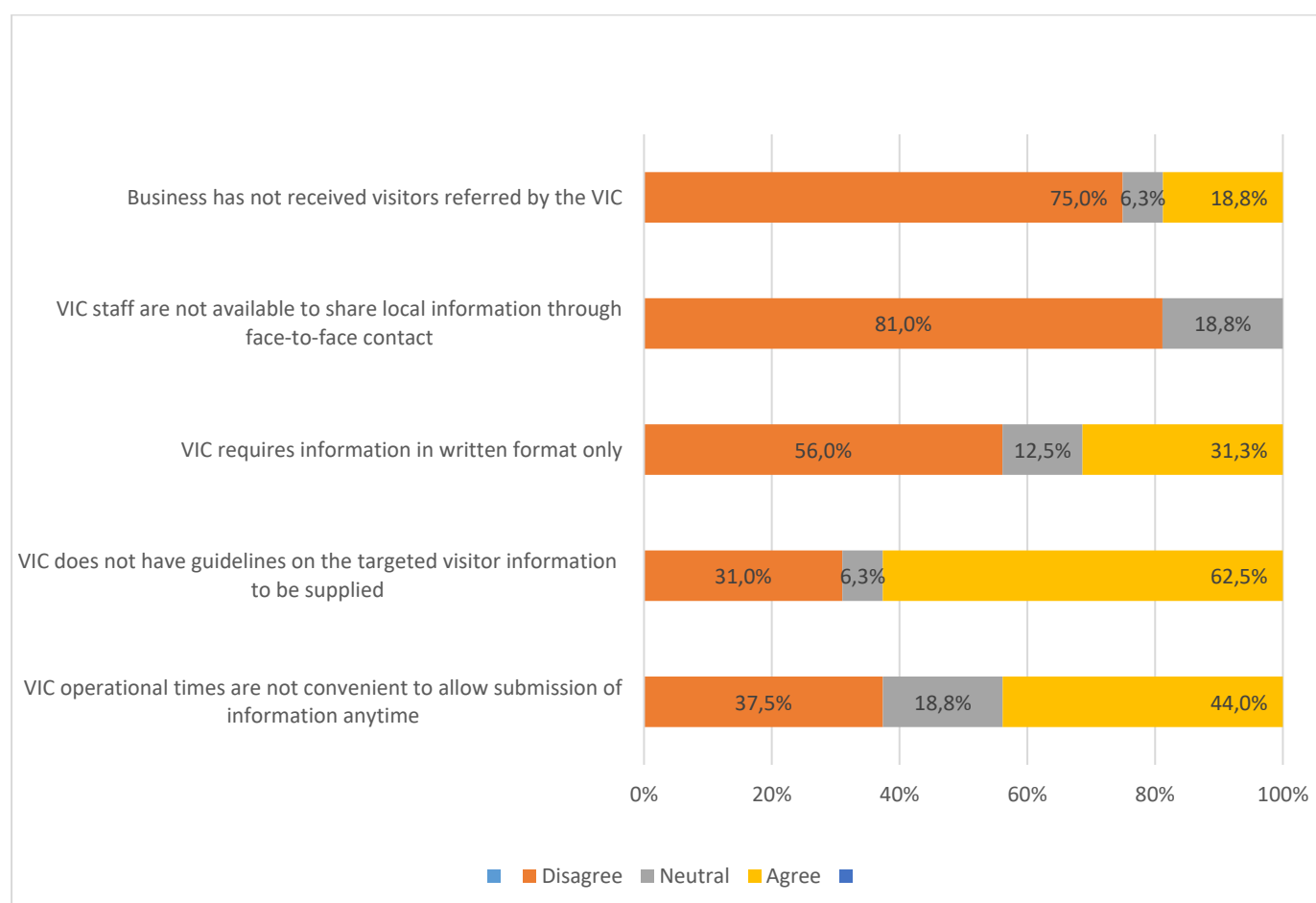


Source: Researcher's own contribution

Only 22.7% of the local tourism businesses experienced challenges in providing VICs with information, while 77.3% did not experience any challenges. When asked about

these challenges in an open-ended question, the local tourism businesses cited the supply and collection of brochures, and particularly the frequency of supplying and collecting them, a lack of transport to deliver brochures, and a lack of communication about how to supply brochures. Other challenges included expensive membership, a lack of visitor referrals from VICs, and limited opportunities to display and exhibit business products in VICs.

Figure 7.12: Business-related challenges to supply information (n = 59)

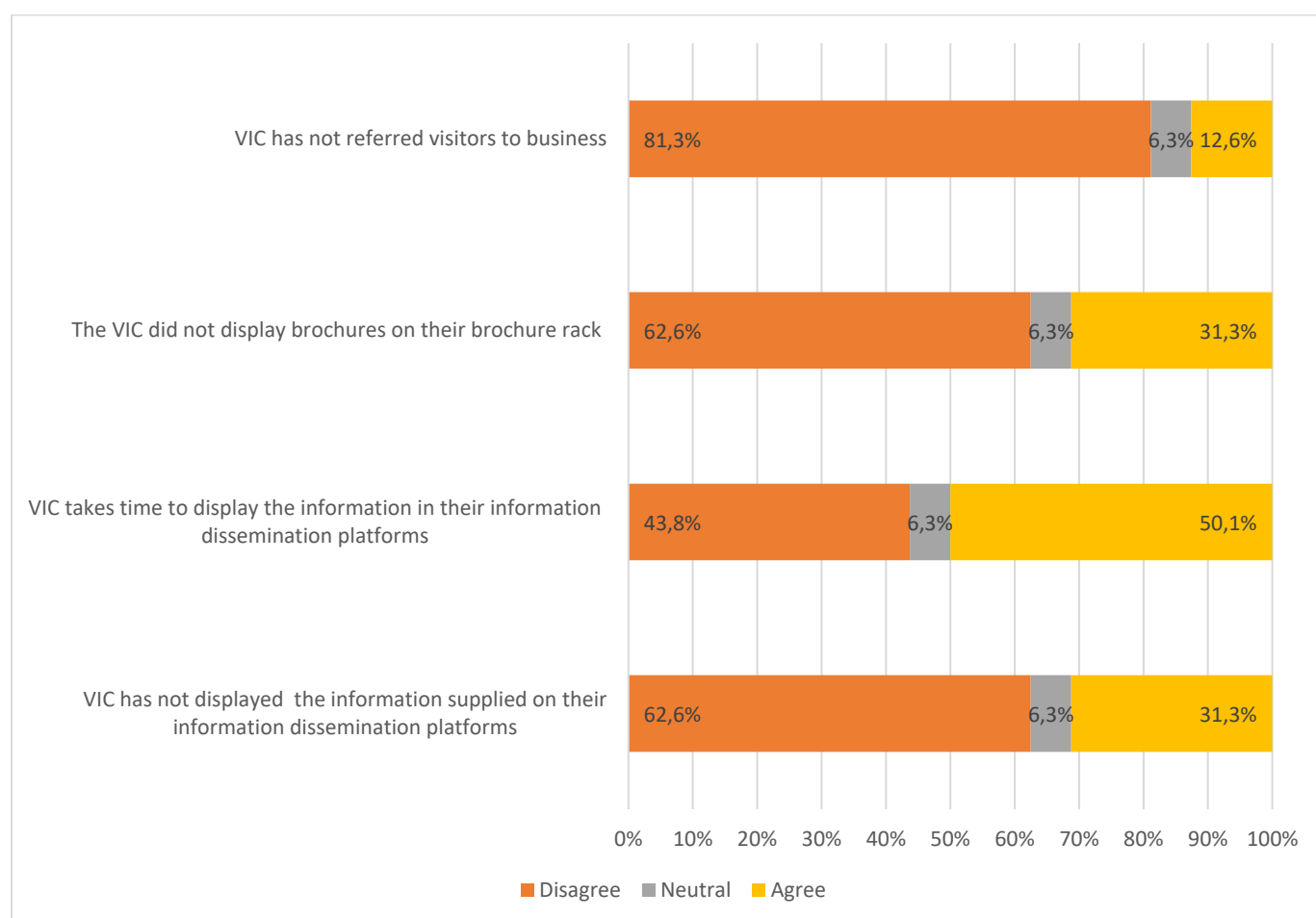


Source: Researcher's own contribution

In addition to the challenges they perceived to have experienced in providing information to VICs, the businesses were also asked whether they agreed or did not agree with specific challenges posed to them in the form of closed questions. Figure 7.12 shows that, with regard to challenges from the business side, the 59 local tourism businesses that responded to this question agreed that VICs do not have guidelines on the targeted visitor information to be supplied (62.5%), and that their operational

times are not convenient for the delivery of information at any time (44.0%). These responses reflect the perceived challenges that VICs have to address in order to facilitate the supply of information. Only 31.3% agreed that VICs require information only in written format, and (18.8%) had not received visitors referred by VICs. Interestingly, none of the businesses agreed that VIC staff are not available to share local information through face-to-face contact.

Figure 7.13: VIC-related challenges to supply information (n = 59)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

As shown in Figure 7.13, the local tourism businesses indicated the challenges experienced from the VICs' side, with only 12.6% agreeing that VICs have not referred visitors to them. Furthermore, they indicated that VICs take time to display business information on their dissemination platforms (50.1%). Almost a third (31.3%) disagreed that VICs displayed the supplied information on their brochure racks and information dissemination platforms.

The results indicate that local tourism businesses seem to have a positive perception of the supply of information. However, the challenges perceived from both the VIC and the business side present opportunities for VICs to put measures in place to improve the supply of information that can ultimately be passed on to visitors to enhance their experience of the areas they want to visit.

7.7 SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES RECEIVED FROM EXCHANGING INFORMATION WITH VICS

This section reflects the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with VICs. In particular, they were asked to rate the extent to which they agree with specific statements about the opportunities they received.

Questions on these opportunities are shown in Table 7.7.

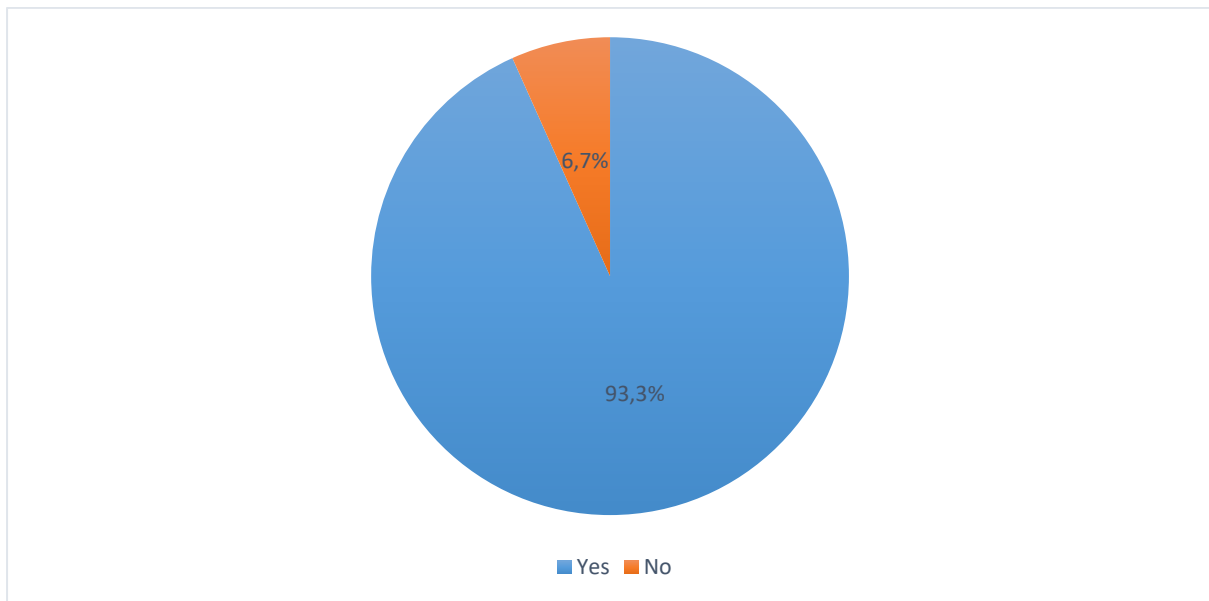
Table 7. 7: Questions: Socio-economic opportunities

Construct	Questions
Socio-economic opportunities from exchanging information with VICs (section 5)	Have you received any benefits from exchanging information with the VIC? (question 5.1)
	To what extent do you agree with statements regarding opportunities that your business received from exchanging information with the VIC? (question 5.2) • Social opportunities • Economic opportunities

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The responses to the above questions are represented graphically in Figures 7.14 and 7.15. The latter figure (Figure 7.15) shows that 74 businesses identified the social opportunities they received from exchanging information with VICs, and responded to all the statements related to these opportunities. However, different numbers of businesses responded to each of the statements on economic opportunities (Table 7.8).

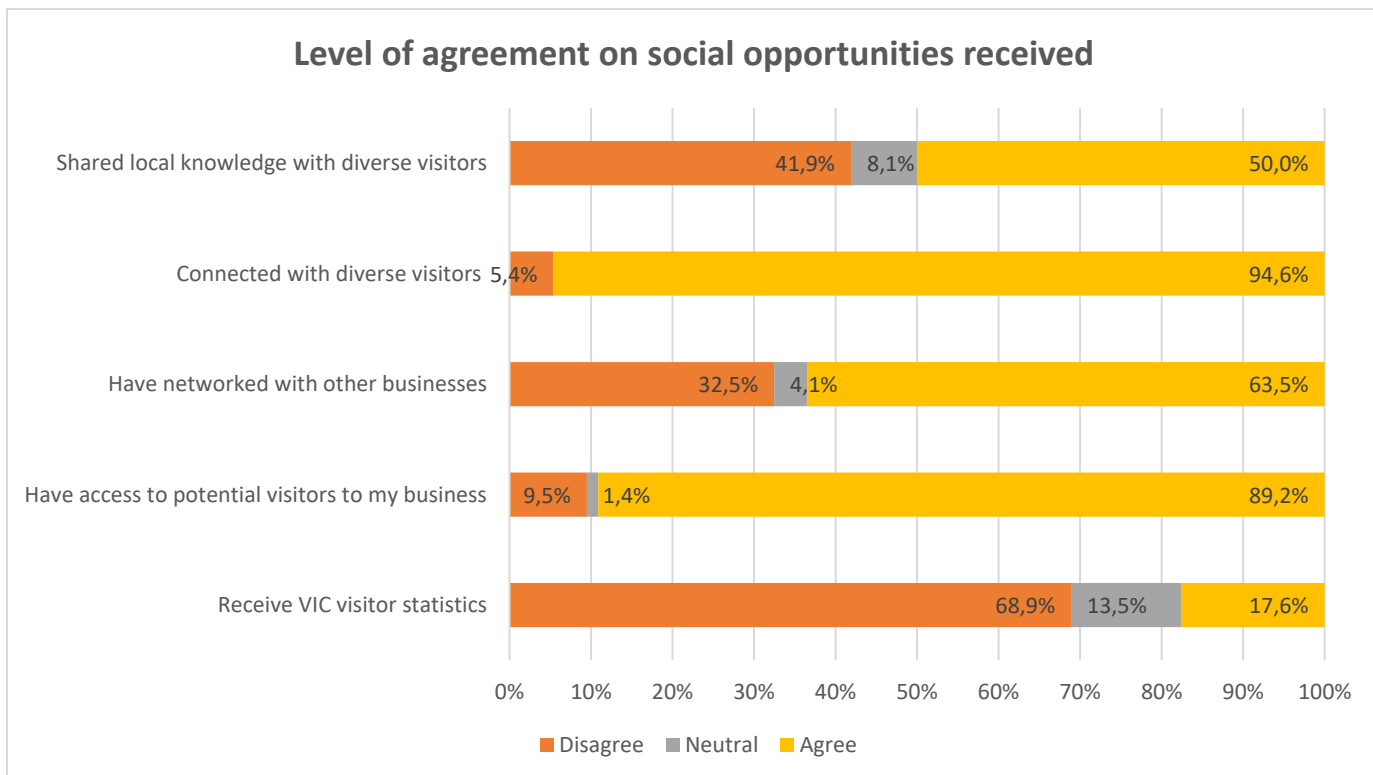
Figure 7.14: Opportunities from information exchange (n = 75)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

Figure 7.14 indicates that 93.3% of the local tourism businesses received opportunities from exchanging information with VICs, while only 6.7% had not.

Figure 7.15: Social opportunities from information exchange (n = 74)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

Figure 7.15 indicates that the majority of the local tourism businesses agreed that the exchange of information with VICs presented opportunities to connect with diverse visitors (94.6%), access potential visitors (89.2%), network with other businesses (63.5%) and share local knowledge with diverse visitors (50.0%). However, only 17.6% of the local tourism businesses agreed that this exchange presented opportunities to obtain VIC visitor statistics, while 68.9% disagreed.

Table 7. 8: Economic opportunities from information exchange

Opportunities	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Business marketed on the VIC website	n = 74	71.6%	4.1%	24.4%
Business is listed on VIC database	n = 74	6.8%	1.4%	91.9%
Received funding to grow my business	n = 74	85.2%	2.7%	12.2%
Attended a business training course	n = 74	21.6%	2.7%	75.7%
Business products exhibited at tourism events	n = 74	39.2%	6.8%	54.0%
Increased visitor bookings	n = 74	54.1%	14.9%	31.1%
Increased visitors' use of products/services	n = 73	49.3%	16.4%	34.2%
Visitors returned to my business	n = 74	31.1%	8.1%	60.8%
Visitors spend more money at my business	n = 74	33.8%	29.7%	36.5%
Visitors recommended business to friends/relatives	n = 73	23.3%	19.2%	57.6%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

As shown in Table 7.8, of the 74 local tourism businesses that responded to the statements related to economic opportunities received from exchanging information with VICs, 91.1% agreed that their businesses were listed in VIC databases. Furthermore, economic opportunities were highlighted by those who indicated that they attended business training courses (75.7%), that visitors returned to their businesses (60.8%), and that their business products were exhibited at tourism events (54.0%). Others disagreed that they received funding to grow their businesses (85.2%), marketed their businesses on VIC websites (71.6%), and that their visitor bookings increased (54.1%). In addition, 57.6% of 73 local tourism businesses agreed

that visitors recommended their businesses to friends/relatives, while 49.3% disagreed that they experienced increased visitors' use of business products/services.

Responses about visitors spending more money at their businesses were quite even on both sides of the scale, with only 36.5% agreeing that the exchange of information presented this opportunity, while 33.8% disagreed, and 29.7% remained neutral. The negative responses point to areas that may require VIC staff's intervention to create opportunities that could emerge from the exchange of information and encourage local tourism businesses to continue exchanging information with VICs.

7.8 KNOWLEDGE SUPPLIED TO VICs

Besides the general information supplied to VICs, local tourism businesses were also asked, in an open-ended question, about any knowledge they have supplied to VICs (section 6: question 6.1-6.5). Only 18 local tourism businesses (24%) indicated that they have supplied VICs with knowledge such as local and traditional cuisine, undiscovered local attractions, and indigenous arts, crafts and beadwork. They also indicated that they emphasised the importance of indigenous storytellers who can work closely with tourist guides to provide knowledge about local areas. They further indicated that they have suggested that staff consider providing visitors with authentic homestay experiences. Among the businesses that responded, tourist guides stand out. They cited providing VICs with knowledge about issues such as township attractions, the houses of former political prisoners and the areas where they used to meet; story tellers whom visitors can visit to get more knowledge about the area; homestays; indigenous, traditional, and local cuisine; traditional dancers, crafts, and beadwork; and rock art sites/caves.

The local tourism businesses indicated that they supplied the knowledge personally to VIC staff members or through information-sharing or capacity-building workshops organised by VIC staff. They did not experience any challenges when providing local knowledge; in fact, they received benefits from supplying this knowledge. In particular, they indicated that staff referred visitors to their businesses to experience township life, authentic storytelling and local culture, cuisine, attractions, and other tourism

products. Through these referrals, local tourism businesses reported that their visitor bookings increased, they were able to network with other businesses, and the purchase of their products improved. Some of the reported responses are as follows:

- “A group of tourists were referred to me to take them out to experience local cuisine”
- “I had more than 180 visitors in my guest house in just two days after the VIC supplied my pamphlets”
- “We always get customers who buy our crafts and beads”
- We “catered at different events”
- “I was given a group of tourists [who] I took out for traditional food”
- I “work with a tour operator to take tourists to the cave”

Although some of these responses may be perceived more as information than as knowledge, they reflect exchanges that take place between VICs and local tourism businesses, even though to a limited extent. With the terms ‘information’ and ‘knowledge’ often used interchangeably, it is possible that the majority of local tourism businesses (n = 57) did not distinguish between the two terms, and therefore did not respond about the knowledge they exchanged, as they had already responded to the question about the information they exchanged with VICs. These gaps highlight the role that staff should play to encourage businesses to share both tacit and explicit knowledge that might not necessarily be available to the staff.

With regard to suggestions about improving the exchange of information and knowledge with local tourism businesses, the importance of incorporating technology into the operations of the VICs, particularly the use of social media platforms and electronic brochures, was emphasised. Local tourism businesses also suggested that VICs encourage networking and linkages among businesses, particularly between small and established businesses and those in similar or different sub-sectors. Also cited were receiving regular visitor statistics, reports and newsletters; improved communication; and regular engagements and meetings. Furthermore, they would like VIC staff to refer visitors in order to expose them to authentic experiences, thus enhancing their experiences of the area. Interestingly, the businesses did not identify

any suggestions from their side. This may indicate the expectations they have that VICs should lead and guide the exchange of information and knowledge and how this exchange should occur.

7.9 INFERENCE ANALYSIS

Several statistical techniques were used to achieve the study's research objective 5 and to test H_6 , which relates to whether the information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

Figure 7.16 shows the five steps that were undertaken to achieve research objective 5 and to test H_6 .

Figure 7.16: Steps to test hypothesis



Source: Researcher's own construction

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v25 was used to perform all statistical analyses in this section. The results are presented in terms of their significance in achieving research objective 5 and testing H_6 , and do not include discussion and interpretation of the literature, since this is the focus of Chapter 9.

7.9.1 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and not Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), was used to determine the underlying factor structure of the data. The questionnaire was

developed from the literature, and not taken from previous instruments; and the sample size was small ($n = 75$). EFAs were conducted on the following constructs:

- **VIC information-related constructs**

q10: Extensive information received

q11: Frequency of receiving information

q12: Useful information received

q13: Preferred information

q14: Useful information sources

q15: Satisfaction with information sources

q16: Preferred information sources

q18: Extensive information supplied

q19: Frequency of supplying information

- **Socio-economic opportunities constructs**

q26: Social opportunities received

q27: Economic opportunities received

7.9.2 Factor analysis

An EFA was conducted on items of each of the 11 constructs, using principal axis factoring and promax rotation to determine their dimensionality. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) for the items in all 11 constructs, indicating that a factor analysis was appropriate for each of the constructs. The total percentage variance explained for all 11 constructs varied between 52.26% and 80.81%, indicating an acceptable total amount of variance explained. The factors identified for each of the 11 constructs were based on the eigenvalue criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1.0 (Field, 2013).

A total of 29 factors were extracted from the EFA of the 11 constructs. In the case of q13 and q26, principal component analysis was used owing to estimation-related constraints when using principal axis factoring. A summary of the EFA of the 11 constructs and the identified factors and items for each are provided in Tables 7.9 to 7.19. The discarded factors or items, as well as the Cronbach's alpha values of the 29 factors, are indicated.

To measure the internal consistency (reliability) of the 29 identified factors – i.e., the manner in which local tourism businesses responded to similar questions in similar ways that measured a particular construct – the Cronbach's alpha of each factor was determined. Although a good reliability score (alpha) is considered to exceed a threshold of 0.7, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.5 is generally accepted in exploratory studies (George & Mallery, 2003).

As seen in Tables 7.10 to 7.20, the results show that the alpha coefficients ranged between 0.206 and 0.892. Cronbach's alpha values between 0.5 and 0.6 were deemed important and still acceptable values, as the study was exploratory in nature (George & Mallery, 2003). However, where the Cronbach's alpha value was lower than 0.5, the factors were discarded, as they were considered unacceptable. As a result, six factors (q13f1, q14f4, q15f4, q16f3, q16f4, and q19f2) were discarded. The items for the 29 factors were further analysed to see whether the deletion of an item would improve the value of Cronbach's alpha. Four items (q18_1, q26f1c, q27f1c, and q27f1d) were therefore discarded. A total of 23 factors with 65 items were considered for further analysis.

Table 7.9: Extensive information received

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings		Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	
q10: Extensive information received	0.613 $p < 0.001$	53.46			
q10_1: Local area information			0.595		0.649
q10_3: Operations of the VIC			0.559		

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings		Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	
q10_5: Bookings/reservations			0.650		
q10_7: Business training courses			0.470		
q10_2: Business services				0.494	0.617
q10_4: Visitor statistics				0.731	
q10_6: Business funding opportunities				0.568	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the extensive information received construct, two factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q10f1) deal with the extensiveness of information that local tourism businesses received to address visitor needs, while factor two (q10f2) highlights the extensiveness of information to address the needs of businesses. The factors were differentiated by labelling q10f1 as "extensive visitor support information received" while q10f2 was labelled "extensive business support information received". The Cronbach's alpha values for the two factors were above 0.6 and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research

Table 7.10: Frequency of receiving information

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings		Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	
q11: Frequency of receiving information	0.740 $p < 0.001$	56.13			
q11_1: Local area information			0.548		0.653
q11_3: Operations of the VIC			0.682		
q11_5: Bookings/reservations			0.619		
q11_7: Business training courses			0.448		
q11_2: Business services				0.821	0.646
q11_4: Visitor statistics				0.498	
q11_6: Business funding opportunities				0.506	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the frequency of receiving information construct, two factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q11f1) focus on the frequency of receiving information from VICs to address visitor needs, while factor two (q11f2) focuses on the frequency of receiving information to address the needs of businesses. The factors were differentiated by labelling q11f1 as “frequency of receiving visitor support information”, while q11f2 was labelled “frequency of receiving business support information”. The Cronbach’s alpha values for the two factors (q11f1 and q11f2) were above 0.6 and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 7.11: Useful information received

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett’s test	% variance explained	Factor loadings		Cronbach’s alpha
			1	2	
q12: Useful information received	0.520 $p < 0.001$	52.26			
q12_2: Business services			0.530		0.635
q12_6: Business funding opportunities			0.922		
q12_7: Business training courses			0.434		
q12_1: Local area information				0.598	0.555
q12_3: Operations of the VIC				0.438	
q12_4: Visitor statistics				0.355	
Q12_5: Bookings/reservations				0.648	

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

For the useful information received construct, two factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q12f1) focus on the usefulness of the information that local tourism businesses received to address visitor needs, while factor two (q12f2) highlights the usefulness of information to address the needs of businesses. The factors were differentiated by labelling q12f1 as “useful visitor support information received”, while q12f2 was labelled “useful business

support information received”. The Cronbach’s alpha values for the two factors indicated one factor (q12f1) above 0.6, which is considered acceptable for exploratory research, and another factor (q12f2) with a value of between 0.5 and 0.6, which is still considered acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 7.12: Preferred information

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q13: Preferred information	0.611 $p < 0.001$	66.47				
q13_1: Local area information			-0.724			0.206
q13_2: Business services			0.758			
q13_3: Operations of VIC				0.735		0.604
q13_4: Visitor statistics				0.737		
q13_5: Bookings/reservations				0.719		
q13_6: Business funding					0.904	0.778
q13_7: Business training					0.857	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the preferred information construct, three factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. Items q13.1, which cluster on factor one (q13f1), represent a negative factor loading and have to be reverse-scored in order to calculate Cronbach's alpha. This factor was discarded for further analysis because its Cronbach's alpha value was much lower than 0.5. Factor two (q13f2) focuses on information that local tourism businesses prefer to address visitor needs, while factor three (q13f3) focuses on information they prefer to address business needs. The factors were differentiated by labelling q13f2 as “preferred visitor support information”, while q13f3 was labelled “preferred business support information”. The Cronbach's alpha values for the two remaining factors (q13f2 and q13f3) were above 0.6 and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research.

It should be noted here that one of the factors consisted of two items. According to Eisinga, Te Grotenhuis and Pelzer (2013), a common situation facing researchers is that poor quality items have to be removed from a limited item pool, resulting in scales with a small number of items – occasionally only two. Thus, although it is not desirable, it is admissible to have two-item factors, especially if they have shown a strong correlation.

Table 7.13: Useful information sources

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings				Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	4	
q14: Usefulness of information sources	0.638 $p < 0.001$	70.66					
q14_3: Electronic touch screens			0.804				0.701
q14_10: Visitor notice boards			0.979				
q14_11: Television/radio			0.386				
q14_7: Printed brochures				0.783			0.789
q14_8: Magazines				0.868			
q14_4: Internet					0.691		0.648
q14_5: Social media					0.603		
q14_6: Mobile applications					0.619		
Q14_9: Audio-visual presentations					0.399		
q14_1: Personal face-to-face contact						0.787	0.415
q14_2: Telephone calls						0.405	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the useful information sources used construct, four factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q14f1) focus

on the usefulness of electronic information sources used by VICs to provide information to local tourism businesses; factor two (q14f2) focuses on printed information sources; factor three (q14f3) on online information sources; while factor four (q14f4) focuses on personal information sources. The factors were differentiated by labelling q14f1 as “useful electronic information sources”, q14f2 as “useful traditional printed information sources”, q14f3 as “useful online information sources”, and q14f4 as “useful traditional personal information sources”. Three of the four factors (q14f1, q14f2, and q14f3) had Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.6, which is acceptable for exploratory research; however, factor q14f4 was discarded for further analysis owing to a Cronbach’s alpha value lower than 0.5.

Table 7.14: Satisfaction with information sources

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett’s test	% variance explained	Factor loadings				Cronbach’s alpha
			1	2	3	4	
q15: Satisfaction with information sources	0.600 $p < 0.001$	70.59					
q15_3: Electronic touch screens for visitors			0.813				0.735
q15_10: Visitor notice boards			0.856				
q15_11: Television/radio			0.642				
q15_7: Printed brochures				0.816			0.771
q15_8: Magazines				0.806			
q15_4: Internet					0.707		0.665
q15_5: Social media					0.739		
q15_6: Mobile applications					0.440		
q15_9: Audio-visual presentations					0.406		
q15_1: Personal face-to-face contact						0.867	0.431
q15_2: Telephone calls						0.375	

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

For the satisfaction with information sources construct, four factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q15f1) focus on satisfaction with electronic information, factor two (q15f2) focuses on printed information sources, factor three (q15f3) on online information sources, while factor four (q15f4) focuses on personal information sources. The factors were differentiated by labelling q15f1 as “satisfaction with electronic information sources”, q15f2 as “satisfaction with printed information sources”, q15f3 as “satisfaction with online information sources”, and q15f4 as “satisfaction with personal information sources”. Three of the four factors (q15f1, q15f2, and q15f3) had Cronbach’s alpha values above 0.6, which is acceptable for exploratory research; however, factor q15f4 was discarded for further analysis owing to a Cronbach’s alpha value lower than 0.5.

Table 7.15: Preferred information sources

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett’s test	% variance explained	Factor loadings				Cronbach’s alpha
			1	2	3	4	
q16: Preferred information sources	0.561 $p < 0.001$	60.57					
q16_4: Internet			0.647				0.668
q16_5: Social media			0.802				
q16_9: Audio-visual presentations			0.558				
q16_6: Mobile applications				0.842			0.655
q16_10: Visitor notice boards				0.605			
q16_1: Personal face-to-face contact					0.701		0.469
q16_2: Telephone calls					0.495		
q16_7: Printed brochure					0.372		
q16_8: Magazines/ newspapers					0.324		
q16_3: Electronic touch screens for visitors						0.737	0.418

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings				Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	4	
q16_11: Television/radio						0.352	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the preferred information sources construct, three factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q16f1) reflect online information sources from which local tourism businesses prefer to receive information; factor two (q16f2) highlights electronic information sources; factor three (q16f3) reflects personal and printed information sources; and factor four (q16f4) focuses on audio-visual electronic information sources. The factors were differentiated by labelling q16f1 as “preferred online information sources”, q16f2 as “preferred electronic information sources”, q16f3 as “preferred personal and printed information sources”, and q16f4 as “preferred audio-visual electronic information sources”. Two of the four factors (q16f1 and q16f2) had Cronbach's alpha values above 0.6, which is acceptable for exploratory research; however, factors q16f3 and q16f4 were discarded for further analysis owing to Cronbach's alpha values lower than 0.5.

Table 7.16: Extensive information supplied

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loading	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
q18. Extensive information supplied	0.574 $p < 0.001$	80.81		
q18_2: Safety information			0.930	0.796
q18_3: Emergency numbers			0.791	
q18_4: Travel bookings and reservations			0.627	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The analysis confirmed unidimensionality for the extensive information supplied construct, as only one factor based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) was identified (Field, 2013). The items that clustered on one factor (q18F) focused on the extensiveness of information supplied; thus q18F was labelled “extensive information supplied”. This factor had a Cronbach’s alpha value above 0.6, which is acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 7.17: Frequency of supplying information

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett’s test	% variance explained	Factor loadings		Cronbach’s alpha
			1	2	
q19: Frequency of supplying information	0.567 $p < 0.001$	78.60			0.892
q19_2: Safety information			0.938		
q19_3: Emergency numbers			0.901		
q19_1: Local area information				0.434	0.307
q19_4: Travel bookings and reservations				0.487	

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

For the frequency of supplying information construct, two factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q19f1) reflect the frequency with which local tourism businesses supplied VICs with safety and emergency information, while factor two (q19f2) focuses on the frequency of supplying information on the local area and travel bookings. The factors were differentiated by labelling q19f1 “frequency of supplying safety and emergency information”, while q19f2 was labelled “frequency of supplying local area information and travel bookings”. The Cronbach’s alpha values for the two factors indicate one factor (q19f1) above 0.6, which is considered acceptable for exploratory research, and another factor (q19f2), which was discarded for further analysis owing to a Cronbach’s alpha value lower than 0.5.

Table 7.18: Social opportunities received

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings		Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	
q26: Social opportunities received	0.534 $p < 0.001$	64.39			
q26_2: Access to potential visitors			0.808		0.779
q26_4: Connecting with diverse visitors			0.886		
q26_1: Access to visitor statistics				0.880	0.561
q26_3: Network with other businesses				0.764	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the construct on social opportunities received, two factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q26f1) indicate access to potential visitors (q26f1a), connecting with diverse visitors (q26f1b), and sharing local knowledge with diverse visitors (q26f1c) as opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with VICs. However, item (q26f1c) was discarded in the analysis owing to a failure to improve the value of the Cronbach's alpha of q26f1. As a result, q26f1 consisted of two items, access to potential visitors (q26f1a) and connecting with diverse visitors (q26f1b) as social opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with the VICs. Factor two (q26f2) focuses on obtaining visitor statistics and networking with other businesses visitors as opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with VICs. The two factors were differentiated by labelling factor q26f1 "access to diverse and potential visitors", while q26f2 was labelled "access to visitor statistics and business networking". The Cronbach's alpha values for the two factors indicated one factor (q26f1) above 0.6, which is considered acceptable for exploratory research, and another factor with a value of between 0.5 and 0.6, which is still considered acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 7.19: Economic opportunities received

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q27: Economic opportunities received from information exchange	0.763 $p < 0.001$	68.31				
q27_2: Business is listed in the VIC database of businesses			0.328			0.818
q27_6: Visitor bookings have increased			1.000			
q27_7: Visitors' use of my products/ services has increased			0.820			
q27_9: Visitors spend more money at my business			0.596			
q27_5: Business products were exhibited at tourism events				0.428		0.794
q27_8: Visitors returned to my business				0.738		
q27_10: Visitors recommended my business to friends/ relatives				0.966		
q27_1: Marketed my business on the VIC website					0.461	0.519
q27_3: Received funding to grow my business					0.686	
q27_4: Attended a business training course					0.372	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the construct on economic opportunities received, three factors were identified based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), indicating that the construct is not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q27f1) reflect business listing in VIC databases, increased visitor bookings, increased visitor usage of business products, and increased visitor spend as economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with VICs. Factor two (q27f2) highlights the exhibition of business products at tourism events, visitors returning to businesses, and visitors recommending business to friends/relatives as

other economic opportunities, and consist of three items. Factor three (q27f3) also consists of three items, and points out that marketing businesses on the VIC website, obtaining funding to grow business, and attending business training courses are other economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received from exchanging information with VICs. It was decided to discard item q27_4 on the basis of its low Cronbach's alpha value. This resulted in a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.519, thus including only items q27_1 and q27_3 in this factor.

To differentiate between the three factors, factor one (q27f1) was labelled "database listing and business growth"; factor two (q27f2) was labelled "product exhibition and visitor loyalty"; while factor three (q27f3) was labelled "business marketing and funding".

7.9.3 Descriptive statistics of the extracted factors

The descriptive statistics were calculated for each of the identified reliable factors that were retained after factor analysis and reliability testing. The mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, as well as the minimum and maximum of each factor, are provided in Tables 7.20a and 7.20b below. The results were split into two tables in order to provide a much clearer picture of the descriptive statistics.

Table 7.20a: Descriptive statistics: local tourism businesses

	q10f1	q10f2	q11f1	q11f2	q12f1	q13f2	q13f3	q14f1	q14f2	q14f3	q15f1	q15f2	q15f3
N	Valid	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3.5233	2.3511	3.1433	1.9067	2.7822	3.9200	4.1947	2.4267	3.6267	3.2267	2.5022	3.6133	3.2000
Median	3.5000	2.3333	3.2500	1.6667	3.0000	4.0000	4.0000	2.6667	4.0000	3.2500	2.6667	4.0000	3.2500
Standard deviation	0.79502	0.85581	0.71798	0.70084	0.88276	0.75703	0.59181	0.83028	1.09388	0.74113	0.84073	1.10458	0.75896
Skewness	-0.756	0.412	-0.496	1.224	-0.328	-1.814	-1.260	-0.485	-0.962	-0.978	--0.569	-0.929	-0.682
Kurtosis	0.468	0.537	-0.104	2.520	-0.314	4.746	3.874	-0.768	0.396	2.192	--0.648	0.268	1.580
Minimum	1.25	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	4.75	4.67	4.67	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	5.00	5.00

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Table 7.20b: Descriptive statistics: local tourism businesses

	q16f1	q16f2	q18f	q19f1	q26f1	q26f2	q27f1	q27f2	q27f3
N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	4.2756	2.8000	2.1486	1.7133	4.0270	2.6959	3.0395	3.2084	1.9189
Median	4.3333	2.5000	2.0000	1.5000	4.0000	3.0000	3.0000	3.3333	1.5000
Std deviation	0.61604	1.20808	0.95569	0.91597	0.74839	1.01946	0.88854	1.02444	0.91543
Skewness	-1.626	0.326	0.544	1.441	-2.405	-0.218	-0.122	-0.826	0.871
Kurtosis	3.926	-0.910	-0.369	1.640	7.844	-0.905	-0.997	-0.370	-0.083
Minimum	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.25	1.00	1.00
Maximum	5.00	5.00	4.67	4.50	5.00	4.50	4.50	4.67	4.00

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Tables 7.20a and 7.20b show that the mean scores for the 23 factors ranged between 1.7133 and 4.2756. The lowest mean score of 1.7133 (SD = 0.91597) was for the factor “frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1), which was measured on a five-point scale anchored at (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) sometimes, (4) often, and (5) always. This low mean score illustrates that the average responses for this factor fell between “never” and “rarely”, indicating a low frequency of supplying VICs with safety and emergency information. The low frequency of this supply might indicate that local tourism businesses did not feel that it was their responsibility to supply this information, as it is often the obligation of law enforcement agencies to produce and distribute it.

The highest mean score of 4.2756 (SD = 0.616040) was for the factor “preferred online information sources” (q16f1), which was measured on a five-point scale anchored at (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. This mean score illustrates that the average response for this factor fell between “agree” and “strongly agree”, indicating a high preference for online information sources. This finding shows that local tourism businesses prefer to receive information more through online information sources than through other information sources. It therefore becomes important for VICs to consider investing in and using these sources to provide information to local tourism businesses.

The distribution of values was established to determine the extent to which the data were symmetrical, and to see whether they fell outside the range of -2 and +2 (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The findings show that the skewness values of all the factors were between -2 and +2, except for “access to diverse and potential visitors” (q26f1), indicating that a normal distribution can be assumed for these factors. To establish the pointedness or flatness of the data distribution, the kurtosis values for 17 of the 23 factors were found to be between -2 and +2, indicating that normality was not a problem for these factors. Kurtosis values above the threshold values of +2 were found for q11f2 (2.520), q13f2 (4.746), q13f3 (3.874), q14f3 (2.192), q16f1 (3.926), and q26f1 (7.844). It is important to note that these deviations do not represent a major violation and, in terms of the robustness and assumptions of the subsequent inferential analyses used, the reason that the variables can be used in the analysis will be provided – e.g., that tests are robust against deviations from normality.

7.9.4 Correlation analysis

The correlations, which measured the size of the linear relationships, were interpreted according to the guidelines of Cohen *et al.* (2003) as follows:

- Small/weak correlations: < 0.3 ($r = 0.10$ to 0.29 : small rho)
- Moderate correlations: $0.3\text{--}0.5$ ($r = 0.30$: medium rho)
- Strong correlations: > 0.5 ($r = 0.50$ to 1.00 : large rho)

Since H_6 aims to test whether the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses, without attempting to establish causation, correlation analysis was the appropriate choice of data analysis technique. To provide a much clearer picture of the correlation analysis, the results are provided in Tables 7.21a and 7.21b below.

Table 7.21a: Correlation analysis

		q10f1	q10f2	q11f1	q11f2	q12f1	q13f2	q13f3	q14f1	q14f2	q14f3
q10f1	Pearson correlation	1									
	Sig. (2-tailed)										
	N	75									
q10f2	Pearson correlation	0.248*	1								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.032									
	N	75	75								
q11f1	Pearson correlation	0.632**	0.243*	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.036								
	N	75	75	75							
q11f2	Pearson correlation	0.358**	0.636**	0.389**	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0.000	0.001							
	N	75	75	75	75						
q12f1	Pearson correlation	0.019	0.615**	0.226	0.416**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.874	0.000	0.051	0,000						
	N	75	75	75	75	75					
q13f2	Pearson correlation	0.432**	0.002	0.502**	0,178	-0.148	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.985	0.000	0,126	0.206					
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75				
q13f3	Pearson correlation	0.152	-0,008	0.151	0,054	0.082	0.293*	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.194	0.947	0.197	0,644	0.483	0,011				
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75			
q14f1	Pearson correlation	-0.107	0.114	-0.038	0.165	0.100	0.091	-0.047	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.359	0.331	0.747	0.158	0.394	0.438	0.691			
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75		
q14f2	Pearson correlation	-0.091	0.382**	0.125	0.104	0.551**	-0.086	0.062	-0.023	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.438	0.001	0.285	0.376	0.000	0.466	0.600	0.844		
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	
q14f3	Pearson correlation	0.209	0.107	0.240*	0,117	0.137	0.199	0.004	0.463**	0.220	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.072	0.360	0,038	0,317	0.242	0.086	0.970	0.000	0.057	
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q15f1	Pearson correlation	-0.074	0.117	-0.012	0.145	0.091	0.139	-0.041	0.917**	-0.041	0.532**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.530	0.318	0.918	0,213	0.436	0.233	0.729	0.000	0.725	0,000

		q10f1	q10f2	q11f1	q11f2	q12f1	q13f2	q13f3	q14f1	q14f2	q14f3
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q15f2	Pearson correlation	-0.090	.0329**	0.086	0.081	.541**	-0.105	0.122	-0.088	0.944**	0.175
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.445	0.004	0.465	0.491	0.000	0.371	0.298	0.454	0.000	0.134
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q15f3	Pearson correlation	0.171	0.060	0.212	0.103	0.093	0.297**	0.069	0.377**	0.148	0.927**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.142	0.607	0.068	0.378	0.429	0.010	0.559	0.001	0.205	0.000
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q16f1	Pearson correlation	0.111	-0.098	-0.029	-0.086	0.018	0.135	0.308**	-0.080	0.041	0.039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.344	0.404	0.802	0.465	0.878	0.249	0.007	0.493	0.726	0.740
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q16f2	Pearson correlation	0.232*	0.102	0.279*	0.353**	-0.067	0.362**	0.125	0.428**	-0.195	.334**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.045	0.386	0.015	0.002	0.569	0.001	0.285	0.000	0.093	0.003
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q18F	Pearson correlation	0.113	0.268*	0.072	0.255*	0.396**	-0.209	-0.046	0.217	0.242*	0.054
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.332	0.020	0.541	0.027	0.000	0.072	0.693	0.061	0.036	0.646
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q19f1	Pearson correlation	-0.019	0.179	0.081	0.277*	0.334**	-0.118	-0.301**	0.355**	0.188	0.229*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.875	0.124	0.488	0.016	0.003	0.313	0.009	0.002	0.105	.048
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q26f1	Pearson correlation	0.424**	-0.033	0.199	-0.073	-0.081	0.143	0.203	-0.058	-0.108	0.150
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.780	0.087	0.533	0.491	0.221	0.081	0.621	0.358	0.198
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q27f1	Pearson correlation	0.450**	0.131	0.312**	0.359**	0.115	0.323**	0.132	0.327**	-0.100	0.419**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.061	0.006	0.002	0.328	0.005	0.258	0.004	0.394	0.000
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q27f2	Pearson correlation	0.267*	0.351**	0.315**	0.413**	0.254*	0.229*	0.035	0.360**	0.120	0.493**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.021	0.002	0.006	0.000	0.028	0.048	0.763	0.002	0.307	0.000
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q26f2	Pearson correlation	0.362**	0.071	0.265*	0.419**	0.045	.304**	0.211	0.055	-0.069	0.260*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.543	0.022	0.000	0.704	0.008	0.069	0.641	0.555	0.024
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q27f3	Pearson correlation	0.161	0.497**	0.008	0.313**	0.435**	0.010	-0.017	-0.015	0.149	0.214
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.168	0.000	0.949	0.006	0.000	0.932	0.887	0.901	0.201	0.065
	N	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75	75

Source: Researcher's own contribution

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7.21b: Correlation analysis

		q15f1		q15f2	q15f3	q16f1		q16f2	q18F	q19f1	q26f1	q27f1	q27f2	q26f2
q10f1	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q10f2	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q11f1	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q11f2	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q12f1	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q13f2	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q13f3	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q14f1	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q14f2	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q14f3	Pearson correlation													
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N													
q15f1	Pearson correlation	1												
	Sig. (2-tailed)													
	N	75												
q15f2	Pearson correlation	-0.079		1										
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.500												
	N	75		75										
q15f3	Pearson correlation	0.521**		0.146	1									

		q15f1		q15f2	q15f3	q16f1		q16f2	q18F	q19f1	q26f1	q27f1	q27f2	q26f2
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.212										
	N	75		75	75									
q16f1	Pearson correlation	-0.047		0.109	0.124	1								
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.688		0.352	0.290									
	N	75		75	75	75								
q16f2	Pearson correlation	0.447**		-0.211	0.330**	0.045		1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.070	0.004	0.703								
	N	75		75	75	75		75						
q1F	Pearson correlation	0.180		0.178	-0.035	-0.132		0.102	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.122		0.127	0.766	0.260		0.384						
	N	75		75	75	75		75	75					
q19f1	Pearson correlation	0.293*		0.126	0.120	-0.157		0.234*	0.719**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.011		0.281	0.305	0.177		0.043	0.000					
	N	75		75	75	75		75	75	75				
q26f1	Pearson correlation	0.000		-0.049	0.193	0.154		-0.110	-0.274*	0.290*	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.998		0.677	0.098	0.188		0.347	0.017	0.012				
	N	75		75	75	75		75	75	75	75			
q27f1a	Pearson correlation	0.390**		-0.092	0.411**	-0.038		0.316**	0.032	0.101	0.379**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001		0.432	0.000	0.748		0.006	0.782	0.387	0.001			
	N	75		75	75	75		75	75	75	75	75		
q27f2	Pearson correlation	0.427**		0.081	0.481**	-0.193		0.262*	0.097	0.185	0.211	0.669**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.489	0.000	0.096		0.023	0.406	0.112	0.069	0.000		
	N	75		75	75	75		75	75	75	75	75	75	
q26f2	Pearson correlation	0.104		-0.033	0.305**	-0.043		0.239*	-0.038	-0.011	.285*	0.497**	0.444**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.374		0.778	0.008	0.717		0.039	0.747	0.928	0.013	0.000	0.000	
	N	75		75	75	75		75	75	75	75	75	75	75
q27f3	Pearson correlation	0.038		0.173	0.204	-0.017		0.023	0.087	0.070	0.033	0.170	0.288*	0.260*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.743		0.137	0.080	0.884		0.846	0.459	0.551	0.780	0.145	0.012	0.025
	N	75		75	75	75		75	75	75	75	75	75	75

Source: Researcher's own contribution

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on Tables 7.21a and 7.21b, two sets of correlation analysis were conducted. The strength and direction of these correlations are also highlighted. Owing to the small sample size, only correlations that reflect strong relationships between variables are highlighted in this section. All the other correlations are highlighted in Appendix G. First, Table 7.22 highlights strong correlations among independent variables (VIC information-related factors). Second, Table 7.23 presents strong correlations between independent variables (VIC information-related factors) and dependent variables (socio-economic opportunities factors). As it has been proven that the Pearson correlation coefficient is robust against deviations from normality (George & Mallery, 2003), the correlation analysis conducted in this study was valid for all the factors studied.

Table 7.22: Correlations among VIC information-related factors

Positive strong correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.632**)
“frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.636**)
“useful visitor support information received” (q12f1)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.615**)
“preferred visitor support information” (q13f2)	• “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.502**)
“useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2)	• “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.551**)
“satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1)	• “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.917**) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.532**)
“satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2)	• “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.541**) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0.944**)
“satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3)	• “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.927**) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.521**)
“frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1)	• “extensive information supplied” (q18f: 0.719**)

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7.22 reveals 12 positive strong correlations among the VIC information-related factors at a 1% level of significance ($p < 0.01$).

