

Advances in Visitor Attraction Research: A Critical and Thematic Review

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Abstract

This study provides a critical and thematic review of the visitor attraction literature over the period 2015-2024, a decade which reflects significant changes in tourism demand, technological innovation, societal trends and global crises. The study identifies and critiques the dominant themes and emerging issues in visitor attraction research in this period, outlines how research methodology has evolved during this period, and what implications such changes have for management practice and theory. The study delivers a multi-dimensional review of visitor attraction scholarship that enables both synthesis of ideas and critical reflection and informs both academic scholarship and practitioner strategy. For the future, the study advances the need to continue to engage critically with the evolving challenges and opportunities facing the sector, and to deepen reflection on the role of attractions within broader tourism systems and their potential to contribute positively to cultural, social, and ecological wellbeing.

1. Introduction

1.1. Justification, focus and structure of the article

The field of visitor attraction research has evolved substantially over the last decade, responding to dynamic shifts in tourism demand, technological innovation, societal trends, and global crises. Visitor attractions (VAs) are fundamental to the global tourism system, serving as key drivers of visitation, destination identity, and regional development. As natural, cultural, or built assets that have been created or converted into permanent visitor experiences, visitor attractions encompass a wide and increasingly complex range of site types and management practices.

Building directly on earlier foundational studies (Leask, 2010; 2016), this article provides a critical and thematic review of peer-reviewed literature on visitor attractions management published between 2015 and 2024. In doing so, the article aims to provide a reflective and critical account of the themes, methodologies, and contextual influences that have shaped this field. The review is motivated by the need to understand how the field has matured, where gaps remain, and what future directions must be taken to guide both academic inquiry and practical management.

In Leask (2010), it was seen that research conducted into visitor attraction research prior to 2009 was predominantly case study based and reliant upon qualitative methods. Leask (2016) established that by the period from 2009 to 2014, research in the area had developed to use quantitative methods to research and analyze data, with extensive

research into contemporary issues that informed academic knowledge and practitioner needs.

The period from 2015 onwards has seen significant challenges and innovations in the management of visitor attractions. The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated widespread closures of museums, galleries, zoos, and heritage sites, prompting both practical innovations in digital engagement and scholarly reflection on resilience and adaptability within the sector (Sharma et al., 2021; Karhu, 2022). Simultaneously, heightened environmental awareness and the urgency of the climate crisis have placed sustainability and regenerative tourism strategies at the forefront of research agendas (Font et al., 2021). The rise of immersive technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), and data analytics has further transformed how attractions are experienced, managed, and studied.

The article is structured as follows. This first section introduces the key terms, methods and context of the research. The second revisits the definition of visitor attractions used in this review, to clarify the boundaries of analysis, then outlines the place of VAs in the literature in bibliometric terms and methodological trends. The third session presents VA research by management themes, covering the key areas identified in Leask (2016): namely, visitor management, resource management, product management and site management. The fourth then considers the implications of the review for new approaches and methods for future research, including gaps in knowledge, theoretical opportunities, and priorities for supporting attraction managers in a complex and changing tourism landscape. The final section concludes by presenting the conclusions and limitations of this review article. VAs are a foundational element of tourism, encompassing cultural, natural, or built assets that have been purposefully developed into permanent visitor experiences. This article adopts the definition provided by Leask (2018), which characterizes VAs as “natural, cultural or built assets that have been created or converted into a permanent visitor experience, where visitor interpretation and engagement with the asset is a core purpose of the development and management of the site” (p. 2). This definition offers clear boundaries, excluding temporary events, general destinations, and retail spaces, and aligns with efforts for consistency and continuity of visitor attraction research.

That said, this article also responds to ongoing definitional ambiguity in VA research. As Leask (2018) highlighted, debates around what constitutes a visitor attraction remain active, particularly in relation to emerging hybrid forms such as event attractions, virtual-only experiences, and blended cultural-commercial spaces (see below and in Section 2.1).