Table 7.23: Correlations: VIC information and socio-economic opportunities

Positive moderate: ($p < 0.01$)	
VIC information-related factors	Socio-economic opportunity factors
• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.424**)	“access to diverse and potential visitors” (q26f1)
• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.362**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.419**) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.304**) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.305**)	“access to visitor statistics and business networking” (q26f2)
• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.450**) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.312**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.359**) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.323**) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.327**) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.411**)	“database listing and business growth” (q27f1)
• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.351**) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.315**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.413**) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.360**) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.493**) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.427**) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.481**)	“product exhibition and visitor loyalty” (q27f2)
• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.497**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.313**)	“business marketing and funding” (q27f3)

“useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.435**)	

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Strong positive relationships could not be established between VIC information-related factors and socio-economic opportunity factors. However, Table 7.23 reveals 21 positive moderate correlations at a 1% level of significance ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that a relationship exists between VIC information-related factors and socio-economic opportunity factors.

In summary, the results of the correlation analysis indicate that, although none of the correlation values in Table 7.23 reveal very strong correlations ($r = 0.50$ to 1.00 : large rho), statistically significant positive and moderate relationships exist between VIC information-related factors (independent variables) and socio-economic opportunity factors (dependent variables) at a 1% level of significance. However, as Table 7.22 shows, a number of VIC information-related factors are strongly correlated with each other, pointing to potential multicollinearity (correlation coefficient values larger than 0.8). Variance inflation indicators were studied within the initial multiple regression analysis outputs to detect multicollinearity, and those factors that reduced the precision and predictions of the coefficients and weakened the statistical power of the regression model were removed. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are discussed in section 7.9.5.

7.9.5 Multiple linear regression analysis

In order to test the relationship (H_6) between VIC information-related factors (independent variables) and socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received (dependent variables); multiple linear regression analysis was conducted.

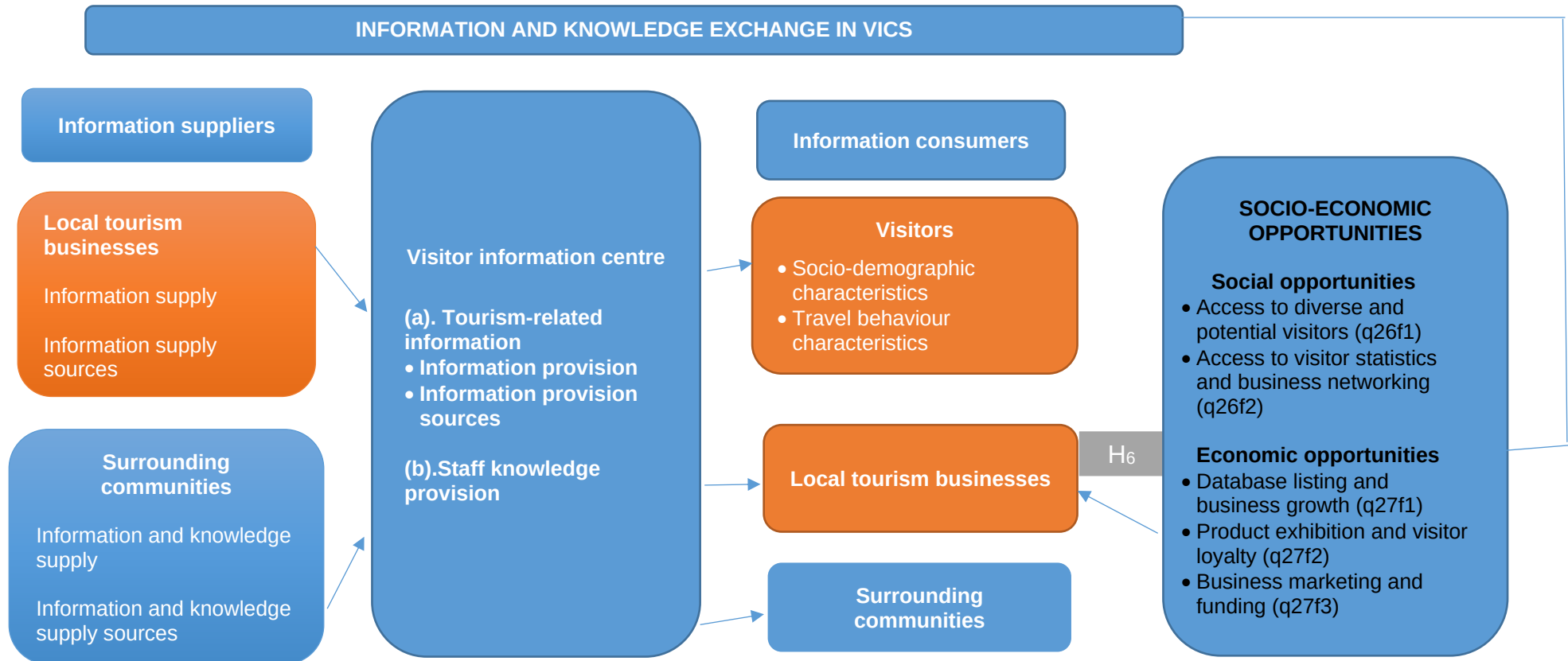
According to Hair *et al.* (2014), multiple regression analysis is a statistical technique that is used to analyse the relationship between a dependent variable and several independent variables. The main objective of the multiple regression analysis is to use

the independent variables, whose values are known, to predict the dependent value. In the analysis, each independent variable is weighted by the regression analysis procedure to ensure maximal prediction from the set of independent variables. The weights indicate the relative contribution of the independent variables to the overall prediction, and facilitate the interpretation of the influence of each variable in making the prediction. The regression model is therefore a linear combination of the independent variables that best predicts the dependent variable (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

In this study, the multiple linear regression procedure was employed to determine the VIC information-related factors (independent variables) that are statistically significant predictors of socio-economic opportunities factors (dependent variables). Thus regression analysis was used to test whether information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses (H₆). However, the main aim is not prediction, but to determine which predictors have a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable. The conceptual relationships investigated are depicted in Figure 7.17 below.

- The information and knowledge that local tourism businesses exchange with VICs contribute to access to diverse and potential visitors (q26f1)
- The information and knowledge that local tourism businesses exchange with VICs contribute to access to visitor statistics and business networking (q26f2)
- The information and knowledge that local tourism businesses exchange with VICs contribute to listing in VIC databases and business growth (q27f1)
- The information and knowledge that local tourism businesses exchange with VICs contribute to product exhibition and visitor loyalty (q27f2)
- The information and knowledge that local tourism businesses exchange with VICs contribute to business marketing and funding (q27f3)

Figure 7.17: Relationship: VIC information and socio-economic opportunities



Source: Researcher's own construction and contribution

LEGEND

- Blue and white text: VIC information and knowledge-related factors
- Orange and white text: VIC information and knowledge-related factors
- Blue and black: socio-economic opportunities factors

Because of the small sample size, the only independent variables that were included in each of the regressions were those with a Pearson correlation coefficient above 0.2. The analysis process followed involved including all the independent variables in the model that qualified. Based on the results, the non-significant variables were taken out of the analysis and the regression model was recalculated. The best-fitting regression model produced was the model with the highest adjusted R^2 and F values, indicating the set of VIC information-related factors that best predicted the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received. In addition, the best-fitting model was used to interpret the statistically significant predictors of these socio-economic opportunities.

The results of the multiple regression analysis are shown in Tables 7.24 to 7.28 below:

Table 7.24: Prediction of access to diverse and potential visitors

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
q10f1	0.502***	0.512***
q11f1	137	-0.145
q13f3	0.109	0.125
q15f3	0.125	0.116
q18f	-0.270*	-0.312***
q19f1	-0.057	
Adjusted R^2	0.263	0.272
F (p value)	5.390 (0.000)	6.527 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

- (i) Results of standardised betas are presented. Statistical significance is indicated with *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$).
- (ii) No multicollinearity was detected (all variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below 10).
- (iii) For the best-fitting model, the R^2 values were relatively small, and showed that 27.2% of the variation in the dependent variable, q26f1, can be explained by the respective set of variables in the best-fitting model.

- (iv) *The F test for regression is statistically significant for both models (the beta coefficient differs significantly from zero – p values all < 0.05).*
- (v) *The standardised beta values and associated significance indicate that q10f1 and q18f were statistically significant.*

The results show a strong positive relationship between access to diverse and potential visitors (q26f1) and extensive visitor support information received (local area information, operations of the VIC, bookings/reservations, business training courses: q10f1) which is statistically significant at a 1% level of significance ($\beta = 0.512$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that they received extensive visitor support information from VICs; the more opportunities were generated for them to access diverse and potential visitors. Thus access to diverse and potential visitors is strongly related to the extensive visitor support information that local tourism business received from VICs.

On the other hand, the results also show a moderate negative relationship between access to diverse and potential visitors (q26f1) and extensive information supplied (safety information, emergency numbers, travel bookings and reservations: q18F). The negative relationship is statistically significant at a 1% level of significance ($\beta = -0.312$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses disagreed that they supplied extensive information to VICs, the more opportunities were generated for them to access diverse and potential visitors.

Table 7.25: Prediction of access to visitor statistics and business networking

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
q10f1	222	0.184*
q11f1	-0.113	
q11f2	0.349	
q13f2	0.097	0.322 ***
q13f3	0.127	0.150
q14f3	-0.145	
q15f3	0.360	0.229 **
q16f2	-0.025	

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
Adjusted R ²	0.236	0.263
F (p value)	3.856 (0.000)	7.616 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

- (i) *Results of standardised betas are presented. Statistical significance is indicated with *(p<0.10), **(p<0.05), ***(p<0.01).*
- (ii) *No multicollinearity was detected (all VIF values were below 10).*
- (iii) *For the best-fitting model, the R² values were relatively small, and showed that 26.3% of the variation in the dependent variable, q26f2, can be explained by the respective set of variables in the best-fitting model.*
- (iv) *The F test for regression is statistically significant for both models (the beta coefficient differs significantly from zero – p values all < 0.05).*
- (v) *The standardised beta values and associated significance indicate that q10f1, q13f2, and q15f3 were statistically significant.*

The results show a weak positive relationship between access to visitor statistics and business networking (q26f2) and extensive visitor support information received (q10f1), which is statistically significant at a 10% level of significance ($\beta = 0.184$). This indicates that, potentially, the more local tourism businesses agreed that they received extensive visitor support information from VICs; the more opportunities were generated for them to access visitor statistics and to network with other businesses. Thus access to visitor statistics and business networking is weakly related to the extensiveness of the visitor support information that local tourism business received from VICs.

The results also show a moderate positive relationship between access to visitor statistics and business networking (q26f2) and preferred visitor support information (operations of VIC, visitor statistics, bookings/reservations: 13f2), which is statistically significant at a 1% level of significance ($\beta = 0.322$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that they prefer to receive visitor support information from VICs, the more opportunities were generated for them to access visitor statistics and to network with other businesses. Thus access to visitor statistics

and business networking is moderately related to the information that local tourism businesses prefer to receive from VICs.

Furthermore, a weak positive relationship exists between access to visitor statistics and business networking (q26f2) and satisfaction with online information sources (social media, mobile applications, audio-visual presentations: q15f3). The relationship is statistically significant at a 5% level of significance ($\beta = 0.229$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that they were satisfied with online information sources, the more opportunities were generated for them to access visitor statistics and to network with other businesses. Thus access to visitor statistics and business networking is weakly related to local tourism businesses' satisfaction with online information sources. However, an earlier discussion (in section 7.5.2) showed that, with the exception of the Internet, with which 70.3% of local tourism businesses were satisfied as a source used by VICs to provide information, some remained neutral about their satisfaction with other sources. In this regard, these local tourism businesses felt neutral about their satisfaction with electronic touch screens (61.3%), mobile applications (60.0%), visitor notice boards (49.3%), and social media (42.7%) as sources used by VICs to provide information to their businesses. Therefore, satisfaction with the Internet might be the main item in q15f3 to contribute to local tourism businesses agreeing that online information sources generated opportunities for them to access visitor statistics and to network with other businesses.

Table 7.26: Prediction of database listing and business growth

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
q10f1	0.403	0.382***
q11f1	-0.075	
q11f2	0.176	0.156
13f2	0.073	
q14f1	-0.175	0.254**
q14f3	0.005	
q15f1	0.090	
q15f3	0.222	0.234**
q16f2	-0.029	

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
Adjusted R ²	0.333	0.373
F (p value)	5.097(0.000)	12.018 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

- (i) *Results of standardised betas are presented. Statistical significance is indicated with *(p<0.10), **(p<0.05), ***(p<0.01).*
- (ii) *No multicollinearity was detected (all VIF values were below 10).*
- (iii) *For the best-fitting model, the R² values were small, and showed that 37.3% of the variation in the dependent variable, q27f1a, can be explained by the respective set of variables in the best-fitting model.*
- (iv) *The F test for regression is statistically significant for both models (the beta coefficient differs significantly from zero – p values all < 0.05).*
- (v) *The standardised beta values and associated significance indicate that q10f1, q14f1, and q15f3 were statistically significant.*

The results show a moderate positive relationship between database listing and business growth (q27f1) and extensive visitor support information received (q10f1), which is statistically significant at a 1% level of significance ($\beta = 0.382$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that the visitor support information that they received from VICs was extensive, the more opportunities were generated for them to be listed in the databases of VICs and to grow their businesses. Thus database listing and business growth are moderately related to the extensiveness of the visitor support information that local tourism businesses received from VICs.

The results also show a weak positive relationship between database listing and business growth (q27f1) and usefulness of electronic information sources used by the VIC to provide information to businesses (electronic touch screens, visitor notice boards, television/radio: q14f1) which is statistically significant at a 5% level of significance ($\beta = 0.254$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that the electronic information sources used by VICs to provide information were useful, the more opportunities were generated for them to be listed in the databases of VICs and to grow their businesses. Thus database listing and

business growth are weakly related to the local tourism businesses' perception of useful electronic information sources used by VICs to provide information. Although a fairly high percentage of the local tourism businesses reported visitor notice boards (49%), television/radio (48%), and electronic touch screens (34%) as information sources that they found not useful, the results of the regression analysis show that the usefulness of at least one of these sources might have contributed slightly more to local tourism businesses agreeing that opportunities were generated for them to list their businesses in the databases of VICs and to grow their businesses.

The results also show a weak positive relationship between VIC database listing and business growth (q27f1) and satisfaction with online information sources (q15f3), which is statistically significant at a 5% level of significance ($\beta = 0.234$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that they were satisfied with online information sources, the more opportunities were generated for them to be listed in the databases of VICs and to grow their businesses. Thus VIC database listing and business growth are weakly related to the local tourism businesses' satisfaction with online information sources.

Table 7.27: Prediction of product exhibition and visitor loyalty

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
q10f1	0.103	0.138
q10f2	0.124	0.130
q11f1	0.066	
q11f2	0.209	0.116
q13f2	0.031	
q14f1	0.214	0.117
q14f3	0.032	
q15f1	-0.011	
q15f3	0.4196	0.396***
q16f1	-0.212	-0.215**
q16f2	-0.077	
q19f1	-0.026	

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
Adjusted R ²	0.356	0.405
F (p value)	4.410(0.000)	9.387(0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

- (i) *Results of standardised betas are presented. Statistical significance is indicated with *(p<0.10), **(p<0.05), ***(p<0.01).*
- (ii) *No multicollinearity was detected (all VIF values were below 10).*
- (iii) *For the best-fitting model, the R² values were moderate, and showed that 40.5% of the variation in the dependent variable, q27f2, can be explained by the respective set of variables in the best-fitting model.*
- (iv) *The F test for regression is statistically significant for both models (the beta coefficients differ significantly from zero – p values all < 0.05).*
- (v) *The standardised beta values and associated significance indicate that q15f3 was statistically significant.*

The results show a moderate positive relationship between product exhibition and visitor loyalty (q27f2) and satisfaction with online information sources (q15f3), which is statistically significant at a 1% level of significance ($\beta = 0.396$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that they were satisfied with online information sources, the more opportunities were generated for them to exhibit their products at tourism events and for visitors to be loyal to their businesses. Thus product exhibition and visitor loyalty are moderately related to local tourism businesses' satisfaction with online information sources.

On the other hand, the results also show a weak negative relationship between product exhibition and visitor loyalty (q27f2) and preferred online information sources (the Internet, social media, and audio-visual presentations: q16f1). The negative relationship is statistically significant at a 5% level of significance ($\beta = -0.215$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses disagreed that they preferred online information sources, the more opportunities were generated for them

to exhibit their products at tourism events and for visitors to be loyal to their businesses.

Table 7.28: Prediction of business marketing and funding

Independent constructs	Original Model 1	Best-fitting Model 2
q10f2	0.390	0.369**
q11f2	-0.033	
q12f1	0.195	0.193
q14f3	-0.270	
q15f3	0.190	0.163
Adjusted R²	0.251	0.271
F (p value)	5.948 (000)	10.166 (000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

- (i) Results of standardised betas are presented. Statistical significance is indicated with *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$).
- (ii) No multicollinearity was detected (all VIF values were below 10).
- (iii) For the best-fitting model, the R^2 values were relatively small, and showed that 27.1% of the variation in the dependent variable, q27f3, can be explained by the respective set of variables in the best-fitting model.
- (iv) The F test for regression is statistically significant for both models (the beta coefficient differs significantly from zero – p values all < 0.05).
- (v) The standardised beta values and associated significance indicate that q10f2 was statistically significant.

The results show a moderate positive relationship between business marketing and funding (q27f3) and extensive business support information received (q10f2), which is statistically significant at a 5% level of significance ($\beta = 0.369$). This indicates the tendency that the more local tourism businesses agreed that they received extensive business support information from VICs, the more opportunities were generated for them to market their businesses on VIC websites and to receive funding to grow their businesses. Thus business marketing and funding are moderately related to the

extensiveness of the business support information that local tourism businesses received from VICs.

7.9.5.1 Conclusions drawn from the multiple regression analysis

The results of the regression analysis show that there is a relationship between VIC information-related factors and the socio-economic opportunities that local tourism businesses received. These relationships are summarised in Table 7.29 below:

Table 7.29: VIC information factors and socio-economic opportunities

VIC information factors	Strength of relationship	Opportunities for local tourism businesses
Extensiveness of visitor support information (q10f1: local area information, operations of the VIC, bookings/reservations, business training courses)	Strong positive	Access to diverse and potential visitors (q26f1)
	Moderate positive	Database listing and business growth (27f1)
	Weak positive	Access to visitor statistics and business networking (26f2)
Preferred visitor support information (q13f2: operations of VIC, visitor statistics, bookings/ reservations)	Moderate positive	Access to visitor statistics and business networking (q26f2)
Extensiveness of business support information (q10f2: business services, visitor statistics, business funding opportunities)	Moderate positive	Business marketing and funding (q27f3)
Usefulness of electronic information sources (q14f1: electronic touch screens, visitor notice boards, television/radio)	Weak positive	Database listing and business growth (q27f1)
Satisfaction with online information sources (q15f3: Internet, social media, mobile applications, audio-visual presentations)	Weak positive	Database listing and business growth (q27f1) Access to visitor statistics and business networking (q26f2)

VIC information factors	Strength of relationship	Opportunities for local tourism businesses
		Product exhibition and visitor loyalty (q27f2)
Preferred online information sources (q16f1: Internet, social media, audio-visual presentations)	Weak negative	Product exhibition and visitor loyalty (q27f2)
Extensive information supplied (q18F: safety information, emergency numbers, travel bookings and reservations)	Moderate negative	Access to diverse and potential visitors (q26f1)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

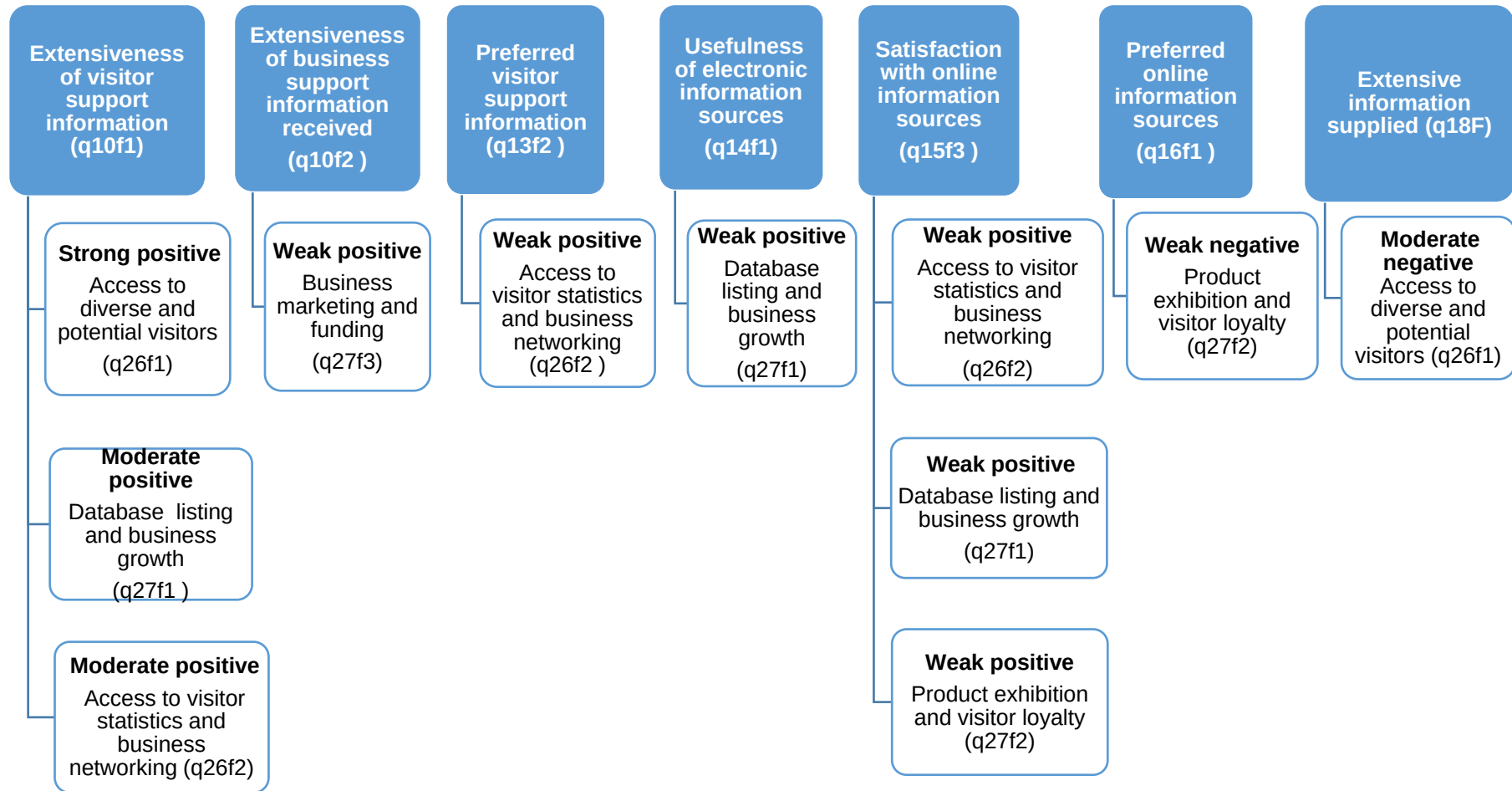
The results show that, if the visitor support information received from VICs was perceived as extensive by local businesses, it could generate several social and economic opportunities for them. Also, the more local tourism businesses perceived the visitor support information received from VICs as extensive, the more they agreed that opportunities were created for them to access diverse and potential visitors and list their businesses in VIC databases. However, such information contributed weakly to their accessing VIC statistics and networking with other businesses. Interestingly, the results show that, if local businesses preferred to receive visitor support information, then opportunities were generated for them to access visitor statistics and business networking. Again, if the business support information received from VICs was perceived to be extensive, then opportunities were generated for them to market their businesses on VIC websites and receive funding to grow their businesses.

As far as information sources are concerned, the results show that, when local tourism businesses perceived electronic information sources to be useful, and when they were more satisfied with online information sources, more opportunities were created for them. These included being listed in VIC databases, access to visitor statistics, networking with other businesses, exhibiting their products, and encouraging visitor loyalty. The weak positive relationships might point to the limited availability and use of electronic and online information sources at VICs. It is therefore important for VIC staff to consider investing in modern electronic and online information sources if local

tourism businesses are to benefit from socio-economic opportunities. The negative relationships, on the other hand, might indicate that, even though local tourism businesses expressed disagreement on the extensiveness of the information they supplied and the online information sources they preferred, opportunities were still generated for them to access diverse and potential visitors, to exhibit their products, and to encourage visitor loyalty.

Figure 7.18 below depicts the relationships established by the regression analysis, highlighting the VIC information-related factors that are significant in generating socio-economic opportunities for local businesses.

Figure 7.18: Factors that contribute to socio-economic opportunities



Source: Researcher's own contribution

7.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the quantitative results of the study to assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses. The results reveal that there is an exchange of information between VICs and local tourism businesses. This exchange presents several socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses. These results therefore address research objective 5 and support H₆. However, the results also identify several VIC information-related factors that are important to contributing to socio-economic opportunities:

- Visitor and business support information that is extensive and that local tourism businesses prefer to receive.
- Electronic information sources that local tourism businesses perceive to be useful, and online information sources with which they are satisfied to receive information from VICs.

Although the study focused on specific visitor and business information, the results show that the achievement of socio-economic opportunities goes beyond the mere provision of information: in fact, it is more dependent on the nature (e.g preference) and extent (extensiveness) of the information that is exchanged between VICs and local tourism businesses. It is therefore important that, in their exchange of information, VIC staff should understand the information needs of local tourism businesses and provide them with information that is extensive and that they prefer to receive. In the same vein, VIC staff should use the information sources with which local tourism businesses are satisfied and that they perceive to be useful for receiving information. While local tourism businesses reported visitor notice boards, electronic touch screens, and television/radio as electronic information sources they found not useful, with which they were dissatisfied, or did not prefer, it is possible that they found these sources to be not particularly relevant to them, as they are available on-site for visitor to use when they physically visit the VICs. Furthermore, local tourism businesses felt neutral about their satisfaction with online information sources such as social media and mobile applications. This may be attributed to the lack – or limited availability – of these sources at most VICs that participated in the study. However,

local tourism businesses still indicated that they preferred to receive information through these sources. The Internet, which can provide information any time and off-site, was found to be useful, and local tourism businesses were satisfied with it as an information source.

Understanding the information needs of local tourism businesses and providing information through sources that meet these needs is necessary to encourage them to be involved in an information exchange process that will generate socio-economic opportunities that are essential to growing their businesses. Although the prediction of socio-economic opportunities focused on VIC information factors, it is also important that the nature and extent of the knowledge that is exchanged between VICs and local tourism businesses be emphasised if local tourism businesses are to benefit from these opportunities.

The next chapter presents an empirical quantitative analysis to assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences. The chapter tests whether visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their memorable visitor experiences (H₁) and behavioural intentions (H₂). In addition, the chapter tests whether the memorable experiences that visitors receive in local areas they visit influence their behavioural intentions (H₃). Lastly, the chapter tests whether the information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences (H₄) and visitors' behavioural intentions (H₅).

CHAPTER 8: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH RESULTS: VIC VISITORS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Having presented the quantitative findings of a survey undertaken with local tourism businesses in the previous chapter, this chapter presents the quantitative results of a survey undertaken with 152 visitors to 18 VICs. The chapter addresses research objective 6, and assesses how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions. The chapter will also test the following research hypotheses emerging from the conceptual framework developed at the end of Chapter 4 (Figure 4:7):

- H₁: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences.
- H₂: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H₄: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable visitor experiences.
- H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

Section 8.2 describes the sample and the questionnaire completed by 152 visitors. Their demographic and travel behaviour characteristics are described in sections 8.3 and 8.4 respectively. Section 8.5 provides information on visitors' visits and use of VICs during travel. Section 8.6 highlights pre-trip planning information searches, while section 8.7 presents the information they searched for at VICs. Section 8.8 presents their experiences at VICs, and section 8.9 presents their experiences at visited areas. Section 8.10 focuses on the inferential analysis that was conducted to test the study's hypotheses (H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄, H₅). The conclusion on how research objective 6 was achieved and how the hypotheses were tested is provided in section 8.11. The

managerial implications for enhancing memorable visitor experiences and visitors' behavioural intentions are also highlighted.

8.2 SAMPLE AND COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES

As explained in Chapter 5, a list of the contact details of visitors who visited VICs 12 months prior to the data collection being undertaken was initially planned to serve as a sampling frame for the study. However, owing to the staff's concerns about research ethics, and the fact that not all VICs keep records of visitors' contact details, only four made their lists of visitors available. As a result, it was not feasible to compile a sampling frame from which to select a representative sample of visitors. It was also impossible to determine a visitor sample size for the study, as the visitor population in the 18 VICs was unknown. With a diffuse target population of visitors, attempting to identify respondents or compile a visitor list to achieve a representative sample was not possible.

Using visitors' email addresses sourced from the supplied lists, questionnaires were emailed to request their participation in the study. In addition, paper-based questionnaires were posted and left at each of the 18 participating VICs for visitors to complete. Visitors were requested either to complete the questionnaires online at https://pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eKYujdZTQqkB7W5, or to complete them in paper format and email them back to the researcher. A total of 34 questionnaires were completed online, while 118 were completed in paper format. Thus 152 completed questionnaires formed a realised sample for the study.

A five-point Likert-type response scale was used to measure the constructs in the questionnaires, as shown in Table 8.1 below.

Table 8.1: Scale grouping

Scale	Scale grouping for graphical purposes
1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly agree	'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' reflected as 'disagree' 'neutral' 'agree' and 'strongly agree' reflected as 'agree'
1= Not extensive at all 2= Not extensive 3= Neutral 4= Extensive 5= Very extensive	'not extensive at all' and 'not extensive' reflected as 'not extensive' 'neutral' 'extensive' and 'very extensive' reflected as 'extensive'
1= Not useful at all 2=Not useful 3=Neutral 4=Useful 5 =Very useful	'not useful at all' and 'not useful' reflected as 'not useful' 'neutral' 'useful' and 'very useful' reflected as 'useful'.
1=Not important at all 2= Unimportant 3=Neutral 4=Important 5=Very important	'not important at all' and 'unimportant' reflected as 'unimportant' 'neutral' 'important' and 'very important' reflected as 'important'
1=Never 2= Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Always	'never' and 'rarely' reflected as 'rarely' 'sometimes' 'often' and 'always' reflected as 'often'

Source: Researcher's own construction

The scales were used in their original five-point Likert-type response format to conduct the factor and subsequent regression analyses. However, to allow a clearer graphical observation of emerging patterns in the descriptive analysis, the responses were grouped into three options, as highlighted in Table 8.2 above. It is also important to point out that some values in the descriptive analysis in Tables 8.3 to 8.34 do not add up to exactly 100%, owing to the rounding of percentages in SPSS v25. For the Likert-type questions, where less than 20% of the values were missing in total, appropriate missing value replacement techniques were used in the exploratory factor analysis and the subsequent inferential analysis. Not all 152 visitors who participated in the

study responded to all the questions in the questionnaire, and this is highlighted in the sections below.

The researcher presented the descriptive statistics of the main constructs using stacked bar charts that reflect the responses as indicated in the frequency tables. The mean (average) was not used owing to the information being ordinal data for which the interpretation is not feasible, as two points on an ordinal scale are not at equal distances from each other. A case in point is the interpretation of a mean of 3 when using the five-point agreement Likert-type response format. This could indicate a tendency to report 'neutral', or it could have been that half of the respondents chose 'agree' or 'strongly agree', and the other half chose 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'. Thus information is only known through the frequency tables.

8.3 PROFILE OF VISITORS WHO RESPONDED

To provide a descriptive profile of the visitors who participated in this study, their socio-demographic characteristics were analysed, and are presented in Table 8.2² below. Frequency counts and valid percentages were used to describe, analyse, and present data patterns.

Table 8.2: Socio-demographic characteristics of visitors (n = 152)

Individual characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
VIC respondents (n = 152)		
Pilgrim's Rest	23	15.1%
Burg Street: Cape Town Tourism	21	13.8%
Donkin VIC: Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism	18	11.8%
Senekal	14	9.2%
Colesberg	13	8.6%
Online	13	8.6%
Makhado	9	5.9%
Durban Tourism	8	5.3%
Kimberley	8	5.3%

² Owing to rounding in SPSS v25, the values for country of residence add up to 100.4%, while the province of residence and age and population group each add up to 99.9%.

Individual characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bloemfontein	7	4.6%
Mpumalanga International Airport	7	4.6%
Pilanesberg	6	3.9%
Cape St Francis	5	3.3%
Country of residence (n = 152)		
South Africa	96	63.2%
Germany	14	9.2%
United States of America	7	4.6%
New Zealand	4	2.6%
United Kingdom	4	2.6%
Belgium	3	2.0%
Brazil	3	2.0%
England	3	2.0%
France	3	2.0%
Australia	2	1.3%
Canada	2	1.3%
Spain	2	1.3%
Congo	1	0.7%
Denmark	1	0.7%
Finland	1	0.7%
Italy	1	0.7%
Japan	1	0.7%
Jordan	1	0.7%
Namibia	1	0.7%
Taiwan	1	0.7%
United Arab Emirates	1	0.7%
Province of residence (n = 152)		
International visitors	54	35.5%
Gauteng	19	12.5%
Eastern Cape	15	9.9%
Limpopo	12	7.9%
Northern Cape	11	7.2%
Western Cape	11	7.2%
Free State	9	5.9%
Mpumalanga	8	5.3%
KwaZulu-Natal	7	4.6%
North West	6	3.9%
Gender (n = 150)		
Female	95	63.3%
Male	55	36.7%

Individual characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (n = 150)		
29–38	47	31.3%
39–48	39	26.0%
19–28	23	15.3%
49–58	22	14.7%
59–68	11	7.3%
>69	5	3.3%
<18	3	2.0%
Population group (n = 152)		
White	63	41.4%
Black	61	40.1%
Coloured	11	7.2%
Indian	7	4.6%
Other	10	6.6%
Highest level of education (n = 152)		
Bachelor's degree	47	30.9%
Diploma/Certificate after Grade 12	37	24.3%
Grade 12/Standard 10/Matric	31	20.4%
Postgraduate degree (e.g., Honours, Master's, PhD)	31	20.4%
Some high school education	5	3.3%
Other	1	0.7%
Employment status (n = 152)		
Employed	86	56.6%
Self-employed	18	11.8%
Unemployed	12	7.9%
Full-time pupil/learner at school	12	7.9%
Pensioner	12	7.9%
Full-time student at college/university	10	6.6%
Other	2	1.3%
Current monthly income (n = 139)		
Less than R10 000	45	32.4%
R50 001–R60 000	27	19.4%
R30 001–R40 000	12	8.6%
R10 001–R20 000	11	7.9%
R20 001–R30 000	11	7.9%
R70 001–R80 000	11	7.9%
R40 001–R50 000	10	7.2%
R60 001–R70 000	9	6.5%
More than R80 000	3	2.2%

Source: Researcher's own construction

The results show that the modal category of the 152 visitors were those who visited the Pilgrim's Rest VIC (15.1%), followed by visitors to Cape Town Tourism's Burg Street VIC (13.8%), Nelson Mandela Bay Tourism's Donkin VIC (11.8%), Senekal VIC (9.2%), Colesberg VIC (8.6%), Makhado VIC (5.9%), Durban VIC (5.3%), and Kimberley VIC (5.3%). The lowest number of visitors were those who visited VICs located in Bloemfontein (4.6%), at Mpumalanga International Airport (4.6%), in Pilanesberg (3.9%), and in Cape St Francis (3.3%). The remaining 18.6% were visitors who completed online questionnaires but did not indicate the VICs they had visited.

South African visitors to VICs accounted for a substantial proportion (63.2%). The remaining 36.8% were international visitors, with the highest numbers coming from Germany (9.2%) and the USA (4.6%). All the other countries had less than 3% of the visitors each. Although 96 visitors (63.2%) were South Africans, it seems that two international visitors also responded to the question about their province of residence in South Africa, bringing the total number of visitors who indicated the province in which they resided to 98. As a result, the figures show that the majority resided in Gauteng Province (12.5%), followed by those who lived in the Eastern Cape Province (9.9%), Limpopo Province (7.9%), Western Cape Province (7.2%), and Northern Cape Province (7.2%). Other visitors came from Free State Province (5.9%), Mpumalanga Province (5.3%), KwaZulu-Natal Province (4.6%), and North West Province (3.9%). The remaining visitors (35.6%) did not indicate the province in which they resided; these were probably international visitors.

The results show that, of the 150 visitors who indicated their gender, 63.3% were females and 36.7% were males. Only two (1.3%) of the 152 visitors did not indicate their ages. The results show that the ages of the other 150 visitors ranged between 18 and 75 years, with more than two-thirds (87.3%) of the visitors being between 29 and 58 years. The dominant age group was 29–38 years (31.3%), followed by 39–48 years (26.0%), 19–28 (15.3%), 49–58 (14.7%), and 59–68 (7.3%). The smallest groups were made up of visitors over 68 years (3.3%) and those younger than 19 years (2.0%).

The population groups of the 152 visitors revealed nearly equal percentages for Whites (41.4%) and Blacks (40.1%). Coloureds and Indians accounted for 7.2% and 4.6% respectively. The other 6.8% were mostly international visitors who possibly

could not classify themselves according to the South African classification of population groups. The education levels of the visitors indicated that the modal category was a Bachelor's degree (30.9%), followed by those with a diploma (24.3%), Grade 12 (20.4%), and a postgraduate qualification (20.4%). Those with some high school education accounted for 3.3% of the visitors, while the remaining 0.7% did not specify their educational levels. The results therefore show a relatively high level of educational attainment among the visitors.

The results for employment status show that the majority of the 152 visitors were employed (56.6%) followed by those who were self-employed (11.8%). Full-time learners in schools, pensioners, and those who were unemployed accounted for 7.9% each. The remaining respondents were full-time (6.6%) and part-time students (1.3%).

Of the 152 visitors, 13 (8.6%) did not respond to the question about their monthly income. Although the results for the 139 visitors who did respond indicate that almost a third (32.4%) of them earned less than R10 000, it is important to consider that some visitors were either full-time learners in high schools or students in institutions of higher learning, and therefore presumably did not earn any income. The next levels of income were R50 001–R60 000, which was reported by 19.4% of the visitors, R30 000–R40 000 indicated by 8.6%, and R10 001–R20 000, R20 001–R30 000, and R70 001–R80 000 reported by 7.9% each. An income of R40 001–R50 000 was reported by 7.2%, and R60 001–R70 000 was indicated by 6.5%. Only 2.2% of the visitors reported earning a monthly income of more than R80 000.

8.4 TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR CHARACTERISTICS

This section reflects the travel behaviour characteristics of the visitors. The questions asked are given in Table 8.3, while Table 8.4³ provides the responses to these questions. However, not all 152 visitors responded to the questions on travel

³ Owing to rounding in SPSS v25, the values for main purpose of visit, travel companions, and number of travel companions add up to 100.1% each, while the values for planned duration of stay add up to 99.9%.

behaviour characteristics, resulting in missing values for the questions given in Table 8.4.

Table 8.3: Questions: Travel behaviour characteristics

Construct	Questions
Travel behaviour characteristics (section 4)	What is the main purpose of your trip to this area? (question 4.1)
	Who did you travel with to this area? (question 4.2)
	How many people travelled with you to this area? (question 4.3)
	What is the main type of transport that you used to travel to this area? (question 4.4)
	Is this the only area that you will be visiting during this trip? If not, which other areas will you visit during this trip? (questions 4.5 and 4.6)
	How long do you plan to stay in this area? (question 4.7)
	What type of accommodation are you using in this area? (question 4.8)
	Have you visited this area before? (question 4.9)
	How many times have you visited this area in the past? (question 4.10)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Table 8.4: Visitor travel behaviour characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Main purpose of trip (n = 136)		
Holiday	90	66.2%
Business	23	16.9%
Visit friends and relatives	16	11.8%
Religious	5	3.7%
Other (specify)	2	1.5%
Travel companions (n = 138)		
Partner/spouse (without children)	47	34.1%
Friends	33	23.9%
Co-workers	19	13.8%
Organised group (e.g., school, sporting)	16	11.6%
Partner/spouse (with children)	15	10.9%
Alone	8	5.8%

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Number of travel companions (n = 138)		
One person	44	31.9%
More than four people	27	19.6%
Two people	23	16.7%
Alone	19	13.8%
Four people	13	9.4%
Three people	12	8.7%
Main type of transport used to travel (n = 136)		
Aircraft	69	50.7%
Car	48	35.3%
Bus	12	8.8%
Taxi	5	3.7%
Motorcycle	2	1.5%
Train	0	0%
Other areas to be visited during the trip (N = 135)		
No	102	75.6%
Yes	33	24.4%
Planned duration of stay (n = 138)		
2–4 nights	57	41.3%
One night	29	21.0%
Day visit	21	15.2%
5–7 nights	21	15.2%
8–10 nights	5	3.6%
More than 10 nights	5	3.6%
Type of accommodation used (n = 119)		
Guest house/bed and breakfast	35	29.4%
Hotel	34	28.6%
Self-catering	33	27.7%
Staying with friends and/or relatives	9	7.6%
Other (specify)	8	6.7%
Prior visit to area (N = 137)		
Yes	93	67.9%
No	44	32.1%
Number of prior visits to area (n = 92)		
2–3 times	46	50.0%
4–5 times	19	20.7%
Once	14	15.2%
More than 5 times	13	14.1%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Of the 136 visitors, two-thirds (66.2%) indicated that they were on holiday as the main reason for undertaking their trips, while 16.9% travelled for business purposes, 11.8% to visit friends and relatives, 3.7% for religious purposes, and only 1.5% for other purposes.

Just over a third (34.1%) of the 138 visitors travelled with partners but without their children, followed by those who travelled with friends (23.9%), co-workers (13.8%), in organised groups (11.6%), or as partners with children (10.9%); only a few (5.8%) travelled alone. With regard to the number of travel companions, 31.9% of the visitors indicated that they travelled with one other person, followed by 20% who travelled with more than four people, 19.6% with two people, and 13.8% travelled alone; those who travelled with four and three people accounted for 9.4% and 8.7% of the visitors respectively.

The majority of the 136 visitors indicated that they used an aircraft (50.7%) to travel to visited areas, followed by those who used cars (35.3%), buses (8.8%), or taxis (3.7%); only 1.5% used motorcycles. None of the visitors used a train for their travel. For accommodation, the distribution of the 119 visitors was quite even, with guest houses or bed and breakfast establishments accounting for 29.4% of the visitors, followed by hotels (28.6%) and self-catering accommodation (27.7%). Only 7.6% stayed with friends and relatives, and 6.7% used other types of accommodation.

With regard to other areas to be visited during the trip, three-quarters (75.6%) of the 135 visitors indicated that there were other areas that they were planning to visit, while 24.4% had no plans to visit other areas. For the planned duration of the stay, the modal category indicated that of the 138 visitors, 41.3% planned to stay for 2 to 4 nights, followed by those who planned to stay for one night (21.0%), 5–7 nights (15.2%) and those visiting for a day only (15.2%). Only 3.6% of the visitors planned to stay for 8–10 nights and the same number (3.6%) planned to stay for more than 10 nights.

For previous visits to the visited areas, 67.9% of the 137 visitors had visited the areas before, while almost a third (32.1%) had not. Of the 92 visitors who had visited the area previously, half (50.0%) had visited two to three times, 20.7% had visited four to five, 15.2% had visited only once, and 14.1% had visited more than five times.

8.5 VIC VISITS AND USE OF VICS DURING TRAVEL

This section reflects the visitors' visits to and use of VICs during their trips. The questions asked are given in Table 8.5, while Table 8.6 and Figures 8.1 to 8.3 provide the responses to the questions. However, not all 152 visitors who participated in the study responded to all the questions in Table 8.5.

Table 8.5: Questions: VIC visits and use

Construct	Questions
VIC visits and use	Did you visit this VIC to search for information during your previous visit to this area? (question 4.11)
	The information I received from the VIC during my previous visit encouraged me to: • Return to this area • Return to this VIC • Recommend the area to friends/relatives • Visit more places during my previous visit • Visit more places during this visit • Spend more money during my previous visit • Spend more money during this visit (question 4.12)
	Do you use a VIC whenever you visit an area? (question 4.13)
	How important is obtaining information from a VIC to you whenever you travel? (question 4.14)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

8.5.1. Visits to and use of VICs during travel

The visitors' visits to and use of VICs during a trip are shown in Table 8.6.

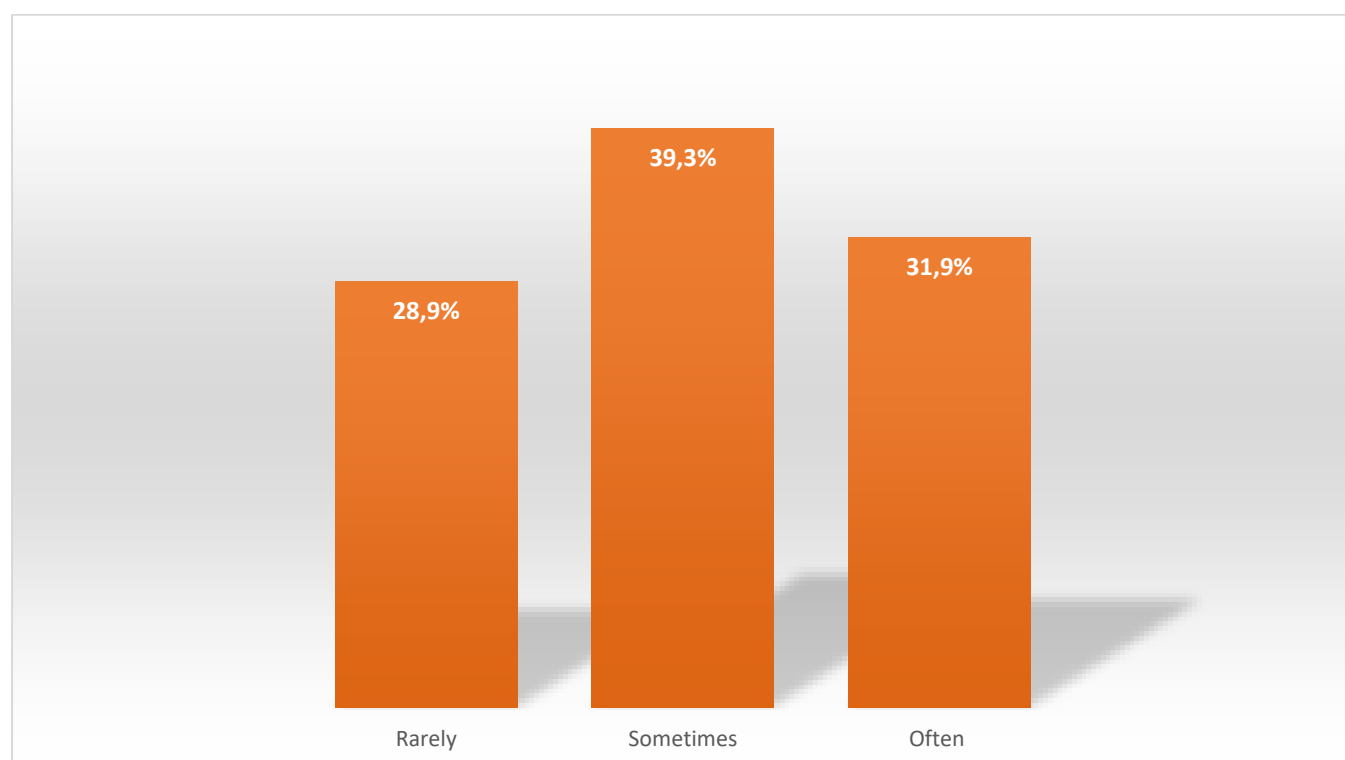
Table 8.6: Previous VIC visits (n = 93)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	59	63.4%
No	34	36.6%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Of the 93 visitors who answered this question, 63.4% indicated that they had visited VICs to search for information during previous trips to the visited areas, while 36.6% had not.

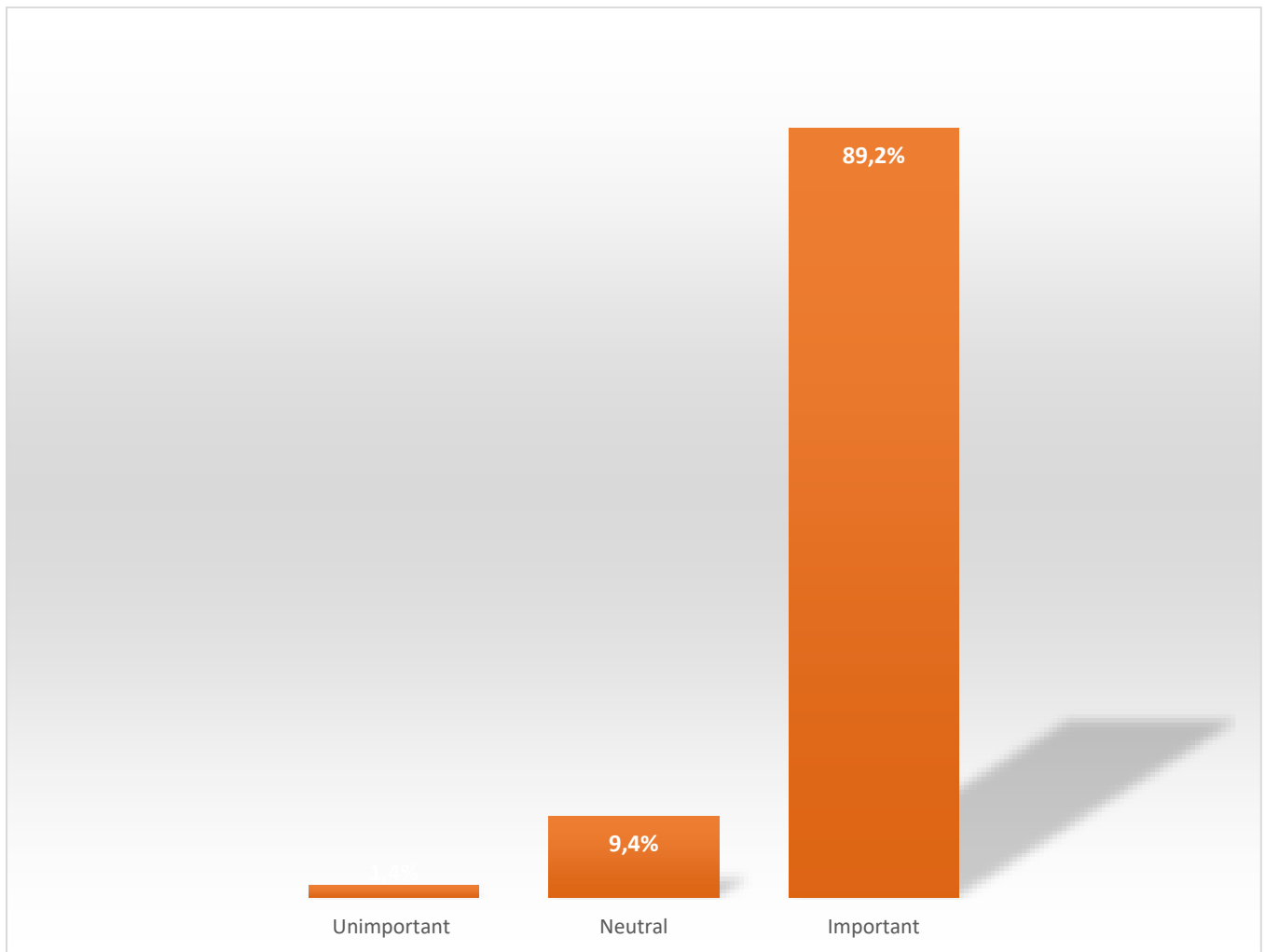
Figure 8.1: Use of VIC during travel (n = 135)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The visitors were asked whether they use VICs whenever they travel. Figure 8.1 above shows that 39.3% of the visitors indicated that they sometimes use VICs, followed by 31.9% who often use them and 28.9% who rarely use them when they travel.

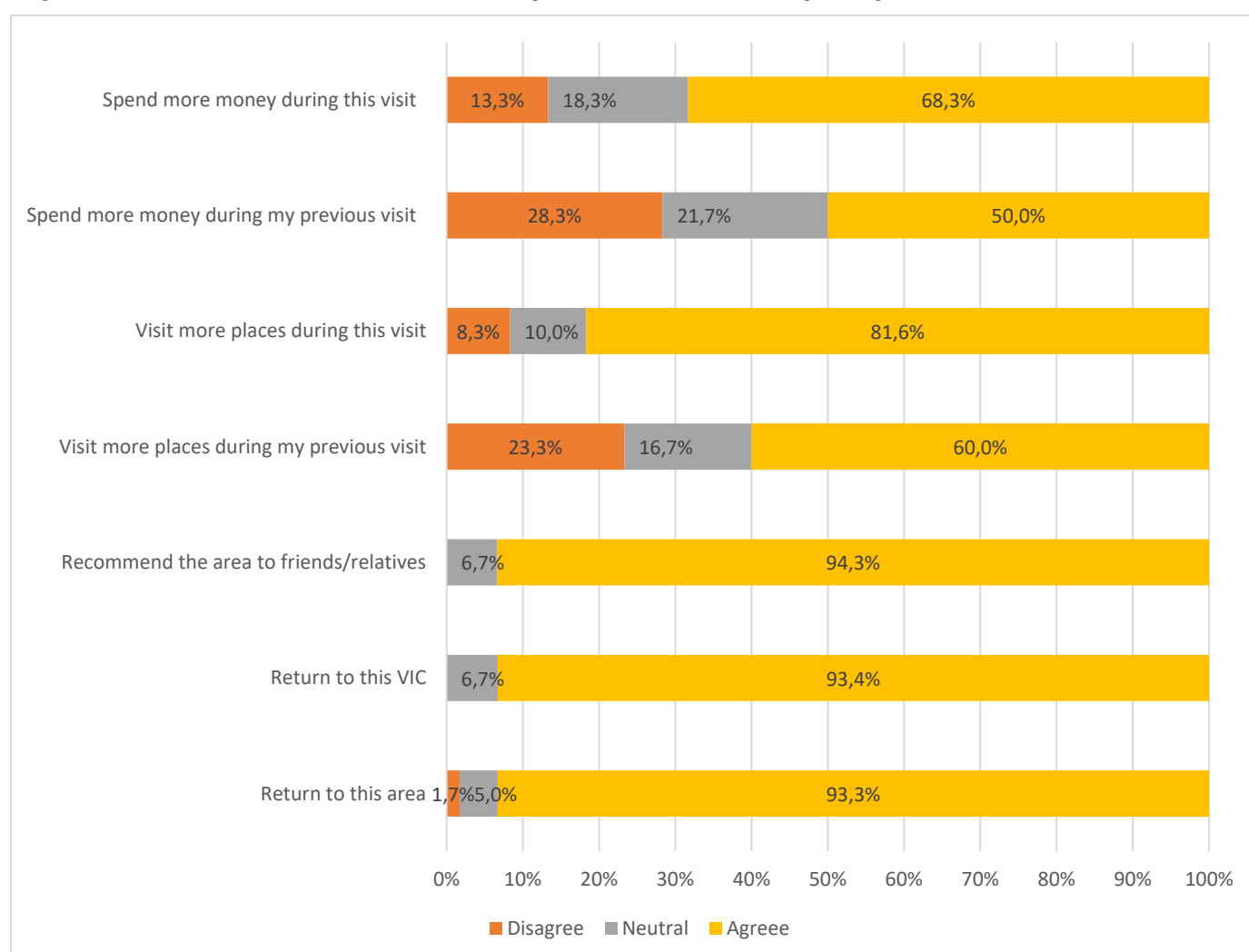
Figure 8.2: Importance of obtaining information from VICs (n = 138)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

When asked about the importance of obtaining information from VICs whenever they travel, 89.2% of the 138 visitors confirmed the importance of doing so, with only 1.4% indicating that it was unimportant. The remaining 9.4% remained neutral in their responses. These findings should be encouraging to VIC staff as they show that visitors still regard VICs as important facilities to provide travel-related information.

Figure 8.3: Effect of information from previous VIC visits (n=60)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

Figure 8.3 indicates that, of the 60 visitors who responded to the question about how information received from previous visits to VICs influenced their behaviour, 94.3% agreed that it encouraged them to recommend visited areas to friends/relatives. Similarly, 93.4% agreed that it encouraged them to return to the VICs they had visited during previous visits. Virtually the same number of visitors (93.3%) agreed that it encouraged them to return to previously visited areas. The VICs' information also encouraged 81.6% of visitors to visit more places during their current visits, while it had encouraged 60.0% to do so during their previous visits. Furthermore, 68.3% of the visitors agreed that the VICs' information influenced them to spend more during their current visits, and 50% during their previous visits. The results show that VICs are perceived to be important sources of information that have the potential to encourage behavioural intentions among those who use them when they travel.

8.6 DECISION-MAKING AND PRE-TRIP PLANNING INFORMATION SEARCH

This section reflects the decisions that visitors made to plan their trips to visited areas. It also focuses on information that visitors searched for in order to plan their trips to visited areas, as well as the extensiveness, frequency, and usefulness of the sources used to plan their trips.

The questions asked are given in Table 8.7, while Figure 8.4 and Tables 8.8 to 8.13 provide the responses to these questions⁴.

Table 8.7: Questions: Decision-making and pre-trip planning information search

Construct	Questions
Decision-making and pre-trip planning information search (section 5)	How much time did you spend to plan your visit to this area? (question 5.1)
	Rate the level of information search you engaged in to plan your trip to this area with regard to: • extensiveness of information search (question 5.2a). • frequency of information search (question 5.2b). • usefulness of this information searched (question 5.2c).
	Rate usage of the following information sources to plan your trip to this area with regard to: • extensiveness of using the information source (question 5.32a). • frequency of using the information source (question 5.3b). • usefulness of the information source (question 5.3c).

Source: Researcher's own contribution

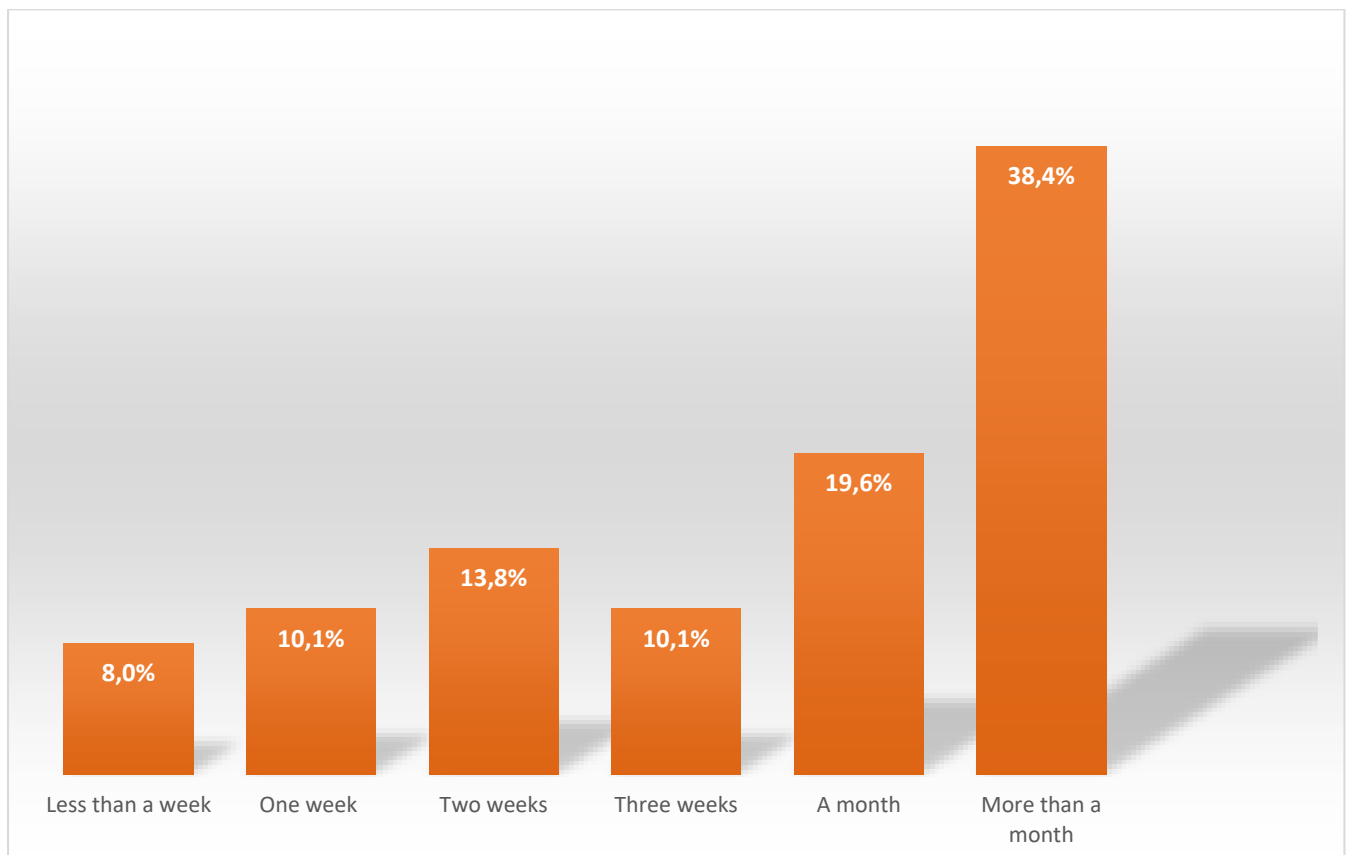
Not all 152 visitors who participated in the study responded to all the questions in Table 8.7. In addition, some values in Tables 8.4 to 8.14 do not add up to exactly 100% owing to the rounding of percentages in SPSS v25.

⁴Owing to rounding percentages in SPSS v25, the values in Tables 8.9 to 8.14 do not add up to exactly 100%.

8.6.1 Time spent to plan visits

The time that visitors spent planning their trips is shown in Figure 8.4, with 38.4% indicating that they made plans to travel more than a month in advance, 19.6% planned a month in advance, and 13.8% planned two weeks in advance, while those who planned either a week or three weeks in advance accounted for 10.1% each. A small group of visitors (8.0%) planned their trips less than a week before travelling.

Figure 8.4: Time spent to plan visits (n = 138)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

8.6.2 Level of information search for trip planning

Visitors were asked to rate the extensiveness of the information search they engaged in, the frequency of searching, and the usefulness of the information they searched to plan their trips. The results are provided in Tables 8.8 to 8.10.

Table 8.8: Extensiveness of pre-trip information searched

Element	Sample	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive
Local area information	n = 136	17.0%	1.5%	81.6%
Safety information	n = 134	36.9%	14.2%	49.3%
Emergency numbers	n = 134	38.0%	12.7%	49.3%
Travel bookings and reservations	n = 133	21.3%	20.3%	58.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Of the 136 visitors, 81.6% indicated that they had searched extensively for local area information. Information on travel bookings and reservations was searched extensively by 58.7% of the 133 visitors. For safety information, almost half (49.3%) of the 134 visitors indicated that they had searched extensively for this information, while 36.9% did not search for this information extensively. Similarly, for emergency numbers, 49.3% of the 134 visitors indicated that they had searched extensively for this information, while 38.0% of visitors did not search for it extensively.

Table 8.9: Frequency of pre-trip information searched

Element	Sample	Rarely	Neutral	Often
Local area information	n = 138	8.6%	27.5%	63.8%
Safety information	n = 137	49.7%	18.2%	32.1%
Emergency numbers	n = 137	49.7%	18.2%	32.1%
Travel bookings and reservations	n = 137	43.1%	17.5%	39.4%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Almost two-thirds (63.8%) of the 138 visitors mentioned that they often searched for local area information to plan their trips, while 8.6% rarely searched for it. For information on travel bookings and reservations, 39.4% of the 137 visitors indicated that they often searched for this information, while 43.1% rarely searched for it. Of the 137 visitors, 32.1% often searched for safety information, and almost half (49.7%) rarely did. Similarly, 32.1% of the 137 visitors often searched for emergency numbers, while 49.7% rarely searched for these numbers.

Table 8.10: Usefulness of pre-trip information searched

Element	Sample	Not useful	Neutral	Useful
Local area information	n = 137	3.6%	2.2.%	94.1%
Safety information	n = 135	20.7%	15.6%	63.7%
Emergency numbers	n = 135	16.3%	15.6%	68.1%
Travel bookings and reservations	n = 135	22.3%	19.3%	58.6%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the visitors found the pre-trip information they searched for useful. Of the 137 visitors, 94.1% indicated that the local area information they searched for was useful, with only 3.6% indicating that it was not useful. Emergency numbers were rated useful by 68.1% of the 135 visitors, and 16.3% rated it not useful. Furthermore, 63.7% of the 135 visitors indicated that the safety information they searched for was useful, while for 20.7% it was not useful. For information on travel bookings and reservations, 58.6% of the 135 visitors indicated that this information was useful; for 22.3% it was not useful.

8.6.3 Information sources used for trip planning

Responses to how visitors rated the sources they used to plan their trips with regard to their extensiveness, frequency, and usefulness are provided in Tables 8.11 to 8.13.

Table 8.11: Extensiveness of pre-trip information sources used

Element	Sample	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive
Word-of-mouth	n = 137	22.6%	3.6%	73.7%
Telephone call	n = 134	48.5%	8.2%	43.3%
Internet	n = 134	23.1%	9.7%	67.1%
Knowledge from previous experience	n = 128	29.6%	17.2%	53.1%
Visitor information centre	n = 130	45.4%	21.5%	33.1%
Social media	n = 127	30.7%	17.3%	52.0%
Mobile applications	n = 126	39.7%	18.3%	42.0%
Local residents of the area	n = 111	62.2%	26.1%	11.7%
Travel agent/tour operator	n = 125	45.6%	16.8%	37.6%
Tourist guidebooks/brochures	n = 136	14.7%	4.4.%	80.9%

Element	Sample	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive
Magazines/newspapers	n = 126	50.0%	16.7%	33.3%
Television/radio	n = 123	57.7%	27.6%	14.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Of the 136 visitors, 80.9% indicated that they extensively used tourist guidebooks or brochures to plan trips to visited areas. Word-of-mouth was used extensively by 73.7% of the 137 visitors, while the Internet was extensively used by 67.1% of the 134 visitors. It is interesting to note that 53.1% of the 128 visitors used their own knowledge from previous experiences. Social media was extensively used by 52.0% of the 127 visitors, telephone calls by 43.3% of the 134 visitors, and mobile applications by 42.0% of the 126 visitors. VICs, which are the focus of this study, were extensively used by a third (33.1%) of the 130 visitors.

On the other hand, visitors did not extensively use several information sources. Local residents as an information source were not extensively used by 62.2% of the 111 visitors; television was not extensively used by 57.7% of the 123 visitors; magazines or newspapers were not extensively used by 50.0% of the 126 visitors; and travel agents or tour operators were not extensively used by 45.6% of the 125 visitors.

Table 8.12: Frequency of pre-trip information sources used

Element	Sample	Rarely	Neutral	Often
Word-of-mouth	n = 138	21.7%	21.7%	56.5%
Telephone call	n = 134	50.7%	10.4%	38.8%
Internet	n = 134	26.1%	12.7%	61.2%
Knowledge from previous experience	n = 128	31.2%	20.3%	48.4%
Visitor information centre	n = 129	49.7%	24%	26.4%
Social media	n = 127	34.6%	19.7%	45.6%
Mobile applications	n = 126	43.7%	21.4%	34.9%
Local residents of the area	n = 115	72.2%	25.2%	2.6%
Travel agent/tour operator	n = 125	48.8%	16.0%	35.0%
Tourist guidebooks/brochures	n = 136	18.4%	5.1%	74.4%
Magazines/newspapers	n = 126	53.9%	15.9%	30.1%
Television/radio	n = 123	61.0%	26.8%	12.2%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Almost three-quarters (74.4%) of the 136 visitors indicated that they often used tourist guidebooks or brochures to plan their trips to visited areas. The Internet was often used by 61.2% of the 126 visitors, while word-of-mouth was often used by 56.5% of the 138 visitors. Social media were often used by 45.6% of the 127 visitors, and mobile applications were often used by just over two-thirds (34.9%) of the 126 visitors. It is interesting that 48.4% of the 128 visitors often used their own knowledge from previous experiences, while VICs were rarely used by almost half (49.7%) of the 129 visitors.

On the other hand, local residents were rarely used by 72.2% of the 115 visitors, with television rarely used by 61.0% of the 123 visitors, magazines or newspapers rarely used by 53.9% of the 126 visitors, telephone rarely used by 50.7% of the 134 visitors, and travel agents or tour operators were rarely used by 48.8% of the 125 visitors.

Table 8.13: Usefulness of pre-trip information sources

Element	Sample	Not useful	Neutral	Useful
Word-of-mouth	n = 138	18.8%	17.4%	63.8%
Telephone call	n = 134	44.8%	10.4%	44.8%
Internet	n = 134	22.3%	11.9%	65.7%
Knowledge from previous experience	n = 129	29.5%	17.8%	52.7%
Visitor information centre	n = 129	47.3%	21.7%	31.0%
Social media	n = 126	32.5%	51.1%	52.4%
Mobile applications	n = 126	38.9%	17.5%	43.7%
Local residents of the area	n = 115	64.4%	21.7%	14.0%
Travel agent/tour operator	n = 125	44.8%	13.6%	41.6%
Tourist guidebooks/brochures	n = 136	17.6%	5.1%	77.2%
Magazines/newspapers	n = 126	50.0%	16.7%	33.3%
Television/radio	n = 123	56.9%	26.8%	16.2%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

More than three-quarters (77.2%) of the 136 visitors indicated that tourist guidebooks or brochures were useful information sources to plan trips to visited areas. The Internet was identified by 65.7% of the 134 visitors as a useful information source, while word-of-mouth was found to be useful by 63.8% of the 138 visitors. Social media were mentioned by 52.4% of the 126 visitors as a useful information source, while mobile applications were mentioned as useful by 43.7% of the 126 visitors. Interestingly,

52.7% of the 129 visitors mentioned the usefulness of their own knowledge from previous experiences, while VICs were regarded as useful by 31.0% of the 129 visitors. As 'not useful' pre-trip information sources, local residents were mentioned by 64.4% of the 115 visitors, television by 56.9% of the 123 visitors, magazines or newspapers by 50.0% of the 126 visitors, telephone by 44.8% of the 134 visitors, and travel agents or tour operators by 44.8% of the 125 visitors.

The results on pre-trip planning show that, although the levels of information search and information source usage were not extensive and frequent, their usefulness tended to be highly rated by visitors. This might indicate that useful information and sources are important in helping visitors to plan their trips.

8.7 INFORMATION PROVIDED TO VISITORS AT VICs

This section reflects on the information that visitors received from VICs. It also focuses on their purpose in visiting VICs and their ratings of the information they received and the information sources they used at VICs. The questions asked are given in Table 8.14. Figures 8.5 and 8.6, and Tables 8.14 to 8.19 provide the responses to these questions⁵.

Table 8.14: Questions: Information provided to visitors at VICs

Construct	Questions
Information provided to visitors (section 2)	Rate the extent of agreement with the statement regarding your purpose to visit the VIC (question 2.1).
	Did you search for information about the local area while at this VIC? (question 2.2).
	Rate the level of information search you engaged in at the VIC with regard to: • extensiveness of information search (question 2.3a). • usefulness of this information (question 2.3b).
	Rate level of agreement with information you would like to receive from the VIC (question 2.4).

⁵ Owing to rounding percentages in SPSS v25, the values in Tables 8.15 to 8.20 do not add up to exactly 100%.

Construct	Questions
	Rate usage of information sources at the VIC with regard to: • extensiveness of using information source (question 2.5a). • usefulness of information source (question 2.5b).
	Rate the extent of agreement with information sources you prefer to receive useful information through while at the VIC (question 2.6).

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Not all 152 visitors who participated in the study responded to all the questions in Table 8.14. In addition, some values in Tables 8.15 to 8.20 do not add up to exactly 100% owing to the rounding of percentages in SPSS v25.

8.7.1 VIC visits

Responses on how visitors rated the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statements relating to their purpose in visiting VICs are provided in Table 8.15.

Table 8.15: Purpose in visiting VICs

Element	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Find general information	152	11,2%	2,0%	86,8%
Find specific information	152	9,2%	0,7%	90,1%
Use business services	150	64,0%	2,7%	33,3%
Use facilities	150	65,3%	5,3%	28,6%
Use the internet	150	54,6%	7,3%	37,3%
Make/pay for bookings	150	70,6%	10,0%	19,3%
Find refreshments	150	68,6%	8,7%	22,7%
Purchase merchandise/souvenirs	150	67,3%	6,7%	26,0%
Take a break from travelling	150	61,3%	7,3%	31,3%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the visitors agreed that their purpose in visiting VICs was to find information, with 90.1% indicating that it was to find specific information, while 86.8% indicated that it was to find general information. On the other hand, some visitors (150 of the 152) disagreed that their purpose in visiting VICs was to make and/or pay for

bookings (70.6%), find refreshments (68.6%), use facilities (65.3%), purchase merchandise or souvenirs (67.3%), use business services (64.0%), take a break from travelling (61.3%), or use the Internet (54.6%). The high number of 'disagree' responses might point to the limited availability of the information or services at the VICs that participated in the study or when the visitors visited the VICs.

8.7.1 Information searched for at VICs

The results of visitors' ratings of the extensiveness and usefulness of the information they searched for at VICs, as well as the information they would like to receive from VIC, are provided in Tables 8.16 to 8.18.

Table 8.16: Extensiveness of information searched for at VICs

Element	Sample	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive
Local area information	n = 145	38.6%	2.8%	58.6%
Safety information	n = 126	52.4%	19.0%	28.5%
Emergency numbers	n = 124	49.9%	16.9%	33.2%
Travel bookings and reservations	n = 117	33.3%	33.3%	33.4%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Of the 145 visitors who indicated that they searched for local area information at VICs, 58.6% mentioned that the information was extensive. However, safety information searched for by 52.4% of the 126 visitors was indicated to be not extensive. Similarly, emergency numbers searched for by 49.9% of the 124 visitors was highlighted as not extensive. For travel bookings and reservations, a third (33.3%) of the 117 visitors mentioned that the information they searched for was not extensive. The high number of 'not extensive' responses might indicate that VICs do not offer this information, or that the information was not available when the visitors visited the VICs.

Table 8.17: Usefulness of information searched for at VICs

Element	Sample	Not useful	Neutral	Useful
Local area information	n = 135	3.6%	2.2%	94.1%
Safety information	n = 138	20.7%	15.6%	63.7%

Emergency numbers	n = 136	16.3%	15.6%	68.1%
Travel bookings and reservations	n = 137	22.3%	19.3%	58.6%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The results show that a high number of visitors identified the information they searched for at VICs as useful. Local area information was found to be useful by 94.1% of the 135 visitors. Safety information searched for by 63.7% of the 138 visitors was mentioned as useful, while emergency numbers were indicated as useful by 68.1% of the 136 visitors. Travel bookings and reservations information were found to be useful by 58.6% of the 137 visitors. The high number of neutral responses to the usefulness of information searched for on travel bookings and reservations might indicate that visitors did not search for this information, as not all the VICs that participated in this study offer this service.

Table 8.18: Preferred VIC information

Element	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Local area information	n = 152	0.7%	0.7%	98.7%
Safety information	n = 152	16.5%	8.6%	75.0%
Emergency numbers	n = 152	14.5%	7.2%	78.3%
Travel bookings and reservations	n = 150	34.7%	9.3%	56.0%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

An overwhelming majority of the visitors (98.7%) agreed that they would like to receive information on the local areas they visited. Three-quarters or more of all the visitors agreed that they would like to receive safety information (75.0%) and emergency numbers (78.3%). More than a third (34.7%) of the 150 visitors disagreed that they would like to receive information on travel bookings and reservations.

8.7.2 Information sources used by VICs to provide information to visitors

Responses on how visitors rated the sources they used to search for information at VICs with regard to the extensiveness of the sources and their perceived usefulness are provided in Tables 8.19 and 8.20. The information sources that visitors would like to use while at VICs are shown in Figure 8.6.

Table 8.19: Extensiveness of information sources used at VICs

Element	Sample	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive
Personal face-to-face contact	n = 150	14.7%	2.7%	82.6%
Electronic touch screen	n = 104	52.0%	41.3%	6.8%
Internet	n = 119	33.6%	19.3%	47.1%
Social media	n = 104	52.0%	41.3%	6.8%
Mobile applications	n = 104	52.0%	41.3%	6.8%
Printed brochures	n = 146	11.0%	4.8%	84.2%
Audio-visual presentations	n = 104	52.0%	41.3%	6.7%
Visitor notice boards	n = 104	52.0%	41.3%	6.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Of the 150 visitors, 82.6% indicated that they extensively used personal face-to-face contact to search for information at VICs. Printed brochures were used extensively by 84.2% of the 146 visitors, while the Internet was used extensively by 47.1% of the 119 visitors. On the other hand, of the 104 visitors who responded, 52.0% indicated that they did not use electronic touch screens, social media, mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, or visitor notice boards extensively. These responses might point to the limited availability and use of online information sources in the VICs that participated in this study.

Table 8.20: Usefulness of information sources used at VICs

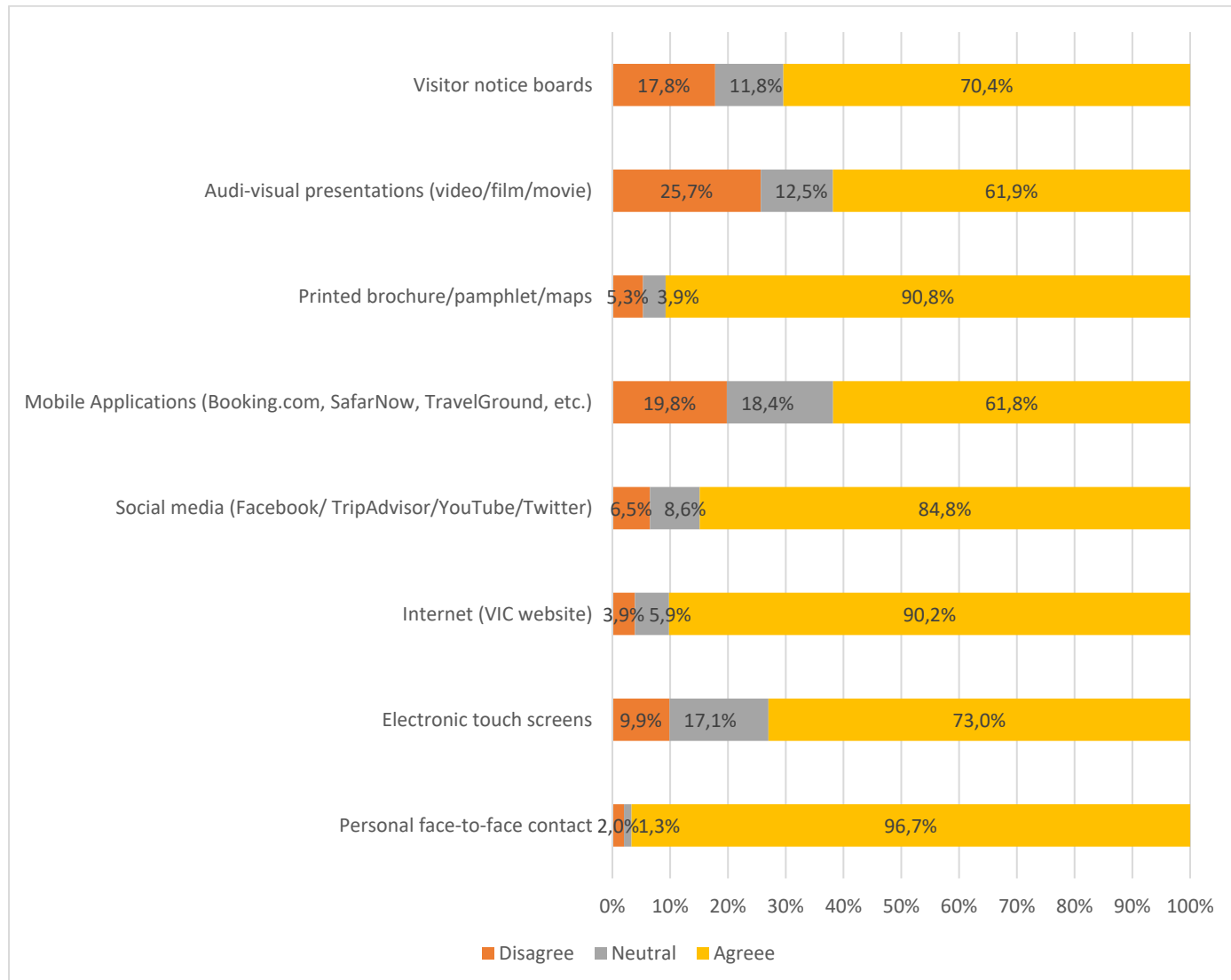
Element	Sample	Not useful	Neutral	Useful
Personal face-to-face contact	n = 150	11.2%	1.3%	87.5%
Electronic touch screen	n = 104	51.0%	42.3%	6.7%
Internet	n = 119	31.1%	20.2%	48.8%
Social media	n = 112	32.5%	51.1%	52.4%
Mobile applications	n = 104	51.0%	42.3%	6.7%
Printed brochures	n = 146	5.5%	4.8%	89.7%
Audio-visual presentations	n = 104	51.0%	42.3%	6.7%
Visitor notice boards	n = 104	51.0%	42.3%	6.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

When asked about the usefulness of the sources they used at VICs, 89.7% of the 146 visitors indicated that printed brochures were useful. Personal face-to-face contact was mentioned as useful by 87.5% of the 150 visitors, while social media were indicated to be useful by 52.4% of the 112 visitors and the Internet by 48.8% of the

119 visitors. On the other hand, 51.0% of the 112 visitors found electronic touch screens, mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, and visitor notice boards not useful.

Figure 8.5: Preferred VIC information sources (n = 152)



Source: Researcher's own contribution

The results in Figure 8.5 show that visitors prefer to receive information through all information sources, with the majority preferring personal face-to-face contact (96.7%), followed by printed brochures, pamphlets or maps (90.8%), the Internet (the VIC website) (90.8%), social media (84.8%), electronic touch screens (73.0%), visitor notice boards (70.4%), mobile applications (61.8%), and audio-visual presentations (61.9%). Besides the neutral responses to mobile applications (18.4%), electronic

touch screens (17.1%), audio-visual presentations (12.5%), and visitor notice boards (12%); the results show that visitors still prefer to receive information through both traditional and online information sources while at VICs.

Similar to the results on the information and sources used for trip planning, the results show that, even though the level of information search and information source usage was not extensive, their usefulness was highly rated. Moreover, even though some information such as safety and emergency numbers and online sources might not have been available at VICs, visitors rated them highly with regard to what they would like to receive and use at VICs. It is important, therefore, for staff to consider visitors' preferences in order to meet their needs.

8.8 VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT VICS

Visitors were asked about their experiences at VICs. They were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with several statements about their experience of the following at VICs: information provision, information quality, information resources, ICTs, staff knowledge, customer care, and behavioural intentions.

The results of visitors' experiences at VICs are given in Tables 8.21 to 8.27 below⁶.

Table 8.21: Information provision

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
The VIC provided me with general information about the local area	n = 152	6.6%	3.9%	89.5%
The VIC provided me with specific information about the local area tourist facilities	n = 152	4.7%	4.7%	90.7%
Information in this VIC is easily accessible	n = 152	3.9%	7.9%	58.1%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

⁶ Owing to rounding percentages in SPSS v25 values in Tables 8.21 to 8.27 do not add up to exactly 100%.

The majority of the visitors expressed positive experiences with information provision at VICs, with 90.7% agreeing that VICs provided them with specific information about local area tourist facilities and, for 89.5%, with general information about the local area. In addition, 58.1% of the visitors agreed that the information at the VICs they visited was easily accessible.

Table 8.22: Information quality

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Information provided in this VIC is clear in meaning	n = 152	2.0%	4.6%	93.5%
Information provided in this VIC is easy to comprehend	n = 152	3.3%	5.3%	91.5%
Information provided in this VIC is easy to read	n = 152	2.0%	4.6%	93.4%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

With regard to information quality, an overwhelming majority of the visitors agreed that the information provided at VICs was clear in meaning (93.5%), easy to read (93.4%), and easy to comprehend (91.5%).

Table 8.23: Information resources

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
The content of printed brochures/pamphlets in this VIC is relevant	n = 152	5.9%	5.3%	88.8%
Audio-visual presentations (video/film/movie) are available to provide destination information	n = 148	62.9%	15.5%	21.6%
A visitor notice board is available to provide destination information	n = 148	56.7%	15.5%	27.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The responses about information resources were diverse, with 88.8% of the visitors agreeing that the content of printed brochures/pamphlets in VICs is relevant. On the other hand, 148 of the 152 visitors expressed disagreement on the availability of audio-visual presentations (62.9%) and visitor notice boards to provide destination information (56.7%).

Table 8.24: Information and communication technologies

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
The VIC has computers that I could use to search for local information	n = 152	44.1%	9.2%	46.7%
Internet is available to search for local information (e.g. 3G and 4G signals)	n = 152	37.5%	14.5%	48.1%
The internet in this VIC is reliable	n = 152	44.1%	21.7%	34.2%
There is free Wi-Fi in this VIC	n = 152	57.9%	10.5%	31.6%
Electronic touch screens are available to provide information about the local area	n = 148	68.2%	12.2%	19.6%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The responses with regard to ICTs show that 46.7% of the visitors reported that the VICs had computers they could use to search for local information. While 48.1% agreed that the Internet was available to search for local information, 44.1% disagreed with the statement that it was reliable. Visitors also disagreed that the VICs had free Wi-Fi (57.9%). Two-thirds (66.6%) of the 148 visitors also disagreed that the VICs had electronic touch screens. These responses might point to the limited availability and use of online information sources in the VICs that participated in this study, or their unavailability when visitors visited these VICs.

Table 8.25: Staff knowledge

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Staff provided me with specific and in-depth knowledge of the local area	n = 152	4.6%	8.6%	86.8%
Staff in this VIC have knowledge about local attractions	n = 152	0%	7.2%	92.1%
Staff in this VIC are competent	n = 152	0.7%	4.6%	94.7%
VIC staff provided me with knowledge to make decisions about things to do in this area	n = 152	5.9%	7.2%	86.6%
Staff's knowledge of the local area will help me to visit diverse tourism facilities in the local area	n = 152	4.6%	7.9%	87.5%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

In rating the VICs' staff's knowledge, the visitors indicated that they were competent (94.7%) and had knowledge of local attractions (92.1%). The visitors agreed that the staff provided them with specific and in-depth knowledge of the local areas (86.8%), and that their knowledge would help them to visit diverse tourism facilities in the area (87.5%) and to make decisions about things to do in the areas (87.5%).

Table 8.26: Customer service

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Customer service in this VIC is excellent	n = 152	2.0%	5.9%	92.0%
Staff understood my information needs	n = 152	3.9%	5.9%	90.2%
Staff paid attention to my queries	n = 152	2.6%	5.9%	91.4%
My interaction with staff was face-to-face	n = 152	1.3%	3.9%	94.7%
I am satisfied with my experience at the VIC	n = 152	1.3%	5.3	93.0%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Customer service was rated positively, with an overwhelming majority of the visitors agreeing that their interaction with staff was face-to-face (94.7%); that they were satisfied with their experiences at VICs (93.0%); that customer service in VICs was excellent (92.0%); that staff paid attention to their queries (91.4%); and that staff understood their information needs (90.2%).

Table 8.27: Visitors' behavioural intentions

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to return to this destination	n = 152	11.9%	12.5%	75.7%
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to return to this VIC in future	n = 152	2.0%	5.9%	92.1%
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to visit more places in the destination	n = 152	8.5%	10.5%	81.0%
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to spend more money at this destination	n = 151	15.8%	15.8%	68.4%

Attribute	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to extend my length of stay at this destination	n = 152	23.0%	17.1%	59.8%
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to recommend the destination to family and friends	n = 152	6.6%	9.9%	83.5%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Table 8.26 shows that the visitors agreed that the information they received from the VICs might influence their behavioural intentions. The information might encourage them to return to the VICs they visited (92.1%), recommend the destination to family and friends (83.5%), visit more places (81.0%), return to the destination (75.7%), and extend their length of stay at the destination (59.8%). Of the 151 who responded to spending more money at the visited destination, 68.4% agreed that the information they received at VICs might encourage them to do so.

In summary, the results for visitors' experience show that they agreed that information provision, information quality, staff knowledge and customer care were part of their experiences at VICs. Moreover, they agreed that the information they received from VICs might influence their behavioural intentions. While the Internet was perceived to be available to search for local information at VICs, it was seen not to be reliable. On the other hand, visitors expressed disagreements about their experiences of information resources and ICTs at VICs. These disagreements were prevalent on the availability of information sources such as audio-visual presentations, visitor notice boards, electronic touch screens, and free Wi-Fi. This might be an indication of the limited availability and use of these sources at the VICs that participated in the study, or their unavailability when the visitors visited these VICs. However, these sources now serve as important tools to disseminate and search for information. With information provision as one of the main responsibilities of VICs, it is important to invest in these sources and to disseminate information that will help visitors make informed travel decisions and enhance their experiences.

8.9 MEMORABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCE IN VISITED AREA

To examine visitors' memorable experiences of areas they visited, they were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the seven dimensions of memorable visitor experience (hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge) as adopted from Kim *et al.*'s (2012) Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) scale.

The results of the visitors' experiences at visited areas are provided in Tables 8.28 to 8.34. However, not all 152 visitors who participated in the study rated all the statements on memorable visitor experiences.

Table 8.28: Hedonism

Indicators	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Experienced something new	n = 134	20.9%	6.0%	73.2%
Participated in special activities	n = 135	14.8%	8.9%	76.3%
Enjoyed every moment	n = 134	4.5%	6.0%	89.0%
Experienced high levels of excitement	n = 134	15.7%	9.7%	74.6%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The majority of the visitors expressed positive responses to hedonism, with 89.0% of the 134 visitors agreeing that they enjoyed every moment, experienced high levels of excitement (74.6%), and experienced something new (73.2%). Also, 135 visitors (76.3%) agreed that they participated in special activities in the visited areas.

Table 8.29: Novelty

Indicators	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Had a once-in-a-lifetime experience	n = 133	27.0%	8.3%	64.6%
Had a unique experience	n = 134	14.9%	8.2%	76.8%
Had a totally different experience from previous ones	n = 134	23.2%	11.2%	65.6%
Had a new experience	n = 133	12.0%	8.3%	79.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

With regard to novelty, 79.7% of the 133 visitors agreed that they had a new experience and 64.6% had a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Furthermore, of the 134 visitors, 76.8% agreed that they had a unique experience, and 65.6% had a different experience from their previous ones.

Table 8.30: Local culture

Indicators	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Had good impressions about the local people	n = 133	10.5%	23.3%	66.1%
Had close encounters with the local culture	n = 134	13.4%	21.6%	64.8%
Met friendly local people	n = 134	3.7%	11.9%	84.4%
Met local people who might be willing to help me	n = 133	3.8%	18.0%	78.2%
Met local people who might be willing to share information about the place	n = 134	3.7%	23.3%	79.8%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Responses with regard to local culture show that, of the 134 visitors, 84.4% agreed that they met friendly people, 79.8% met local people who might be willing to share information about the place they visited, and 64.8% had close encounters with the local culture. Furthermore, of the 133 visitors, 78.2% agreed that they met local people who might be willing to help them, and 66.1% had a good impression of local people.

Table 8.31: Refreshment

Indicators	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Felt a sense of freedom	n = 134	14.2%	17.2%	68.7%
Felt revitalised	n = 134	3.7%	14.2%	82.1%

In rating refreshment, 82.1% of the 134 visitors agreed that they felt revitalised, while 68.7% felt a sense of freedom.

Table 8.32: Meaningfulness

Indicators	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Had meaningful experience	n = 133	3.1%	6.0%	91.0%
Accomplished my goal	n = 134	18.7%	8.2%	73.2%
Discovered new things about myself	n = 134	19.4%	14.9%	65.7%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Meaningfulness was rated positively, with an overwhelming majority of the 133 visitors agreeing that they had a meaningful experience (91.0%). Of the 134 visitors, 73.2% agreed that they accomplished their goals, while 65.7% discovered new things about themselves.

Table 8.33: Involvement

Indicators	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Participated in activities which I really wanted to do	n = 134	19.4%	8.2%	72.4%
Got involved in activities of great interest to me	n = 134	8.9%	3.0%	88.0%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Responses with regard to involvement show that, of the 134 visitors, 88.0% agreed that they got involved in activities of great interest to them, while 72.4% participated in the activities that they really wanted to do.

Table 8.34: Knowledge

Indicators	Sample	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Explored new things	n = 134	7.4%	6.0%	86.8%
Gained new knowledge	n = 134	9.7%	3.7%	86.6%
Learnt new cultures	n = 134	14.2%	10.4%	75.4%

Source: Researcher's own contribution

An almost equal number of responses were provided for the visitors' experience with regard to knowledge, with 86.8% of the 134 agreeing that they explored new things and 86.6% gaining knowledge. Furthermore, 75.4% agreed that they had learnt about new cultures.

The results on memorable visitor experience show that visitors agreed that the dimensions of MTEs: hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement and knowledge were part of their experiences at visited areas. By providing experiences that visitors can enjoy, VIC staff, together with destination marketers, can attract more visitors to their areas. Positive experiences can also lead to visitor satisfaction and encourage behavioural intentions.

8.10 INFERENCE ANALYSIS

Several statistical techniques were used to achieve the study's research objective 6 and to test the following five hypotheses:

- H₁: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences.
- H₂: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H₄: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable visitor experiences.
- H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

Figure 8.6 shows the five steps that were followed to test the research hypotheses.

Figure 8.6: Steps to test hypotheses



Source: Researcher's own construction

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) v25 was used to perform all the statistical analyses in this section. The results are presented in respect of their significance to the research objective and the hypotheses that relate to how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs may contribute to memorable visitor experiences and how these experiences contribute to visitors' behavioural intentions. The discussion and interpretation of the results in relation to the literature is not covered in this section, but is emphasised in Chapter 9.

8.10.1 Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

In this study, EFA was used to determine the underlying factor structure of the data. The questionnaire was developed from the literature, and was not taken from previous instruments; and the sample size was small ($n = 152$). As mentioned in section 8.9, the dimensions of memorable visitor experience were adapted from Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE scale. EFAs were conducted on the following constructs:

- **Information-related constructs**

q9: Purpose in visiting VICs

q11: Extensiveness of VIC information searched

q12: Usefulness of VIC information searched

q13: Preferred VIC information

q14: Extensiveness of VIC information sources used

q15: Usefulness of VIC information sources used

q16: Preferred VIC information sources

q17: VIC visitor experiences

q29: Effect of previous VIC information

q33: Extensiveness of trip planning information searched

q34: Frequency of searching trip planning information

q35: Usefulness of trip planning information searched

q36: Extensiveness of trip planning information sources used

q37: Frequency of using trip planning information sources

q38: Usefulness of trip planning information sources used

- **Memorable visitor experience construct**

q41: Memorable visitor experience at visited areas

- Hedonism
- Novelty
- Local culture
- Refreshment
- Meaningfulness
- Involvement
- Knowledge

8.10.1.1 Factor analysis

An EFA was conducted on items of each of the 22 constructs, using principal axis factoring and promax rotation, to determine the dimensionality of each of the constructs. However, q14 and q15 were excluded from the EFA and from further analysis, as five items in each construct had 40 missing values, which is more than the 20% that is allowable. As a result, 20 constructs were considered for further analysis.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was above the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007; Hair *et al.*, 1998) and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) for the items in all 20 constructs, indicating that a factor analysis was appropriate for each of the constructs. The total percentage variance explained for all 20 constructs varied between 56.87% and 86.02%, indicating an acceptable amount of variance explained. The factors identified for each of the 20 constructs were based on the eigenvalue criterion of eigenvalues greater than 1.0 (Field, 2013). A total of 38 factors were extracted from the EFA of the 20 constructs. A summary of the EFA of the 20 constructs and the identified factors and items for each are provided in Tables 8.35 to 8.48.

To measure the internal consistency (reliability) of the 38 identified factors – i.e., the manner in which visitors responded to similar questions in similar ways that measured a particular construct – the Cronbach's alpha of each factor was determined. Although a good reliability score (alpha) is considered to exceed a threshold of 0.7, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.5 is generally accepted in exploratory studies (George & Mallery, 2003). Therefore, Cronbach's alpha values between 0.5 and 0.6 were deemed important and still acceptable, as the study was exploratory in nature (George & Mallery, 2003).

As can be seen in Tables 8.35 to 8.49, the results show that the alpha coefficients ranged between 0.521 and 0.923. As none of the Cronbach's alpha values were lower than 0.5, all 38 factors were considered reliable. The items of the 38 factors were analysed further to see whether the deletion of any would improve the value of Cronbach's alpha. In this regard, three items (q36_9, q37_9, q38_9) were discarded.

Table 8.35: Purpose in visiting VIC

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q9: Purpose in visiting VIC						
q9_4: Use facilities	0.773 p < 0.001	64.906	0.513			0.817
q9_6: Make/pay for bookings			0.774			
q9_7: Find refreshments			0.800			
q9_8: Purchase merchandise/souvenirs			0.762			
q9_9: Take a break from travelling			0.582			
q9_3: Use business services				0.956		0.624
q9_5: Use the internet				0.457		
q9_1: Find general information about the local area					0.742	0.521
q9_2: Find specific information about tourist facilities in the local area					0.459	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the 'purpose to visit VICs' construct, three factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that cluster on factor one (q9f1) focus on the purpose in using VIC facilities, factor two (q9f2) reflects the purpose in using VIC services, while factor three (q9f3) focuses on the purpose in finding information provided by VICs. The factors were differentiated by labelling q9f1 as 'purpose to use VIC facilities', q9f2 as 'purpose to use VIC services', and q9f3 as 'purpose to find VIC information'. The Cronbach's alpha values for the three factors indicated that two factors (q9f1 and q19f2) were above 0.6, which is considered acceptable for exploratory research, and that one factor (q9f3) had a value of between 0.5 and 0.6, which is also considered acceptable (George & Mallery, 2003).

Table 8.36: Extensiveness of VIC information searched

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
q11: Extensiveness of VIC information searched				
q11_1: Local area information	0.587 p < 0.001	58.161	0.372	0.722
q11_2: Safety information			0.992	
q11_3: Emergency numbers			0.940	
q11_4: Travel bookings and reservations			0.340	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The analysis confirmed unidimensionality for the extensiveness of information searched construct, as the analysis identified only one factor based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013). The items that clustered on the one factor (q11F) focused on the extensiveness of information that visitors searched for at VICs; thus q11F was labelled 'extensiveness of information searched at VICs'. This factor had a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.6, which is acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.37: Usefulness of VIC information searched

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
q12: Usefulness of VIC information searched				
q12_1: Local area information	0.641 <i>p</i> < 0.001	56.968	0.369	0.734
q12_2: Safety information			0.929	
q12_3: Emergency numbers			0.882	
q12_4: Travel bookings and reservations			0.423	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the usefulness of VIC information searched construct, only one factor was identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on the one factor (q12F) focused on the usefulness of information that visitors searched

for at VICs; thus q12F was labelled ‘usefulness of information searched at VICs’. This factor had a Cronbach’s alpha value above 0.6, which is acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.38: Preferred VIC information

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
q13: Preferred VIC information				
q13_1: Local area information	0.657 <i>p</i> < 0.001	60.478	0.359	0.759
q13_2: Safety information			0.967	
q13_3: Emergency numbers			0.913	
q13_4: Travel bookings and reservations			0.499	

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

The analysis confirmed unidimensionality for the preferred VIC information construct, as it identified only one factor based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013). The items that clustered on the one factor (q13F) focused on the information that visitors prefer to receive from VICs; thus q13F was labelled ‘preferred VIC information’. This factor had a Cronbach’s alpha value above 0.6, which is acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.39: Preferred VIC information sources

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q16: Preferred VIC information sources						
q16_2: Electronic touch screens	0.712 <i>p</i> < 0 .001	72.329	0.616			0.841
q16_3: Internet			1.001			
q16_4: Social media			0.812			
q16_5: Mobile applications				0.331		0.690
q16_7: Audio-visual presentations				0.740		

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q16_8: Visitor notice boards				0.869		0.631
q16_1: Personal face-to-face contact					0.714	
q16_6: Printed brochures					0.701	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the preferred VIC information sources construct, three factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on factor one (q16f1) reflected VIC online information sources that visitors prefer; factor two (q16f2) highlighted electronic information sources; while factor three (q16f3) reflected traditional sources. The factors were differentiated by labelling q16f1 'preferred VIC electronic information sources'; q16f2 was labelled 'preferred VIC electronic information sources'; while q16f3 was labelled 'preferred VIC traditional information sources'. The Cronbach's alpha values for the three factors were above 0.6, and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.40: Visitor experience at VICs

Information -related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings							Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Visitor experience at VICs (q17)										
q17_2_1	0.579 p < 0.001	54.207	0.930							0.719
q17_1			0.788							
q17_3			0.375							
q17_4	0.672	65.083		0.663						0.836
q17_6	p < 0.001			0.955						
q17_10				0.776						
q17_12_1	0.511	52.282			0.828					0.870
q17_13_1	p < 0.001				0.930					
q17_14	0.763	60.139				0.696				0.880
q17_15	p < 0.001					0.818				
q17_16						0.867				

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings							Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
q17_17						0.753				
q17_18_1						0.731				
q17_19	0.718 p < 0.001	51.836					0.586			0.829
q17_20							0.764			
q17_22							0.756			
q17_23							0.782			
q17_21_1							0.693			
q17_24	0.861 p < 0.001	64.732						0.815		0.899
q17_25								0.879		
q17_26								0.842		
q17_27								0.664		
q17_28_1								0.806		
q17_29	0.843 p < 0.001	53.479							0.723	0.866
q17_30									0.546	
q17_31									0.833	
q17_32									0.875	
q17_33									0.726	
q17_34									0.633	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the VIC visitor experience construct, seven factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. Six factors focused on the visitors' experiences of VICs construct, while the seventh factor centred on the effect of VIC information on future behavioural intentions.

The items that clustered on factor one (q17f1) reflected visitors' experience of information provision, factor two (q17f2) focused on the experience of information quality, factor three (q17f3) centred on the experience of information resources, while factor four (q17f4) revealed the experience of ICT availability. On the other hand, factor five (q17f5) focused on the experience of VIC staff knowledge, while factor six (q17f6) indicated the experience of customer service. Factor seven (q17f7) presented the effect of the information received from VICs on visitors' future Behavioural intentions.

The seven factors were labelled as follows:

q17f1: 'experience of information provision in VICs'

q17f2: 'experience of VIC information quality'

q17f3: 'experience of VIC information resources'

q17f4: 'experience of ICTs in VICs'

q17f5: 'experience of VIC staff knowledge'

q17f6: 'experience of VIC customer service'

q17f7: 'visitors' behavioural intentions'

The Cronbach's alpha values for all seven factors were above 0.6, and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.41: Effect of previous VIC information

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q29: Effect of previous VIC information						
q29_1: Return to this area	0.670 <i>p</i> < 0.001	82.824	0.739			0.792
q29_2: Return to this VIC			0.892			
q29_3: Recommend the area to friends/ relatives				0.609		
q29_4: Visited more places during my previous visit				0.941		0.923
q29_6: Spent more money during my previous visit				0.905		
q29_5: Visit more places during this visit					0.813	0.791
q29_7: Spend more money during this visit					0.852	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the effect of previous VIC information construct, three factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus

indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on factor one (q29f1) reflected the effect that the information that visitors received during previous visits to VICs had on encouraging them to return to the area, return to the VICs, and recommend the area to family and relatives. Factor two (q29f2) showed the effect of previous VIC information on encouraging visitors to visit more places and spend more money during that visit, while factor three (q29f3) reflected the effect that this information might have on encouraging them to visit more places and spend more money during their current visit. The factors were differentiated by labelling q29f1 'visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area'; q29f2 was labelled 'previous area visited and money spent'; and q29f3 was labelled 'current area visited and money spent'. The Cronbach's alpha values for the three factors were above 0.6, and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.42: Extensiveness of trip planning information searched

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
q33: Extensiveness of trip planning information searched (q33)				
q33_1: Local area information	0.687 <i>p</i> < 0.001	86.015	0.557	0.847
q33_2: Safety information			0.947	
q33_3: Emergency numbers			0.950	
q33_4: Travel bookings and reservations			0.600	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the construct on the extensiveness of trip planning information searched, only one factor was identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on the one factor (q33F) focused on the extensiveness of the information that visitors searched for trip planning; thus q33F was labelled 'extensiveness of trip planning information searched'. This factor had a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.6, which was acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.43: Frequency of searching trip planning information

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
q34: Frequency of searching trip planning information				
q34_1: Local area information	0.684 <i>p</i> < 0.001	67.966	0.396	0.836
q34_2: Safety information			0.994	
q34_3: Emergency numbers			0.951	
q34_4: Travel bookings and reservations			0.668	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The analysis confirmed unidimensionality for the preferred VIC information construct, as the analysis identified only one factor, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013). The items that clustered on the one factor (q34F) focused on the frequency of searching trip planning information; thus q34F was labelled 'frequency of searching trip planning information'. This factor had a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.6, which was acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.44: Usefulness of trip planning information searched

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
Q35: Usefulness of trip planning information searched				
q35_1: Local area information	0.644 <i>p</i> < 0.001	62.955	0.583	0.798
q35_2: Safety information			0.924	
q35_3: Emergency numbers			0.858	
q35_4: Travel bookings and reservations			0.767	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the construct on the usefulness of trip planning information searched for, only one factor was identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on the one factor (q35F) focused on the usefulness of trip planning

information searched; thus q35F was labelled ‘usefulness of trip planning information searched’. This factor had a Cronbach’s alpha value above 0.6, which was acceptable for exploratory research.

Table 8.45: Extensiveness of trip planning information source used

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q36: Extensiveness of trip planning information source used						
q36_4: Knowledge from previous experience	0.824 p < 0.000	71.999	0.349			0.809
q36_5: Visitor information centre			0.528			
Q36_8: Local residents of the area			0.673			
q36_11: Magazines/ newspapers			0.591			
q36_12: Television/ radio			1.052			
q36_3: Internet				0.900		0.861
q36_6: Social media				0.996		
q36_7: Mobile applications				0.572		
q36_1: Word-of-mouth					0.802	0.701
q36_2: Telephone call					0.793	
q36_10: Tourist guidebooks/brochures					0.550	

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

For the construct on the extensiveness of trip planning information sources used, three factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on factor one (q36f1) reflected the extensive use of internal and external trip planning information sources; factor two (q36f2) suggested extensive use of online trip planning information sources; while factor three (q36f3) involved extensive use of traditional trip planning information sources. The factors were differentiated by labelling q36f1 ‘extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources’; q36f2 was labelled ‘extensive usage of electronic trip planning information sources’; while q36f3 was labelled ‘extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources’. The Cronbach’s alpha values for the three factors were above

0.6, and were considered acceptable for exploratory research. However, item q36_9 (extensive use of travel agent/tour operator) was discarded in the analysis after examining the improvement in the value of the Cronbach's alpha of the factors.

Table 8.46: Frequency of using for trip planning information

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q37: Frequency of using for trip planning information						
q37_3: Internet	0.801 p < 0.000	69.575	0.863			0.857
q37_6: Social media			0.992			
q37_7: Mobile applications			0.570			
q37_4: Knowledge from previous experience				0.370		0.762
q37_5: Visitor information centre				0.543		
q37_8: Local residents of the area				0.401		
q37_11: Magazines/ newspapers				0.558		
q37_12: Television/ radio				1.032		
q37_1: Word-of-mouth					0.704	0.658
q37_2: Telephone call					0.790	
q37_10: Tourist guidebooks/ brochures					0.439	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the construct on the frequency of using trip planning information, three factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on factor one (q37f1) reflected the frequency of using online trip planning information sources; factor two (q37f2) suggested the frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources; while factor three (q37f3) involved the frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources. The factors were differentiated by labelling q37f1 'frequency of using online trip planning information

sources', q37f2 as 'frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources', and q37f3 as 'frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources'. The Cronbach's alpha values for the three factors were above 0.6, and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research. However, item q37_9 (frequency of using travel agent/tour operator) was discarded in the analysis after examining the improvement in the value of the Cronbach's alpha of the factors.

Table 8.47: Usefulness of trip planning information source used

Information-related construct and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings			Cronbach's alpha
			1	2	3	
q38: Usefulness of trip planning information source used						
q38_3: Internet	0.814 p < 0.001	61.437	0.757			0.800
q38_6: Social media			0.820			
q38_7: Mobile applications			0.851			
q38_9: Travel agent/ tour operator			0.447			
q38_4: Knowledge from previous experience				0.347		0.794
q38_5: Visitor information centre				0.589		
q38_8: Local residents of the area				0.601		
q38_11: Magazines/ newspapers				0.851		
q38_12: Television/ radio				0.945		
q38_1: Word-of-mouth					0.662	0.650
q38_2: Telephone call					0.732	
q38_10: Tourist guidebooks/brochure					0.462	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the construct on frequency of using trip planning information, three factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on factor one (q38f1) reflected the usefulness of online trip planning information sources;

factor two (q38f2) suggested the usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources; while factor three (q38f3) involved the usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources. The factors were differentiated by labelling q38f1 ‘usefulness of electronic trip planning information sources’, q38f2 as ‘usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources’, and q38f3 as ‘usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources’. The Cronbach’s alpha values for the three factors were above 0.6, and so were considered acceptable for exploratory research. However, item q38_9 (usefulness of travel agent/tour operator) was discarded in the analysis after examining the improvement in the value of the Cronbach’s alpha of the factors.

Table 8.48: Memorable visitor experiences at visited areas

Memorable visitor experience dimensions and item description	KMO & Bartlett’s test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach’s alpha
			1	
q41f1: MTE: Hedonism				
41_1: Experienced something new	0.792 <i>p</i> < 0.001	63.831	0.720	0.805
q41_2: Participated in special activities			0.660	
q41_3: Enjoyed every moment			0.671	
q41_4: Experienced high levels of excitement			0.828	
q41f2: MTE: Novelty				
q41_5: Had a once-in-a-lifetime experience	0.797 <i>p</i> < 0.001	73.168	0.836	0.873
q41_6: Had a unique experience			0.893	
q41_7: Had a totally different experience from previous ones			0.717	
q41_8: Had a new experience			0.758	
q41f3: MTE: Local culture				
q41_9: Had a good impression about the local people	0.726 <i>p</i> < 0.001	73.524		0.898
q41_10: Had close encounters with the local culture			0.793	

Memorable visitor experience dimensions and item description	KMO & Bartlett's test	% variance explained	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha
			1	
q41_11: Met friendly local people			0.739	
q41_12: Met local people who might be willing to help me			0.774	
q41_13: Met local people who might be willing to share information about the place			0.890	
q41f4: MTE: Refreshment				
q41_14: Felt a sense of freedom	0.500 <i>p</i> < 0.001	77.372	0.739	0.690
q41_15: Felt revitalised			0.739	
q41f5: MTE: Meaningfulness				
q41_16: Had meaningful experience	0.677 <i>p</i> < 0.001	68.387	0.604	0.755
q41_17: Accomplished my goal			0.820	
q41_18: Discovered new things about myself			0.756	
q41f6: MTE: Involvement				
q41_19: Participated in activities which I really wanted to do	0.500 <i>p</i> < 0.001	85.181	0.838	0.806
q41_20: Got involved in activities of great interest to me			0.838	
q41f7: MTE: Knowledge				
q41_21: Explored new things	0.675 <i>p</i> < 0.001	77.715	0.654	0.854
q41_22: Gained new knowledge			0.847	
q41_23: Learnt new cultures			0.955	

Source: Researcher's own contribution

For the construct on visitors' experience at visited areas, seven factors were identified, based on the eigenvalue criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) (Field, 2013), thus indicating that the construct was not unidimensional. The items that clustered on the seven factors reflected visitors' memorable experiences at visited areas; thus q41f1 was labelled 'hedonism', q41f2 'novelty', q41f3 'local culture', q41f4 'refreshment',

q41f5 'meaningfulness', q41f6 'involvement', and q41f7 'knowledge'. These factors are similar to the seven dimensions of Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE scale. The Cronbach's alpha values for all seven factors were above 0.6, and so were considered acceptable where the MTE scale (Kim *et al.*, 2012) was applied to a new context (i.e., VICs).

8.10.2 Descriptive statistics of the extracted factors

The descriptive statistics for the 38 reliable factors retained after factor analysis and reliability testing were conducted. The mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, as well as the minimum and maximum of each factor, are provided in Tables 8.49a, 8.49b, and 8.49c. The results were split into three tables in order to provide a much clearer picture of the descriptive statistics.

Table 8.49a: Descriptive statistics: visitors

	q9f1	q9f2	q11f	q12f	q16f1	q16f2	q16f3	q17f1	q17f2	q17f3	q17f4	q17f5	q17f6	q17f7	q29f1	29f2	q29f3
N: Valid	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	2,2457	2,5155	2,8384	3,7501	4,0965	3,5702	4,3914	4,2646	4,2390	2,3547	2,6638	4,2176	4,3374	3,9803	4,3000	3,4000	3,8917
Median	2,0000	2,5000	2,9479	3,7500	4,0000	3,6667	4,5000	4,3333	4,0000	2,0000	2,6000	4,0000	4,2000	4,0000	4,0000	3,7500	4,0000
Std deviation	1,0381	1,3240	0,9407	0,7235	0,8171	0,9755	0,6406	0,6566	0,5836	1,2728	1,1947	0,6084	0,6054	0,8140	0,5340	1,0923	0,8689
Skewness	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521
Std error of skewness	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197
Kurtosis	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745
Std error of kurtosis	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391
Minimum	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	2,00	2,00	2,33	1,00	1,00	1,60	2,00	1,50	3,00	1,00	1,50
Maximum	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Table 8.49b: Descriptive statistics: visitors

	q33f	q34f	q35f	q36f1	q36f2	q36f3	q37f1	q37f2	q37f3	q38f1	q38f2	q38f3
N: Valid	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152	152
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	3,4063	3,0206	3,6973	2,5761	3,2648	3,4706	3,0831	2,4001	3,3153	3,1098	2,5746	3,4135
Median	3,4228	3,0000	3,7500	2,5761	3,2648	3,4841	3,0831	2,4001	3,3333	3,1098	2,5746	3,4453
Std deviation	1,0040	0,9572	0,8099	0,9324	1,1382	0,9267	1,1251	0,8388	0,9077	1,0018	0,8924	0,8921
Skewness	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521	0,521
Std error of skewness	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197
Kurtosis	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745	-0,745
Std error of kurtosis	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391
Minimum	1,00	1,25	1,75	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	0,80	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Maximum	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Table 8.49c: Descriptive statistics: visitors

		q41f1	q41f2	q41f3	q41f4	q41f5	q41f6	q41f7
N: Valid	Valid	152	152	152	152	152	152	152
Missing		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		3,8977	3,7322	3,9251	3,8694	3,8562	3,8731	3,9751
Median		4,0000	3,7500	4,0000	4,0000	4,0000	4,0000	4,0000
Std deviation		0,79278	0,92190	0,69121	0,79094	0,77996	0,88902	0,78209
Skewness		-0,803	-0,785	-0,345	-0,662	-0,705	-1,080	-1,034
Std error of skewness		0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197	0,197
Kurtosis		1,018	0,434	0,095	1,143	0,760	1,445	1,612
Std error of kurtosis		0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391	0,391
Minimum		1,00	1,00	1,80	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00
Maximum		5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00	5,00

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The mean scores for the 38 factors ranged between 2.2457 and 4.3914. The lowest mean score of 2.2457 (SD=1.03811) was for the factor 'purpose to use VIC facilities' (q9f1), which was measured on a five-point scale anchored at (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. This low mean score shows that the average response for this factor fell between 'disagree' and 'neutral', indicating that visitors tended to disagree that the purpose of their visit to the VIC was to use its facilities. The highest mean score of 4.3914 (SD=0.64057) was for the factor 'preferred VIC traditional information sources' (q16f3), which was measured on a five-point scale anchored at (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. This mean score shows that the average response for this factor fell between 'agree' and 'strongly agree', indicating a *high preference for VIC traditional information sources*.

The distribution of values was established to determine the extent to which the data were symmetrical, and to see whether the skewness and kurtosis values fell outside the range of -2 to +2 (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The results show that all the values for skewness and 33 of the 38 kurtosis values were between -2 and +2, indicating that normality was not a problem; thus a normal distribution of data can be assumed. The kurtosis values that were above the threshold values of +2 were found for q12F (2.194), q16f1 (4.169), and q16f3 (2.613). It is important to note that these deviations do not represent a major violation of the normal distribution assumption. In addition, where the assumption of normality is required, the reason that the variables can be used in the analysis will be provided – e.g., that tests are robust to deviations from normality.

8.10.3 Correlation analysis

The correlation, which measured the size of the linear relationships, was interpreted according to the guidelines of Cohen *et al.* (2003) as follows:

- Small/weak correlations: <0.3 ($r = 0.10$ to 0.29 : small rho)
- Moderate correlations: 0.3 – 0.5 ($r = 0.30$: medium rho)
- Strong correlations: >0.5 ($r = 0.50$ to 1.00 : large rho)

Since H_1 to H_5 and the sixth objective of this research aimed to investigate how the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experience and behavioural intentions, without attempting to establish causation, correlation analysis was the appropriate choice of data analysis technique. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Tables 8.50a and 8.50b in order to provide a much clearer picture.

Table 8.50a: Correlations among independent variables: visitors

		q9f1	q9f2	q11F	q12F	q16f1	q16f2	q16f3	q17f1	q17f2	q17f3	q17f4	q17f5	q17f6	q17f7
q91	Pearson correlation	1													
q9f2	Pearson correlation	0.301**	1												
q11F	Pearson correlation	0.305**	0.166*	1											
q12F	Pearson correlation	0.278**	0.272**	0.436**	1										
q16f1	Pearson correlation	-0.106	0,099	-0.047	0.007	1									
q16f2	Pearson correlation	0.332**	0.208**	0.119	0.050	0.388**	1								
q16f3	Pearson correlation	0.036	0.215**	-0.010	0.117	0.277**	0.260**	1							
q17f1	Pearson correlation	0.019	0.106	0.097	0.182*	0.081	0.215**	0.287**	1						
q17f2	Pearson correlation	0.067	0.141	0.252**	0.298**	0.030	0.180*	0.223**	0.654**	1					
q17f3	Pearson correlation	0.375**	0.148	0.193*	0.032	-0.016	0.288**	0.064	0.111	0.161*	1				
q17f4	Pearson correlation	0.306**	0.415**	0.216**	0.209**	0.100	0.240**	0,080	0.248**	0.284**	0.399**	1			
q17f5	Pearson correlation	0.103	0.130	0.251**	0.297**	0,044	0.178*	0.207*	0.456**	0.477**	0.169*	0.214**	1		
q17f6	Pearson correlation	0.100	0.195*	0.292**	0.128	0.005	0.209**	0,115	0.496**	0.558**	0.236**	0.232**	0.618**	1	
q17f7	Pearson correlation	0.287**	0,037	0.271**	0.211**	0,002	0.323**	0.184*	0.301**	0.306**	0.420**	0.146	0.559**	0.497**	1
q29f1	Pearson correlation	0.064	0.145	-0,073	0.325*	-0,024	0.060	0.167	0.442**	0.552**	0.056	0.281*	0.566**	0.582**	.261*
q29f2	Pearson correlation	0.147	0.325*	0.047	0.289*	0.023	0.170	0.075	0,220	0.299*	0.345**	0.295*	0.287*	0.120	0,243

		q9f1	q9f2	q11F	q12F	q16f1	q16f2	q16f3	q17f1	q17f2	q17f3	q17f4	q17f5	q17f6	q17f7
q29f3	Pearson correlation	0.322*	0.315*	0.404**	0.239	-0.168	0.093	-0.030	0.270*	0.356**	0.238	0.400**	0.203	0.238	0.277*
q33F	Pearson correlation	0.330**	0.269**	0.311**	0.321**	-0.103	0.228**	0.085	0.243**	0.289**	0.178*	0.370**	0.234**	0.359**	0.192*
q34F	Pearson correlation	0.381**	0.146	0.148	0.134	-0.072	0.235**	0.017	0.193*	0.204*	0.176*	0.332**	0.163*	0.293**	0.235**
q35F	Pearson correlation	0.296**	0.160*	0.121	0.226**	0.015	0.319**	0.121	0.155	0.206*	0.210**	0.254**	0.193*	0.301**	0.219**
q36f1	Pearson correlation	0.466**	0.292**	0.281**	0.355**	-0,026	.334**	0.129	0.176*	0.404**	0.413**	0.379**	0.379**	0.276**	0.331**
q36f2	Pearson correlation	0.170*	0.040	0.058	0.180*	0.166*	0.365**	0.118	0.237**	0.328**	0.233**	0.230**	0.356**	0.276**	0.260**
q36f3	Pearson correlation	0.297**	0.139	0,058	0.125	-0.012	0.299**	0.146	0.117	0.140	0.186*	0.394**	0.268**	0.183*	0.234**
q37f1	Pearson correlation	0.171*	-0.047	0.010	0.122	0.115	0.289**	0.071	0.190*	0.247**	0.144	0,157	0.291**	0.197*	0.212**
q37f2	Pearson correlation	0.472**	0.215**	0.270**	0.293**	-0.101	0.286**	0.062	0.148	0.347**	0.339**	0.323**	0.335**	0.246**	0.320**
q37f3	Pearson correlation	0.292**	0.066	0.036	0.114	-0.054	0.192*	0.090	0.042	0.071	0.118	0.317**	0.214**	0.098	0.207*
q38f1	Pearson correlation	0.155	-0.042	0.079	0.164*	0.144	0.311**	0.095	0.133	0.196*	0.174*	0.139	0.274**	0.179*	0.183*
q38f2	Pearson correlation	0.428**	0.305**	0.299**	0.357**	-0.082	0.286**	0.118	0.067	0.287**	0.394**	0.333**	0.360**	0.207*	0.286**
q38f3	Pearson correlation	0.258**	0.108	0,071	0.160*	-0.034	0.229**	0.103	-0.012	0.023	0.135	0.325**	0.197*	0.080	0.160*

Source: Researcher's own contribution

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8.50b: Correlations among independent variables: visitors

		q29f1	q29f2	q29f3	q33F	q34F	q35F	q36f1	q36f2	q36f3	q37f1	q37f2	q37f3	q38f1	q38f2	q38f3
q91	Pearson correlation															
q9f2	Pearson correlation															
q11F	Pearson correlation															
q12F	Pearson correlation															
q16f1	Pearson correlation															
q16f2	Pearson correlation															
q16f3	Pearson correlation															
q17f1	Pearson correlation															
q17f2	Pearson correlation															
q17f3	Pearson correlation															
q17f4	Pearson correlation															
q17f5	Pearson correlation															
q17f6	Pearson correlation															
q17f7	Pearson correlation															
q29f1	Pearson correlation	1														
q29f2	Pearson correlation	0.285*	1													

		q29f1	q29f2	q29f3	q33F	q34F	q35F	q36f1	q36f2	q36f3	q37f1	q37f2	q37f3	q38f1	q38f2	q38f3
q29f3	Pearson correlation	0.278*	0.444**	1												
q33F	Pearson correlation	0.225	-0.020	0.382**	1											
q34F	Pearson correlation	0.193	0.062	0.476**	0.681**	1										
q35F	Pearson correlation	0.169	0.091	0.075	0.521**	0.601**	1									
q36f1	Pearson correlation	0.212	0.305*	0.203	0.459**	0.409**	0.367**	1								
q36f2	Pearson correlation	0.236	0.029	0.046	0.432**	0.406**	0.346**	0.541**	1							
q36f3	Pearson correlation	0.167	0.003	0.089	0.457**	0.435**	0.271**	0.460**	0.410**	1						
q37f1	Pearson correlation	0.166	-0.131	0.005	0.312**	0.324**	0.249**	0.390**	0.875**	0.360**	1					
q37f2	Pearson correlation	0.108	0.119	0.191	0.395**	0.357**	0.292**	0.863**	0.448**	0.469**	0.525**	1				
q37f3	Pearson correlation	0.062	-0.136	0.050	0.365**	0.355**	0.213**	0.361**	0.320**	0.935**	0.378**	0.467**	1			
q38f1	Pearson correlation	0.047	-0.184	-0.138	0.274**	0.235**	0.246**	0.343**	0.766**	0.365**	0.843**	0.426**	0.373**	1		
q38f2	Pearson correlation	0.077	0.159	0.142	0.365**	0.269**	0.296**	0.798**	0.375**	0.436**	0.388**	0.830**	0.412**	0.516**	1	
q38f3	Pearson correlation	-0.055	-0.188	0.006	0.377**	0.309**	0.244**	0.307**	0.291**	0.900**	0.311**	0.365**	0.927**	0.429**	0.453**	1

Source: Researcher's own contribution

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on Tables 8.50a and 8.50b, two sets of correlation analysis were conducted. The strength and direction of these correlations are also highlighted. Owing to the small sample size, only correlations that reflect strong relationships between variables are highlighted in this section. All the other correlations are highlighted in Appendix H.

First, Table 8.51 highlights strong correlations among the independent variables (VIC information-related factors). Second, Table 8.51 presents strong correlations between the independent variables (VIC information-related factors) and the dependent variables (memorable visitor experiences). As it has been proven that the Pearson correlation coefficient is robust against deviations from normality (George & Mallery, 2003), the correlation analysis conducted in this study was valid for all the factors studied.

Table 8.51: Correlations among VIC information related factors

Positive strong correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“visitors’ experience of VIC information provision” (q17f1)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.654**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.558**) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.552**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.618**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.559**) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.566**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6)	• “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.582**)
“extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F)	• “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.681**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.521**)
“frequency of trip planning information searched (q34F)	• “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.601**)
“extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1)	• “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.541**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.863**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.798**)

Positive strong correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2)	• “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.875**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.766**)
“extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3)	• “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.935**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.900**)
“frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1)	• “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.525**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.843**)
“frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2)	• “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.830**)
“frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3)	• “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.927**)
“usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1)	• “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.516**)

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8.51 reveals 22 positive strong correlations among VIC information-related factors at a 1% level of significance ($p < 0.01$).

Table 8.52: Correlations: VIC information and memorable visitor experiences

Positive strong correlation: $p < 0.01$	
VIC information-related factors	Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences
• “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.511**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.411**)	“knowledge” (q41f7)
Positive and moderate correlation	
• “visitors’ experience of VIC information provision” (q17f1:0.308**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.395**)	“hedonism” (q41f1)

• “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.316**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.360**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.334**) • extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.365**)	
• “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.318**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.445**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.410**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.415**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions”(q17f7:0.377**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.379**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.309**)	“novelty” (q41f2)
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.302**) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.306**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.414**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.343**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.305**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.413**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.463**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.431**) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.386**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.301**)	“local culture” (q41f3)
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.334**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.302**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.329**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.332**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.351**) • “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.330**)	“refreshment” (q41f4)
• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.342**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.315**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.312**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.321**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.337**)	“meaningfulness” (q41f5)
• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.349**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.346**) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.453**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.324**)	“involvement” (q41f6)
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.308**) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.331**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.361**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.311**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.326**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.358**)	“knowledge” (q41f7)

• “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.320**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.348**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources”(q38f2:0.310**)	

Source: Researcher’s own contribution

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8.52 reveals several correlations between VIC information-related factors and memorable visitor experiences at a 1% level of significance ($p < 0.01$). The correlation values reveal positive strong correlations between ‘previous area visited and money spent’ (q29f2) and ‘extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources’ (q36f1) and the memorable visitor experience dimension of ‘knowledge’ (q41f7). In addition, there are 47 positive moderate correlations between VIC information-related factors and memorable visitor experiences.

As shown in Table 8.51, a number of VIC information-related factors are very strongly correlated with each other, pointing to potential multicollinearity (correlation coefficient values larger than 0.8). Variance inflation indicators in the initial hierarchical regression analysis outputs were studied to detect multicollinearity, and those factors that reduced the precision and predictions of the coefficients and weakened the statistical power of the regression model were removed. The results of the hierarchical regression analysis are discussed in section 8.10.4.

8.10.4 Hierarchical regression analysis

This section presents the results of the hierarchical regression model that was used to test the following hypotheses:

- H₁: Visitors’ demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences.
- H₂: Visitors’ demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.

- H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H₄: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable visitor experiences.
- H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

Hierarchical regression deals with how predictor (independent) variables are selected and entered into a model (Hair *et al.*, 2014). In a hierarchical regression, independent variables are not entered into the regression simultaneously but in steps, in order to provide a better understanding of how the entry of new variables in each step changes the predictive power of existing variables. Specifically, 'hierarchical regression' refers to the process of adding or removing predictor variables from the regression model in steps (Hair *et al.*, 2014).

In this study, the hierarchical regression procedure was employed to determine how introducing new independent VIC information variables changes the predictive power of existing independent VIC information variables. However, the main aim is not prediction, but determining which predictors have a statistically significant relationship with the dependent variable. The conceptual relationships investigated are shown in Figure 8.7, and listed below.

H₁: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences:

- H_{1a}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of hedonism.
- H_{1b}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of novelty.
- H_{1c}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of local culture.
- H_{1d}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of refreshment.

- H_{1e}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of meaningfulness.
- H_{1f}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of involvement.
- H_{1g}: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their experience of the knowledge they gained.

H₂: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.

H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions:

- H_{3a}: Visitors' experience of hedonism contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3b}: Visitors' experience of novelty contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3c}: Visitors' experiences of local culture contribute to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3d}: Visitors' experience of refreshment contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3e}: Visitors' experience of meaningfulness contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3f}: Visitors' experience of involvement contributes to their behavioural intentions.
- H_{3g}: Visitors' experience of the knowledge they gained contributes to their behavioural intentions.

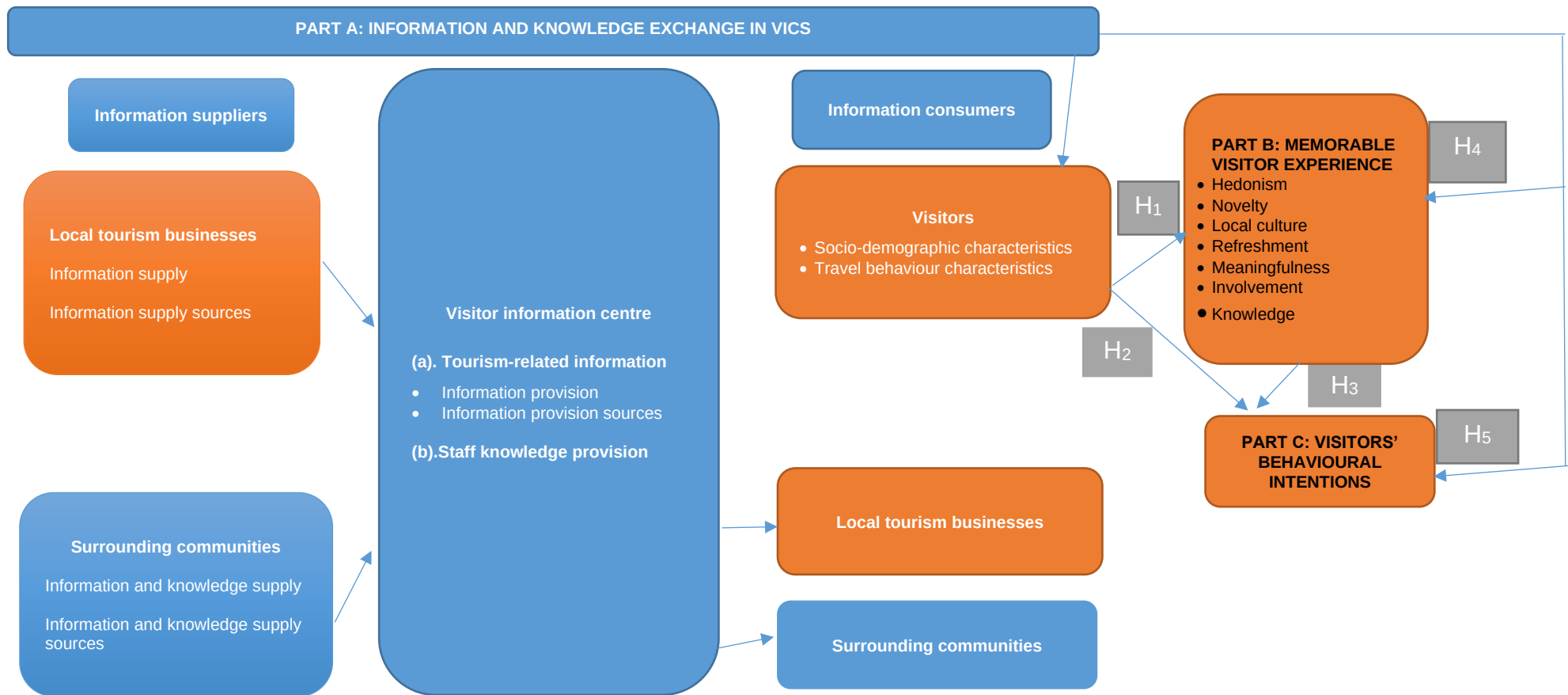
H₄: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' memorable visitor experiences:

- H_{4a}: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of hedonism.
- H_{4b}: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of novelty.
- H_{4c}: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of local culture.

- H_{4d}: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of refreshment.
- H_{4e}: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of meaningfulness.
- H_{4f}: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experience of involvement.
- H_{4g}: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' experiences of the knowledge they gained.

H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

Figure 8.7: Relationship: VIC information and memorable visitor experiences



Source: Researcher's own construction and contribution

LEGEND

- Blue and white text: VIC information and knowledge-related factors
- Orange and white text: VIC information and knowledge-related factors
- Orange and black: Memorable visitor experience and visitors' behavioural intentions

8.10.5.1 Process followed to model the hierarchical regression analysis

In order to test whether visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics as well as VIC information-related factors have an effect on dimensions of memorable visitor experience, hierarchical regression was conducted. The following process was employed to model the regressions:

- Model 1 entailed only regressing the demographic and travel behaviour characteristics. The reason for first running a separate regression was to be able to determine their effect in isolation first, and to decrease the number of variables, since covering the seven original demographic and travel behaviour characteristics variables necessitated the creation of dummy variables, resulting in a set of 18 variables to be included in the analysis. Multicollinearity was also investigated at this stage to identify any variables that needed to be excluded. The seven demographic and travel behaviour characteristics variables are educational level, purpose of visit, travel companion, duration of stay, gender, age, and visiting of areas.
- Model 2 included selecting only statistically significant variables from the first regression and checking whether the adjusted R^2 has improved. The set of statistically significant variables identified in this step (demographic and travel behaviour characteristics) was then included in hierarchical regression model 3; these were `dumpurpose3`, `dumwho5`, and `dumduration5`. These dummy variables are explained in section 8.10.5.2 below.
- Model 3 entailed a hierarchical regression that included the variables identified in model 2 (`dumpurpose3`, `dumwho5`, `dumduration5`). Key independent variables (`q11f`, `q12f`, `q16f1`, `q16f2`, `q16f3`, `q17f1`, `q17f2`, `q17f3`, `q17f4`, `q17f5`, `q17f6`, `q33F`, `q34F`, `q35F`, `q36f1`, `q36f2`, `q36f3`, `q37f1`, `q37f2`, `q37f3`, `q38f1`, `q38f2`, and `q38f3`) were added, and multicollinearity was investigated to identify any variables that needed to be excluded.

- Model 4 involved the resulting model after multicollinearity variables (q36f2, q36f3, q37f2, q37f3, and q38f3) were excluded. This is the regression model that was used as a basis to obtain a best-fitting model.
- Model 5 involved running the regression models iteratively and deleting variables – first, where their significant value was above 0.6, then above 0.3, and last, above 0.1. After a set of variables had been deleted owing to their significance values, the models were tested to see whether deletion improved the adjusted R^2 . The point where the deletion no longer increased the adjusted R^2 was the best-fitting regression model that provided the set of variables that were used to explain optimally the dependent variable.

8.10.5.2 Creation of dummy variables: demographic and travel behaviour characteristics

As stated in section 8.10.5.1 above, covering the seven original demographic and travel behaviour characteristics variables in Model 1 necessitated the creation of dummy variables for four variables: education, purpose, travel companion, and duration of stay. The dummy variables are described below:

- **Education**

Table 8.53 Dummy variables for level of education

Original categories	Re-grouped categories	Dummy variables
1 = No schooling	1 = No or some schooling	Reference variable
2 = Primary education		
3 = Some high school education		
4 = Grade 12/Standard 10/Matric	2 = Completed secondary education (GRD12)	• dumedu2
5 = Diploma/Certificate after Grade 12	3 = Tertiary education	• dumedu3
6 = Bachelor's degree		

Original categories	Re-grouped categories	Dummy variables
7 = Postgraduate degree (e.g., Honours, Master's, PhD)	4 = Postgraduate education	dumedu4

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Table 8.53 shows the dummy variables created for level of education. The original seven categories used to measure visitors' educational level were re-grouped into four categories. Category 1 (no or some schooling) was used as a reference variable for visitors' educational level. As a result, three dummy variables were created for educational level.

- Purpose**

Table 8.54: Dummy variables for purpose of visit

Original categories	Dummy variables
1 = Holiday	dumpurpose1
2 = Business	Reference variable
3 = Visiting friends and relatives	dumpurpose3
4 = Religious	dumpurpose4

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Four categories were used to measure visitors' main purpose of visit. Category 2 (business) was used as a reference variable for visitors' trip purpose, resulting in the creation of three dummy variables.

- Travel companion**

Table 8.55: Dummy variables for travel companion

Original categories	Dummy variables
1 = Alone	Reference variable
2 = Friends	dumwho2
3 = Partner/spouse (without children)	dumwho3
4 = Partner/spouse (with children)	dumwho4

Original categories	Dummy variables
5 = Co-workers	dumwho5
6 = Organised group	dumwho6

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Six categories were used to measure the number of people with whom visitors travelled. Category 1 (alone) was used as a reference variable for visitors' companions, resulting in the creation of five dummy variables:

- **Duration of stay**

Table 8.56: Dummy variables for duration of stay

Original categories	Re-grouped categories	Dummy variables
1 = Day visit	1 = Day visit	Reference variable
2 = One night	2 = One night	Dumduration2
3 = 2–4 nights	3 = 2–4 nights	Dumduration3
4 = 5–7 nights	4 = 5–7 nights	Dumduration4
5 = 8–10 nights	5 = Longer than 7 nights	Dumduration5
6 = More than 10 nights		

Source: Researcher's own contribution

The original six categories used to measure visitors' duration of stay in visited areas were regrouped into five categories. Category 1 (day visit) was used as a reference variable for visitors' planned duration of stay. As a result, four dummy variables were created for duration of stay:

8.10.5.3 Prediction of memorable visitor experience attributes

H₁ and H₄ in the conceptual framework in Figure 8.8 postulate that memorable visitor experiences are determined by visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics as well as by VIC information-related factors. Accordingly, six predictions were developed and tested using hierarchical regression analysis.

The results are presented in Tables 8.57 to 8.62.

- **Prediction of experiences of hedonism (q41f1)**

The results for predicting hedonism are presented in Table 8.56 below:

Table 8.57: Prediction of hedonism

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	dumedu4	-0.201				
	dumedu3	-0.387				
	dumedu2	-0.291				
	dumpurpose1	-0.189				
	dumpurpose3	-0.286**				
	dumpurpose4	-0.135				
	dumwho2	-0.090				
	dumwho3	-0.147				
	dumwho4	0.020				
	dumwho5	-0.403**				
	dumwho6	-0.071				
	dumduration2	-0.012				
	dumduration3	0.014				
	dumduration4	-0.028				
	dumduration5	0.297***				
	Gender	-0.014				
	Age	-0.078				
	q26	-0.050				
	dumpurpose3		-0.157**			
	dumwho5		-0.196**			
	dumduration5		0.283***			
Step 1	dumpurpose3			-0.157**		
	dumwho5			-0.196**		
	dumduration5			0.283***		
Step 2	dumpurpose3			-0.181**		
	dumwho5			-0.154		
	dumduration5			0.175**		
	q11f			-0.026		
	q12f			-0.027		
	q16f1			0.003		
	q16f2			0.181		
	q16f3			-0.072		
	q17f1			-0.001		
	q17f2			0.165		
	q17f3			0.102		
	q17f4			0.177**		
	q17f5			0.253**		

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	q17f6 q33F q34F q35F q36f1 q36f2 q36f3 q37f1 q37f2 q37f3 q38f1 q38f2 q38f3			-0.072 0.100 -0.075 -0.046 0.281 -0.236 0.123 -0.148 0.057 0.085 0.112 -0.166 -0.318		
Step 1	dumpurpose3 dumwho5 dumduration5				-0.157** -0.196** 0.283***	
Step 2	dumpurpose3 dumwho5 dumduration5 q11f q12f q16f1 q16f2 q16f3 q17f1 q17f2 q17f3 q17f4 q17f5 q17f6 q33F q34F q35F q36f1 q36f2 q36f3 q37f1 q37f2 q37f3 q38f1 q38f2 q38f3				-0.190** -0.151 0.191** 0.000 -0.046 0.008 0.165 -0.080 0.038 0.168 0.096 0.150 0.211** -0.052 0.037 -0.070 -0.059 0.243 -0.161 -0.099 -0.070	
Step 1	dumpurpose3 dumwho5 dumduration5					-0.157** -0.196** 0.283***
Step 2	dumpurpose3 dumwho5 dumduration5					-0.179** -0.116* 0.169**

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	q16f2 q17f2 q17f3 q17f4 q17f5 q36f1 q38f1					0.144* 0.160* 0.102 0.133* 0.179** 0.143 -0.254***
Adjusted R^2		0.054	0.095	0.278 of step 2 result	0.283 of step 2 result	0.318
F (p value) for regression model for final step 2 result		1.430 (0.130)	6.314 (0.000)	3.239 (0.000)	3.845 (0.000)	8.048 (0.000)
R^2 change and associated F change significance				0.113 (0.000) (step 1) 0.289 (0.000) (step 2)	0.113 (0.000) (step 1) 0.270 (0.000) (step 2)	0.113 (0.000) (step 1) 0.250 (0.000) (step2)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$).

Variables highlighted in blue display multicollinearity based on their variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance levels.

Variables above the threshold values for multicollinearity of greater than 10 or smaller than 0.1 were excluded.

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics did not contribute significantly in model 1 ($F = 1.430$, $p > 0.10$) and that these variables accounted for only 5.4% ($R^2 = 0.054$) of the variance of experience in hedonism. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with coefficients (dumpurpose3, $\beta = -0.286$, dumwho5, $\beta = -0.403$, and dumduratio5, $\beta = 0.297$), model 2 improved the adjusted R^2 from 0.054 to 0.095 and led to $F = 6.314$, $p < 0.001$. Subsequently, these statistically significant variables were included in the hierarchical regression model.

Introducing VIC information-related factors in Model 3 resulted in $F = 3.239$ ($p < 0.001$) and an R^2 change of 0.289, with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.278. However, model 3 had factors that showed multicollinearity (q36f1, q36f2, q37f2, q37f3, and q38f3); thus these factors were excluded from model 4. Furthermore, as these factors showed multicollinearity in the regression analyses of other dependent factors (q41f2, q41f3,

q41f4, q41f5, q41f6, q41f7, and q17f7), model 3 was excluded from subsequent analyses.

Model 4, without the factors that displayed multicollinearity, led to a statistically significant regression model that resulted in $F = 3.845$ ($p < 0.001$) and an R^2 change of 0.270 with an adjusted R^2 value of 0.283. The adjusted R^2 value suggests that the current set of VIC information-related factors explained 28% of the variation in the level of hedonism. In model 5, the variance explained in the level of hedonism increased from 28% (model 4) to 32%, with an adjusted $R^2 = 0.318$ and an R^2 change of 0.250, with an associated statistically significant F change ($p < 0.001$).

The final β values in model 5 indicate that visitors whose main purpose was to visit friends and relatives showed a tendency to experience lower levels of hedonism (dumpurpose3, $\beta = -0.179$) compared with those whose main purpose was business-related. Similarly, visitors who travelled with co-workers showed a tendency to experience lower levels of hedonism (dumwho5, $\beta = -0.116$) than those who travelled alone. Interestingly, visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism (dumduration5, $\beta = 0.169$) than those who only planned to visit for a day.

Electronic information sources through which visitors preferred to receive information while at VICs (q16f2, $\beta = 0.144$) had a small statistically significant positive effect on the level of hedonism perceived, while the usefulness of online trip planning information sources (q38f1, $\beta = -0.254$) had a statistically significant negative effect. In addition, visitors' experience of the quality of information (q17f2, $\beta = 0.160$), the availability of ICTs (q17f4, $\beta = 0.133$) and the knowledge that VIC staff have of local areas (q17f5, $\beta = 0.179$) had a significantly positive effect on the level of perceived hedonism.

- **Prediction of experiences of novelty (q41f2)**

The results for predicting novelty are presented in Table 8.58.

Table 8.58 Prediction of novelty

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	Gender	-0.016			
	Age	0.063			
	q26	-0.007			
	dumedu4	-0.159			
	dumedu3	-0.339			
	dumedu2	-0.257			
	dumpurpose1	-0.191			
	dumpurpose3	-0.207			
	dumpurpose4	-0.085			
	dumwho2	0.037			
	dumwho3	-0.145			
	dumwho4	0.032			
	dumwho5	-0.408**			
	dumwho6	-0.180			
	dumduratio2	-0.022			
	dumduratio3	0.102			
	dumduratio4	0.059			
	dumduratio5	0.258**			
	dumwho5		-0.202**		
	dumduratio5		0.248***		
Step1	dumwho5			-0.202**	
	dumduratio5			0.248**	
Step 2	dumwho5			-0.100	
	dumduratio5			0.134*	
	q11f			-0.030	
	q12f			0.003	
	q16f1			0.030	
	q16f2			0.122	
	q16f3			0.021	
	q17f1			-0.015	
	q17f2			0.195*	
	q17f3			0.084	
	q17f4			0.032	
	q17f5			0.133	
	q17f6			0.162	

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	q33F q34F q35F q36f1 q37f1 q38f1 q38f2			0.020 -0.164 0.074 0.103 0.038 -0.228 0.091	
Step 1	dumwho5 dumduration5				-0.202* 0.248***
Step 2	dumwho5 dumduration5 q16f2 q17f2 q17f3 q17f5 q17f6 q34F q36f1 q38f1				-0.117* 0.138* 0.146* 0.188** 0.093 0.138 0.158 -0.121 0.179* -0.163**
Adjusted R^2		0.071	0.085	0.282	0.325
F (p value) for regression model for final step 2 result		1.574 (0.078)	7.969 (0.001)	3.971 (0.001)	8.258 (0.000)
R^2 change and associated F change significance				0.281 (0.000)	0.273 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$)

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics did not contribute significantly in model 1 ($F = 1.574$, $p > 0.05$) and that these variables accounted for only 7% ($R^2 = 0.071$) of the variance in experience novelty. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with model 2 coefficients dumwho5 ($\beta = -0.202$) and dumduration5 ($\beta = 0.248$), model 2 improved the adjusted R^2 from 0.071 to 0.085 and led to $F = 7.969$, $p \leq 0.01$. Subsequently, these statistically significant variables were included in the hierarchical regression model 4.

Introducing VIC information-related factors in model 4 led to a statistically significant regression model ($F = 3.971$, $p < 0.01$) and resulted in an R^2 change of 0.281, which

was statistically significant, suggesting that VIC information-related factors significantly improved the predictive power of the model, as it explained 28.2% (adjusted R^2 value) of the variation in the experience of novelty. In the best-fitting model 5, the variance explained in the experience of novelty increased from 28% (model 4) to 33% ($R^2 = 0.325$), and this change in R^2 was 0.273 with an associated statistically significant F change ($p < 0.001$).

The final β values in model 5 indicate that visitors who travelled with co-workers showed a tendency to experience lower levels of novelty (dumwho5, $\beta = -0.117$) than those who travelled alone. On the other hand, visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of novelty (dumdURATION5, $\beta = 0.138$) than those who only planned to visit for a day.

Electronic information sources through which visitors prefer to receive information while at VICs (q16f2, $\beta = 0.146$), the extensive use of internal and external trip planning information sources (q36f1, $\beta = -0.179$), and visitors' experience of information quality (q17f2, $\beta = 0.188$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on the level of novelty perceived. Similarly, the usefulness of online trip planning information sources (q38f1, $\beta = -0.163$) had a small but statically significant negative effect.

- **Prediction of experiences of local culture (q41f3)**

The results for predicting experiences of local culture are presented in Table 8.59.

Table 8.59: Prediction of experiences of local culture

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumedu4	-0.028			
	dumedu3	-0.263			
	dumedu2	-0.159			
	dumpurpose1	-0.262			
	dumpurpose3	-0.272**			
	dumpurpose4	-0.099			
	dumwho2	-0.171			
	dumwho3	-0.376*			
	dumwho4	-0.041			
	dumwho5	-0.607***			

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumwho6	-0.385**			
	dumduration2	0.050			
	dumduration3	0.086			
	dumduration4	0.058			
	dumduration5	0.254**			
	Gender	-0.010			
	Age	0.073			
	q26	0.085			
	dumpurpose3		-0.057		
	dumwho5		-0.219***		
	dumwho6		-0.175**		
	dumduration5		0.267***		
Step 1	dumpurpose3			-0.057	
	dumwho5			-0.219***	
	dumwho6			-0.175**	
	dumduration5			0.267***	
Step 2	dumpurpose3			-.068	
	dumwho5			-.148*	
	dumwho6			-0.081	
	dumduration5			0.182**	
	q11f			0.110	
	q12f			0.029	
	q16f1			-0.011	
	q16f2			0.113	
	q16f3			-0.026	
	q17f1			-0.039	
	q17f2			0.116	
	q17f3			0.173**	
	q17f4			0.076	
	q17f5			0.141	
	q17f6			-.164	
	q33F			-0.030	
	q34F			-0.047	
	q35F			0.122	
	q36f1			-0.078	
	q37f1			0.152	
	q38f1			-0.240	
	q38f2			0.062	
Step 1	dumwho5				-.0.210**
	dumwho6				-0.172**
	dumduration5				-0.257***
Step 2	dumwho5				-0.131*

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumwho6				-0.087
	dumduration5				0.158**
	q11f				0.112
	q16f2				0.103
	q17f2				0.113
	q17f3				0.175**
	q17f5				0.155*
	q17f6				0.143
	q35F				0.096
	q38f1				-0.105
Adjusted R^2		0.147	0.112	0.301	0.340
F (p value) for regression model for final step 2 result		2.294 (0.004)	5.739 (0.000)	3.995(0.000)	7.502 (0.000)
R^2 change and associated F change significance				0.268 (0.000)	0.256 (0.000)

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$)

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contributed significantly to model 1 ($F = 2.294$, $p < 0.01$) and that these variables accounted for 15% ($R^2 = 0.147$) of the variance in the experience of local culture. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with model 2 coefficients dumwho5 ($\beta = -0.219$), dumwho6 ($\beta = 0.175$) and dumduration5 ($\beta = 0.267$), the adjusted R^2 decreased slightly from 0.147 to 0.112 in model 2 and led to $F = 5.739$, $p < 0.01$. It was, however, still decided to include the statistically significant variables from model 1 in the hierarchical regression model 4.

Introducing VIC information-related factors in model 4 led to a statistically significant regression model ($F = 3.995$, $p < 0.01$) and resulted in an R^2 change of 0.268, which was statistically significant, suggesting that VIC information-related factors significantly improved the predictive power of the model, as it explained 30% (adjusted R^2 value) of the variation in the experience of local culture. In the best-fitting model 5, the variance explained in the experience of local culture increased from 30% (model 4) to 34% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.340$), and this change in R^2 (0.256) was statistically significant.

The final β values in model 5 indicate that visitors who travelled with co-workers showed a tendency to experience lower levels of local culture (dumwho5, $\beta = -0.131$) than those who travelled alone. On the other hand, visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of local culture (dumduration5, $\beta = 0.158$) than those who only planned to visit for a day. However, their experience of VIC information resources (q17f3, $\beta = 0.175$) and the staff's knowledge of local products (q17f5, $\beta = 0.155$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on their experience of local culture in visited areas.

- **Prediction of experiences of refreshment (q41f4)**

The results for predicting refreshment are presented in Table 8.60.

Table 8.60: Prediction of refreshment

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumedu4	-0.125			
	dumedu3	-0.384			
	dumedu2	-0.279			
	dumpurpose1	-0.250			
	dumpurpose3	-0.209			
	dumpurpose4	-0.106			
	dumwho2	-0.369**			
	dumwho3	-0.393*			
	dumwho4	-0.071			
	dumwho5	-0.547***			
	dumwho6	-0.208			
	Gender	-0.020			
	Age	-0.156			
	q26	0.053			
	dumduration2	0.002			
	dumduration3	-0.008			
	dumduration4	-0.034			
	dumduration5	0.191*			
	dumwho2		-0.080		
	dumwho5		-0.130		
Step 1	dumwho2			-0.080	
	dumwho5			-0.130	

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
Step 2	dumwho2			-0.075	
	dumwho5			-0.053	
	q11f			0.132	
	q12f			-0.036	
	q16f1			0.005	
	q16f2			0.148	
	q16f3			0.048	
	q17f1			-0.066	
	q17f2			0.033	
	q17f3			0.117	
	q17f4			0.127	
	q17f5			0.172	
	q17f6			0.085	
	q33F			0.035	
	q34F			-0.028	
	q35F			.0102	
	q36f1			-0.080	
	q37f1			0.068	
	q38f1			-0.118	
	q38f2			0.066	
Step 1	q11f				0.130**
	q16f2				0.142**
	q17f3				0.111
	q17f4				0.126
	q17f5				0.205***
	q35F				0.100
Adjusted R^2		0.055	0.006	0.147	0.206
F (p value) for regression model		1.435 (0.128)	1.458 (0.236)	2.303 (0.003)	7.539 (0.000)
R^2 change and associated F change significance				0.241 (0.003)	0.238 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$)

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics did not contribute significantly in model 1 ($F = 1.435$, $p > 0.10$) and that these variables accounted for only 6% ($R^2 = 0.055$) of the variance in experiencing refreshment in visited areas. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with model 2 coefficients dumwho2 ($\beta = -0.080$) and dumwho5 ($\beta = -0.130$), the adjusted R^2

decreased from 0.055 to 0.006 in model 2 and led to $F = 1.458$, $p > 0.10$. It was, however, still decided to include the statistically significant variables from model 1 in the hierarchical regression model 4.

Introducing VIC information-related factors in model 4 led to a statistically significant regression model ($F = 2.303$, $p < 0.000$) and resulted in an adjusted R^2 value of 0.147, suggesting that VIC information-related factors significantly improved the predictive power of the model, as it explained 15% of the variation in the experience of refreshment. In the best-fitting model 5, the variance explained in the experience of refreshment increased from 15% (model 4) to 21% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.206$), and this change in R^2 (0.238) was statistically significant.

The final β values in model 5 indicate that the extensiveness of the information that visitors searched for at VICs (q11f, $\beta = -0.130$), the electronic information sources from which they preferred to receive information while at VICs (q16f2, $\beta = 0.142$), and their experience of VIC staff's knowledge of local products (q17f5, $\beta = 0.205$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on the level of refreshment they experienced in visited areas.

- **Prediction of experiences of meaningfulness (q41f5)**

The results for predicting meaningfulness are presented in Table 8.61.

Table 8.61: Prediction of meaningfulness

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	Gender	-0.053			
	Age	0.078			
	q26	0.000			
	dumedu4	-0.063			
	dumedu3	-0.290			
	dumedu2	-0.161			
	dumpurpose1	-0.275*			
	dumpurpose3	-0.213*			
	dumpurpose4	-0.017			
	dumwho2	-0.064			

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumwho3	-0.294			
	dumwho4	-0.029			
	dumwho5	-0.576***			
	dumwho6	-0.186			
	dumduration2	-0.058			
	dumduration3	0.099			
	dumduration4	0.136			
	dumduration5	0.243**			
	dumwho5		-0.236**		
	dumduration5		0.257***		
Step 1	dumwho5			-0.236***	
	dumduration5			0.257***	
Step 2	dumwho5			-0.113	
	dumduration5			.0177	
	q11f			0.002	
	q12f			-0.048	
	q16f1			-0.027	
	q16f2			0.146	
	q16f3			0.081	
	q17f1			-0.106	
	q17f2			0.155	
	q17f3			0.064	
	q17f4			0.155*	
	q17f5			0.095	
	q17f6			0.093	
	q33F			-0.102	
	q34F			-0.113	
	q35F			0.190*	
	q36f1			0.061	
	q37f1			0.207	
	q38f1			-0.214	
	q38f2			-0.001	
Step 1	dumwho5				-0.236**
	dumduration5				0.257***
Step 2	dumwho5				-0.145**
	dumduration5				0.176**
	q16f2				0.151*
	q17f2				0.143*
	q17f3				0.098
	q17f4				0.131
	q35F				0.164*
	q37f1				0.174

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	q38f1 q33F q17f5				-0.189 -0.133 0.126
Adjusted R^2		0.150	0.102	0.223	0.252
F (p value) for regression model		2.322 (0.004)	9.595 (0.000)	3.172 (0.000)	5.621(0.000)
R^2 change and associated F change significance				0.212 (0.000)	0.192 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$)

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contributed significantly in model 1 ($F = 2.322$, $p < 0.01$) and that these variables accounted for 15% ($R^2 = 0.150$) of the variance to meaningful experiences in visited areas. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with model 2 coefficients dumwho5 ($\beta = -0.236$) and dumduration5 ($\beta = 0.257$), the adjusted R^2 decreased from 0.150 to 0.102 in model 2 and led to $F = 9.595$, $p < 0.01$. It was, however, still decided to include the statistically significant variables from model 1 in the hierarchical regression model 4.

Introducing VIC information-related factors in model 4 led to a statistically significant regression model ($F = 3.172$, $p < 0.01$) and resulted in a R^2 change of 0.212, which was statistically significant, suggesting that VIC information-related factors significantly improved the predictive power of the model, as it explained 22.3% (adjusted R^2 value) of the variation in the level of meaningfulness. In the best-fitting model 5, the variance explained in meaningful experiences increased from 22% (in model 4) to 25% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.252$), and the change in R^2 (0.192) was statistically significant.

The final β values in model 5 indicate that visitors who travelled with co-workers showed a tendency to experience lower levels of meaningfulness (dumwho5, $\beta = -0.145$) than those who travelled alone. However, visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher

levels of meaningfulness (dumduration5, $\beta = 0.176$) than those who only planned to visit for a day.

The electronic information sources through which visitors prefer to receive information while at VICs (q16f2, $\beta = 0.151$) and the useful information for which they searched to plan their trips (q35F, $\beta = 0.164$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on the perceived level of meaningfulness. Similarly, their experience of the information quality at VICs (q17f2, $\beta = 0.143$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on the perceived level of meaningfulness. These independent variables were only significant at the 10% level of significance

- **Prediction of experiences of involvement (q41f6)**

The results for predicting experiences of involvement are presented in Table 8.62.

Table 8.62: Prediction of experiences of involvement

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumedu4	-0.059			
	dumedu3	-0.160			
	dumedu2	-0.096			
	dumpurpose1	-0.222			
	dumpurpose3	-0.206			
	dumpurpose4	0.104			
	dumwho2	-0.089			
	dumwho3	-0.286			
	dumwho4	-0.123			
	dumwho5	-0.580***			
	dumwho6	-0.240			
	dumduration2	-0.084			
	dumduration3	0.101			
	dumduration4	0.064			
	dumduration5	0.202**			
	Gender	-0.053			
	Age	0.136			
	q26	-0.095			
	dumwho5		-0.240***		
	dumduration5		0.232***		
Step 1	dumwho5			-0.240***	

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumduration5			0.232***	
Step 2	dumwho5			-0.138*	
	dumduration5			0.094	
	q11f			-0.064	
	q12f			0.087	
	q16f1			-0.085	
	q16f2			0.085	
	q16f3			0.098	
	q17f1			-0.032	
	q17f2			0.156	
	q17f3			0.062	
	q17f4			0.124	
	q17f5			0.211**	
	q17f6			-0.050	
	q33F			-0.040	
	q34F			-0.098	
	q35F			0.158	
	q36f1			0.193	
	q37f1			-0.025	
	q38f1			-0.096	
	q38f2			-0.145	
Step 1	dumwho5				-0.240***
	dumduration5				0.232***
Step 2	dumwho5				-0.140*
	dumduration5				0.107
	q16f3				0.096
	q17f2				0.128
	q17f4				0.123
	q17f5				0.174**
	q34F				-0.123
	q35F				0.176*
	q36f1				0.143
	q38f1				-0.148*
Adjusted R^2		0.118	0.093	0.200	0.237
F (p value) for regression model for final step 2 result		1.999 (0.015)	8.741 (0.000)	2.883 (0.000)	5.679 (0.000)
R^2 change and associated F change significance				0.201 (0.000)	0.182 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$)

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contributed significantly in Model 1 ($F = 1.999$, $p < 0.05$) and that these variables accounted for 12% ($R^2 = 0.118$) of the variance in visitors' involvement in local activities. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with model 2 coefficients *dumwho5* ($\beta = -0.240$) and *dumduratio5* ($\beta = 0.232$), the adjusted R^2 decreased slightly from 0.118 to 0.093 in model 2 and led to $F = 8.741$, $p < 0.001$. It was, however, still decided to include the statistically significant variables from model 1 in the hierarchical regression model 4.

Introducing VIC information-related factors in model 4 led to a statistically significant regression model ($F = 2.883$, $p < 0.01$) and resulted in an R^2 change of 0.201, which was statistically significant, suggesting that VIC information-related factors significantly improved the predictive power of the model, as it explained 20% (adjusted R^2 value) of the variation in the level of involvement. In the best-fitting model 5, the variance explained in the level of involvement increased from 20% (in model 4) to 24% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.237$), and this change in R^2 (0.182) was statistically significant.

The final β values in model 5 indicate that visitors who travelled with co-workers showed a tendency to experience lower levels of involvement in activities at visited areas (*dumwho5*, $\beta = -0.140$) than those who travelled alone. Similarly, the usefulness of trip planning information (*q38f1*, $\beta = -0.148$) had a small but statistically significant negative effect on the perceived level of involvement. However, visitors' experience of the useful information for which they searched to plan their trips (*q35F*, $\beta = 0.176$) and the staff's knowledge of local products (*q17f5*, $\beta = 0.174$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on the perceived level of involvement.

- **Prediction of experiences of knowledge (q41f7)**

The results for predicting experiences of knowledge are presented in Table 8.63.

Table 8.63: Prediction of experiences of knowledge

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumedu4	-0.052			
	dumedu3	-0.202			
	dumedu2	-0.106			
	dumpurpose1	-0.148			
	dumpurpose3	-0.172			
	dumpurpose4	0.153			
	dumwho2	-0.094			
	dumwho3	-0.247			
	dumwho4	-0.036			
	dumwho5	-0.555***			
	dumwho6	-0.279*			
	dumduraction2	-0.064			
	dumduraction3	0.118			
	dumduraction4	0.136			
	dumduraction5	0.241**			
	Gender	0.050			
	Age	0.101			
	q26	-0.043			
	dumwho5		-0.276***		
	dumduraction5		0.263***		
Step 1	dumwho5			-0.276***	
	dumduraction5			0.263***	
Step 2	dumwho5			-0.157**	
	dumduraction5			0.154**	
	q11f			0.072	
	q12f			-0.091	
	q16f1			-0.140*	
	q16f2			0.217**	
	q16f3			0.111	
	q17f1			-0.103	
	q17f2			0.157	
	q17f3			0.068	
	q17f4			0.158*	
	q17f5			0.188	
	q17f6			-0.040	
	q33F			0.028	

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	q34F q35F q36f1 q37f1 q38f1 q38f2			-0.184* 0.188** 0.188 0.031 -0.084 -0.117	
Step 1	dumwho5 dumdURATION5				-0.276*** 0.263***
Step 2	dumwho5 dumdURATION5 q16f1 q16f2 q16f3 q17f1 q17f2 q17f4 q17f5 q34F q35F q36f1 q38f2				-0.165** 0.146** -0.168** 0.238*** 0.107 -0.115 0.144 0.188** 0.166** -0.177** 0.171** 0.229* -0.164
Adjusted R^2		0.161	0.125	0.324	0.344
F (p value) for regression model for final step 2 result		2.439 (0.002)	11.806 (0.000)	4.618 (0.000)	7.078 (0.000)
R^2 change and associated F change significance				0.277 (0.000)	0.263 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$)

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contributed significantly in Model 1 ($F = 2.439$, $p < 0.01$) and that these variables accounted for 16% ($R^2 = 0.161$) of the variance in the experience of knowledge in visited areas. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with model 2 coefficients dumwho5 ($\beta = -0.276$) and dumdURATION5 ($\beta = -0.263$), the adjusted R^2 decreased slightly from 0.161 to 0.125 in model 2 and led to $F = 11.806$, $p < 0.01$. It was, however, still decided to include the statistically significant variables from model 1 in the hierarchical regression model 4.

Introducing VIC information-related factors in model 4 led to a statistically significant regression model ($F = 4.618$, $p < 0.01$) and resulted in a R^2 change of 0.277, which was statistically significant, suggesting that VIC information-related factors significantly improved the predictive power of the model, as it explained 32% (adjusted R^2 value) of the variation in the level of knowledge gained. In the best-fitting model 5, the variance explained in the knowledge gained increased from 32% (model 4) to 34% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.344$), and this change in R^2 (0.263) was statistically significant.

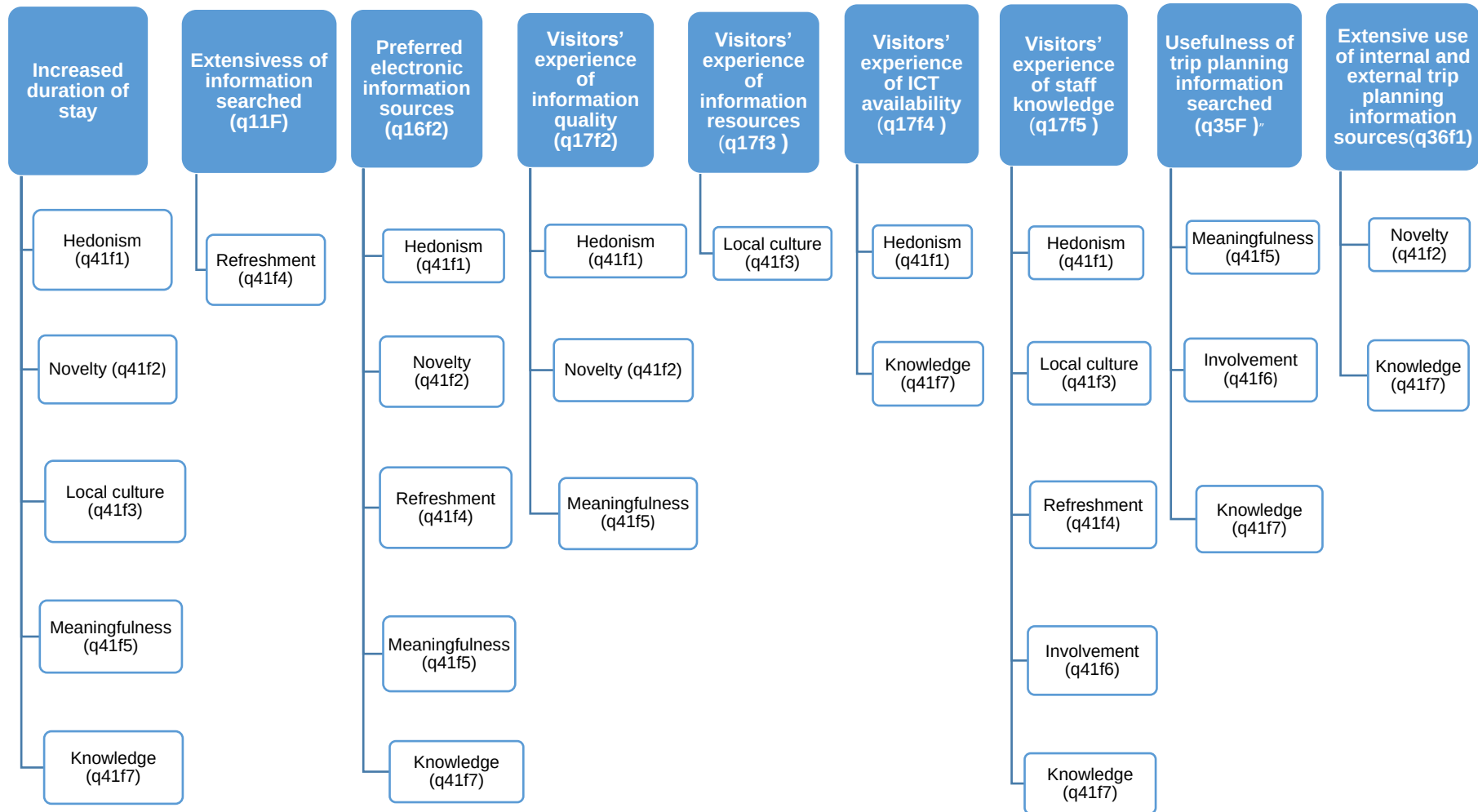
The final β values in model 5 indicate that visitors who travelled with co-workers showed a tendency to experience lower levels of knowledge gained (dumwho5, $\beta = -0.165$) than those who travelled alone. However, visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of knowledge gained (dumduration5, $\beta = 0.146$) than those who only planned to visit for a day.

The electronic information sources through which visitors prefer to receive information while at VICs (q16f2, $\beta = 0.238$), the extensive use of internal and external trip planning information sources (q36f1, $\beta = 0.229$), and the useful information for which they searched to plan their trips (q35F, $\beta = 0.171$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on the level of knowledge gained.

Similarly, their experience of the availability of ICTs in VICs (q17f4, $\beta = 0.188$) and of the staff's knowledge of local products (q17f5, $\beta = 0.166$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect. However, the online information sources through which they prefer to receive information while at VICs (q16f1, $\beta = -0.168$) and the frequency of searching for trip planning information (q34F, $\beta = -0.177$) had a small but statistically significant negative effect.

Figure 8.8 reflects the factors that showed a tendency to effect higher levels of memorable visitor experiences, while Figure 8.9 reflects the factors that showed a tendency to effect lower levels.

Figure 8.8: Factors effecting higher levels of memorable visitor experiences

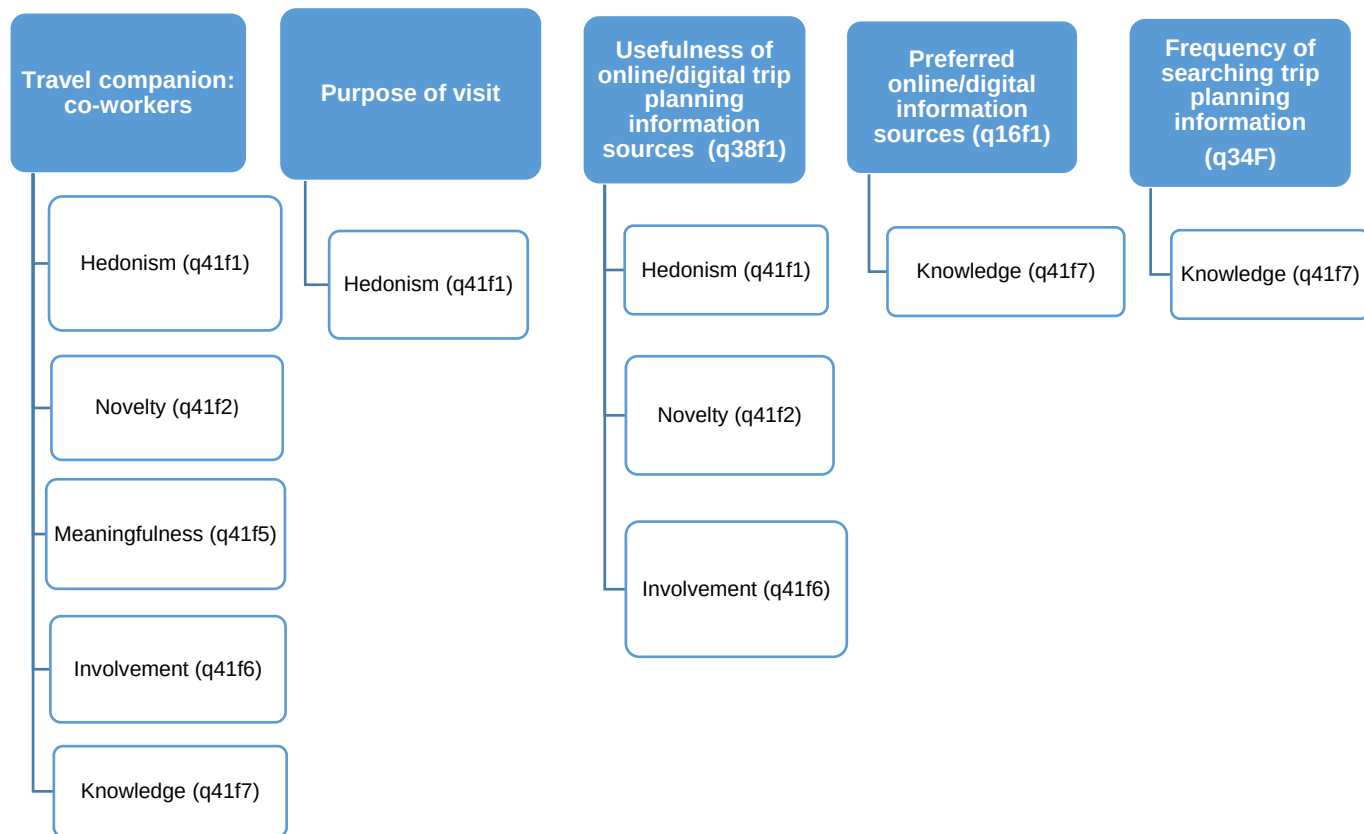


Source: Researcher's own contribution

- Visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights (dumduration5) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism (q41f1), novelty (q41f2), local culture (q41f3), meaningfulness (q41f5), and knowledge (q41f7) than those who only planned to visit for a day.
- Visitors who searched for information extensively at VICs (q11F) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of refreshment (q41f4).
- Visitors who prefer to receive information through electronic information sources such as mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, and visitor notice boards while at VICs (q16f2) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism (q41f1), novelty (q41f2), refreshment (q41f4), meaningfulness (q41f5), and knowledge (q41f7).
- Visitors who agreed that the quality of the information they received from VICs was clear in meaning and easy to comprehend and read (q17f2) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism (q41f1), novelty (q41f2), and meaningfulness (q41f5).
- Visitors who agreed that information resources such as audio-visual presentations and visitor notice boards are available at VICs, and that the content of the printed brochures in VICs is relevant (q17f3), showed a tendency to experience higher levels of local culture (q41f3).
- Visitors who agreed that VICs have computers, the Internet, free Wi-Fi, and electronic touch screens they could use to search for local information (17f4) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism (q41f1) and knowledge (q41f7).
- Visitors who agreed that VIC staff are knowledgeable and competent, and provided them with specific and in-depth knowledge of the local area (q17f5), showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism (q41f1), local culture (q41f3), refreshment (q41f4), involvement (q41f6), and knowledge (q41f7).

- Visitors who indicated that the information for which they searched to plan their trip was useful (q35F) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of meaningfulness (q41f5), involvement (q41f6), and knowledge gained (q41f7).
- Visitors who indicated that they used internal and external information sources extensively to plan their trips to visited areas (q36f1) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of novelty (q41f2) and knowledge (q41f7).

Figure 8.9: Factors effecting lower levels of memorable visitor experiences



Source: Researcher's own contribution

- Visitors who travelled with co-workers (dumwho5) showed a tendency to experience lower levels of hedonism (q41f1), novelty (q41f2), meaningfulness (q41f5), involvement (q41f6), and knowledge (q41f7) than those who travelled alone.

- Visitors whose main purpose was to visit friends and relatives (dumpurpose3) showed a tendency to experience lower levels of hedonism (q41f1) than those whose main purpose was business-related.
- Visitors who disagreed that the online trip planning information sources they used were useful (q38f1) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism (q41f1), novelty (q41f2), and involvement (q41f6).
- Visitors who disagreed that they prefer to receive information through online information sources while at VICs (q16f1) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of knowledge (q41f7).
- Visitors who disagreed that they searched for information to plan their trips frequently (q34F) showed a tendency to experience higher levels of knowledge (q41f7).

Relationships with visitors' behavioural intentions (q17f7)

H₂, H₃, and H₅ in the conceptual framework (Figure 8.8) postulate that visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics, memorable visitor experiences, and information and knowledge they receive from VICs predict their behavioural intentions (q17f7). The results of predicting these behavioural intentions are presented in Table 8.64.

Table 8.64: Prediction of behavioural intentions

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumedu4	-0.032			
	dumedu3	-0.259			
	dumedu2	-0.174			
	dumpurpose1	-0.267			
	dumpurpose3	-0.224			
	dumpurpose4	-0.256**			
	dumwho2	-0.306			
	dumwho3	-0.282			
	dumwho4	-0.101			

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	dumwho5	-0.513***			
	dumwho6	-0.307**			
	dumduration2	0.014			
	dumduration3	0.147			
	dumduration4	0.076			
	dumduration5	0.275***			
	Gender	-0.062			
	Age	-0.083			
	q26	-0.027			
	dumpurpose4		-0.150*		
	dumwho5		-0.049		
	dumwho6		-0.083		
	dumduration5		0.218***		
Step 1	dumpurpose4			-0.150*	
	dumwho5			-0.049	
	dumwho6			-0.083	
	dumduration5			0.218***	
Step 2	dumpurpose4			-0.137*	
	dumwho5			0.082	
	dumwho6			-0.030	
	dumduration5			0.101	
	q11f			0.072	
	q12f			0.066	
	q16f1			-0.084	
	q16f2			0.232***	
	q16f3			0.126*	
	q17f1			-0.064	
	q17f2			-0.070	
	q17f3			0.311***	
	q17f4			-0.153**	
	q17f5			0.410***	
	q17f6			0.146	
	q36f1			-0.003	
	q37f1			0.073	
	q38f1			-0.098	
	q38f2			-0.068	
	q41f1			0.120	
	q41f2			-0.080	
	q41f3			0.105	
	q41f4			-0.008	
	q41f5			0.124	
	q41f6			-0.014	

Step	Factor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 4	Model 5
	q41f7			-0.179	
Step 1	dumpurpose4 dumwho5 dumduraton5				-0.176 -0.038 0.228
Step 2	dumpurpose4 dumwho5 dumduraton5 q11f q16f2 q16f3 q17f2 q17f3 q17f4 q17f5 q17f6 q38f1 q41f3 q41f5 q41f7				-0.156** 0.086 0.122* 0.083 0.202*** 0.088 -0.076 0.299*** -0.150** 0.407*** 0.125 -0.069 0.118 0.087 -0.143
Adjusted R ²		0.123	0.057	0.468	0.497
F (p value) for regression model		2.047 (0.012)	3.281 (0.013)	6.113 (0.000)	10.929 (0.000)
R ² change and associated significance				0.478 (0.000)	0.471 (0.000)

Source: Researcher's own contribution

Note: Standardised beta-coefficients are presented. *($p < 0.10$), **($p < 0.05$), ***($p < 0.01$)

The results indicate that demographic and travel behaviour characteristics did contribute significantly in model 1 ($F = 2.047$, $p < 0.05$) and that these variables accounted for 12% ($R^2 = 0.123$) of the variance in visitors' behavioural intentions. Entering only statistically significant variables from model 1, with model 2 coefficients dumpurpose4 ($\beta = -0.150$) and dumduraton5 ($\beta = -0.218$), the adjusted R^2 decreased slightly from 0.123 to 0.057 in model 2 and led to $F = 3.281$, $p < 0.05$. Subsequently these statistically significant variables were included in hierarchical regression model 4.

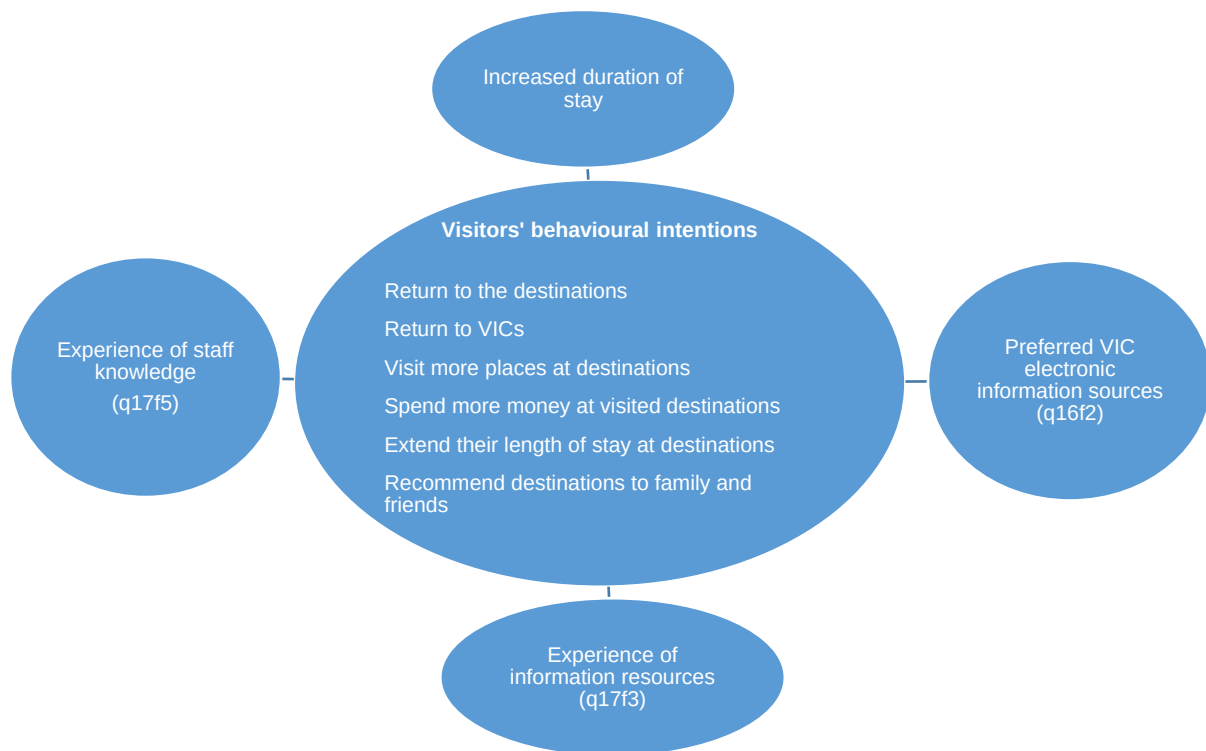
Introducing VIC information-related factors in model 4 led to a statistically significant regression model ($F = 6.113$, $p < 0.01$) and resulted in a R^2 change of 0.478 which

was statistically significant, suggesting that VIC information-related factors significantly improved the predictive power of the model, as it explained 47% (adjusted R^2 value) of the variation in visitors' behavioural intentions. In model 5, the variance explained in visitors' behavioural intentions increased from 47% (model 4) to 50% (adjusted $R^2 = 0.497$), and this change in R^2 (0.471) was statistically significant.

The final β values in model 5 indicate that none of the dimensions of memorable visitor experiences i.e. 'local culture' (q41f3), 'meaningfulness' (q41f5) and 'knowledge' (q41f7), were statistically significant to predict visitors' behavioural intentions. However, the results show that visitors who visited local areas for religious purposes (dumpurpose4, $\beta = -0.156$) showed a tendency to experience lower levels of behavioural intentions than those whose main purpose was business-related. In addition, visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of behavioural intentions (dumduration5, $\beta = 0.122$) than those who only planned to visit for a day.

The electronic information sources through which visitors prefer to receive information while at the VIC (q16f2, $\beta = 0.202$) and their experience of VIC information resources (q17f3, $\beta = 0.299$) and the staff's knowledge (q17f5, $\beta = 0.407$) had a small but statistically significant positive effect on their level of behavioural intention. However, their experience of the availability of ICTs in VICs (q17f4, $\beta = -0.150$) had a small but statistically significant negative effect.

Figure 8.10: Factors contributing to visitors' behavioural intentions



Source: Researcher's own contribution

In summary, the results of predicting visitors' behavioural intentions in Figure 8.10 show that visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of behavioural intentions than those who only planned to visit for a day. Furthermore, higher levels of behavioural intention were shown by visitors who:

- prefer to receive information through electronic information sources such as mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, and visitor notice boards while at VICs.
- agreed that information resources such as audio-visual presentations and visitor notice boards are available at VICs to provide information, and that the content of the printed brochures in VICs is relevant.
- agreed that VIC staff are competent and provided them with specific and in-depth knowledge of the local area to help them make decisions about things to do and about visiting diverse tourism facilities in the local areas.

On the other hand, visitors who visited local areas for religious purposes showed a tendency to experience lower levels of behavioural intentions than those whose main purpose was business-related. Similarly, visitors who disagreed that ICTs are available in VICs showed a tendency to have higher levels of behavioural intentions.

8.11 CONCLUSION

The results in Chapters 6 and 7 indicated that there is an exchange of information in VICs, and that this exchange generated socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. In addition, the results of the survey with local tourism businesses identified several VIC information-related factors that are involved in the exchange process and that facilitate the achievement of these opportunities.

The results in this chapter show that memorable visitor experiences are predicted by visitors' travel behaviour characteristics and by VIC information-related factors. These results therefore support H_1 and H_4 . In particular, a stay of longer than seven nights, along with the following VIC information-related factors, had an influence on memorable visitor experience:

- Extensive VIC information searched (q11F).
- Preferred VIC electronic information sources (e.g., mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, and visitor notice boards: q16f2).
- VIC information quality (q17f2).
- VIC information resources (e.g., audio-visual presentations and visitor notice boards: q17f3).
- Availability of ICTs in VICs (e.g., computers, the Internet, free Wi-Fi, and electronic touch screens: q17f4).
- Staff knowledge (q17f5).
- Useful trip planning information (q35F).
- Extensive use of internal (e.g., knowledge from previous experience) and external (VICs, local residents of the area, magazines/newspapers, television/radio) trip planning information sources (q36f1).

Also revealed in this chapter is that visitors' travel behaviour characteristics and VIC information-related factors influenced their behavioural intentions; thus the results support H₂ and H₅. A stay longer than seven nights, as well as visitors' preferred VIC electronic information sources (q16f2), visitors' experience of VIC information resources (q17f3), and experience of staff knowledge (q17f5) influenced their behavioural intentions to return to visited areas, visit more places, spend more money, extend their length of stay at these, return to VICs, and recommend destinations to family and friends. However, the results did not support H₃, as none of the memorable visitor experience dimensions (hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement and knowledge) predicted visitors' behavioural intentions. It is important, therefore, that staff give attention to these factors and incorporate them into their information provision approaches and plans. More importantly, the information-related factors should be emphasised in the VIC information exchange programmes.

The next chapter integrates the findings in chapter 6 and the quantitative results from chapters 7 and 8; and discusses them in relation to the objectives and research hypotheses of the study and the literature reviewed in chapters 2 to 4. Based on the triangulation of the results, the conceptual framework to guide the exchange of information and knowledge is confirmed.

CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to examine the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in Visitor Information Centres (VICs), and how this exchange contributes to memorable visitor experiences and socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. Another purpose was to understand the full potential of VICs with a view to synergise the engagement with stakeholders and even between stakeholders and the community; and to find the best synergies for the visitors, local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. The study adopted the term 'VIC' in order to involve both same-day visitors and overnight visitors/tourists whether domestic or international. It is also important to point out that, since different kinds of visitors use VICs, the terms 'visitor' and 'tourist' are used interchangeably in this study. Memorable visitor experiences therefore includes experiences of same-day visitors and overnight visitors/tourists.

This chapter summarises the thesis by demonstrating how the research objectives were achieved, how the hypotheses were supported, and how the study has contributed to theory, practice, management, and the wider VIC environment. It draws upon the literature reviewed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, the qualitative findings presented in Chapter 6, and the quantitative results provided in chapters 7 and 8, with a view to refining the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.5) and arriving at a final confirmed framework.

The first section systematically outlines how each of the six research objectives was addressed in relation to the main findings from the literature and the empirical study. The second section shows how the conceptual framework (Figure 4.5) was developed from the literature and refined to arrive at a tested and confirmed framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs (Figure 9.1). A detailed discussion of the framework is provided to offer insights into how each part of the framework was refined.

The third section discusses the study's theoretical and practical contributions and the managerial implications that the framework provides to guide information and knowledge exchange in VICs. Finally, the chapter reflects on the research's limitations, makes suggestions for future research, and offers concluding remarks.

9.2 ACHIEVEMENT OF THE RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The secondary research objectives described below were formulated to support the achievement of the primary objective, which was to develop a tested and confirmed framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs:

Objective 1: To discuss information and knowledge exchange in the tourism sector.

This objective was addressed through the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. An overview of tourism from both global and South African perspectives was given. The concept of information, its role in tourism, the characteristics that make tourism information unique, and typologies of tourism information, information management, and information exchange were discussed. To locate information exchange in a tourism context, the model of tourism information exchange developed by Sheldon (1997) was adopted (refer to Fig. 2.2). The model identifies various stakeholders that produce and receive information in the tourism sector, and the connections and exchanges that take place between them. The model completes the feedback loop by demonstrating the need for information to flow from visitors back to suppliers.

The concept of knowledge, its management, and the role it plays in tourism were also examined in Chapter 2. Knowledge exchange in tourism is an important factor in stimulating the innovation and development of the sector, thus influencing organisational learning and service innovation, which further produce a competitive edge for tourism organisations (Rao *et al.*, 2018). To create value for both visitors and destinations (Edwards *et al.*, 2016), knowledge creation and exchange should extend beyond tourism organisations such as VICs to include and benefit different stakeholders. Social exchange theory (SET) (refer to par 2.8.3), which formed the

theoretical foundation of the study owing to its emphasis on the benefits, both social and economic, that individuals might obtain when sharing and exchanging knowledge (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Jeong & Oh, 2017) was also discussed.

From a tourism development perspective, SET suggests that residents evaluate an exchange based on the benefits or costs arising from the exchanges that take place in tourism. If they perceive that the benefits are greater than the costs, they are likely to be involved in the exchange, show positive attitudes, and support future tourism development in their community. However, if they perceive tourism's impacts negatively, they are likely to show negative attitudes and not support tourism development (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2017; Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Jani, 2018; Woo *et al.*, 2018). The theory has not been used to explain exchanges that take place in other areas of tourism. It has also not been applied in information dissemination organisations such as VICs to understand the exchange of information and knowledge that takes place between VICs and their different stakeholders, such as surrounding communities and local tourism businesses, or the socio-economic opportunities that stakeholders may receive from such exchanges.

The constructs emphasised in the model of tourism information exchange (Sheldon, 1997), SET (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Jeong & Oh, 2017) and the VIC information exchange model (Deery., 2007) contributed to the development of a conceptual framework (Figure 4.7) that was identified for the study and was relevant to the VIC environment. As such, tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, visitors' memorable experiences and behavioural intentions, and socio-economic opportunities for VIC stakeholders were explored further in the empirical study and expressed in research objectives 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

Objective 2: To describe information search and memorable visitor experiences in the travel process.

This objective was examined in Chapter 3, where the literature that was reviewed focused on the importance of the information search in the travel process in order to help visitors make informed travel decisions and to enhance their experiences during travel. The main themes emerging in Chapter 3 – information search and memorable

visitor experiences – were then discussed in relation to the literature review and the empirical results.

- **Information search**

The reviewed literature showed that information search is a complex and dynamic process during which visitors use different types of information source owing to their diverse information needs and the decisions inherent in the different stages of travel (Zarezadeh, Benckendorff & Gretzel, 2018; Matikiti-Manyeverere & Kruger, 2019).

The empirical results in Chapter 8 showed that, when planning a trip, visitors searched extensively and frequently for information about the local area. The information was also found to be useful. However, while safety information, travel bookings and reservations, and emergency numbers were searched neither extensively nor frequently, they were found to be useful. For information sources, brochures, the Internet, word-of-mouth, and social media were identified as being useful for trip planning. Although visitors did not extensively or frequently use certain information sources, such as knowledge from previous experiences and from VICs, they perceived them to be useful in assisting them to plan their trips.

The results of the information searched for at VICs specifically showed that, although visitors did not search extensively for safety information, travel bookings and reservations, and emergency numbers, they found this information, together with local area information for which they searched extensively, to be useful. Furthermore, they found printed brochures, personal face-to-face contact, social media, and the Internet to be useful. However, the results on the information sources used at VICs point to the possibility of a limited availability and use of online information sources such as social media, mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, visitor notice boards, and electronic touch screens in the VICs that participated in this study.

While Choe *et al.* (2017) mention that visitors' information search behaviours differ between the pre-trip planning and during-trip stages, the results of the study showed that information, and the sources through which it is distributed, need to be useful to help with visitors' travel needs and the decisions that they make in both stages. With

online information sources redefining the entire travel process and changing the information search, the dissemination and exchange of information throughout the trip is important (Buhalis & Amaranggana, 2015; Choe, 2017; Neuhofer, 2015; Matikiti-Manyevere & Kruger, 2019; Mieli & Zillinger, 2020). It is also imperative that information dissemination organisations such as VICs leverage and benefit from modern technological innovations in their operational practices. This is important to help visitors find useful information not only when they are planning their trips or visiting VICs, but also throughout their whole journey.

- **Memorable tourism experience (MTE)**

With regard to memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), the empirical results point to experiences that visitors had at visited areas. The term 'MTEs' refers to positive tourism experiences that are remembered and recalled after the event or activity has occurred (Kim, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2012). These are memories that visitors treasure long after the trip is over (Kruger *et al.*, 2013). They therefore serve to strengthen and enhance the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998).

Using Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE scale, the results showed that visitors agreed that the dimensions of MTEs (hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge) were part of their experiences at visited destinations. The study found that the useful information for which visitors searched to plan their trips (local area information, safety information, emergency numbers, and travel booking and reservations) contributed to MTEs. In particular, the study found that visitors who indicated that the information for which they searched to plan their trip was useful showed a tendency to experience higher levels of meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge gained at visited areas. These findings corroborated those of Ho *et al.* (2012), that useful trip planning information is necessary to enhance the quality of the travel experience. For information sources, the study found that the internal (knowledge from previous experience) and external information sources (VICs, local residents, magazines/newspapers, television/radio) that visitors used extensively to plan their trips contributed to MTEs and, in particular, the novelty and knowledge gained in visited areas.

The results on the information searched at VICs in particular show that the information that was searched for extensively (local area information, safety information, emergency numbers, and travel booking and reservations) contributed to higher levels of refreshment. Despite the limited availability of online information sources in VICs, visitors who agreed that they were available at the VICs they visited, and that the brochures in these VICs were relevant, showed a tendency to experience higher levels of local culture i.e. interaction and engagement with local culture and people. Similarly, those who used information resources such as computers, the Internet, free Wi-Fi, and electronic touch screens at VICs they visited showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism and knowledge gained in visited areas. These sources are considered important to help visitors share experiences and to make informed travel decisions throughout their travel (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Buhalis, 2019; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Choi *et al.*, 2018; Karamehmedović, 2019; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Khatri, 2019; Mariani *et al.*, 2019).

It is important to point out that the purpose of objective 2 was to describe memorable visitor experiences in the travel process through a literature review in order to lay a foundation for its application during the trip stage when visitors are at visited areas. As a result, memorable tourism experiences, including statistically significant predictors of memorable experiences during the trip stage when visitors are at VICs and visited areas, were discussed in detail under objective 6 (H₁ and H₄) below.

Objective 3: To discuss tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs and to develop a conceptual framework to guide this exchange.

This objective was addressed in Chapter 4. First, the literature on VICs from global and South African perspectives was examined, highlighting their roles and functions, the role of staff in the delivery of information and knowledge, the factors that influence staff's effectiveness to deliver memorable tourism experiences, and the sources used to disseminate information and knowledge in VICs. Collaborations between VICs and stakeholders such as visitors, tourism organisations, other VICs, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities were discussed. More importantly, the social and economic opportunities generated by such collaborations were presented.

Earlier research emphasised stakeholder collaboration as a critical contributor to creating socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities, including local tourism businesses (Alonso & Liu, 2012; Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Ballantyne & Hughes, 2004; Pearce, 2004; Edwards *et al.*, 2016; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Yu, Chang & Ramanpong, 2019). In addition, a VIC information exchange model developed by Deery *et al.* (2007) emphasises interactions and information exchanges between VICs and other stakeholders. This model also contributed to the development of the conceptual framework.

Second, VICs and information provision in South Africa were discussed in Chapter 4. Emphasis was placed on government efforts to promote VICs, the functions of VICs, the information sources used in VICs, and the governance and management structures in VICs.

The literature reviewed in Chapters 2 to 4 laid the foundation for the study to identify the theoretical constructs to be used to develop a conceptual framework of information and knowledge exchange relevant to the VIC environment (Figure 4.5). This conceptual framework integrated the constructs of information and knowledge exchange, socio-economic opportunities, memorable visitor experience, and visitors' behavioural intentions into one framework. It provided the perspective and frame of reference within which the study was conducted.

The conceptual framework linked the literature review chapters (2-4) with the empirical phase of the study, which focused on examining the exchange of tourism information and knowledge between VIC staff and their stakeholders. Based on the empirical results, the framework was revisited in order to arrive at a tested and confirmed framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The specific exchanges that take place in VICs are presented in the discussion of objectives 4 and 5 below.

Objective 4: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities

This objective was addressed through the qualitative component of the empirical research presented in Chapter 6, and included findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with 27 VIC staff members and the seven focus group discussions with surrounding communities regarding the information and knowledge exchanged in VICs and the opportunities presented by this exchange process. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. Detailed and rich findings from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions complemented the quantitative results from the surveys conducted with visitors and local tourism businesses.

The findings from the semi-structured interviews revealed that there is an exchange of information and limited knowledge in VICs. The study revealed that VIC staff exchange information and knowledge with different segments of the surrounding communities such as local tourism businesses, non-tourism related businesses, and institutions of learning. In addition, staff exchange information with other stakeholders such as neighbouring VICs and embassies. These findings corroborate the importance of exchanging information that was emphasised in previous studies. Information and knowledge exchange was found to enable the exchange of ideas and resources (Aldama-Nalda & Gil-Garcia, 2011; Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Jeong & Oh, 2017; Savolainen, 2017). However, the exchange of information becomes valuable when collaborating organisations are able to identify potential benefits from such collaboration (Cavallo, Lynch, & Scull, 2014; Gil-Garcia & Aldama-Nalda, 2013). The findings related to the exchange of information and knowledge that takes place in VICs revealed the opportunities describe below that resulted from this exchange.

- **Information-related opportunities**

While staff reported to have exchanged information with different segments of the surrounding communities, such as local tourism businesses and institutions of learning, none mentioned that they had received information directly from community members. However, they mostly provided travel-related information to community

members travelling either as day or as overnight visitors in their own areas or in other provinces. Similarly, none of the community members in the focus group discussions reported having received or supplied staff with information of any kind. This indicated a limited engagement and exchange of information and knowledge between staff and community members.

Although Deery *et al.* (2007) identify local residents as secondary consumers of VIC information, they consider them to be important stakeholders in exchanging information with staff. Alonso and Liu (2012) emphasise that VICs need to collaborate with community members as an important stakeholder in order to fulfil their roles. Consideration of the needs of different stakeholders, including local communities, could help VICs to maximise their contribution to visitor satisfaction and to the promotion and competitiveness of destinations (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002). Such collaborative relationships can contribute to the long-term sustainability of VICs (Arãna *et al.*, 2016) and to the empowerment of and benefits for surrounding communities (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002). In the study, both staff and surrounding communities confirmed the importance of exchanging information and knowledge between them, and made the following information-related suggestions about the opportunities that might result from such exchanges:

- While both emphasised the need to involve surrounding communities in tourism events and exhibitions, focus group participants in particular suggested that tourism events, such as those hosted during Tourism Month, might be hosted in local areas. In that way, they would feel a sense of pride and ownership of the events and could be involved in the planning and logistical arrangements to host the events. With events hosted in their own areas, they could display locally made products at the events and generate an income from the sale of these products.
- Staff should link skilled and talented individuals such as artists, crafters, and cultural groups with visitors in order to encourage visitors to buy local products.
- Staff should provide a range of general information to educate surrounding communities, and undertake regular research to understand the needs of

surrounding communities, and use the intelligence gathered to conduct workshops on interventions they could implement to meet those needs.

- Owing to high unemployment levels amongst graduates, community members suggested that staff should keep information that might expose learners and students to opportunities such as bursaries, learnerships, and internship programmes that would equip them with the critical skills that are required in the job market.
- Staff should offer various in-service training programmes to unemployed graduates or students in order for them to gain experience and to prepare them for the job market. The in-service training programmes are a succession initiative that involves the sharing and transfer of experience and expertise by staff through hands-on operations (Rao *et al.*, 2018). Interviews with staff showed that volunteer work is a challenge in South Africa owing to the high levels of unemployment and poverty in the country, and that people require jobs that will provide them a salary or stipend to improve the quality of their lives.
- Although staff in some VICs give surrounding communities access to VIC boardrooms to host meetings, community members suggested that, in addition to meeting facilities, staff should provide access to VIC resources such as printers, photocopying machines, scanners, and Wi-Fi for learners and students to use when compiling assignments and research projects.

While these suggestion expressed the communities' needs, the majority of the staff emphasised them as part of their roles and of the information they provide. This points to a communication gap and to limited engagement between the staff and surrounding communities. It is therefore important that staff intensify their awareness and outreach programmes, and work with community structures such as community tourism organisations that are already operating in tourism-related activities with local businesses in communities.

The suggestions made by community members focused on how the exchange could create socio-economic opportunities for surrounding communities and contribute to job creation and community empowerment, thereby improving the quality of their lives. The suggestions reflected the VIC community integration function, which emphasises

the role of VICs as centres in which to host community meetings and events, and ways to enable and encourage opportunities for community involvement in tourism (Ballantyne & Hughes, 2004; Pearce, 2004; Smith & Holmes, 2012). The suggestions also corroborate those made by Fallon and Kriwoken (2002) that VICs should ensure that surrounding communities are empowered. The generation of socio-economic opportunities was also raised by several researchers as critical to enhancing connections between visitors and surrounding communities and uplifting the local economy (Yu *et al.*, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014).

- **Knowledge-related opportunities**

Collaborations among stakeholders are emphasised in several information exchange models. In the tourism information exchange model, Sheldon (1997) identifies various tourism stakeholders that produce and receive information, and emphasises that information flows between suppliers, travel intermediaries, and visitors. Deery *et al.*'s (2007) VIC information exchange model identifies VICs as intermediaries in the information exchange process, with suppliers and consumers exchanging information using different information sources. However, these models do not consider the flow of knowledge between and among the different stakeholders or the opportunities that they could receive from exchanging information and knowledge.

This study found that there is a limited exchange of knowledge between staff and surrounding communities, even though knowledge exchange is a critical element through which experience, information, skills, and expertise are exchanged and transferred among members of an organisation (Kim & Lee, 2013) in order to improve the timeliness of decision-making and promote innovation (Rao *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, both staff and surrounding community members acknowledged that VIC staff should be familiar with and possess knowledge of local tourism products in order to give visitors additional information that is not available in brochures. Community members in particular emphasised that staff could expose visitors to local lifestyles, culture, and cuisine. In addition, the information in VIC brochures and pamphlets could be supplemented by the experience and knowledge that community members (such as tourist guides, storytellers, and tour operators) have of local tourism products and local culture. Such knowledge could be passed on to visitors to provide them with

memorable experiences, which might encourage behavioural intentions. Edwards *et al.* (2016) point to the importance of community members participating in knowledge-sharing structures and serving as travel experts and ambassadors who co-produce knowledge to supplement the information provided by DMOs, including VICs. Community members could also be involved in travel knowledge co-production to reach, persuade, and attract potential visitors and to shape visitors' experiences (Leung *et al.*, 2013), and in turn create value on behalf of both visitors and destinations (Edwards *et al.*, 2016).

The study found that, through exchanging knowledge with surrounding communities, staff could create opportunities to improve their lives so that they benefit from visitor spend in visited areas. The millennial market, who are in search of novelty, new knowledge, and authentic experiences, might prefer to connect and meet locals, thus contributing to local economies and supporting small-scale and locally owned businesses (Bernardi, 2017; Cavagnaro *et al.*, 2018). Knowledge exchange with different stakeholders is therefore an area that requires consideration by staff to complement the information they provide with the experience and knowledge residing in surrounding communities.

Objective 5: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses

Gaining an understanding of how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses was the main scope of objective 5, which was met by both the qualitative and the quantitative components of the empirical research presented in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively. Chapter 6 included the findings from the semi-structured interviews conducted with staff about the information and knowledge exchanged with local tourism businesses and the opportunities presented by this exchange process. Chapter 6 also included the findings of the focus group discussions held with members of surrounding communities. Detailed and rich qualitative findings complemented the quantitative results elicited from a survey conducted with local tourism businesses. Chapter 7 presented the empirical quantitative findings of a survey undertaken with 75

local tourism businesses about the information provided to them by VICs, the information that they have supplied to VICs, the sources that are used in the information exchange process, and the socio-economic opportunities they have received from the exchange process.

In the interviews, staff mentioned that they work mainly with the marketing units of their tourism marketing agencies to maintain databases of local products and services, both tourism and non-tourism related, for marketing and promotional purposes. Most of the businesses are however in the accommodation sub-sector. This might require staff, together with the marketing units of tourism marketing agencies, to improve their recruitment strategies to get businesses in other tourism sub-sectors, such as attractions, food and beverages, and transport services, listed in their databases.

Being listed in the databases is the main channel through which local businesses could access opportunities such as the following:

- Marketing businesses in VICs' calendar of events, social media platforms, and local and international tourism events;
- Displaying business products and brochures in VICs;
- Displaying VIC brochures in establishments;
- Providing preferential treatment for referrals;
- Inviting businesses to workshops and dialogue sessions in which they receive information on and insights into the sector, training courses, and funding opportunities to educate them, help them grow their businesses, equip them with the requisite skills, and encourage them to network with other businesses.

While businesses confirmed the existence of these opportunities, they pointed out that the exchange did not present opportunities to obtain visitor statistics, receive funding to grow their businesses, market their businesses on the websites of VICs' marketing agencies, increase visitor bookings, or use business products/services. Staff indicated that these opportunities, along with business accreditation, advertising in VIC promotional material such as visitors' guides, and access to country profiles and research reports that provide market intelligence on potential visitors, are some of the

additional benefits that are only provided to businesses that are paying members of tourism marketing agencies. These benefits, however, differ across marketing agencies and non-profit organisations (NPOs), and are based on the type of membership to which businesses subscribe. The responses on the non-attainment of these opportunities might therefore have been provided by local tourism businesses that were not paying members of tourism marketing agencies.

The findings showed that the information that staff provide to businesses helps them to access potential visitors who might purchase and use their services. However, staff did not mention any social opportunities that are generated by the exchange of information in VICs. The role that staff play therefore points to the marketing and promotional function of VICs (Pearce, 2004), which involves exposing local tourism businesses to potential visitors (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010). The referrals that staff make point to the role that VICs play in meeting the needs of visitors (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Draper, 2018; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014) and generating economic opportunities through selling and recommending local products for visitors to purchase (Lyu & Lee, 2015). However, staff indicated that, although they undertake this role, they are not allowed to single out particular businesses, but provide visitors with options from which they can choose. This point is emphasised by Lyu and Lee (2015), who indicate that staff are prohibited from recommending particular tourism businesses for visitors to visit.

Although the results of the frequency analysis in Chapter 7 and the findings from the interviews with staff revealed socio-economic opportunities that local tourism business received from the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs, the multiple linear regression analysis determined the factors in the exchange process that were statistically significant predictors of these opportunities. The multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to address objective 5 and H₆. The results are discussed below.

H₆: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed the following VIC information-related factors as statistically significant predictors of socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses:

- Extensive visitor support-related information that staff provided (e.g., local area attractions, operations of VICs, booking/reservations services) predicted businesses' access to diverse and potential visitors.
- Extensive visitor support-related information, useful VIC electronic information sources (e.g., electronic touch screens, visitor noticeboards, television/radio) and satisfaction with VIC online information sources (e.g., the Internet, social media, mobile applications, audio-visual presentations) predicted businesses' listing in a database and their growth.
- Extensive visitor support information, preferred visitor support information (e.g., visitor statistics, bookings/reservations), and satisfaction with VIC online information sources predicted businesses' access to visitor statistics and networking opportunities.
- Extensive business support information (e.g., business services, business funding opportunities) predicted businesses' marketing and funding opportunities.
- Satisfaction with online information sources predicted product exhibition opportunities and visitor loyalty to businesses.

The results showed that the more local tourism businesses agreed that VIC information-related factors were part of the exchange of information and knowledge, the more they agreed that opportunities were created for them. However, when they agreed that VIC information-related factors were not part of the exchange process, the less they agreed that opportunities were created for them. These results supported H₆ and identified the factors that have an impact on attaining socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses in the VIC environment. Generating socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses is part of government's wider plan

to encourage public utilities such as VICs to improve the lives of people and to grow the economy of areas in which they are located, given the country's high levels of poverty and unemployment. To achieve this, staff should consider the VIC information-related elements that were identified as predictors of socio-economic opportunities for local businesses and incorporate them into their information provision and exchange approaches, plans and programmes.

Objective 6: To assess how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences.

The objective was addressed by the qualitative and quantitative component of the research presented in Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 respectively. Chapter 6 presented the findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with staff and the focus group discussions conducted with surrounding communities about the information and knowledge exchanged in VICs. Chapter 8, on the other hand, presented the empirical results of a survey undertaken with 152 visitors to the 18 VICs that participated in this study. The survey examined the views of these visitors about the information they received from VICs, and how this information enhanced their experiences at VICs and in local areas they visited.

As emphasised in the information exchange models (Deery *et al.*, 2007; Sheldon, 1997), an important aspect of the exchange between VICs and stakeholders is to ensure that the information that is exchanged flows to visitors. The results from the interviews with staff and the survey with local tourism businesses showed that the information being exchanged and displayed in VIC brochure stands, in establishments, or at tourism events is aimed at meeting the information needs of visitors throughout their travel. In this way, the aim of the exchange process is not only to benefit those who are involved in the exchange process, but also to benefit the visitors who are consumers of the information and the knowledge that is exchanged in VICs. Thus the information and knowledge that is exchanged is passed on to visitors to enhance their experiences at VICs and in visited areas. Staff therefore play a facilitator role, enabling an ideal environment that enhances opportunities for visitors to have memorable experiences at visited areas (Chandralal *et al.*, 2015).

The results of the frequency analysis showed that visitors agreed that information provision, information quality, staff knowledge, customer service, and the use of information sources such as brochures and the Internet were part of their experiences at VICs. In addition to enhancing visitor experiences at VICs, the information and knowledge that is exchanged with stakeholders is passed on to visitors to give them authentic and memorable experiences of the local areas and to influence their behavioural intentions. However, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed that, while the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences (hedonism, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, refreshment, involvement, and knowledge), several VIC information-related factors were statistically significant predictors of these experiences. The hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to address objective 6 and to test H₁ and H₄. The results are discussed below.

H₁: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to memorable visitor experiences.

Visitors agreed that all the dimensions of the MTE scale – hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge – were part of their experiences in the areas they visited. However, as Cornelisse (2018) indicates, the memorability of tourism experiences might differ for different visitors. Thus the results of the hierarchical regression analysis showed that the travel behaviour characteristics related to visitors' planned duration of stay at visited areas contributed significantly to predicting their memorable experiences. In particular, visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of hedonism, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, and knowledge than those who planned to visit for only a day.

Although the study did not find any demographic characteristics that contributed significantly to predicting memorable visitor experiences, Sthapit *et al.* (2019a) found that the relationship between novelty seeking and memorable local food experiences differed across gender, age, and travel behaviour characteristics. They found that the novelty-seeking effect on memorable local food experiences was more significant for older females and repeat visitors than for younger male visitors and first-time visitors.

Similarly, Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017) found that demographic characteristics such as age, gender, and nationality exert a greater impact on levels of hedonism, involvement, and knowledge than on levels of meaningfulness. The study's results therefore partially supported H₁, and add to those of previous studies (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Sthapit *et al.*, 2019a) by including increased duration of stay as another travel behaviour characteristic that might have an effect on MTEs.

H₄: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to memorable visitor experiences.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed the following VIC information-related factors to be statistically significant predictors of memorable visitor experiences (hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge) at visited areas:

- Increased length of stay, preferred VICs electronic information sources (e.g., mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, and visitor noticeboards), VIC information quality, VIC ICTs, and staff knowledge predicted higher levels of hedonism. On the other hand, travel with co-workers, travel for purposes of visiting friends and relatives, and useful online trip planning information sources (the Internet, social media, mobile applications, travel agent/tour operator) predicted lower levels of hedonism.
- Increased length of stay, preferred VIC electronic information sources (e.g., electronic touch screens, the Internet, social media), VIC information quality, and extensive internal (knowledge from previous experience) and external information trip planning sources (VICs, local resident, magazines, television/radio) predicted higher levels of novelty. Travel with co-workers and useful online trip planning information sources predicted lower levels of novelty.
- Increased length of stay, VIC information resources, and staff knowledge predicted higher levels of local culture.
- Extensive information searched for at VICs, preferred VICs electronic information sources, and staff knowledge predicted higher levels of refreshment.

- Increased length of stay, preferred VIC electronic information sources, VIC information quality, and useful trip planning information searched predicted higher levels of meaningfulness, while travel with co-workers predicted lower levels of meaningfulness.
- Staff knowledge and useful trip planning information searches predicted higher levels of involvement, while travel with co-workers and useful online trip planning information sources predicted lower levels of involvement.
- Increased duration of stay, preferred VICs electronic information sources, VIC ICTs, staff knowledge, useful trip planning information searches, and extensive internal and external information trip planning sources predicted higher levels of knowledge. Conversely, travel with co-workers, preferred online information sources, and frequent trip planning information search predicted lower levels of knowledge.

The results showed that visitors who agreed that VIC information-related factors were part of their experiences in areas they visited experienced higher levels of the dimensions of MTE. In contrast, those who agreed that VIC information-related factors were not part of their experiences at visited areas experienced lower levels of the dimensions of MTE. The study's results therefore supported H₄, and added factors that might have an impact on the MTE dimensions in the VIC environment. As Sthapit, Coudounaris and Björk (2019) emphasise, it is important to investigate other factors that might have an impact on the MTE dimensions. The results are important in enabling VICs to create an ideal environment that enhances memorable visitor experiences at visited areas (Chandralal *et al.*, 2015). These memorable experiences may also influence visitors' behavioural intentions, leading them to extend their length of stay, increase their expenditure at the destinations, and revisit the destinations and VICs in future (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Ortega *et al.*, 2014).

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed that, while the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions, several VIC information-related factors are statistically significant predictors of these behavioural intentions. The hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to address objective 6 and to test H₂, H₃, and H₅. The results revealed the following:

H₂: Visitors' demographic and travel behaviour characteristics contribute to their behavioural intentions.

The results showed that visitors who planned to stay at visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of behavioural intentions than those who planned to visit for only a day. This showed that travel behaviour characteristics related to visitors' planned duration of stay in visited areas contributed to predicting their behavioural intentions. In particular, visitors who planned to stay in visited areas for longer than seven nights showed a tendency to experience higher levels of behavioural intentions than those who planned to visit for only a day. Although the study did not find any demographic characteristics that contributed significantly to predicting visitors' behavioural intentions, Sthapit *et al.* (2019a) found that the novelty-seeking effect on memorable local food experiences was more significant for repeat visitors than for first-time visitors. The study's results therefore partially supported H₂ and added to those of previous studies (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Sthapit *et al.*, 2019a), indicating that visitors' travel behaviour characteristics, such as increased duration of stay in visited areas, contribute to their behavioural intentions.

H₃: Memorable experiences that visitors get in local areas they visit contribute to their behavioural intentions.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed that none of the dimensions of MTE were statistically significant predictors of visitors' behavioural intentions; thus H₃ was not supported. These results differed from previous studies that showed that visitors' experiences at the destination are a strong predictor of their future behaviour (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Tavares *et al.*, 2018; Tsai, 2016; Yu *et al.*, 2019) or are likely to lead to frequent and higher word-of-mouth and revisit intentions (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2019). Instead, in this study, electronic information sources through which visitors prefer to receive information while at VICs (mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, and visitor noticeboards), their experience of VIC information resources, and staff knowledge predicted visitors' behavioural intentions. These predictors of behavioural intentions are provided in the discussion of H₅ below.

H₅: The information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis revealed the VIC information-related factors that are statistically significant predictors of visitors' behavioural intentions. The study found that increased length of stay, preferred VIC electronic information sources (e.g., mobile applications, audio-visual presentations, visitor noticeboards), and experience of VIC information resources, and staff knowledge predicted higher levels of behavioural intentions, while travel for religious purposes and ICT availability predicted lower levels of behavioural intentions. The results showed that visitors who agreed that these VIC information-related factors were part of their experiences in areas they visited experienced higher levels of behavioural intentions, while those who agreed that they were not part of their experiences, experienced lower levels of behavioural intentions. The study's results therefore supported H₅ and identified the factors that might have an impact on the visitors' behavioural intentions in the context of VICs. These factors are important for staff to consider. Influencing visitors' behavioural intentions could increase the potential that they would extend their length of stay, increase their expenditure at the destinations, return to the destination, and recommend it to friends and relatives (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Draper, 2018; Ortega *et al.*, 2014; Tavares *et al.*, 2018).

An assessment of how the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs contributes to visitors' behavioural intentions shows that attaining such intentions is not only dependent on and shaped by the exchange, but is also affected by the VIC information-related factors emphasised in this section. Based on the triangulation of the results, the conceptual framework (Figure 4.5) developed at the end of Chapter 4 was refined in order to arrive at a tested and confirmed framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs, which is provided in section 9.3 below.

9.3 FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VICS

A conceptual framework developed at the end of Chapter 4 was revised in the light of the findings and results from Chapters 6, 7, and 8. Earlier models such as the model of tourism information exchange (Sheldon, 1997) and the VIC information exchange model (Deery *et al.*, 2007), and the literature reviewed in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, formed the basis for developing this conceptual framework. Social exchange theory (SET), which was adopted as the study's main theoretical foundation owing to its focus on stakeholder collaboration and benefits (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Kim & Park, 2017; Woo *et al.*, 2018; Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2017, Jani, 2018), was emphasised in the conceptual framework.

Six hypotheses (H₁, H₂, H₃, H₄, H₅, H₆) were developed from the literature and included in the conceptual framework, and then were tested using quantitative data stemming from the empirical research reported on in Chapters 7 and 8, in order to arrive at a framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs. The qualitative data from the empirical research reported on in Chapter 6 was used to support the different parts of the proposed framework. This resulted in a framework on tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, which is the contribution that this research makes to VIC operations.

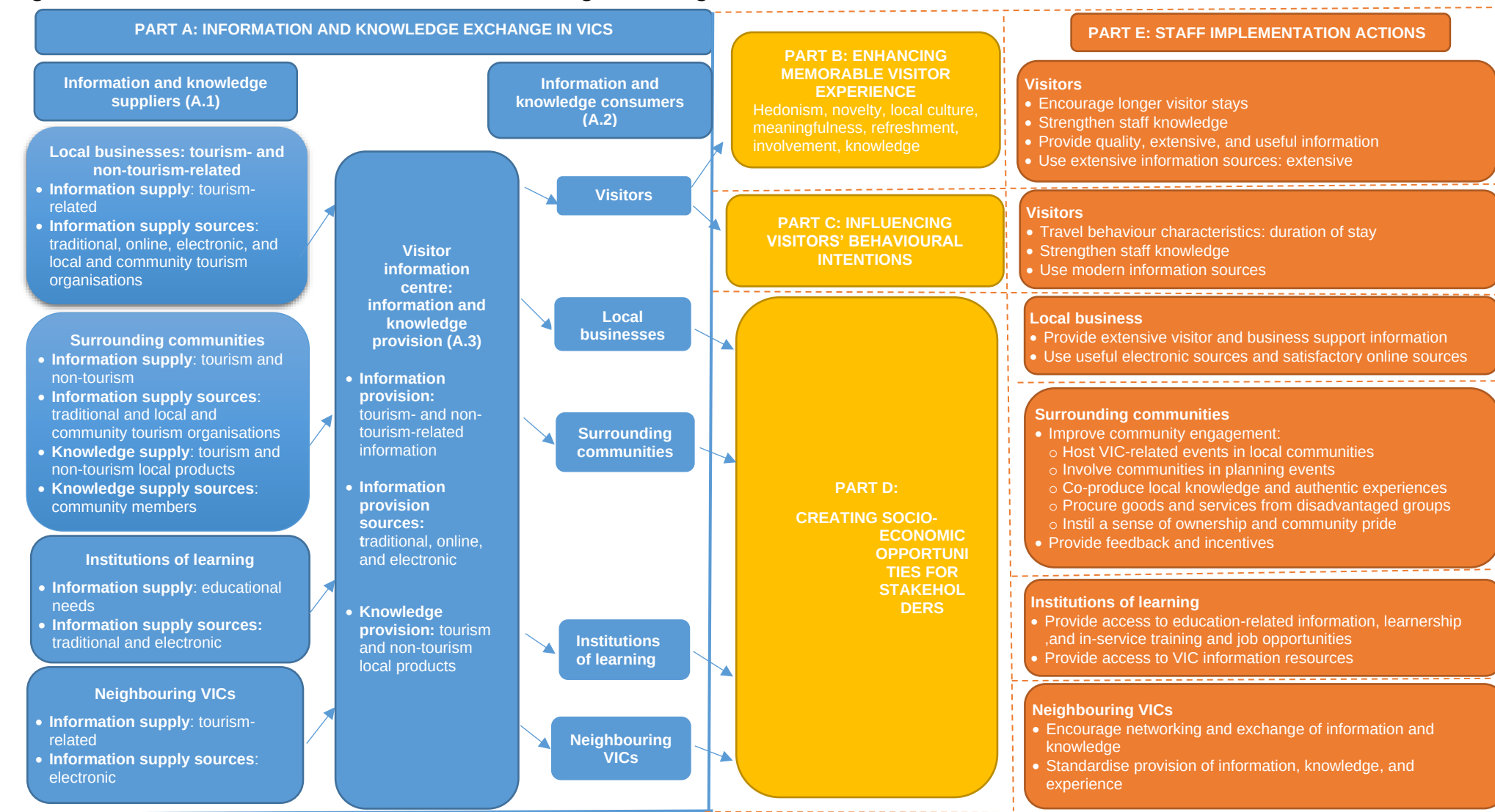
Figure 9.1 presents the framework, which has five major parts:

- Part A: Information and knowledge exchange in VICs
- Part B: Memorable visitor experiences
- Part C: Visitors' behavioural intentions
- Part D: Socio-economic opportunities
- Part E: Staff implementation actions

Each part highlights how the conceptual framework (Figure 4.7) was revised in the light of the empirical findings to arrive at a final framework to guide the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICs (Figure 9.1). Each of the five parts of the

framework is discussed in the sections that follow. The discussion will mainly focus on the factors that were added to the conceptual framework and were not considered in earlier information exchange models (based on the empirical findings) to arrive at a final framework (Figure 9.1). Part 5 highlights the VIC information-related factors and actions that staff should implement to be able to contribute to memorable visitor experiences, behavioural intentions, and socio-economic opportunities for different stakeholders. The factors and implementation actions are discussed and emphasised in each part of the framework, and are highlighted in orange and white in Figure 9.1.

Figure 9.1: Framework on information and knowledge exchange in VICs



Source: Researcher's own contribution

PART A: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VICS

Part A of the framework highlights the exchange of information and knowledge that takes place in VICs. The dotted vertical line demarcates this part of the framework from the others, and is highlighted in blue and white in Figure 9.1. First, the various stakeholders involved in exchanging information and knowledge with VICs as suppliers and consumers are identified. The type of information, knowledge, and sources used in the exchange process are also highlighted. Second, the information and knowledge that VICs provide to stakeholders and the sources they use are discussed.

- **Information and knowledge suppliers (A.1)**

The framework highlights the suppliers of information and knowledge that are important to allowing the exchange process to take place.

Local tourism businesses and non-tourism-related businesses that are paying members of tourism marketing agencies to which VICs report, supply VICs with information on their products such as accommodation, attractions, restaurants, and tours. They also provide visitor statistics, occupancy rates, special offers, and events that they plan to host. Businesses use a variety of methods to supply information to VICs. They supply it in person through physical visits and the delivery of brochures, pamphlets, and leaflets. Some supply the information telephonically, via email, and through local and community tourism organisations. Others use modern technologies such as social media and mobile technology to communicate with VICs.

Surrounding communities provide VICs with their tourism-related information needs as well as general and non-tourism-related information, mainly in person and through local and Community Tourism Organisations (CTOs), in order to meet their everyday needs. They also share their knowledge of local products with VIC staff, although limited, owing to their experience of the local areas in which they reside. This local knowledge is not available in brochures, but may be sourced from community members such as tourist guides or tour operators and storytellers who may share knowledge of the history, culture, and traditions of local areas. Such knowledge is

necessary to supplement VIC information and to be passed on to visitors in order to provide them with authentic and memorable experiences in visited areas (Araña *et al.*, 2016; Edwards *et al.*, 2016).

Institutions of learning provide VICs with information related to the educational needs of teachers, learners, and students. The information is mostly provided in person, with teachers and learners visiting VICs to explain their information needs. Teachers also use emails to inform VICs of the information they require to carry out their tourism-related teaching tasks. Learners' and students' needs relate to information to complete assignments and research projects.

Neighbouring VICs in the public and private sector exchange tourism-related information in the form of brochures to enable networking and the exchange of ideas and information, to standardise information and service provision, and to support visitors during their travel. The information is mainly exchanged via email.

Non-tourism businesses, surrounding communities, and institutions of learning were not considered in previous frameworks, but were found in this study to be important stakeholders that exchange information and knowledge with VICs. Information from non-tourism businesses, local knowledge from surrounding communities, and the educational needs of institutions of learning are exchanged with VICs in order to meet the needs of visitors and other users. It is therefore important that VICs identify and work with the stakeholders who will supply them with information and knowledge that they can be passed on to their users. The involvement of various stakeholders in VICs is critical to their operation and sustainability (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2002), fulfilling their roles (Alonso & Liu, 2012), and maximising their contribution to visitor satisfaction and to the promotion and competitiveness of destinations (Araña *et al.*, 2016).

- **Information and knowledge consumers (A.2)**

In the framework, **visitors are consumers** of the information and knowledge supplied by VICs and other suppliers. **Information and knowledge suppliers are also consumers** of information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs. This shows that suppliers are not only involved in supplying information and knowledge to VICs, but

also stand to gain from the relationship they have with VICs as consumers. SET highlights that individuals engage in a relationship of exchanging resources from which some future benefit is expected (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Kim & Park, 2017). Therefore, in order for information and knowledge suppliers to continue their relationships with VICs, staff should engage them as consumers of the exchanges that take place in VICs.

- **Information and knowledge provision by VICs (A.3)**

Unlike the previous VIC information exchange models (Deery *et al.*, 2007), in which VICs only disseminate tourist information, the framework developed in this study emphasised the dissemination of tourism- and non-tourism-related information, as well as the dissemination of knowledge of local area products.

While VICs mainly provide tourism-related information such as on accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, and tours (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Draper, 2018; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Minghetti & Celotto, 2013; Wong & McKercher, 2011), the framework shows that VICs also disseminate **non-tourism-related information**. This is mainly to assist rural communities in particular, who often lag behind in access to information (Kassongo, Tucker & Pather, 2018; Oyedemi & Mogano, 2017). As a result, VICs also provide the non-tourism-related information that surrounding communities require to meet their everyday needs, such as employment opportunities or educational needs. As emphasised in the earlier discussion of information and knowledge suppliers, there is a limited exchange of local knowledge between suppliers and VICs. But this knowledge is necessary to supplement VICs' information and to meet the needs of visitors and other VIC users. Knowledge exchange is therefore emphasised in the framework as an area that requires consideration by the staff as one of the functions of VICs, although it is not currently practised.

The provision of non-tourism-related information and of local knowledge is an important contribution that this research has made to extending the functions of VICs so that they can remain relevant in the environments in which they operate. VICs should therefore consider the structural, organisational, and contextual conditions in which they operate if they are to remain relevant and meet the needs of their users. In

this regard, information and knowledge that staff provide should be multi-functional and directed by the specific needs of their users.

- **VIC information provision sources (A.3)**

The study found that, besides the Internet, most VICs still rely on traditional information sources such as brochures and face-to-face communication. Furthermore, they do not have their own websites or mobile applications, but use those of their marketing agencies to provide information and knowledge to stakeholders. The availability of free Wi-Fi is limited in the few VICs that provide it. Even in VICs that have invested in information kiosks and touch screens, there are no plans to guide staff on how to maintain or fix them when they break down. This shows that VICs in South Africa still lag behind in the use of online information sources. This is despite the emphasis placed on sources such as mobile devices, social media, and smart technologies as being significant in connecting with visitors, searching for travel information, making informed decisions, sharing travel experiences (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Dorcic *et al.*, 2019; Law *et al.*, 2018) and booking flights, hotels, or car rentals (Yip & Mo, 2020). These modern information sources were not included in previous information exchange frameworks (Sheldon, 1997; Deery *et al.*, 2007). Since their initial development, information sources have undergone significant changes, and have altered visitors' information needs and search behaviours as well as information dissemination and exchange behaviours. Artificial intelligence and web technologies are now available to assist visitors to filter out and narrow down the information of interest, and to provide them with possible travel suggestions based on their needs and on the views and ratings of other visitors (Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020).

The limited use of online sources may pose a threat to the survival of VICs and turn them into relics of the past (Lyu & Lee, 2015). On this basis, staff are encouraged to take advantage of them by harnessing and investing in these technologies, because visitors' expectations, needs, and search behaviours continue to change and be reshaped during their travel (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Choe *et al.*, 2017; Khatri, 2019; Lee, Yoo & Gretzel, 2016; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Mannaa, 2019). The framework highlights that, in providing information and knowledge, VICs should use both **traditional** and **online sources**. The use of technology might be useful to

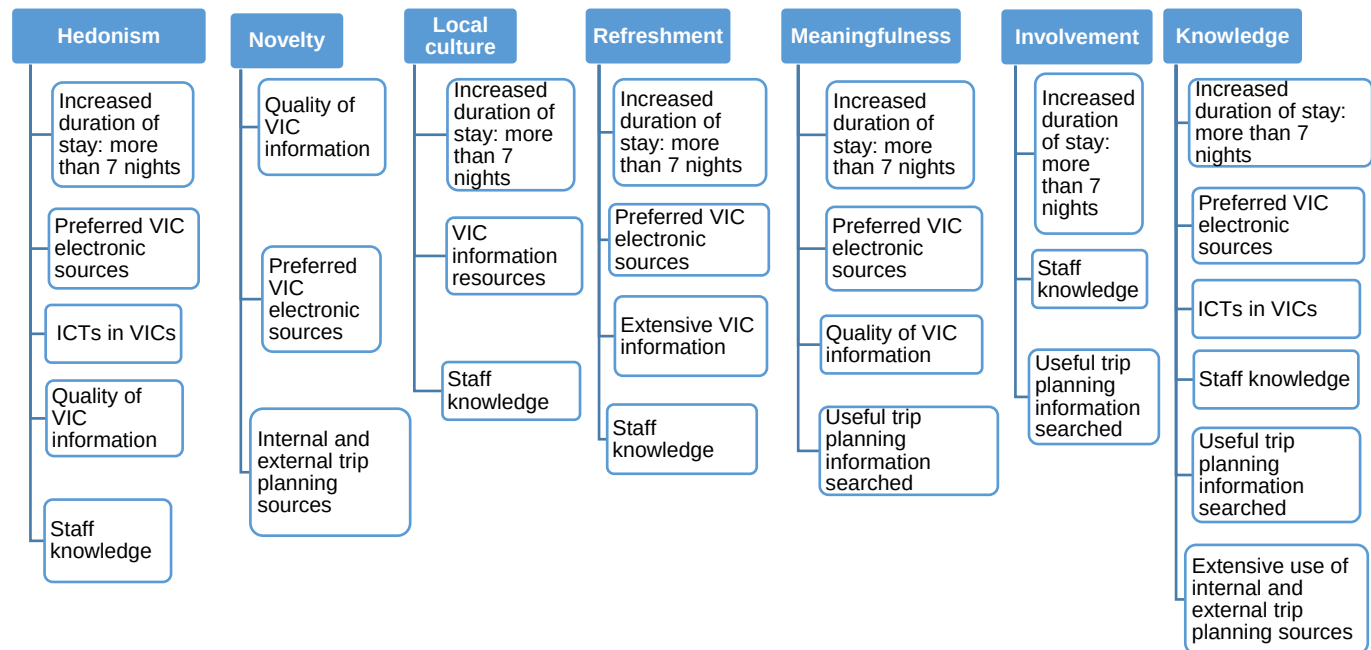
complement traditional information sources, adding value and enhancing the quality and depth of the information available at VICs.

PART B: ENHANCING MEMORABLE TOURISM EXPERIENCE (MTE)

The term 'MTE' refers to positive tourism experiences that are remembered and recalled after the event or activity has occurred (Kim, 2018; Kim *et al.*, 2012). These memories are not only recalled but are also treasured long after the trip is over (Andrades & Dimanche, 2014; Kruger *et al.*, 2013). They add value during travel (Tung & Ritchie, 2011) and serve to strengthen and enhance the recollection of pleasurable memories of the destination experience (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1998). Part B of the framework focused on enhancing such memorable visitor experiences. The dotted horizontal line demarcates this part, and is highlighted in yellow and white in Figure 9.1.

The framework highlights that the information and knowledge that is supplied to VICs is passed on to visitors to enhance their memorable experiences. To do this, staff should play the role of facilitators, and enable an environment that enhances opportunities for visitors to have memorable experiences (Chandralal *et al.*, 2015). The framework identifies several factors (Figure 9.2) that staff should consider in order to enhance the memorable visitor experiences associated with Kim *et al.*'s (2012) MTE scale. Actions that staff should consider in undertaking this role are also highlighted.

Figure 9.2: Factors enhancing memorable visitor experiences



Source: Researcher's own contribution

Increased duration of stay: Visitors' travel behaviour characteristics may have an effect on MTEs (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018; Sthapit *et al.*, 2019a). Extending visitors' length of stay in visited areas has a positive effect on tourist experiences (Ortega *et al.*, 2014). To fulfil their role of enhancing visitor experiences, it is important for staff to develop initiatives that encourage visitors to **stay longer in visited areas**. Activities in which visitors can meet local people and get first-hand insight into the local lifestyle, culture, and cuisine might encourage them to stay longer there.

Staff knowledge: Staff knowledge, competence, and skills are identified as factors that influence their effectiveness in delivering memorable visitor experiences (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Deery *et al.*, 2007, Draper, 2018). A deeper understanding of local tourism products could help them to enhance visitors' experiences (Wong & McKercher, 2011). Knowledge of local tourism products could be sourced from surrounding communities. This presents staff with opportunities to collaborate with surrounding communities and to expose visitors to products that are likely to enhance their experience not only of the visited area, but also of the broader region (Draper, 2018).

VIC information: VICs exchange information and knowledge with different stakeholders. In order to enhance memorable visitor experiences during travel, the information passed on to visitors must be of a **good quality** (Mistilis & D'Ambra, 2008; Wong & McKercher, 2011). VICs should therefore ensure that the information they provide to visitors is clear in meaning, easy to comprehend, and easy to read. Furthermore, the information should be sufficiently **extensive** and **useful** to assist visitors to plan their trips, thus reducing product uncertainty or risks; to make informed decisions; and to direct them to tourism products that might enhance their experiences in visited areas. Intense, extensive, and useful information for trip planning is necessary to enhance the quality of the travel experience (Ho *et al.*, 2012; Manyevere & Kruger, 2019). Also important is that staff should direct the type and quality of information that suppliers provide, as this is important to enhancing visitors' memorable experiences.

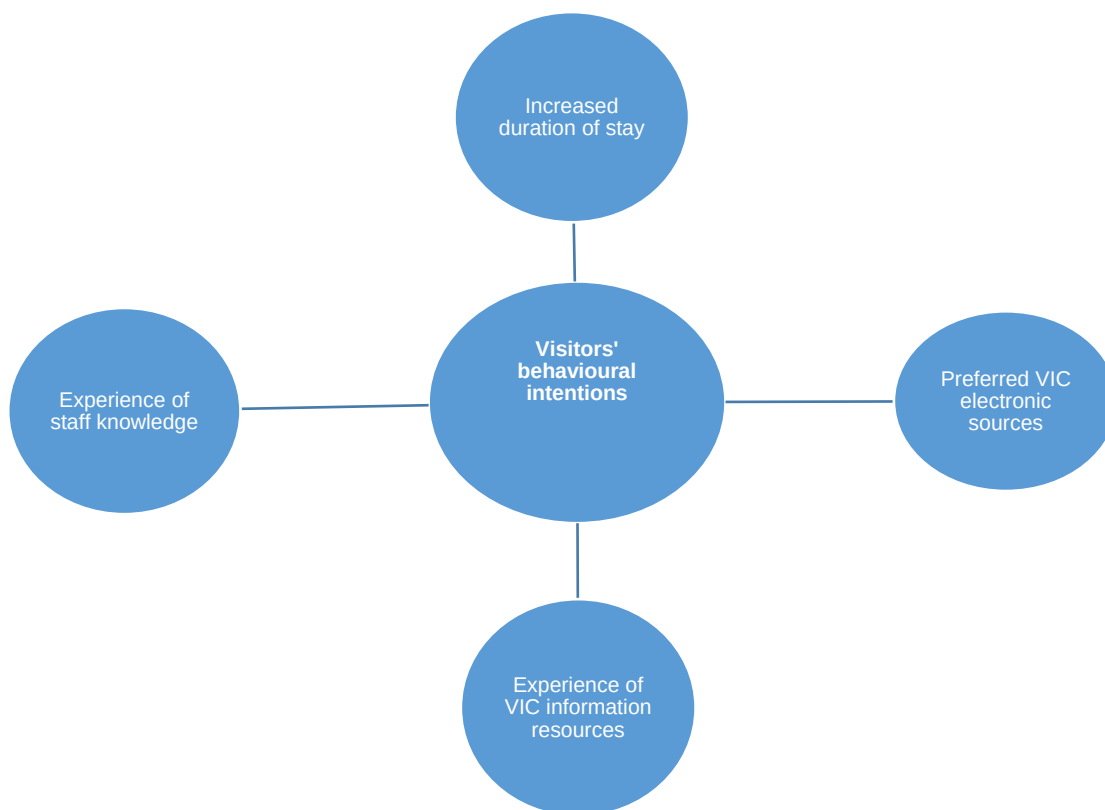
VIC information sources: The advent of modern technologies such as mobile devices, social media, Wi-Fi, and smart technologies has transformed travel behaviour considerably (Choe *et al.*, 2017). Visitors are becoming smarter as these technologies assist them to search for information before, during, and after travel. It is therefore important for VICs to take advantage of the convenience and opportunities presented by these sources to enable visitors to receive real-time information that enhances their travel experiences. To add value to memorable visitor experiences, staff should **integrate diverse and multiple information sources** (ICTs, the Internet, online, and electronic, mobile, and smart technologies) to allow visitors to access different types of information to plan their trips and access VICs' information that would help them to make informed decisions and ultimately to enhance their trip experience (Choe *et al.*, 2017; Coromina & Camprubí, 2015; No & Kim, 2015; Xiang *et al.*, 2015). Staff should ensure that the information resources are reliable and that they are in a good working condition at all times.

PART C: INFLUENCING VISITORS' BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS

Part C of the framework focused on influencing visitors' behavioural intentions. The dotted horizontal line demarcates this part, and is highlighted in yellow and white in Figure 9.1.

'Behavioural intentions' involve the desirable behaviours that visitors are likely to demonstrate in the future (Chen, *et al.*, 2011). The framework highlights that the information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs is passed on to visitors to influence their behavioural intentions. VICs are a valuable resource for providing information on the spot; thus staff can favourably influence visitors' behaviour, choices, and optimal decision-making (Ispas *et al.*, 2014). The framework identifies several factors (Figure 9.3) that staff should consider in order to influence visitors' behavioural intentions. Actions that staff should consider in undertaking this role are also highlighted.

Figure 9.3: Factors influencing visitors' behavioural intentions



Source: Researcher's own contribution

Staff knowledge: Knowledge of the local tourism products that staff receive from surrounding communities can create awareness of tourism attractions in the visited destinations, as visitors may not be aware of the tourism products and services on offer (Choi *et al.*, 2012; Draper, 2018; Ortega *et al.*, 2014). Such knowledge can result in visitors having memorable experiences that might influence their future behaviours.

This could lead visitors to increase **the duration of their stay**, increase their expenditure at the destinations, and revisit the destinations and the VICs in future (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Ortega *et al.*, 2014). The information could also be shared with friends and relatives after the trip, and thus encourage them to visit the destinations (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Mistilis & Gretzel, 2014).

As emphasised in Parts A and B of the framework, technology is significant in the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs. For visitors, the use of technology can serve as a source of information for other potential visitors, and might be a useful platform for sharing experiences with these visitors during and after a trip (Antunes *et al.*, 2018; Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017; Mannaa, 2019; Mariani, Styven & Ayeh, 2019). Such experiences might influence potential visitors' behavioural intentions to visit the destinations. VICs should therefore take advantage of **information sources** (ICTs, the Internet, online, and electronic, mobile, and smart technologies) that would enable them to reach out and share the experiences of other visitors with potential visitors, both on-site and virtually.

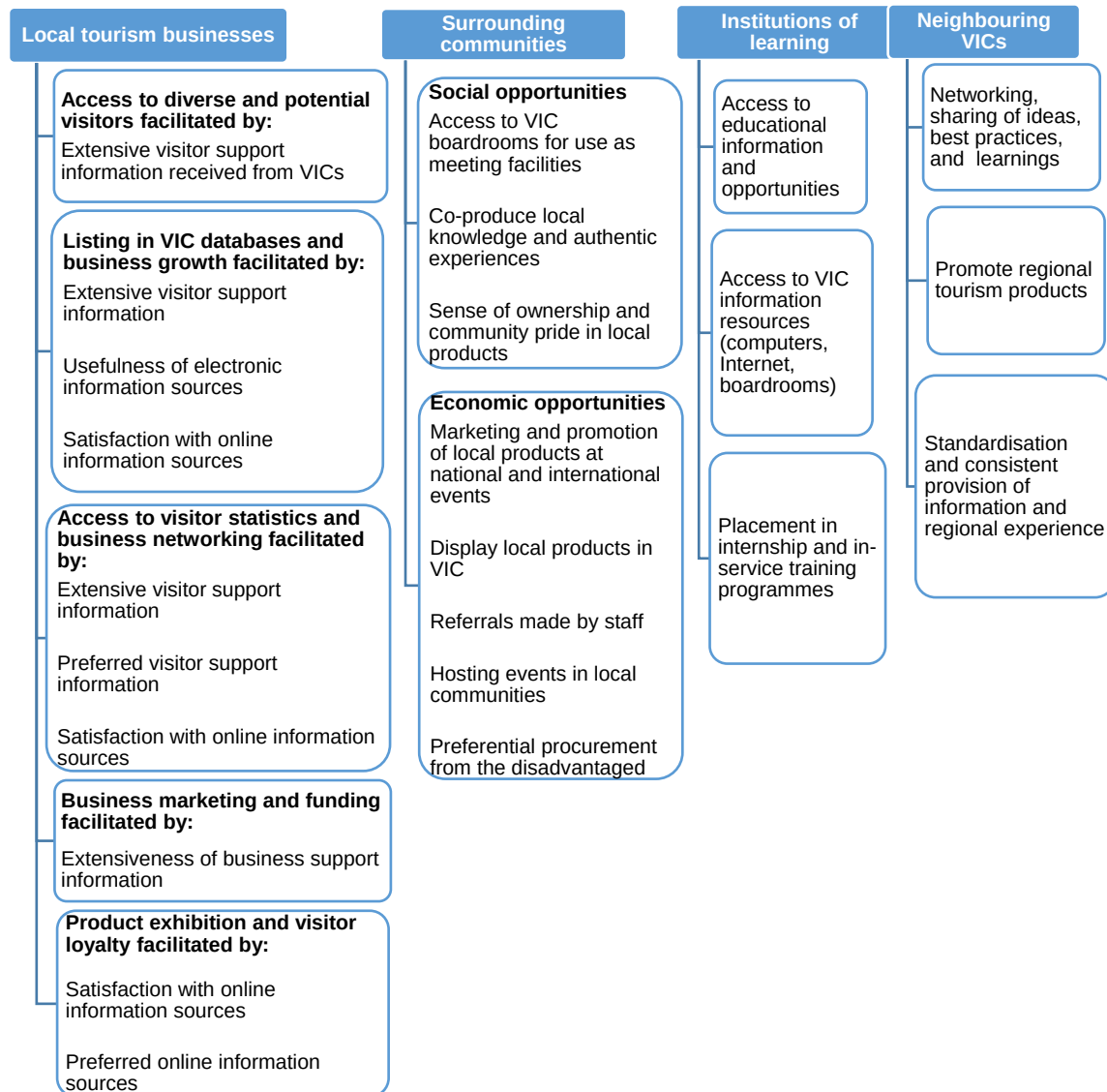
PART D: CREATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAKEHOLDERS

Part D of the framework focused on creating socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders. The dotted horizontal line demarcates this part, and is highlighted in yellow and white in Figure 9.1. This part of the framework is a novel contribution to information and knowledge exchange in the VIC environment, as it has not been considered in earlier models (Sheldon, 1997; Deery *et al.*, 2007). As public utilities receiving funding from government, it is important that the role of VICs in information and knowledge provision also contributes to government's wider plan of creating socio-economic opportunities and improving the lives of communities in their surroundings. These opportunities highlight what VICs should aim to achieve when exchanging information and knowledge with stakeholders.

The framework highlights that, through the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs, stakeholders such as surrounding communities, institutions of learning, and

neighbouring VICs may attain socio-economic opportunities. The opportunities are presented in Figure 9.4 below.

Figure 9.4: Factors creating socio-economic opportunities



Source: Researcher's own contribution

According to SET, individuals engage in a reciprocal process of interacting and exchanging resources with others in order to obtain future benefits (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Kim & Park, 2017) that can be economic or non-economic (Jeong & Oh, 2017). When the exchange results in benefits, repeated exchanges occur (Savage & Bergstrand, 2012). In tourism, surrounding communities are likely to be involved in the exchange of resources and in supporting tourism development if they perceive that the exchange will generate socio-economic opportunities (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Woo *et al.*, 2018; Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2017; Jani, 2018). Therefore, in order to continue exchanging information and knowledge with suppliers, staff should enable them to obtain socio-economic opportunities from this exchange process by holding **regular and frequent engagements**, providing **feedback** on achievements, challenges, and areas requiring improvement, and providing **incentives** to encourage future exchanges.

The framework identifies specific actions that staff should undertake for each stakeholder, as outlined below.

Local tourism businesses: Staff should understand the information needs of local business, particularly those that would enable them to access potential visitors and to market and grow their businesses. To achieve this, they should,

First, provide **extensive information that is visitor-focused** to help businesses to support and serve visitors' needs. The information could be about local area attractions, the operations of VICs, or booking/reservation services that businesses might want VICs to assist them with.

Second, staff should provide businesses with **extensive information** that would support them in their operations, such as exposing them to funding opportunities to grow their businesses.

Third, staff should use the **online and electronic sources** (such as social media and mobile technology) that businesses find **useful** to communicate information, and to enable VICs to receive such information from businesses.

Surrounding communities: Staff should improve their **engagement** with surrounding communities so that VICs become relevant and improve the lives of those in their surroundings. To do this, they should engage them in their operations. In addition to what they are already doing about referrals, marketing local products at events and in VICs, and allowing surrounding communities to use VIC boardrooms for community meetings and events, staff may do the following:

- First, **source local knowledge** from surrounding communities to supplement VIC information and to pass it on to visitors to provide them with authentic and memorable experiences.
- Second, **host VIC-related events** in local communities, involve them in the **planning and logistical arrangements** to host such events, and provide them with a platform to display locally made products at the events.
- Third, staff should **procure goods and services** from surrounding communities and give **preference to businesses owned by disadvantaged groups**, such as the youth, women, and people living with disabilities, as a way to create new market opportunities to support the development and empowerment of disadvantaged groups.
- These actions would instil a sense of **ownership of VIC initiatives and community pride** in local products that visitors could purchase, and generate an income for surrounding communities. In addition, surrounding communities could feel that they are **part of VICs**, and so **support initiatives** that VICs might undertake in local areas.

Institutions of learning: In addition to providing **access to information that learners and students use to compile assignments and research projects**, allowing them to use VIC boardrooms, and placing students in learnership programmes, staff could provide **access to other VIC information resources** such as printers, photocopying machines, scanners, and limited Wi-Fi. Owing to high unemployment levels, staff should provide unemployed graduates with information that would expose them to

educational opportunities such as bursaries and internship programmes outside the VIC environment.

Neighbouring VICs: Staff should work with other VICs to encourage networking, learning, and the exchange of ideas, information, knowledge, and best-practice solutions among VICs. This might involve staff exchange programmes, sharing brochures, or convening regular meetings, workshops, or discussion forums. Such platforms are necessary to promote regional tourism products, enhance regional experiences, and encourage the standardised provision of information, knowledge, and service across VICs and throughout visitors' journeys.

9.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS

The value of the study can be seen in the contribution it makes to extend the body of knowledge on tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs, both theoretically and practically, in a tourism and non-tourism context.

9.4.1 Theoretical contribution

The study makes a theoretical contribution to the research gaps identified in the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs. The literature review and the empirical data analysis were used to address the research gaps.

First, while some studies examined information provision and exchange in VICs (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Pearce, 2004; Deery *et al.*, 2007), they did not consider knowledge an important element in the exchange process. This is a relevant research gap, because the provision of knowledge is about more than providing information: it involves the dissemination of information that is combined with experience, context, interpretation, reflection, and perspective. Such knowledge adds a new level of understanding and insight (Jennex, 2017).

Chapters 6 and 7 contributed to the literature by introducing the concept of knowledge exchange in VICs, although staff and their stakeholders made little distinction between

'information' and 'knowledge', and used the terms interchangeably. VICs and their stakeholders should exchange knowledge about local tourism products such as community sites, facilities, and events. This local knowledge is used to supplement VIC information (Araña *et al.*, 2016; Edwards *et al.*, 2016) because it is not available in brochures. It enables visitors to make choices and to plan their travel based on informed staff recommendations – which are often absent when they have to search and plan their travel based on online sources only (Deery *et al.*, 2007; Draper, 2018).

Second, most studies on information provision in VICs were conducted in developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) (Gitelson & Perdue, 1988; Pennington-Gray & Vogt, 2003; Draper, 2018) and Australia (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2009; Deery *et al.*, 2007; Smith & Holmes, 2012), and did not include contextual conditions that might be important in developing countries. The literature on VICs in South Africa was reviewed in Chapter 4 to highlight the efforts undertaken to address the information needs of visitors and surrounding communities. The literature contributes to understanding the context in which VICs play a role in job creation and community empowerment and development, particularly in rural areas. Thus VICs located in both urban and rural municipalities were included in the study in order to show the operational variations that exist between VICs. Classifying VICs in this way helped to examine, first, how those in urban areas, with often-improved infrastructure, could provide support and good practice from which those in rural areas could learn; and second, how those in rural areas might be developed and resourced to help uplift the standard of living and create socio-economic opportunities for communities in their surroundings, thereby contributing to the improvement of local economies. This distinction is important in helping to address the urban–rural divide created by imbalances of the past, when the economic development of rural areas was often ignored, resulting in a lack of quality of life in these areas.

Third, while VICs play a role in enhancing memorable visitor experiences and facilitate visitors' behavioural intentions (Chandralal *et al.*, 2015; Wong & McKercher, 2011), earlier research did not examine how the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs contributed to the MTE dimensions (hedonism, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, refreshment, involvement, knowledge) and to behavioural intentions. This research gap was empirically addressed in Chapters 6 and 8. The findings

revealed that the information and knowledge that is exchanged in VICs is passed on to visitors to enhance their memorable experiences and to facilitate their behavioural intentions. Chapter 8 also contributed to the literature by identifying visitors' travel behaviour characteristics and VIC information-related factors as additional factors that might have an impact on the MTE dimensions and on visitors' behavioural intentions in the VIC environment. Travel behaviour characteristics relating to increased length of stay at destinations and VICs' information-related factors such as extensive information, quality information, information sources, extensive and useful trip planning information, and staff knowledge are some of the factors that VIC staff should consider in order to help them enhance memorable visitor experiences. This is a contribution that the study has made to the VIC literature; and it resonates with what Sthapit *et al.* (2019) emphasised – that it is important to investigate other factors that might have an impact on the MTE dimensions.

For behavioural intentions, the study's results were different from those of previous studies (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Yu *et al.*, 2019) – that visitors' experiences at destinations are a strong predictor of their future behaviour or are likely to lead to frequent word-of-mouth and revisit intentions (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2019). The study found that visitors' travel behaviour characteristics and VICs' information-related factors are additional factors that might have an impact on visitors' behavioural intentions. Travel behaviour characteristics relating to increased length of stay at destinations and VICs' information-related factors such as information sources and staff knowledge are factors that VIC staff should consider in order to help them facilitate visitors' behavioural intentions. These findings have contributed to the literature on visitors' behavioural intentions in the VIC environment to increase their potential of extending their length of stay, increasing their expenditure at the destinations, returning to the destination, and recommending it to friends and relatives (D'Ambra & Mistilis, 2010; Draper, 2018; Ortega *et al.*, 2014; Tavares *et al.*, 2018).

Fourth, despite researchers (Alonso & Liu, 2012; Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003; Ispas *et al.*, 2014; Lyon *et al.*, 2017) acknowledging the importance of integrating multi-stakeholder perspectives into the operation of VICs, limited studies have addressed the involvement of different stakeholders in the operation of VICs. Most research studies focused on the demand side of providing information to visitors, paying less

attention to understanding the views of those on the supply side, such as those who are responsible for VICs' operation and those who supply VICs with information and knowledge. The literature reviewed in Chapter 4 emphasised the importance of VICs' collaboration with other stakeholders and understanding the views of those involved in the operation of VICs. Accordingly, the often-ignored views of those on the supply side – those providing information and knowledge, such as VIC staff, local tourism businesses, and surrounding communities – were empirically examined. Research objectives 4 and Chapter 6 empirically examined the views of VIC staff and surrounding communities, while objective 5 and Chapter 7 examined the views of local tourism businesses about information and knowledge exchange in VICs. These multiple views and perspectives contributed to the literature, as solving a research problem satisfactorily not only requires the quantification of responses, but also an in-depth exploration that results in detailed and rich responses.

Fifth, with the proliferation of mobile technology, social media, and smart technologies, several researchers (Arãna *et al.*, 2016; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Lyu & Hwang, 2015; Swart, 2016) have cautioned others about the impact that technology might have on the future operation of VICs. The impact of technology poses a threat to the survival of VICs, as it can make them relics of the past (Lyu & Lee, 2015). For Arãna *et al.* (2016), technology should complement the design of VICs, adding value and enhancing the quality and depth of the information and service they provide to visitors. However, electronic and online information sources were not included in earlier information exchange frameworks (Sheldon, 1997; Deery *et al.*, 2007). This is a relevant research gap because, since the development of these frameworks, information sources have experienced significant changes and have altered visitors' information needs and search behaviours, as well as information dissemination and exchange behaviours. Artificial intelligence and web technologies are now available to assist visitors to filter out and narrow down the information of interest, and to provide them with travel suggestions based on their needs and on the views and ratings of other visitors (Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020).

Chapter 3 reviewed the literature on the information sources used in tourism, while Chapter 5 reviewed the information sources used in VICs and their impact on the survival of VICs. The use of information sources to exchange information and

knowledge in VICs was empirically reviewed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. However, VICs still lag behind in adopting electronic and online information sources, as many still rely on traditional information sources such as brochures and face-to-face communication. With knowledge supplied by surrounding communities mainly through face-to-face communication, this study has contributed to the literature by emphasising the use of technology in VICs in order to complement traditional information sources and enhance the quality and depth of the information and knowledge exchanged with stakeholders.

Sixth, earlier information exchange models (Sheldon, 1997; Deery *et al.*, 2007) did not focus on the opportunities that the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs might generate for stakeholders. The generation of socio-economic opportunities is emphasised in SET (discussed in Chapter 2). The theory stresses that individuals enter into a reciprocal relationship of exchanging resources when they obtain social and economic benefits from the relationship (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Jeong & Oh, 2017; Kim & Park, 2017). They determine whether to continue or terminate the relationship, based on a comparison of the benefits and costs of maintaining the relationship (Jeong & Oh, 2017). Depending on the costs and benefits of the social exchange related to tourism, perceptions of economic and social benefits might facilitate and enhance information and knowledge exchange behaviours (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017).

While SET has been applied widely in tourism studies (Afthanorhan *et al.*, 2017; Capistrano & Weaver, 2017; Chang, 2018; Jani, 2018; Woo *et al.*, 2018; Maruyama *et al.*, 2019), it has not been used to explain exchanges that take place in other areas of tourism, such as tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs. The studies also do not address the socio-economic opportunities that stakeholders involved in the exchange process might obtain. This research gap was examined to address objectives 3, 4, and 5, and was empirically addressed in Chapters 6 and 7. The results revealed that the exchange generated socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders: surrounding communities received opportunities to meet tourism-related and everyday needs; institutions of learning received opportunities to meet their educational needs; while neighbouring VICs obtained opportunities to serve visitors and to network with other VICs. For local tourism businesses, the exchange presented opportunities to

market their businesses and access potential visitors. Chapter 7 also contributed to the literature by identifying the VIC information-related factors that are significant predictors of socio-economic opportunities for local tourism businesses. VICs' information-related factors, such as extensive information to support visitors and businesses, and information sources, are some of the factors that VIC staff should consider in order to help them generate socio-economic opportunities for local businesses. This study has made this contribution to the VIC literature by considering the applicability of SET in the context of information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

9.4.2 Practical contributions

The VIC tourism information and knowledge exchange framework arising from this study makes a significant contribution in helping VICs to extend and play their role in community beneficiation. The framework addresses community beneficiation objectives that VICs, as publicly funded tourism-related initiatives, are required to fulfil in addition to providing visitor information. It is important to point out that the proposed framework is not static but generic, and can be customised to the environment within which each VIC operates. Also important in the VIC environment is collaboration as a critical contributor to the creation of socio-economic opportunities for different stakeholders (Alonso & Liu, 2012; Araña *et al.*, 2016; Ballantyne & Hughes, 2004; Pearce, 2004; Edwards *et al.*, 2016; Lyu & Lee, 2015; Yu *et al.*, 2019). If implemented adequately, the framework could provide guidelines for the exchange of information and knowledge so that VICs become relevant in meeting the changing needs of visitors and improving the lives of communities in their surroundings, thereby boosting the local economies in which they operate.

The proposed framework can be applied in other information dissemination environments in order to establish its usefulness as a tool to guide how exchanges in VICs might contribute to socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders and to creating memorable visitor experiences. It is also important to apply the framework in order to monitor its performance and the progress that VICs may make through its application. The lessons and insights that arise from that monitoring are crucial to contextualise its application, based on the environment in which it is applied. Thus the structural,

organisational, and contextual conditions in which VICs operate should be considered in the application of the framework.

The Department of Tourism, which is responsible for the management of VICs at a national level, should lead and guide how the framework might supplement other VIC strategic and operational plans related to information and knowledge provision. It is also important to guide the **standardisation of information and knowledge** across VICs. The national framework for VICs in South Africa (Department of Tourism, 2011a) identifies the standardisation of tourism information provision as one of the key features for the continued growth of the tourism sector and changing the lives of all South Africans. Standardisation will not only help to avoid any duplication in the provision of information and knowledge, but will also enable visitors to receive information and knowledge of interest on any area in the country in a consistent way throughout their travel. It will also ensure that VICs have visible signage and are branded in the same way. **Visible signage and standardised branding** will help VICs to be easily identifiable and distinguish from other information centres, such as libraries, including differentiating the information and services they provide. Associating VICs with a particular sign and brand will help users to know what to expect, and assure them of the credibility of the information and services they might expect across VICs.

Collaboration among VICs will expose visitors to products that are likely to enhance their experiences not only of the visited area, but also of the broader region (Draper, 2018). It is therefore important that the Department of Tourism develop guidelines to direct the standardisation of information and knowledge provision across VICs. An implementation plan with specific activities to be undertaken should be developed as part of operationalising the guidelines. In addition, a monitoring and evaluation plan needs to be developed to track and assess the implementation and achievement of actions, as well as any changes that need to be considered. The department should convene workshops and discussion sessions to capacitate VICs on the standardisation guidelines. The sessions should also aim to encourage networking and the exchange of ideas, information, knowledge, and best practices among the staff of different VICs. An incentive scheme with benefits for participating VICs could be introduced to encourage participation in the standardisation of information and

knowledge provision. It is important that the implementation of the guidelines is not be viewed as a top-down and static directive, but as a consultative process that allows VICs to engage the department on ideas and suggestions that are relevant to their working environments. As a result, the guidelines should be generic and be customised to each VIC's operational environment.

9.5 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Beyond the theoretical and practical contributions, the study has offered several managerial implications and recommendations on the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs. With the increasing need for public utilities to be relevant and to contribute to government's wider plan of improving the lives of people in the vicinity of areas in which they operate, creating socio-economic opportunities is important to guaranteeing their survival and receiving continued government support. For VICs, enhancing visitors' memorable experiences and facilitating their behavioural intentions, and creating socio-economic opportunities for local businesses and surrounding communities are important contributions that they should make to remain relevant in meeting the needs of their stakeholders and developing local economies. To achieve this, the study suggests the areas discussed below for management's consideration.

a) Stakeholder engagement

Findings show that while staff maintained regular engagement with local tourism businesses and institutions of learning, their engagement with surrounding communities was limited. This is an area which require staff's consideration to make VIC relevant to communities in their surroundings. Even though staff maintained regular engagement with local tourism businesses and institutions of learning, they identified areas that require improvements. Suggestions to improve engagement with each stakeholder are discussed below:

- **Engagement with surrounding communities:** Staff should work with various community structures and different stakeholders to source local knowledge that

should be passed on to visitors in order to provide them with authentic and memorable experiences in visited areas. They should embark on outreach and awareness programmes on the functions of VICs and on how surrounding communities could benefit from VIC activities and from the tourism sector in general. This is necessary to position VICs as relevant public utilities that contribute to government's wider plan of improving the lives of people and growing the economy of areas in which they are located. They should also procure goods and services from surrounding communities, and give preference to businesses owned by disadvantaged groups such as the youth, women, and people living with disabilities. Staff should therefore develop and implement a procurement plan that emphasises the preferential use of businesses owned by these disadvantaged groups. This would create new market opportunities to support the development and empowerment of disadvantaged groups.

- **Local tourism businesses:** Staff should encourage networking and linkages among businesses during meetings and workshops they have with local businesses. These linkages should be between small and established businesses and those in similar or different sub-sectors. As most of the businesses with which staff exchange information are in the accommodation sub-sector, together with the marketing units of tourism marketing agencies, staff may improve their recruitment strategies to get businesses in other tourism sub-sectors, such as attractions, food and beverages, and transport services, listed in their databases.
- **Institutions of learning:** Staff should enter into formal memoranda of agreement (MoAs) with institutions of learning to guide the exchange of information and knowledge in a coordinated and organised way. The MoAs should clarify roles and responsibilities, and how learners and students might access relevant information to meet their educational needs.

b) Technological advancement

The results of the survey of local tourism businesses, as well as the findings of the interviews with staff and the focus group discussions with surrounding communities, pointed to the limited availability of electronic and online information sources in the VICs that participated in the study. They still rely on printed and face-to face sources of information, and do not have their own websites, but use those of their tourism marketing agencies. However, stakeholders identified sources such as social media, mobile apps, and electronic brochures as sources from which they preferred to receive information from VICs. In order to meet the needs of stakeholders and to take advantage of the opportunities presented by these technologies, it is recommended that staff undertake the following:

- Invest and incorporate modern technologies such as social media, smart technologies, artificial intelligence, web technologies, and mobile applications, to provide visitors with travel suggestions based on their needs. These technologies should be integrated in such a way that they are target-specific, including differentiating between younger and older visitors or potential, first time and repeat visitors. For example, staff may use modern technologies to provide younger visitors with information on upcoming local concerts and live entertainment. This is important, as visitors' and stakeholders' needs are many and varied. In addition, visitor expectations, needs, and search behaviours also change, and are reshaped during the different stages of travel.
- Provide free Wi-Fi as a way to increase the accessibility of VIC information by enabling visitors to use their personal mobile devices to gain access to this information.
- Use both traditional (e.g., brochures, local newspapers, community radio) and online sources in a complementary way to add value and to enhance the quality and depth of the information available to visitors. Although traditional sources may be seen to be outdated, they are considered relevant to reach rural communities in local languages, especially in countries such as South Africa,

where rural communities often lag behind in socio-economic development owing to the imbalances created by apartheid policies.

- Review the current model of VIC operation that provides information mostly through brochures, as the availability of modern technologies might not only increase VIC visits and usage, but might also present convenient opportunities for visitors to receive and share real-time information anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, leveraging modern technologies will keep VICs relevant and competitive in meeting the changing needs of visitors and VIC users, particularly for VICs located in rural municipalities that often lag behind in infrastructure development. However, it is important to regularly upgrade and maintain the technologies in use.
- Use computerised information and knowledge systems to record, store, analyse, and retrieve information and knowledge assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and staff expertise and experience. An information and knowledge system will enable the exchange of information, knowledge and experiences among staff internally in VICs, and between staff and external stakeholder. The capabilities that the system has, including its content, perceived ease of use, and usefulness, render it a valuable system to manage and exchange information (Ngirigacha *et al.*, 2019). It has advantages such as faster data processing and information retrieval, improved data accuracy, improved security of information, reduced data losses and duplication, an improved backup system, easy access to information, and reduced managerial and human costs (Laudon & Laudon, 2015; Ngirigacha *et al.*, 2019; Opoku & Enu-Kwesi, 2017).

c) Staff training

Community members and staff alike emphasised the importance of training to equip VIC staff with the skills and knowledge needed in providing information and knowledge. To do this, staff should undertake the following:

- Attend regular training, formal and informal, in order to increase their knowledge of current issues in information and knowledge provision and to remain relevant and up-to-date in a fast-changing and technology-driven era. The training should enable staff to cope and meet the ever-changing visitor and stakeholder needs brought about by advances in online platforms, mobile devices, and smart technologies.
- Engage in regular staff exchange programmes with other VICs to enhance a continuous peer exchange of information, knowledge, learning, best practices, and skills, and to collaborate on joint activities such as hosting events.
- Conduct regular surveys and use the intelligence gathered to understand and respond to stakeholders' needs. Such evaluations would help them to re-evaluate their information and knowledge provision plans and interventions so that they could develop actions and programmes to improve their performance. For local businesses and surrounding communities, staff could use the intelligence gathered from surveys to conduct intervention workshops or to collaborate with educational institutions in offering educational programmes that are tailor-made to meet their needs.
- Information from surveys is also important in contributing to understanding the overall performance of VICs in a province and that of the province's tourism performance generally. However, the findings of this report revealed that VICs use different variables and formats to compile reports that contribute to the overall provincial tourism performance reports. While some VICs collect socio-demographic information related to age, gender, country of origin, educational level, employment status and occupation, and purpose of visit, others record visitors' travel characteristics such as country of origin, travel companion, length of stay, accommodation used during stay, daily expenditure, and trip-planning information sources. Still others only record the number of visitors during a particular period, whether daily, weekly, or monthly. Some use the visitors' book, while others have developed a form/questionnaire to capture information on visitor statistics and VIC visits. These variations reveal a lack of standardisation in recording and reporting on VIC visits.

It is evident that concerted efforts are required at a provincial level to agree on relevant visitor indicators that could be used to measure tourism performance in a standardised way. This would require a commitment by the different stakeholders involved in visitor services, such as destination marketing agencies, local and provincial marketing agencies, and VICs. The Department of Tourism at a national level should play a leading role in guiding the relevant indicators to be used in measuring tourism performance at a provincial and a local level, and to be aligned to the National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS: 2016-2026, 2017).

d) Sharing good practices

The findings showed that most VICs experience a shortage of human, financial, and technological resources. The challenges seem to be severe in VICs that are located in rural municipalities. The staff of these VICs are often the only staff member, performing managerial functions and providing front-desk information. The VICs are also the only facilities providing information; thus staff provide not only tourism information, but also general and non-tourism related information to anyone using the VIC. These challenges are often less severe in VICs located in urban municipalities, particularly those in metropolitan areas. Those in urban areas have improved infrastructure. For example, Cape Town Tourism operates mobile VICs to provide visitors and local citizens with real-time access to information on local tourism products, and booking and ticketing services wherever they are in the city. The mobile VICs also provide access to free Wi-Fi in their immediate vicinity (refer to section 4.10.3). The challenge that VICs in urban municipalities often experience relates to upgrading and maintaining technologies (e.g., electronic information touch screens, computers, printers). The disparities between VICs point to the importance of sharing good practices across VICs. It is therefore important that the Department of Tourism coordinate platforms, such as best practice workshops, to enable the sharing of information and knowledge. Such platforms are necessary to provide support, learning, and good practice, and to show how those in rural areas could be developed and resourced in order to raise the standard of living and create socio-economic opportunities for communities in their surroundings, thereby contributing to the improvement of local economies.

9.6 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

While a mixed methods research design was adopted in this study to overcome the respective deficiencies of the quantitative or qualitative methods by combining and thus capitalising on the individual strengths of the two methods, some limitations were noted that point to opportunities and recommendations for future research.

9.6.1 Access to VICs

During the process of negotiating entry to VICs, the researcher could not reach some of them, as email communications bounced back as undelivered, indicating that some email addresses in the database no longer existed or were captured incorrectly. Following an extended period spent to obtain the participation of at least one VIC in the Western Cape Province, the Malmesbury VIC expressed its willingness to take part in the study. Although staff members were willing to participate in the study, it was difficult to recruit local tourism businesses or community members in the vicinity of the VIC. A similar challenge was experienced with a VIC in George, despite concerted efforts to solicit the participation of local tourism businesses or community members. Given these challenges, only one VIC in the Western Cape participated in the study, whereas in other provinces, at least two businesses took part in the study.

9.6.2 Lack of a sampling frame

Not all VICs keep a record of visits. In some VICs, staff were reluctant to provide lists of visitor contact details, raising ethical issues related to the lack of visitors' consent to share their details with third parties. In the end, only four VICs submitted visitor lists. However, these lists showed differences in the variables that VICs use to report visits, with some reporting demographic information related to age, gender, country of origin, and purpose of visit, while others only recorded the number of visitors during a particular period, whether daily, weekly, or monthly. These variations revealed a lack of standardisation in recording and reporting VIC visits. For local tourism businesses, it was not feasible to compile a sampling frame from which to select a representative sample of local tourism businesses due to several challenges. Some VIC staff raised

concerns about providing the contact details of their stakeholders to third parties, others asked to engage directly with local tourism businesses listed in their databases.

As a result, the researcher had to use non-probability purposive and convenience sampling techniques and rely on VIC staff to encourage willing and available visitors and local tourism businesses to participate in the study. The main limitations of these techniques are that results cannot be generalised, and they are prone to bias and subjective judgement. The lack of a sampling frame or contact details of visitors and local tourism businesses also affected the response rate for the online survey, as the researcher could not follow up or send reminders to encourage participation.

Owing to this low response rate, ethical clearance was sought to use traditional access methods to complement the Internet-mediated access and to encourage visitor participation. Paper-based questionnaires were posted and left at each of the 18 participating VICs for visitors to complete manually. VIC staff were also requested to invite tourism businesses listed in their databases to complete the survey in a hard copy and email it back to the researcher. The traditional access methods were useful in addressing some of the limitations associated with Internet-mediated access, such as excluding those without Internet access. In addition, the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of Pretoria granted approval to use an incentive to encourage participation. However, most visitors did not participate in the draw, and the intention to use an incentive was discarded. The low response rate was also experienced with the paper-based questionnaires, and may have been affected by other factors such as respondents disregarding the emails, the survey being sent out during periods that respondents regarded as inappropriate (such as after hours), and language barriers, especially for international visitors.

SPSS was used to analyse the quantitative data descriptively and inferentially. Statistical analysis techniques such as frequency counts, descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analyses, reliability analyses, correlation analyses, and regression analyses were performed to test the study's hypotheses empirically. Although nonparametric tests (Mann Whitney) could be run, as the sample sizes of the groups is largely unequal (118 paper based vs 34 online questionnaires), the **power is lower**

compared to a test with the same total sample size but equal group sizes. It was decided that the effect would be negligible and therefore not impact the overall findings.

Owing to the small sample sizes for visitors (n=152) and local tourism businesses (n=75), structural equation modelling, which allows for causal mechanisms and simultaneous analysis of all the variables in the model, could not be used to determine the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. With the number of paths involved, Partial-Least-Square modelling (PLS) was also not performed as it would result in statistically power that would be unacceptably low; well below the threshold of .8 for the .05 significance level. The study therefore employed regression analysis techniques to indicate the strength and direction of the relationship and the tendency that an increase in the unit of an independent variable will lead to an increase/decrease in the dependent variable.

9.6.3 Reliance on third parties to recruit respondents

Relying on VIC staff to distribute paper-based questionnaires presented challenges that were beyond the researcher's control, such as knowing whether the questionnaires were actually placed in the VICs or distributed to local tourism businesses, how many were distributed, and the reasons for non-participation. For the qualitative component, the researcher relied on community members who were familiar with their local areas to invite potential participants to the focus group discussions. Such reliance introduces bias and subjective judgement. As a result, care was taken to ensure that the VICs and the recruitment assistants were fully briefed about the study in order to ensure that relevant respondents were included in the study.

9.6.4 Limited resources

The resources available to the researcher, both human and financial, had an impact on what she could realistically do and achieve in the study. The researcher single-handedly conducted the study with no research assistant. This involved travelling

across the country and personally visiting all 18 VICs spread across the nine provinces, and conducting face-to-face interviews with VIC staff members and moderating the focus group discussions. In addition, the researcher personally had to capture all the data elicited from the 152 visitor surveys and 75 local tourism businesses surveys in Microsoft Excel, as well as personally transcribe all 28 interviews and seven focus group discussions.

Despite the limitations highlighted in this section, the study has provided some valuable insights, and has laid the foundation for future studies.

9.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has contributed new knowledge on the exchange of tourism information and knowledge in VICS. These insights, as well as the study's limitations, could inspire and inform an agenda for further research. The proposed framework of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs covers a wide range of research themes that could serve as a reference point for further studies on VICs and, more importantly, on information and knowledge exchange in similar settings to VICs. Each of the four parts of the framework, with new insights, could be further explored individually and in-depth using larger samples.

An important research gap identified in the study relates to the standardisation of information and knowledge provision across VICs. To address this gap, future research should examine the exchange of information and knowledge that takes place across VICs and the efforts that VICs undertake to standardise information and knowledge provision across visitors' journey. The results of the current study have shown that information and knowledge exchange in the VIC environment is undertaken in an uncoordinated way, without a framework to guide the standardisation of this phenomenon. This challenge is also emphasised in the national framework for VICs in South Africa (Department of Tourism, 2011a), which identifies the standardisation of tourism information provision as one of the key features for the continued growth of the tourism sector and for changing the lives of all South Africans.

Unlike the current study, which has focused on information and knowledge exchange inside VICs, future research should be outward-looking and examine this phenomenon across VICs with a view to developing a framework to guide the standardisation of information and knowledge exchange across VICs. In addition to the constructs examined in the study, such as information and knowledge exchange and the sources used to exchange information and knowledge, future research should include other stakeholders that exchange information and knowledge with VICs, such as those that did not participate in this study. The results of the current study have shown that other stakeholders, such as local businesses that are not considered primary in the tourism sector (e.g., pharmacies), institutions of learning, local and community tourism organisations, brochure management agencies, and law enforcement agencies, which are critical in addressing visitor safety, also exchange information and knowledge with VICs. Standardisation, including signage and branding, is an important future research avenue to encourage the provision and exchange of information and knowledge consistently across VICs.

Other areas recommended for future research are as follows:

- The current study focused on government-funded VICs and their exchange of information and knowledge. The results showed that the exchange of information, mainly in the form of brochures, takes place between publicly and privately owned VICs. Future research is therefore recommended to focus on the exchange of information and knowledge in and between other types of VIC, such as privately owned VICs and government-funded VICs that offer a membership programme to local businesses. The research should examine how these VICs exchange information, knowledge, and other resources with stakeholders, as well as the opportunities generated by such exchanges. The results could provide valuable lessons and best practice solutions for other VICs.
- The current study focused on the role that VICs play in the provision of information and knowledge during trip planning and while visitors are at their destinations. The findings revealed that the information and knowledge that staff provide to visitors might influence their future behaviours. In turn, visitors might

share this information and knowledge with friends and relatives after the trip, and thus encourage them to visit the destinations they had visited. This reflects the role that VICs could also play after the trip. This is a research gap worth investigating. Specifically, VICs could follow up with their users and examine the information and knowledge they shared after the trip, and with whom they shared it. Such research would be important to providing VICs and their tourism marketing agencies with market intelligence on potential visitors they could target to encourage visits to destinations.

- The group dynamics that might have been influenced by the different roles that community members play in their communities were not examined during focus group discussions. This is a critical element worth examining in future research, to assess power relations within the communities and whether some participants used their status in the community to dominate the discussions. Such dynamics might explain who and more importantly, how, VICs should reach out to enable the most effective engagement with the stakeholders, particularly surrounding communities.

The suggested areas above show that future research is needed to provide insights into VICs in order to increase their usage and to keep them relevant and competitive while meeting the needs of their stakeholders. While many questions still require attention, the researcher hopes that this study has provided some useful recommendations that could stimulate and encourage further research avenues in the area of tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

9.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate how the research objectives were achieved. The contribution that the study has made, theoretically and practically, its limitations, and suggestions for future research, were also discussed. More importantly, the study proposed a framework to guide tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

The findings have revealed that there is an exchange of different types of information between VIC staff and different stakeholders, including local tourism businesses, institutions of learning, surrounding communities, and neighbouring VICs. However, there is a limited exchange of local knowledge with all stakeholders. Although this exchange is undertaken on an ad-hoc basis and in an uncoordinated way, several socio-economic opportunities accrued to local tourism businesses and surrounding communities. However, several VIC information-related factors enabled the attainment of socio-economic opportunities for stakeholders. These factors mainly included the provision of extensive and useful information and knowledge by competent and knowledgeable staff, and the use of electronic and online information sources. Through the exchange of information and knowledge in VICs, visitors were provided with memorable experiences. Travel behaviour characteristics relating to the increased length of stay at destinations and VICs' information-related factors (such as extensive information, quality information, information sources, extensive and useful trip planning information, and information sources and staff knowledge) were some of the factors that enhanced memorable tourism experiences. Also, visitors' travel behaviour characteristics relating to an increased length of stay at destinations and VICs' information-related factors (such as information sources and staff knowledge) facilitated visitors' behavioural intentions. These findings therefore have provided evidence that VICs still have a place and role in the dissemination of tourism information and knowledge. To be effective and to remain relevant and competitive, VICs should find ways to invest in and harness the opportunities presented by the emerging electronic, online, mobile, and smart technologies. In this way, they would add value to their services, and enhance the quality and depth of the information and knowledge available to stakeholders. These new insights led to the development of a framework to guide tourism information and knowledge exchange in VICs.

Embedded within the wider information and knowledge exchange field, this research not only addressed a number of research gaps and contributed to the body of knowledge, but also provided the knowledge foundation and suggested research avenues to enable VICs to remain relevant and competitive and to meet the needs of their users and stakeholders. Given that this was the first study to examine tourism information and knowledge exchange in South African VICs, the resulting framework has sought to position the role that VICs could play beyond the mere provision of

information and knowledge to visitors, but to become multifunctional centres that respond to and address the needs of different stakeholders in their vicinity. On this basis, the framework is important in guiding the provision of tourism information and knowledge to enhance memorable visitor experiences in a standardised and consistent way throughout visitors' journeys and to influence visitors' behavioural intentions. Moreover, the framework is important in helping VICs to extend and play their role in community beneficiation by contributing to improving the lives of communities in their surroundings, thereby boosting the economy of local areas. These VIC roles establish a case for their continued operation and funding.

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APPENDIX A: Ethical clearance



Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Tel: +27 12 420 3395

E-mail: ronel.rensburg@up.ac.za

2 December 2016

Strictly confidential

Prof FA Fairer-Wessels
Tourism Management Division

Dear Professor Fairer-Wessels

Project: Tourism information and knowledge exchange in visitor information centres
Researcher: KRU Tlabela
Student No: 29624917
Supervisor: Prof FA Fairer-Wessels
Co-supervisor: Dr A Douglas
Department: Tourism Management

Thank you for the application you submitted to the Committee for Research Ethics, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. I have pleasure in informing you that the Committee formally approved the above study on an *ad hoc* basis on 2 December 2016. The approval is subject to the candidate abiding by the principles and parameters set out in the application and research proposal in the actual execution of the research.

The approval does not imply that the researcher, student or lecturer is relieved of any accountability in terms of the Codes of Research Ethics of the University of Pretoria if action is taken beyond the approved proposal.

The Committee requests that you convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ronel Rensburg'.

pp PROF RS RENSBURG
CHAIR: COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH ETHICS

Fakulteit Ekonomiese en Bestuurswetenskappe
Lefapha la Disaense tša Ekonomi le Taolo

APPENDIX B: Permission letter from the Department of Tourism



tourism
Department:
Tourism
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X 424, PRETORIA 0001, Tourism House, 17 Trevenna Street, Sunnyside, PRETORIA, 0002
Tel: (+27 12) 444 6000, Fax: (+27 12) 444 7000, Call Centre: +27 (0) 86 012 1929, Website: www.tourism.gov.za

The Ethics Committee
University of Pretoria
Pretoria
0002

Dear Sir/Madam

Ms Kholadi Ramadimetja Uriel Tlabela will undertake research on the topic "Tourism Information and Knowledge Exchange in Visitor Information Centres (VICs) under the guidance of Prof Felicité Fairer-Wessels and Dr Anneli Douglas of the Division: Tourism Management, University of Pretoria.

As the VICs fall under the auspice of the Department of Tourism, permission is hereby granted to allow Ms Tlabela to undertake research at selected VICs. The research will be conducted amongst visitors to the VICs, and local tourism business operators and communities in the surrounding of VICs that will participate in the research and under conditions agreed upon by the Department of Tourism. The research will be undertaken during the period December 2016 to February 2017. Research findings will be shared with the Department and Departmental sources must be appropriately referenced.

Yours sincerely

Ms Shamilla Chettiar
Deputy Director General: Policy and Knowledge services
Date 16/11/16

APPENDIX C: Questionnaire for visitors



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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Denkleiers • Leading Minds • Dikgopolo tša Dihlalefi

TOURISM INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES (VICs)

FOR OFFICE ONLY: QUESTIONNAIRE NUMBER

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE: VIC VISITORS

This research is undertaken for academic purpose as part of the requirements for the completion of a PHD in Tourism Management at the University of Pretoria. The main purpose of this study is to examine how tourism information and knowledge exchange within VICs can create memorable visitor experience and generate sustainable socio-economic benefits and opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism business operators. The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request. In this study, information provision relates to general information available in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc) while knowledge refers to specific information that is not in written format but based on experiences, involvement and understanding of the local environment.

This is an anonymous survey as your name will not appear on the questionnaire. The answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential as you cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give. This survey will take about **20 minutes** to complete. Please circle the number in the block that you wish to select as your response to the question asked or write your responses in the spaces provided.

All enquiries regarding this research and questionnaire may be addressed to:

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Name of VIC visited	
Date of completing questionnaire	

SECTION 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1.1. What is your country of residence? _____

1.2. If South African, in which province do you reside?

Eastern Cape	1	Gauteng	2	Limpopo	3	North West	4	Western Cape	5
Free State	6	KwaZulu-Natal	7	Mpumalanga	8	Northern Cape	9		

1.3. What is your gender? Male [1] Female [2]

1.4. What is your age? _____

1.5. What is your race group?

Black	1	Coloured	2	Indian	3	White	4	Other (specify)	5

1.6. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

No schooling	1	Primary education	2	Some high school education	3	Grade 12/Standard 10/Matric	4
Diploma/Certificate after Grade 12	5	Bachelor's Degree	6	Postgraduate Degree (e.g. Honours, Masters, PhD)	7	Other (specify)	8

1.7. What is your employment status?

Employed	1	Unemployed	2	Self- employed	3	Full time student pupil/learner at school	4
Full time student at college/university	5	Pensioner	6	Other (specify)	7		

1.8. What is your current monthly income?

Less than R10000	1	R10001-R20000	2	R20001-R30000	3	R30001-R40000	4
R40001-R50000	5	R50001-R60000	6	R60001-R70000	7	R70001-R80000	8
						More than R80 000	9

SECTION 2: INFORMATION PROVIDED TO VISITORS AT VIC (i.e. *general information available in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc*)

2.1. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement below regarding your purpose to visit the VIC? (1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5=Strongly Agree)

My purpose to visit the VIC was to:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Find general information about the local area.	1	2	3	4	5
Find specific information about tourist facilities in the local area (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, events, tours, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
Use business services (e.g. fax, photocopy, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Use facilities (restrooms, water fountains, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Use the internet	1	2	3	4	5
Make/pay for bookings	1	2	3	4	5
Find refreshments	1	2	3	4	5
Purchase merchandise/souvenirs	1	2	3	4	5
Take a break from travelling	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5

2.2. Did you search for information about the local area while at this VIC? Yes [1] No [2] (Go to Q2.4)

2.3. Please rate the level of information search you engaged in at the VIC with regard to: (a) *extensiveness of information search* and (b) *usefulness of this information*

Information search on the following types of information	Extensiveness of information search					Usefulness of information				
	Not extensive at all	Not extensive	Never	Extensive	Very extensive	Not at all useful	Not useful	Neutral	Useful	Very useful
Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, tours, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Safety information (road conditions, water and petrol services, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Emergency numbers (police, hospital, ambulance, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Travel booking and reservations (excursions, events, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

2.4. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

I would like to receive information on the following from the VIC:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, tours, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Safety information (road conditions, water and petrol services, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Emergency numbers (police, hospital, ambulance, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Travel booking and reservations (excursions, events, etc)	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5

2.5. Please rate your usage of the following information sources at the VIC with regard to: (a) *extensiveness of using information source* and (b) *usefulness of information source*

information source	Extensiveness of information source usage					Usefulness of information source				
	Not extensive at all	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive	Very extensive	Not at all useful	Not useful	Neutral	Useful	Very useful
Personal face-to-face contact	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Electronic touch screens	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Internet (VIC website)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/YouTube/Twitter)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Mobile Applications (Booking.com, SafarNow, TravelGround, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Printed brochure/pamphlet/maps	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Audi-visual presentations (video/film/movie)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor notice boards	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

2.6. To what extent do you agree that the following are ways in which you prefer to receive useful information while at the VIC?

I prefer to receive information through:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Personal face-to-face contact	1	2	3	4	5
Electronic touch screens	1	2	3	4	5
Internet (VIC website)	1	2	3	4	5
Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/YouTube/Twitter)	1	2	3	4	5
Mobile Applications (Booking.com, SafarNow, TravelGround, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Printed brochure/pamphlet/maps	1	2	3	4	5
Audi-visual presentations (video/film/movie)	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor notice boards	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 3: VISITOR EXPERIENCE AT THE VIC

3.1. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your experience of information provision at the VIC? (1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5=Strongly Agree).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Information provision					
The VIC provided me with general information about the local area	1	2	3	4	5
The VIC provided me with specific information about the local area tourist facilities (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, events, tours, etc).	1	2	3	4	5
Information in this VIC is easily accessible	1	2	3	4	5
Information quality					
Information provided in this VIC is clear in meaning	1	2	3	4	5
Information provided in this VIC is easy to comprehend	1	2	3	4	5
Information provided in this VIC is easy to read	1	2	3	4	5
Information resources					
The content of printed brochures/pamphlets in this VIC is relevant	1	2	3	4	5
Audio-visual presentations (video/film/movie) are available to provide destination information	1	2	3	4	5
A visitor notice board is available to provide destination information	1	2	3	4	5
Information and Communication Technologies					
The VIC has computers I could use to search for local information	1	2	3	4	5

Internet is available to search for local information (e.g. 3G and 4G signals)	1	2	3	4	5
The internet in this VIC is reliable (e.g. 3G and 4G signals)	1	2	3	4	5
There is free Wi-Fi in this VIC	1	2	3	4	5
Electronic touch screens are available to provide information about the local area	1	2	3	4	5
Staff knowledge					
Staff provided me with specific and in-depth knowledge of the local area	1	2	3	4	5
Staff in this VIC have knowledge about local attractions	1	2	3	4	5
Staff in this VIC are competent	1	2	3	4	5
VIC staff provided me with knowledge to make decisions about things to do in this area	1	2	3	4	5
Staff's knowledge of the local area will help me to visit diverse tourism facilities in the local area	1	2	3	4	5
Customer service					
Customer service in this VIC is excellent	1	2	3	4	5
Staff understood my information needs	1	2	3	4	5
Staff paid attention to my queries	1	2	3	4	5
My interaction with staff was face-to-face	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with my experience at the VIC	1	2	3	4	5
Behavioural intentions					
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to return to this destination	1	2	3	4	5
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to return to this VIC in future	1	2	3	4	5
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to visit more places in the destination	1	2	3	4	5
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to spend more money at this destination	1	2	3	4	5
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to extend my length of stay at this destination	1	2	3	4	5
The information I received from the VIC might encourage me to recommend the destination to family and friends	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 4: TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

4.1. What is the main purpose of your trip to this area?

Holiday	1	Business	2	Visit Friends and Relatives	3	Religious	4	Other (specify)	5

4.2. Who did you travel with to this area?

Alone	1	Friends	2	Partner/spouse (without children)	3	Partner/spouse (with children)	4	Co-workers	5
Organised group (e.g. school, sporting)					6	Other (specify)			7

4.3. How many people travelled with you to this area?

Alone	1	One person	2	Two people	3	Three people	4	Four people	5	More than four people	6

4.4. What is the main type of transport that you used to travel to this area?

Aircraft	1	Bus	2	Motorcycle	3	Car	4	Taxi	5	Train	6	Other (specify)	7

4.5. Is this the only area that you will be visiting during this trip? Yes [1] (Go to Q2.7) No [2

4.6. If Not, which other areas will you visit during this trip? _____

4.7. How long do you plan to stay in this area?

Day visit	1	One night	2	2-4 nights	3	5-7 nights	4	8-10 nights	5	More than 10 nights	6

4.8. What type of accommodation are you using in this area?

Hotel	1	Guest house/ Bed and Breakfast	2	Self-catering	3	I will be staying with Friends/Relatives	4	Other specify	5

4.9. Have you visited this area before? Yes [1] No [2] (Go to Q2.13)

4.10. How many times have you visited this area in the past?

Once	1	2-3 times	2	4-5 times	3	More than 5 times	4	Other (specify)	5

4.11. Did you visit this VIC to search for information during your previous visit to this area?

Yes [1] No [2] (Go to Q2.13)

4.12. To what extent do you agree with the following? (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree and 5=Strongly Agree).

The information I received from the VIC during my previous visit encouraged me to:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Return to this area	1	2	3	4	5
Return to this VIC	1	2	3	4	5
Recommend the area to friends/relatives	1	2	3	4	5
Visit more places during my previous visit	1	2	3	4	5
Visit more places during this visit	1	2	3	4	5
Spend more money during my previous visit	1	2	3	4	5
Spend more money during this visit	1	2	3	4	5

4.13. Do you use a VIC whenever you visit an area?

Never	1	Rarely	2	Sometimes	3	Often	4	Always	5

4.14. How important is obtaining information from a VIC to you whenever you travel?

Not important at all	1	Unimportant	2	Neutral	3	Important	4	Very important	5

SECTION 5: DECISION MAKING AND PRE-TRIP PLANNING

5.1. How much time did you spend to plan your visit to this area?

Less than a week	1	One week	2	Two weeks	3	Three weeks	4	A month	5	More than a month	6

5.2. Please rate the level of information search you engaged in to plan your trip to this area with regard to: (a) *extensiveness of information search*, (b) *frequency of information search* and (c) *usefulness of this information searched*.

Information search on the following types of information	Extensiveness of information search					Frequency of information search					Usefulness of information searched				
	Not extensive at all	Not that extensive	Neutral	Extensive	Very extensive	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Useless	Not that useful	Neutral	Useful	Very useful
Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, tours, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Safety information (road conditions, water and petrol services, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Emergency numbers (police, hospital, ambulance, etc.)															
Travel booking and reservations (excursions, events, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

5.3. Please rate your usage of the following information sources to plan your trip **to this area** with regard to: (a) *extensiveness of using the information source* (b) *frequency of using the information source* and (c) *usefulness of the information source*

information source	Extensiveness of using information source					Frequency of information source					Usefulness of information source				
	Not extensive at all	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive	Very extensive	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Not useful at all	Not useful	Neutral	Useful	Very useful
Word of Mouth (family /friends)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Telephone call															
Internet (Websites of tourism establishments)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge from previous experience	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor Information Centre	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/YouTube/Twitter)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Mobile Applications (Booking.com, SafarNow, TravelGround, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Local residents of the area	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Travel agent/Tour operator	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Tourist guidebooks/brochures	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Magazines/Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Television/radio	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (Specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 6: MEMORABLE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

6.1. Have you visited any attractions in this area during this trip? Yes [1] No [2] (Go to Q6.4)

6.2. How many attractions did you visit in this area during this trip? _____

6.3. To what level do you agree that the following aspects were part of your experience during your visit to the area (1 = *not at all* and 5 = *very much*). (1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5=Strongly Agree).

During my visit to this area I:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Hedonism					
Experienced something new	1	2	3	4	5

Participated in special activities	1	2	3	4	5
Enjoyed every moment	1	2	3	4	5
Experienced high levels of excitement	1	2	3	4	5
Novelty					
Had a once-in-a lifetime experience	1	2	3	4	5
Had a unique experience	1	2	3	4	5
Had a totally different experience from previous ones	1	2	3	4	5
Had a new experience	1	2	3	4	5
Local culture					
Had a good impressions about the local people	1	2	3	4	5
Had close encounters with the local culture	1	2	3	4	5
Met friendly local people	1	2	3	4	5
Met local people who might be willing to help me	1	2	3	4	5
Met local people who might be willing to share information about the place	1	2	3	4	5
Refreshment					
Felt a sense of freedom	1	2	3	4	5
Felt revitalised	1	2	3	4	5
Meaningfulness					
Had meaningful experience	1	2	3	4	5
Accomplished my goal	1	2	3	4	5
Discovered new things about myself	1	2	3	4	5
Involvement					
Participated in activities which I really wanted to do	1	2	3	4	5
Got involved in activities of great interest to me	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge					
Explored new things	1	2	3	4	5
Gained new knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
Learnt new cultures	1	2	3	4	5

- 6.4. What do you think can be done to improve the provision of information at this VIC? (i.e. *provision of general information available in written format*).
- 6.5. What do you think can be done to improve the provision of knowledge at this VIC? (i.e. *provision of specific information that is not in written format but based on experiences, involvement and understanding of **the local environment***).

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX D: Questionnaire for local tourism businesses



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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Denkleiers • Leading Minds • Dikgopolo tša Dihlalefi

TOURISM INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

INTERVIEW GUIDE: TOURISM BUSINESS OPERATOR

This research is undertaken for academic purpose as part of the requirements for the completion of a PHD in Tourism Management at the University of Pretoria. The main purpose of this study is to examine how tourism information and knowledge exchange within VICs can create memorable visitor experience and generate sustainable socio-economic benefits and opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism business operators. The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request. In this study, information provision relates to general information available in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc.) while knowledge refers to specific information that is not in written format but based on VIC staff's experiences, involvement and understanding of the local environment.

This is an anonymous interview as your name will not appear on the questionnaire. The answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential as you cannot be identified in person, based on the answers you give. This interview guide will take about **20 minutes** to complete. Please circle the number in the block that you wish to select as your response to the question asked or write your responses in the spaces provided.

Please feel free to either:

- **complete the questionnaire online at**
https://pretoria.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPjvVMYeA4A6bMV
- **complete the questionnaire and email it back to ktlabela@tourism.gov.za or khuli.tlabela@gmail.com**

All enquiries regarding this research and questionnaire may be addressed to:

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Name of VIC visited	
Date of completing questionnaire	

PART 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1.1. What is your gender? Male [1] Female [2]

1.2. What is your age? _____

1.3. What is your population group?

Black	1	Coloured	2	Indian	3	White	4	Other (specify)	5

1.4. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

No schooling	1	Primary education	2	Some high school education	3	Grade 12/Standard 10/Matric	4
Diploma/Certificate after Grade 12	5	Bachelor's Degree	6	Postgraduate Degree (e.g. Honours, Masters, PhD)	7	Other (specify)	8

1.5. In which tourism subsector do you classify your business? (you can tick more than one option)

Accommodation	1	Business Tourism/MICE	2	Food & Beverage	3	Tour Operator	4
Tourist Guiding	5	Transport Services	6	Other (specify)	7		

1.6. What is your position in the business? _____

PART 2: VISITATION TO THE VIC

2.1. Are you aware of a VIC in this area? Yes [1] No [2]

2.2. Have you visited the VIC in the area before? Yes [1] No [2]

PART 3: INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE VIC TO THE LOCAL TOURISM BUSINESS OPERATOR (i.e. information provided in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc.)

3.1. Has your business received any information from the VIC?

Yes [1]

No [2]

3.2. Please rate the type of information you received from the VIC with regard to: (a). how extensive the information was (b). frequency of receiving the information and (c) usefulness of this information for your business?

Information from VIC	Extensiveness of information received					Frequency of receiving information					Usefulness of the information received for my business				
	Not extensive at all	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive	Very extensive	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Not at all useful	Not useful	Neutral	Useful	Very useful
Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, events, tours, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

Information from VIC	Extensiveness of information received					Frequency of receiving information					Usefulness of the information received for my business				
	Not extensive at all	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive	Very extensive	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Not at all useful	Not useful	Neutral	Useful	Very useful
Business services (e.g. fax, photocopy, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Operations of the VIC (opening and closing times, functions of the VIC, etc.)							1	2	3	4	5	1	3	4	5
Visitor statistics (profiles/travel patterns)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Bookings/Reservation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Business funding opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Business training courses	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

3. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

I would like to receive information on the following from the VIC:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, events, tours, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Business services (e.g. fax, photocopy, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Operations of the VIC (opening and closing times, functions of the VIC, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor statistics (profiles/travel patterns)	1	2	3	4	5
Bookings/Reservation	1	2	3	4	5
Business funding opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Business training courses	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5

3.4. Please rate the following sources used by the VIC to provide information to your business with regard to: (a) usefulness of the information source and (b) satisfaction with the information source

information source	Usefulness of information source					Satisfaction with the information source				
	Not useful at all	Not useful	Neutral	Useful	Very useful	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Personal face-to-face contact	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Telephone calls	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Electronic touch screens for visitors	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Internet (VIC website)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/YouTube/Twitter)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Mobile Applications (Booking.com, SafarNow, TravelGround, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Printed brochure/pamphlet/maps	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Magazines/Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Audio-visual presentations (video/film/movie)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor notice boards	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Television/radio	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (Specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

3.5. To what extent do you agree that the following are ways in which you prefer to receive information from the VIC?

I prefer to receive information through:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Personal face-to-face contact	1	2	3	4	5
Telephone calls					
Electronic touch screens for visitors	1	2	3	4	5
Internet (VIC website)	1	2	3	4	5
Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/YouTube/Twitter)	1	2	3	4	5
Mobile Applications (Booking.com, SafarNow, TravelGround, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
Printed brochure/pamphlet/maps	1	2	3	4	5
Magazines/Newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
Audio-visual presentations (video/film/movie)	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor notice boards	1	2	3	4	5
Television/radio	1	2	3	4	5
Other (please specify)	1	2	3	4	5

PART 4: INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY LOCAL TOURISM BUSINESS OPERATORS TO THE VIC
(i.e. information provided in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc.)

4.1. Have you supplied the VIC with any information? Yes [1] No [2]

4.2. Please rate the type of information you supplied to the VIC with regard to: (a) *how extensive the information was* and (b) *the frequency of supplying the information*?

Information supplied to VIC	Extensiveness of the information supplied					Frequency of supplying the information				
	Not extensive at all	Not extensive	Neutral	Extensive	Very extensive	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, tours, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Safety information (road conditions, water and petrol services, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Emergency numbers (police, hospital, ambulance, etc.)										
Travel booking and reservations (excursions, events, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

4.3. Did you receive any feedback from the VIC regarding the usefulness of the type of information you supplied? Yes [1] No [2]. Please elaborate on your answer.

4.4. Have you experienced challenges in providing the VIC with information about your business?

Yes [1] No [2]

4.5. What challenges did you experience in providing the VIC with information about your business?

4.6. Please rate the level of *agreement* with challenges you experienced in providing the VIC with information about your business?

Challenges experienced in providing information	Level of agreement				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Challenges from the business side					
The VIC operational times are not convenient to allow submission of information anytime	1	2	3	4	5
VIC does not have guidelines on the targeted visitor information to be supplied	1	2	3	4	5
The VIC requires information in written format only	1	2	3	4	5
VIC staff are not available to share local information through face-to-face contact	1	2	3	4	5
The business has not received visitors referred by the VIC	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)					
Challenges from the VIC side					

The VIC has not displayed the information I supplied on their information dissemination platforms	1	2	3	4	5
The VIC takes time to display the information in their information dissemination platforms	1	2	3	4	5
The VIC did not display my brochures on their brochure rack	1	2	3	4	5
The VIC has not referred visitors to my business	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5

PART 5: SOCIO-ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FROM EXCHANGING INFORMATION WITH VIC

5.1. Have you received any benefits from exchanging information with the VIC?

Yes [1] No [2].

5.2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding opportunities that your business received from exchanging information with the VIC? (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree and 5=Strongly Agree).

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES					
	1	2	3	4	5
I receive VIC visitor statistics	1	2	3	4	5
I have access to potential visitors to my business	1	2	3	4	5
I have networked with other businesses	1	2	3	4	5
I connected with diverse visitors	1	2	3	4	5
I shared local knowledge with diverse visitors	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5
ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES					
	1	2	3	4	5
I marketed my business on the VIC website	1	2	3	4	5
My business is listed in the VIC database of businesses	1	2	3	4	5
I received funding to grow my business	1	2	3	4	5
I attended a business training course	1	2	3	4	5
My business products were exhibited at tourism events	1	2	3	4	5
Visitor bookings have increased	1	2	3	4	5
Visitors' use of my products/services have increased	1	2	3	4	5
Visitors returned to my business	1	2	3	4	5
Visitors spend more money at my business	1	2	3	4	5
Visitors recommended my business to friends/relatives	1	2	3	4	5
Other (specify)	1	2	3	4	5

PART 6: KNOWLEDGE SUPPLIED TO THE VIC (*specific information that is not in written format but based on experiences, involvement and understanding of the local environment*).

- 6.1. Besides the general information that you have supplied to the VIC, what local knowledge have you supplied to the VIC?
- 6.2. How did you supply this knowledge to the VIC?
- 6.3. Did you experience any challenges in supplying this knowledge? Yes [1] No [2].
Please elaborate on your answer.
- 6.4. Have you received any benefits from supplying the VIC with knowledge? Yes [1] No [2].
Please elaborate on your answer.
- 6.5. What do you think can be done to improve the exchange of information and knowledge between the VIC and local tourism business operators?

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX E: Interview schedule for VIC staff



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TOURISM INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES (VICs)

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE: VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE STAFF

This research is undertaken for academic purpose as part of the requirements for the completion of a PHD in Tourism Management at the University of Pretoria. The main purpose of this study is to examine how tourism information and knowledge exchange within VICs can create memorable visitor experience and generate sustainable socio-economic benefits and opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism business operators. The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request. In this study, information provision relates to general information available in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc) while knowledge refers to specific information that is not in written format but based on experiences, involvement and understanding of the local environment.

This is an anonymous survey as your name will not appear on the questionnaire. The answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential as you cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give. This survey will take about **30 minutes** to complete. Please circle the write your responses in the spaces provided.

All enquiries regarding this research and questionnaire may be addressed to:

Ms Kholadi Tlabela (Researcher) khuli.tlabela@gmail.com/ ktlabela@tourism.gov.za Cell: 082 773 5586	Prof Felicité Fairer-Wessels (Supervisor) Faculty of Economic and Management Science University of Pretoria Felicite.Fairer-Wessels@up.ac.za Tel: +2712 420 4374 Cell:+2784 510 4844	Dr Anneli Douglas (Co-supervisor) Faculty of Economic and Management Science University of Pretoria Anneli.Douglas@up.ac.za Tel: +2712 420 4073 Cell:082 497 4870

Name of VIC						Name of municipality in which the VIC is located			
Type of municipality	Urban	1	Rural	2	Date of interview				

PART 1: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- 1.1. What is your gender? _____
- 1.2. What is your age? _____
- 1.3. What is your population group? _____
- 1.4. _____
- 1.5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed? _____
- 1.5. What is your position at this VIC? _____
- 1.6. How long have you been working at this VIC? _____
- 1.7. What are your roles and responsibilities at this VIC? (e.g. respond to walk in and telephone enquiries, emails/internet generated enquiries)
- 1.8. What are your other responsibilities besides working at this VIC?
- 1.9. Have you worked at another VIC before? If Yes, how long have you worked at this VIC?

Name of VIC you worked at previously	
Number of years at the previous VIC	

- 1.10. Have you worked in any other tourism subsector? If Yes, what subsector did you work in? _____
- 1.11. How long have you worked within the tourism industry? -----

PART 2: BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE VIC

- 2.1. Who is the main custodian of the VIC?
- 2.2. What are the main functions of this VIC?

2.3. **What are the operating times of the VIC?**

2.4. **Who are the main users of the VIC?**

2.5. **What do visitors use the VIC for?**

2.6. **How many visitors, on average, visit the VIC on a monthly basis?**

Season	Months	Number of visitors
Peak season		
Low season		

2.7. **Are there any other VICs in this area? If Yes, how do you work with these VICs?**

Names of other VICs in this area?	
How do you work with VICs in this area?	

2.8. **How many people are currently employed at this VIC?**

Category	Male				Female			
	Black	White	Coloured	Indian	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Full time (40 hours per week and more)								
Part time (less than 40 hours per week)								
Volunteer								

2.9. **How do you work with the Provincial Tourism Authority responsible to market the province?**

PART 3: INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE VIC TO VISITORS (i.e. general information available in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc)

3.1. Please answer the following questions related to information provision to visitors during trip planning and while at the VIC?

	Pre-trip planning.	While at the VIC
What type of information do you provide to visitors? • Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, tours, etc) • Safety information (road conditions, water, emergency numbers, petrol services, etc.) • Emergency numbers (police, hospital, ambulance, etc.) • Travel booking and reservations (excursions, events, etc)		
How do you provide the information to visitors? Personal face-to-face contact at the VIC, telephone calls, Internet (Websites of tourism establishments/VIC/Provincial Tourism Agency), Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/Twitter)		
In what format do you provide the information to visitors? (Printed brochures, hard copy documents, electronic copies)		
How do visitors prefer to receive information from the VIC? Personal face-to-face contact at the VIC, telephone calls, Internet (Websites of tourism establishments), Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/Twitter)		

In what format do you visitors prefer to receive the information? (Printed brochures, hard copy documents, electronic copies)		
What challenges do you experience in providing information to visitors?		
How do you receive feedback on the usefulness of the information you provide to visitors?		

PART 4: INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE VIC TO STAKEHOLDERS (general information available in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc)

4.1. Please answer the following questions related to information that you provide to your stakeholders (local tourism business operators and surrounding communities)?

Information provision	Tourism business operators	Surrounding communities	Other stakeholders (Please name other stakeholders you provide information to e.g. learners/students)
What type of information do you provide to your stakeholders? • Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, tours, etc • Safety information (road conditions, distances between towns etc.) • Emergency numbers (police, hospital, ambulance, etc.)			

• Travel booking and reservations (excursions, events, etc) • Business services (e.g. fax, photocopy, etc) • Operations of the VIC (opening and closing times, functions of the VIC, etc) • Visitor statistics (profiles/travel patterns) • Business funding opportunities • Business training courses) • Public access to the Internet			
How do you provide the information (e.g. Face-to-face/personal contact at VIC, Telephone calls, Internet (Websites of tourism establishments), Knowledge from previous experience, Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/Twitter)			
How do your stakeholders prefer to receive information from the VIC? e.g. Face-to-face/personal contact at VIC, Telephone calls, Internet (Websites of tourism establishments), Knowledge from previous experience, Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/Twitter)			
What challenges do you experience in providing information to your stakeholders?			
How do you receive feedback on the usefulness of the information you provide to your stakeholders?			

Which visitor enquiries (accommodation, attractions, etc.) did you refer to your stakeholders?			

PART 5: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE PROVIDED BY STAKEHOLDERS TO THE VIC *(information relates to general information available in written format (e.g. brochures, maps, etc) while knowledge refers to specific information that is not in written format but based on experiences, involvement and understanding of the local environment).*

5.1. Please answer the following questions related to information and knowledge provided to the VIC by stakeholders (local tourism business operators and surrounding communities)?

Information provision	Tourism business operators	Surrounding communities
Information and knowledge from stakeholders?		
What type of information do you receive from your stakeholders? • Local area information (accommodation, maps, attractions, restaurants, tours, etc • Safety information (road conditions, water and petrol services, etc.) • Emergency numbers (police, hospital, ambulance, etc.) • Travel booking and reservations (excursions, events, etc)		
What knowledge do you receive from your stakeholders?		
How information and knowledge is provided to the VIC		
How is the information provided to the VIC e.g. Face-to-face/personal contact at VIC, Telephone calls, Internet (Websites of tourism establishments), Knowledge from		

previous experience, Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/Twitter)		
How is the knowledge provided to the VIC?		
Preference on how to receive information and knowledge from stakeholders		
How do you prefer to receive the information from your stakeholders: e.g. Face-to- face/personal contact at VIC, Telephone calls, Internet (Websites of tourism establishments), Knowledge from previous experience, Social media (Facebook/ TripAdvisor/Twitter)		
How do you prefer to receive knowledge from your stakeholders?		
Challenges of receiving information and knowledge from stakeholders		
What challenges do you experience in receiving information from your stakeholders?		
What challenges do you experience in receiving knowledge from your stakeholders?		
Benefit of receiving information and knowledge provided by stakeholders		
How does the information provided by your stakeholders benefit the VIC?		
How does the knowledge provided by your stakeholders benefit the VIC?		

Feedback to stakeholders on the usefulness of information and knowledge they provide		
Do you give your stakeholders feedback on the usefulness of the information that they provide to the VIC?		
Do you give your stakeholders feedback on the usefulness of the knowledge that they provide to the VIC?		
Social opportunities gained from exchanging information with the VIC		
What social opportunities do your stakeholders get from exchanging information with the VIC? <i>(receive VIC visitor statistics, access to potential visitors, networking, connect with diverse visitors, share local knowledge with diverse visitors)</i>		
What social opportunities do your stakeholders get from exchanging knowledge with the VIC? <i>(receive VIC visitor statistics, access to potential visitors, networking, connect with diverse visitors, share local knowledge with diverse visitors)</i>		
Economic opportunities gained from exchanging information with the VIC		
What economic opportunities do your stakeholders get from exchanging information with the VIC <i>(increased visitor bookings, increased use of products/services, increased visitor returns, loyalty, market business on VIC website, list business in VIC database, receive funding to grow, business training, exhibit business products at tourism events)</i>		

What economic opportunities did your stakeholders get from exchanging knowledge with the VIC? <i>(increased visitor bookings, increased use of products/services, increased visitor returns, loyalty, market business on VIC website, list business in VIC database, receive funding to grow, business training, exhibit business products at tourism events)</i>		
Which visitor enquiries (accommodation, attractions, etc.) have been referred to you by your stakeholders?		

5.2. How do you make sure that information and knowledge received from local tourism business operators and surrounding communities is passed on to visitors?

	Local tourism business operators	Surrounding communities
Information		
Knowledge		

5.3. How do you network with information suppliers in order to share ideas on information and knowledge provision practices?

5.4. Do you have internal frameworks/strategies that you use as guidelines on information and knowledge exchange within the VIC? Please elaborate.

PART 6: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE WORKER SKILLS

6.1. Do you think the staff have skills required to provide information and knowledge to visitors, local tourism business operators and surrounding communities?

	Visitor	Local tourism business operators	Surrounding communities
Information			
Knowledge			

6.2. What skills do you think staff require to provide visitors with information they are looking for? (*Numeracy, information, knowledge, interpersonal, IT skills; basic literacy, etc.*)

6.3. Has the staff attended any capacity building training on information and knowledge provision? If yes, please elaborate on the training they have attended and suggest any improvements that you think can be made to such training sessions.

6.4. How do you ensure that the staff is kept up to date with current information and knowledge within the fast changing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) environment?

6.5. What do you think can be done to improve information provision at this VIC?

6.6. What do you think can be done to improve knowledge provision at this VIC?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION

APPENDIX F: Focus group schedule for surrounding communities



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TOURISM INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE IN VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES (VICs)

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE: SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES

This research is undertaken for academic purpose as part of the requirements for the completion of a PHD in Tourism Management at the University of Pretoria. The main purpose of this study is to examine how tourism information and knowledge exchange within VICs can create memorable visitor experience and generate sustainable socio-economic benefits and opportunities for surrounding communities and local tourism business operators. The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request. In this study, information provision relates to general information available in written format e.g. brochures, maps, etc) while knowledge refers to specific information that is not in written format but based on experiences, involvement and understanding of the local environment.

This is an anonymous survey as your name will not appear on the questionnaire. The answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential as you cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give. The focus group discussion will take about **an hour**.

All enquiries regarding this research and questionnaire may be addressed to:

Ms Kholadi Tlabela (Researcher) khuli.tlabela@gmail.com/ ktlabela@tourism.gov.za Cell: 082 773 5586	Prof Felicité Fairer-Wessels (Supervisor) Faculty of Economic and Management Science University of Pretoria Felicité.Fairer-Wessels@up.ac.za Tel: +2712 420 4374 Cell:+2784 510 4844	Dr Anneli Douglas (Co- supervisor) Faculty of Economic and Management Science University of Pretoria Anneli.Douglas@up.ac.za Tel: +2712 420 4073 Cell:0824974870

Name of VIC	Name of municipality in which the VIC is located				Date of focus group discussion	
Type of municipality	Urban	1	Rural	2		

PART 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- 1.1. Age
- 1.2. Gender

PART 2: INFORMATION NEEDED BY SURROUNDING COMMUNITY FROM THE VIC (i.e. *general information available in written format*).

AWARENESS AND VISITS TO VICS

- 2.1. Are you aware of a VIC in this area? Yes [1] No [2]
- 2.2. Have you visited the VIC before? Yes [1] No [2]
- 2.3. Why did you visit the VIC?
- 2.4. What information were you looking for when you visited the VIC?
- 2.5. Did you find the information you were looking for? Yes [1] No [2]
- 2.5.1. If Yes, how was the information provided to you?
- 2.5.2. If Not, what problems did you experience to find the information you were looking for

PART 3: INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY THE VIC TO THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES (i.e. *general information available in written format*).

- 3.1. Have you received any information from the VIC? Yes [1] No [2]
- 3.2. What information did you receive from the VIC?
- 3.3. How useful was the information you received from the VIC
- 3.4. How did you receive this information from the VIC?
- 3.5. How often did you receive this information?
- 3.6. How satisfied were you with:
 - 3.6.1. The information you received?
 - 3.6.2. How the information was provided to you?
- 3.7. Did you experience any challenges in getting information from the VIC?
- 3.8. Did the information you received from the VIC benefit you in anyway? If so,
 - 3.8.1. What social opportunities did you get from the information received from the VIC?
 - 3.8.2. What economic opportunities did you get from information received from the VIC?
- 3.9. Do you think it is important for the VIC to supply surrounding communities with information? If so:

- 3.9.1. What information would you like to receive from the VIC?
- 3.9.2. How would you prefer to receive information from the VIC?
- 3.10. What do you think can be done to improve information provision to surrounding communities at this VIC?

PART 4: INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE SUPPLIED BY SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES TO THE VIC

4.1. *Information supplied to the VIC (i.e. general information available in written format)*

- 4.1.1. Have you supplied the VIC with any information? Yes [1] No [2]
- 4.1.2. What information did you supply to the VIC?
- 4.1.3. How did you supply this information to the VIC?
- 4.1.4. How often do you supply the VIC with information?
- 4.1.5. Did you receive any feedback from the VIC regarding the usefulness of the information you have supplied?
- 4.1.6. Did you experience any challenges in providing this information? If so elaborate on the challenges you have experienced.
- 4.1.7. What benefits do you think the VIC gets from the information that you supply to them?
- 4.1.8. Do you think it is important to supply the VIC with information? If so:
 - 4.1.8.1. What type of information do you think should be supplied to the VIC?
 - 4.1.8.2. How should this information be supplied to the VIC?
 - 4.1.8.3. Who do you think should supply the VIC with information?

4.2. *Knowledge supplied to the VIC (i.e. specific information that is not in written format but based on experiences, involvement and understanding of the local environment).*

- 4.2.1. Besides the general information that you have supplied to the VIC, what local knowledge have you supplied to the VIC?
- 4.2.2. How did you supply this information to the VIC?
- 4.2.3. Did you receive any feedback from the VIC regarding the usefulness of the local knowledge you have supplied? Please elaborate?
- 4.2.4. Did you experience any challenges in providing this knowledge? Please elaborate?

- 4.2.5. Have you received any opportunities (social and economic) from providing the VIC with local knowledge? If so, what benefits did you get?
- 4.2.6 What benefits do you think the VIC get from the knowledge that you supply?
- 4.2.7. Do you think it is important to supply the VIC with knowledge? If so:
 - 4.2.7.1 What knowledge do you think should be supplied to the VIC?
 - 4.2.7.2. How should this knowledge be supplied to the VIC?
 - 4.2.7.2 Who do you think should supply the VIC with knowledge?
- 4.2.8. As the community of this area, have you been approached by the VIC to share ideas regarding:
 - 4.2.8.1. How the community can potentially obtain social opportunities from exchanging information and knowledge with the VIC?
 - 4.2.8.2. How the community can potentially obtain economic opportunities from exchanging information and knowledge with the VIC?
 - 4.2.8.3. How the area could benefit from exchanging information and knowledge with the VIC

Thank you for your participation

APPENDIX G: Correlation analysis-local tourism business survey

Significant correlations among VIC information related factors

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.05$	
q10f2: "extensive business support information received"	• "extensive visitor support information received" (q10f1: 0.248*)
q11f1: "frequency of receiving visitor support information"	• "frequency of receiving business support information" (q11f2: 0.243*)
q13f3: "preferred visitor support information"	• "preferred visitor support information" (q13f2: 0.293*)
q14f3: "useful online information sources"	• frequency of receiving visitor support information" (q11f1: 0.240*)
q16f2: "preferred electronic information sources"	• "extensive visitor support information received" (q10f1: 0.232*) • "frequency of receiving visitor support information" (q11f1: 0.279*)
q18F: "extensive information supplied"	• "extensive business support information received" (q10f2: 0.268*) • "frequency of receiving business support information" (q11f2: 0.255*) • "useful traditional printed information sources" (q14f2: 0.242*)
q19f1: "frequency of supplying safety and emergency information"	• "frequency of receiving business support information" (q11f2: 0.277*) • "useful online information sources" (q14f3: 0.229*) • "satisfaction with electronic information sources" (q15f1: 0.293*) • "preferred electronic information sources" (q16f2: 0.234*)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations among VIC information related factors

Positive strong correlations: $p < 0.01$	
"frequency of receiving visitor support information" (q11f1)	• "extensive visitor support information received" (q10f1: 0.632**)
"frequency of receiving business support information" (q11f2)	• "extensive business support information received" (q10f2: 0.636**)
"usefulness of visitor support information received" (q12f1)	• "extensive business support information received" (q10f2: 0.615**)
"preferred visitor support information" (q13f2)	• "frequency of receiving visitor support information" (q11f1: 0.502**)
"useful traditional printed information sources" (q14f2)	• "useful visitor support information received" (q12f1: 0.551**)

“satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1)	• “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.917**) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.532**)
“satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2)	• “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.541**) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0.944**)
“satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3)	• “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.927**) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.521**)
“frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1)	• “extensive information supplied to VICs”(q18f: 0.719**)
Positive moderate correlations	
“frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.358**) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.389**)
“useful visitor support information received” (q12f1)	• “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.416**)
“preferred visitor support information” (q13f2)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.432**)
“useful traditional printed information sources”(q14f2)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.382**)
“useful online information sources” (q14f3)	• “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.463**)
“satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.329**)
“satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3)	• “useful information sources” (q14f1: 0.377**)
“preferred online information sources” (q16f1)	• “preferred business support information”(q13f3: 0.308**)
“preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2)	• “useful business support information received” (q11f2: 0.353**) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.362**) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.428**) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.334**) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.447**) • satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.330**)
“extensive information supplied” (q18F)	• “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.396**)
“frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1)	• “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.334**) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.355**)

Positive weak correlations	
“satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3)	• “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.297**)
Negative moderate correlations	
“frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1)	• “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.301**)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Non-significant correlations among VIC information related factors

Positive, weak and not-significant	
“useful visitor support information received” (q12f1)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.019) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.226)
“preferred visitor support information” (q13f2)	• “frequency of receiving business support information” (q10f2: 0.002) • “frequency of receiving business support information”(q11f2: 0.178)
“preferred business support information” (q13f3)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.152) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.151) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.054) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.082)
“useful electronic information sources” (q14f1)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.114) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.165) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.100) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.091)
“useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2)	• “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.125) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.104) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.062)
“useful online information sources” (q14f3)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.209) • “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.107) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f2: 0.117)

Positive, weak and not-significant	
	• “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.137) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.199) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.004) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0.220)
“satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.117) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.145) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.091) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.139)
“satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2)	• “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.086) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.081) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.122) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.175)
“satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.171) • “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.060) • frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.212) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.103) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.093) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.069) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0.148) • “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: 0.146)
“preferred online information sources” (q16f1)	• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.111) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.018) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.135) • “usefulness of traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0.041) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.039) • “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: 0.109)

Positive, weak and not-significant	
	• “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.124)
“preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.102) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.125) • “preferred online information sources” (q16f1: 0.045)
“extensive information supplied” (q18F)	• Extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.113) • frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.072) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.217) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.054) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.180) • “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: 0.178) • “preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2: 0.102)
“frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1)	• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.179) • frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.081) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0.188) • “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: 0.126) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.120)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Non-significant correlations among VIC information related factors

Negative, weak and not-significant	
“preferred visitor support information” (q13f2)	“useful of visitor support information received” (q12f1: -0.148)
“preferred business support information” (q13f3)	“extensiveness of business support information received” (q10f2: -0.008)
“useful of electronic information sources” (q14f1)	“extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: -0.107) “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: -0.038) “preferred business support information” (q13f3: -0.047)
“useful of traditional printed information sources” (q14f2)	“extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: -0.091)

Negative, weak and not-significant	
	“preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: -0.086) “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: -0.023)
“satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1)	“extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: -0.074) frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: -0.012) “preferred business support information” (q13f3: -0.041) “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: -0.041)
“satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2)	“extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: -0.90) “preferred support information” (q13f2: -0.105) “usefulness of electronic information sources” (q14f1: -0.088) “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: -0.079)
“preferred online information sources” (q16f1)	“extensive business support information received” (q10f2: -0.098) frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.029) “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: -0.086) “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: -0.080) “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: -0.047)
“preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2)	“useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: -0.067) “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: -0.195) “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: -0.211)
“extensive information supplied” (q18F)	“preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: -0.209) “preferred business support information” (q13f3: -0.046) satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: -0.035) “preferred online information sources” (q16f1: -0.132)
“frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (19f1)	extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: -0.019) “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: -0.118) “preferred online information sources” (q16f1: -0.157)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations between VIC information-related factors and socio-economic opportunities factors

Positive and weak correlation: $p < 0.05$	
VIC information-related elements	Socio-economic opportunities
• “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.260*) • “preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2: 0.239*)	“access to visitor statistics and business networking” (q26f2)
• “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.279*) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.254*)	“increased visitor booking” (q27f1b)
• “preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2: 0.262*) • “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.267*) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.254*) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.229*)	“product exhibition and visitor loyalty” (q27f2)
Negative and weak correlation	
“extensive information supplied to VICs” (q18F: -0.274*) “frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1: -0.290*)	“access to diverse and potential visitors” (q26f1)
“frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.265*)	“access to visitor statistics and business networking” (q26f2)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations between VIC information-related factors and socio-economic opportunities factors

Positive and moderate: $p < 0.01$	
VIC information-related factors	Socio-economic opportunities
• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.424**)	“access to diverse and potential visitors” (q26f1)
• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.362**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.419**) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.304**) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.305**)	“access to visitor statistics and business networking” (q26f2)

Positive and moderate: $p < 0.01$	
VIC information-related factors	Socio-economic opportunities
• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.450**) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.312**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.359**) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.323**) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.327**) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.411**)	“business listing in VIC databases” (q27f1)
• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.351**) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.315**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.413**) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.360**) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.493**) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.427**) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.481**)	“product exhibition and visitor loyalty” (q27f2)
• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.497**) • “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: 0.313**) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.435**)	“business marketing and funding” (q27f3)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Positive, weak and not-significant correlation	
• “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.199) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.143) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.203) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.150)	“access to diverse and potential visitors” (q26f1)

Positive, weak and not-significant correlation	
• “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.000) • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.193) • “preferred online information sources” (q16f1: 0.154)	
• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.071) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.045) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.211) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: 0.055) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: -0.069) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.104) • “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: -0.033) • “preferred online information sources” (q16f1: -0.043) • “extensive information supplied to VICs” (q18f: -0.038)	“access to visitor statistics and business networking” (q26f2)
• “extensive business support information received” (q10f2: 0.131) • “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: 0.115) • “preferred business support information” q13f3: 0.132) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.419**) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.390*) • “preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2: 0.316**) • “extensive information supplied to VICs” (q18f: 0.032) • “frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1: 0.101)	“business listing in VIC databases” (q27f1)
• “preferred business support information” (q13f3: 0.035) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0,120) • “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: 0.081)	“product exhibition and visitor loyalty” (q27f2)

Positive, weak and not-significant correlation	
• “extensive information supplied to VICs” (q18f: 0.097) • “frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1: 0.185)	
• “extensive visitor support information received” (q10f1: 0.161) • “frequency of receiving visitor support information” (q11f1: 0.008) • “preferred visitor support information” (q13f2: 0.010) • “preferred business support information” (q13f3: -0.017) • “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: -0.015) • “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: 0.149) • “useful online information sources” (q14f3: 0.214) • “satisfaction with electronic information sources” (q15f1: 0.038) • “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” q15f2: 0.173 • “satisfaction with online information sources” (q15f3: 0.204) • “preferred online information sources” (q16f1: -0.017) • “preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2: 0.023) • “extensive of information supplied to VICs” (q18f: 0.087) • “frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1: 0.070)	“business marketing and funding” (q27f3)

Non-significant correlations between VIC information-related factors and socio-economic opportunities factors

Negative, weak and not-significant correlation	
“extensive business support information received” (q10f2: -0.033) “frequency of receiving business support information” (q11f2: -0.073) “useful visitor support information received” (q12f1: -0.081) “useful electronic information sources” (q14f1: -0.058) “useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: -0.108)	“access to diverse and potential visitors” (q26f1)

Negative, weak and not-significant correlation	
“satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: -0.049) “preferred electronic information sources” (q16f2: -0.110)	
“frequency of supplying safety and emergency information” (q19f1: -0.011)	Access to visitor statistics and business networking (q26f2)
“useful traditional printed information sources” (q14f2: -0.100) “satisfaction with traditional printed information sources” (q15f2: -0.092) “preferred online information sources” (q16f1: -0.038)	Business listing in VIC databases (q27f1a)
“preferred online information sources” (q16f1: -0.193)	Product exhibition and visitor loyalty (q27f2)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX H: Correlation analysis–visitor survey

Significant correlations among VIC information related elements

Positive moderate correlations: $p < 0.05$	
Purpose to use VIC facilities" (q9f1)	• current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.322*)
"purpose to use VIC services" (q9f2)	• "current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.315*) • "visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area" (q29f1:0.325*) • "previous area visitation and spent" (q29f2:0.289*)
"usefulness of information searched" (q12F)	• "visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area" (q29f1:0.325*)
"previous visitation and spent" (q29f2)	• "extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q36f1:0.305*)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations among VIC information related elements

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.05$	
"purpose to use VIC facilities" (q9f1)	• extensive usage of online trip planning information sources" (q36f2:0.170*) • "frequency of using online trip planning information sources" (q37f1:0.171*)
"purpose to use VIC services" (q9f2)	• "extensiveness of information searched"(q11F:0.166*) • "visitors' experience of VIC customer service" (q17f6:0.195*) • "usefulness of trip planning information searched"(q35F:0.160*)
"extensiveness of information searched" (q11F)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.193*)
"usefulness of information searched" (q12F)	• "visitors' experience of information provision in VICs" (q17f1:0.182*) • "previous area visitation and spent" (q29f2:0.289*) • "extensive usage of online trip planning information sources" (q36f2:0.180*) • "usefulness of online trip planning information sources" (q38f1:0.164*) • "usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources" (q38f3:0.160*)
"preferred VIC online information sources" (q16f1)	• "extensive usage of online trip planning information sources" (q36f2:0.166*)
"preferred VIC electronic information sources" (q16f2)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.180*) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.178*) • "frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources" (q37f3:0.192*)

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.05$	
"preferred traditional VIC information sources" (q16f3)	• "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.207*) • "visitors' experience of the impact of VIC information on future behavior" (q17f7:0.184*)
"visitors' experience of information provision in VICs" (q17f1)	• "current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.270*) • "frequency of trip planning information searched" (q34F:0.193*) • "extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q36f1:0.176*) • "frequency of using online trip planning information sources" (q37f1:0.190*)
"visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.161*) • "frequency of trip planning information searched" (q34F:0.204*) • "usefulness of trip planning information searched" (q35F:0.206*) • "usefulness of online trip planning information sources" (q38f1:0.196*)
"visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3)	• "extensiveness of trip planning information searched" (q33F:0.178*) • "frequency of trip planning information searched" (q34F:0.176*) • "extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources" (q36f3:0.186*) • "usefulness of online trip planning information sources" (q38f1:0.174*)
"visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4)	• "visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area" (q29f1:0.281*) • "previous area visitation and spent" (q29f2:0.295*)
"visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5)	• "previous area visitation and spent" (q29f2:0.287*) • "frequency of trip planning information searched" (q34F:0.163*) • "usefulness of trip planning information searched" (q35F:0.193*) • "usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources" (q38f3:0.197*)
"visitors' experience of VIC customer service" (q17f6)	• "extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources" (q36f3:0.183*) • "frequency of using online trip planning information sources" (q37f1:0.197*) • "usefulness of online trip planning information sources" (q38f1:0.179*) • "usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q38f2:0.207*)
"visitors' behavioural intentions" (q17f7)	• "visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area" (q29f1:0.261*) • "current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.277*) • "extensiveness of trip planning information searched" (q33F:0.192*) • "frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources" (q37f3:0.207*) • "usefulness of online trip planning information sources" (q38f1:0.183*) • "usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources" (q38f3:0.160*)

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.05$	
“visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1)	• “previous area visitation and spent” q29f2:0.285* • “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.278*)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations among VIC information related elements

Positive strong correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“visitors’ experience of VIC information provision” (q17f1)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.654**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.558**) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.552**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.618**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.559**) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.566**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6)	• “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.582**)
“extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F)	• “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.681**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.521**)
“frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F)	• “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.601**)
“extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1)	• “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.541**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.863**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.798**)
“extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2)	• “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.875**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.766**)
“extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3)	• “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.935**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.900**)
“frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1)	• “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.525**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.843**)
“frequency of using internal and external	• “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.830**)

Positive strong correlations: $p < 0.01$	
trip planning information sources" (q37f2)	
"frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources" (q37f3)	• "usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources" (q38f3:0.927**)
"usefulness of online trip planning information sources" (q38f1)	• "usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q38f2:0.516**)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations among VIC information related elements

Positive moderate correlations: $p < 0.01$	
"purpose to use VIC facilities" (q9f1)	• "purpose to use VIC services" (q9f2: 0.301**) • "extensiveness of VIC information searched" (q11F:0.305**) • "preferred VIC electronic information sources" (q16f2:0.332**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3: 0.375**) • "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4: 0.306**) • "extensiveness of trip planning information searched" (q33F: 0.330**) • "frequency of trip planning information searched" (q34F:0.381**) • "extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q36f1: 0.466**) • "frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources" (q37f2:0.472**) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q38f2: 0.428**)
"purpose to use VIC services" (q9f2)	• "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4:0.415**) • "usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q38f2:0.305**)
"extensiveness of information searched" (q11F)	• "usefulness of information searched" (q12F:0.436**) • "current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.404**) • "extensiveness of trip planning information searched" (q33F:0.311**)
"usefulness of information searched" (q12F)	• "extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q36f1:0.355**) • "usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q38f2:0.357**)
"preferred VIC online information sources" (q16f1)	• "preferred VIC electronic information sources" (q16f2:0.388**)
"preferred VIC electronic information sources" (q16f2)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f7:0.323**) • "usefulness of trip planning information searched" (q35F:0.319**)

Positive moderate correlations: $p < 0.01$	
	• “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.334**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.365**)
“visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.456**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.496**) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.442**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.301**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.477**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.306**) • “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.356**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.404**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.328**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.347**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3)	• “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.399**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.420**) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.345**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.413**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.339**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.394**)
“visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4)	• “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.400**) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.370**) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.332**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.379**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.394**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.323**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.317**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.333**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.325**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5)	• “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.379**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.356**)

Positive moderate correlations: $p < 0.01$	
	• “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.335**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.360**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6)	• “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.497**) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.359**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.301**)
“visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7)	• “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.331**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f:0.320**)
“previous visitation and spent” (q29f2)	• “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.444**)
“current visitation and spent” (q29f3)	• “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.382**) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.476**)
“extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F)	• “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.459**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.432**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.457**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.312**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.395**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.365**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.365**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.377**)
“frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F)	• “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.409**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.406**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.435**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.324**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.357**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.355**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.309**)

Positive moderate correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F)	• “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.367**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.346**)
“extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1)	• extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.460**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.390**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.361**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.343**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.307**)
“extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2)	• extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.410**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.448**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.320**) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.375**)
“extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3)	• frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.360**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.469**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.365**) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.436**)
“frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1)	• “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.378**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.388**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.311**)
“frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2)	• “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.467**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.426**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.365**)
“frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3)	• “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.373**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.0412**)

Positive moderate correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1)	• “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.429**)
“usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2)	• “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.453**)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations among VIC information related elements

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1)	• “usefulness of information searched” (q12F:0.278**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.287**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.296**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.297**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.292**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.258**)
“purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2)	• “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.272**) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.208**) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.215**) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.269**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.292**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.215**)
“extensiveness of information searched” (q11F)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.252**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.216**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.251**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.292**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.271**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.281**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.270**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.299**)
“usefulness of information searched” (q12F)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.298**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.209**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.297**) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.211**)

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.01$	
	• “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.321**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.293**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.226**)
“preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1)	• “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.277**)
“preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2)	• “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.260**) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.215**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f3:0.288**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.240**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.209**) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched”(q33F:0.228**) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.235**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.299**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.289**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.286**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.311**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.286**) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.229**)
“preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3)	• “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.287**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.223**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC information provision in VICs” (q17f1)	• “visitors’ experience of available VIC ICT” (q17f4:0.248**) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.243**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.237**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2)	• “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.284**) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.299*) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched”(q33F:0.289**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.247**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.287**)

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.01$	
“visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.236**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.210**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.233**)
“visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.214**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.232**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.254**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.230**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5)	• “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.234**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.268**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.291**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.214**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.274**)
“visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6)	• “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.293**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.276**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.276**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.246**)
“visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7)	• “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.235**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.219**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.260**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.234**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.212**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.286**)
“extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F)	• “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.274**)
“frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F)	• “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.235**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.269**)
“usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F)	• “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.271**) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.249**)

Positive weak correlations: $p < 0.01$	
	• “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.292**) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.213**) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources”(q38f1:0.246**) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.296**) • q38f3: “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3: 0.244**)
“extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2)	• “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3: 0.291**)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Non-significant correlations among VIC information related elements

Positive, weak and not-significant	
“purpose to use VIC facilities”(q9f1)	• “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.036) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.019) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.067) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.103) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.100) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.064) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.147) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.155)
“purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2)	• “preferred electronic and online information sources” (q16f1: 0.099) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.106) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.141) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f3:0.148) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.130) • “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.037) • visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.145) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.146) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.040) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.139) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.066) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.108)

Positive, weak and not-significant	
“extensiveness of information searched” (q11F)	• “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:-0.047) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.119) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:-0.010) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.097) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.047) • “frequency of trip planning information searched”(q34F:0.148) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.121) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.058) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.058) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources”(q37f1:0.010) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.036) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.079) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.071)
“usefulness of information searched” (q12F)	• “preferred online information sources” (q16f1:0.007) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.050) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.117) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.032) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.128) • “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.239) • frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.134) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.125) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.122) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.114)
“preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1)	• “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.081) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.030) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f3:-0.016) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.100) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge (q1f5: 0.044) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.005) • q17f7: “visitors’ behavioural intentions” (q17f7:0.002) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:-0.024) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.023) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.103) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:-0.072) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.015) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.115)

Positive, weak and not-significant	
	• “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.144)
“preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2)	• “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.060) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.170) • “current local area visitation and spent”(q29f3:0.093)
“preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.064) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.080) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.115) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.167) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.075) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.085) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.017) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.121) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.129) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.118) • extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.146) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.071) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.062) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.090) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.095) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.118) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.103)
“visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1)	• “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.111) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.220) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.155) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.117) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.148) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.042) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.133) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.067)

Positive, weak and not-significant	
"visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2)	• "extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources" (q36f3:0.140) • "frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources" (q37f3:0.071) • "usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources" (q38f3:0.023)
"visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3)	• "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.169*) • "visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area" (q29f1:0.056) • "current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.238) • "frequency of using online trip planning information sources" (q37f1:0.144) • "frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources" (q37f3:0.118) • "usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources" (q38f3:0.135)
"visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4)	• "visitors' behavioral intentions" (q17f7:0.146) • "frequency of using online trip planning information sources" (q37f1:0.157) • "usefulness of online trip planning information sources" (q38f1:0.139)
"visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5)	• "current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.203)
"visitors' experience of VIC customer service" (q17f6)	• "previous area visitation and spent" (q29f2:0.120) • "current local area visitation and spent" (q29f3:0.238) • "frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources" (q37f3:0.098) • "usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources" (q38f3:0.080)
"visitors' behavioral intentions" (q17f7)	• "previous area visitation and spent" (q29f2:0.243)
"visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area" (q29f1)	• "extensiveness of trip planning information searched" (q33F:0.225) • "frequency of trip planning information searched" (q34F:0.193) • "usefulness of trip planning information searched" (q35F:0.169) • "extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources" (q36f1:0.212) • "extensive usage of online trip planning information sources" (q36f2:0.236) • "extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources" (q36f3:0.167) • "frequency of using online trip planning information sources" (q37f1:0.166) • "frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources" (q37f2 0.108)"frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources"(q37f3:0.062)

Positive, weak and not-significant	
	• “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.047) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” • (q38f2:0.077)
“previous area visitation and spent” (29f2)	• “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.062) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.091) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources”(q36f2:0.029) “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.003) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources”(q37f2:0.119) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.159)
“current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3)	• “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.075) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.203) • extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.046) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.089) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.005) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.191) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.050) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.142) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.006)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Non-significant correlations among VIC information related elements

Negative, weak and not-significant	
“purpose to use VIC facilities”(q9f1)	• “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:-0.106)
“purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2)	• “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:-0.047) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:-0.042)
“extensiveness of information searched” (q11F)	• “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:-0.073)
“preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1)	• “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:-0.168) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:-0.026)

Negative, weak and not-significant	
	• “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:-0.012) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:-0.101) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:-0.054) • usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:-0.082) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:-0.034)
“preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3)	• “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:-0.030)
“visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1)	• “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:-0.012)
“visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1)	• “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:-0.055)
“previous area visitation and spent” (29f2)	• “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:-0.020)
“current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3)	• “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:-0.138)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations between VIC information-related factors and dimensions of memorable visitor experiences

Positive and moderate correlation: p<0.05	
VIC information-related elements	Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences
• “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.314*)	“hedonism” (q41f1)
• previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.323*)	“local culture”
• “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.325*)	
• visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” q29f1:0.307*	“meaningfulness” (q41f5)
• previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.311*)	
• “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.309*)	
Positive and weak correlation	
• “purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2:0.194*)	“hedonism” (q41f1)
• “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.270*)	
• “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.204*)	“novelty” (q41f2)
• “purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2:0.182*)	

• “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.177*) • extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.196*) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.162*)	
• “purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2:0.193*) • “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.192*) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.180*) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.175*)	“local culture” (q41f3)
• “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.182*) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.260*) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.283*) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.202*) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.185*) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.167*)	“refreshment” (q41f4)
• “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.169*) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.169*) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.188*) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.190*)	“meaningfulness” (q41f5)
• “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.187*) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.286*) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33f:0.171*)	“involvement” (q41f6)
• “purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2:0.185*) • “extensiveness of VIC information searched” (q11F:0.176*) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.186*) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.191*) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.170*)	“knowledge” (q41f7)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations between VIC information-related factors and dimensions of memorable visitor experiences

Positive and strong correlation: p<0.01	
VIC information-related elements	Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences
• “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.511**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.411**)	“knowledge” (q41f7)
Positive and moderate correlation	
• “visitors’ experience of VIC information provision” (q17f1:0.308**)	“hedonism” (q41f1)

• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.395**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.316**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.360**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.334**) • extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.365**)	
• “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.318**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.445**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.410**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.415**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions”(q17f7:0.377**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.379**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.309**)	“novelty” (q41f2)
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.302**) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.306**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.414**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.343**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.305**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.413**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.463**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.431**) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.386**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.301**)	“local culture” (q41f3)
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.334**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.302**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.329**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.332**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.351**) • “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.330**)	“refreshment” (q41f4)
• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.342**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.315**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.312**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.321**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.337**)	“meaningfulness” (q41f5)
• “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.349**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.346**) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.453**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.324**)	“involvement” (q41f6)
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.308**) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.331**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.361**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.311**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.326**)	“knowledge” (q41f7)

• “visitors’ experience of VIC staff knowledge” (q17f5:0.358**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.320**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.348**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources”(q38f2:0.310**)	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant correlations between VIC information-related factors and dimensions of memorable visitor experiences

Positive and weak correlation: $p < 0.01$	
VIC information-related elements	Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.225**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.259**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service”(q17f6:0.294**) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources”(q16f2:0.251**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.290**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.232**)	“hedonism” (q41f1)
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.216**) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.251**) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.216**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.273**) • visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.246**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.215**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.294**)	q41f2 “novelty”
• “extensiveness of VIC information searched:” (q11F:0.255**) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.252**) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33f:0.278**) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.249**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.339**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.229**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.294**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.267**)	q41f3 “local culture”
• “purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2:0.261**) • extensiveness of VIC information searched:” (q11F:0.260**) • preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.289**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information quality” (q17f2:0.238**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.283**)	q41f4 “refreshment”

• “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.247**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.257**) • “extensive usage of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q36f1:0.262**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.218**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.247**)	
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.216**) • “purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2:0.221**) • “preferred VIC electronic information sources” (q16f2:0.280**) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.229**) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.217**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.271**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VIC” (q17f4:0.294**) • usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.293**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.251**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.265**) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q38f2:0.252**)	q41f5 “meaningfulness”
• “purpose to use VIC facilities” (q9f1:0.234**) • “purpose to use VIC services” (q9f2:0.224**) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.256**) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.255**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC information resources” (q17f3:0.211**) • “visitors’ experience of ICT availability in VICs” (q17f4:0.260**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.248**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.238**) • “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.210**) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.255**) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.216**) • “frequency of using internal and external trip planning information sources” (q37f2:0.232**) • “usefulness of internal and external trip planning information sources” (q38f2:0.212**)	q41f6 “involvement”
• “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.273**) • “visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.226**) • “visitors’ experience of VIC customer service” (q17f6:0.299**) • “visitors’ behavioral intentions” (q17f7:0.283**) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.219**) • extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.270**) • “extensiveness of trip planning information searched” (q33F:0.255**)	q41f7 “knowledge”

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Non-significant correlations between VIC information-related factors and dimensions of memorable visitor experiences

Positive and weak correlation	
VIC information-related elements	Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences
• “extensiveness of VIC information searched:” (q11F:0.150) • “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.124) • “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:0.051) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.156) • “usefulness of trip planning information searched” (q35F:0.117) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.129) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.196) • “extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.142) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.024) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.109) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.070) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.016) • usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.009)	“hedonism” (q41f1)
• “extensiveness of VIC information searched:” (q11F:0.156) • “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:0.058) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.251) • “previous area visitation and spent” (q29f2:0.235) • “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.181) • “frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.111) • extensive usage of traditional trip planning information sources” (q36f3:0.100) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.085) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.036) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.046)	“novelty” (q41f2)
• “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:0.012) • “preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.141) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.126) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.108) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.075)	“local culture” (q41f3)
• “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.127) • “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:0.076) • preferred VIC traditional information sources” (q16f3:0.156)	“refreshment” (q41f4)

• “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.133) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.114) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.129) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.090)	
• “extensiveness of VIC information searched” (q11F:0.092) • “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.101) • “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:0.063) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.148) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.121) • “usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.094)	“meaningfulness” (q41f5)
• “extensiveness of VIC information searched” (q11F:0.081) • “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:0.004) • current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.178) • frequency of trip planning information searched” (q34F:0.138) • “extensive usage of online trip planning information sources” (q36f2:0.147) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.070) • “frequency of using traditional trip planning information sources” (q37f3:0.144) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.025) • usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:0.108)	“involvement” (q41f6)
• “usefulness of VIC information searched” (q12F:0.132) • “preferred VIC online information sources” (q16f1:-0.009) • “visitor recommendation and return to VIC and area” (q29f1:0.174) • “current local area visitation and spent” (q29f3:0.246) • “frequency of using online trip planning information sources” (q37f1:0.153) • “usefulness of online trip planning information sources” (q38f1:0.115)	“knowledge” (q41f7)
Negative and weak correlation	
“usefulness of traditional trip planning information sources” (q38f3:-0.019)	“novelty” (q41f2)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations between dimensions of memorable visitor experiences and visitors’ behavioural intentions

Positive and weak correlation: $p < 0.05$	
Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences	VIC information-related elements
q41f4 “refreshment”	“visitors’ experience of information provision in VICs” (q17f1:0.182*)

Correlations between dimensions of memorable visitor experiences and visitors' behavioural intentions

Positive and moderate correlation: $p < 0.01$	
Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences	Behavioural intentions
"hedonism" (q41f1)	• "visitors' experience of information provision in VICs" (q17f1:0.308**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.395**) • "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4:0.316**) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.360**) • "visitors' behavioural intentions" (q17f7:0.334**)
"novelty" (q41f2)	• "visitors' experience of information provision in VICs" (q17f1:0.318**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.445**) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.410**) • visitors' experience of VIC customer service (q17f6:0.415**) • "visitors' behavioural intentions" (q17f7:0.377**)
"local culture" (q41f3)	• visitors' experience of information provision in VICs" (q17f1:0.306**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.414**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.343**) • "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4:0.305**) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.413**) • visitors' experience of VIC customer service (q17f6:0.463**) • "visitors' behavioural intentions" (q17f7:0.431**)
"refreshment" (q41f4)	• "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4:0.302**) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.329**) • visitors' experience of VIC customer service (q17f6:0.332**) • "visitors' behavioural intentions" (q17f7:0.351**)
"meaningfulness" (q41f5)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.342**) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.315**) • visitors' experience of VIC customer service (q17f6:0.312**) • "visitors' behavioural intentions" (q17f7:0.321**)
"involvement" (q41f6)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.349**) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.346**)
"knowledge" (q41f7)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.361**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.311**) • "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" (q17f4:0.326**) • "visitors' experience of VIC staff knowledge" (q17f5:0.358**)

Significant correlations between dimensions of memorable visitor experiences and visitors' behavioural intentions

Positive and weak correlation: $p < 0.01$	
Dimensions of memorable visitor experiences	Behavioural intentions
"hedonism" (q41f1)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.259**) • visitors' experience of VIC customer service (q17f6:0.294**)
"novelty" (q41f2)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.273**) • "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" q17f4:0.246**)
"refreshment" (q41f4)	• "visitors' experience of VIC information quality" (q17f2:0.238**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.283**)
"meaningfulness" (q41f5)	• visitors' experience of information provision in VICs" (q17f1:0.217**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.271**) • "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VIC" q17f4:0.294**)
"involvement" (q41f6)	• visitors' experience of information provision in VICs" (q17f1:0.255**) • "visitors' experience of VIC information resources" (q17f3:0.211**) • "visitors' experience of ICT availability in VICs" q17f4:0.260**) • "visitors' experience of VIC customer service (q17f6:0.248**) • "visitors' behavioural " (q17f7:0.238**)
"knowledge" (q41f7)	• visitors' experience of information provision n VICs" (q17f1:0.226**) • "visitors' experience of VIC customer service (q17f6:0.299**) • "visitors' behavioural" (q17f7:0.283**)