1.2. Methods

This review provides a critical synthesis of peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2015 and 2024, specifically focused on visitor attractions that meet the above criteria. While we acknowledge the significant contributions of scholars published in academic books (such as Edelheim, 2015; Weidenfeld et al., 2016; Fyall et al., 2022), monographs, conference proceedings and other outputs, the focus of this narrative review was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles. As such, it builds on earlier works, with the aim of assessing scholarly progress in the conceptualization, management, and methodological investigation of visitor attractions. In doing so, the review addresses three guiding questions: (1) What are the dominant themes and emerging issues in visitor attraction research from 2015 to 2024? (2) How has research methodology evolved during this period? (3) What implications does this have for management practice and theory?

In keeping with the evolving scope of the field, this narrative review employed a comprehensive literature search across high-quality journals in tourism, heritage, museum studies, and associated disciplines (e.g., management, history, geography and economics). Studies involving visitor attractions that are fixed, managed, and experience-oriented – as per Leask’s (2018) criteria – were selected for inclusion, while studies focusing on broader destination policy, temporary events, or commercial retail environments, were excluded. Google Scholar was employed using the defined search terms ‘visitor attraction’ and ‘tourist attraction’ to accommodate terminological differences. The quality journals were initially identified using the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) Academic Journal Guide rankings from 2021. Initial searching focused on journals ranked 2* to 4* in the sector studies field. This resulted in outputs from 17 tourism, travel and heritage publications before widening the search to include journals ranked at 1*, which resulted in outputs from a further nine relevant journals in the field. Only one CABS unranked journal was included (International Journal of Tourism Cities) due to there being a number of relevant and robust outputs for the paper, and a further journal was consulted outside of the sector studies field (Journal of Business Research) for the same reason. This enabled analytical clarity and definitional coherence to be maintained. This consistency of approach with previous articles enhances continuity and supports the identification of key developments in VA research.

A total of 555 journal articles were identified during this process: this being subsequently cut to a final reference list of 354 articles. As per Snyder’s (2019) approach, a comprehensive shortlisting activity took place where each author independently reviewed each of the articles against two guiding criteria: (1) aligns with established definition of a VA; (2) maintains a focus on VA management. Each article was ranked either red (not in scope), amber (potentially relevant for team discussion) or green (within scope). Furthermore, each author summarized the significance of each article and the key themes that were surfaced. Two rounds of reviews were then merged and calibrated and through

team agreement resulted in the final 354 articles for narrative analysis. This process implies that the selected body of articles focuses specifically on aspects of visitor attraction management, rather than general destination or tourism policy. In isolating research that strictly adheres to a robust definition of visitor attractions, this review contributes to the development of a more focused and theoretically coherent body of knowledge.

Starting with the existing themes and processes identified in Leask's (2016) article, the data were then coded using keywords and abstracts, plus additional features such as type and methods, to identify significant themes. Subsequently, using thematic coding in NVivo, the data were examined to identify the density of themes relating to visitor attraction management. The result is a multi-dimensional review of visitor attraction scholarship that supports both the synthesis of ideas and critical reflection. Where relevant, data were allocated to more than one node for analysis or reallocated to another node where no significant common theme was observed. This acknowledged the diversity of coverage within articles that could rarely be attributed to a single node, but where possible, dominant thematic areas were identified to categorize the papers. Queries were then used to identify outcomes and to develop classification categories. The authors acknowledge the potential limitations of this approach in terms of subjectivity but consider the rigorous process of article selection and theme identification to contribute to the high quality of this narrative review.

1.3. Visitor attraction research context

The individual nature of visitor attractions, their assets, experiences and contexts, has resulted in a wealth of VAs internationally, with a huge variety of management challenges. This has resulted in a diverse range of approaches to asset management being adopted, often being determined by their stakeholders (Leask, 2022).

In the period since 2015, increased focus on balancing the volume of visitors with the asset and experiences came further to the fore (Moorhouse et al., 2016; Baral et al., 2021), with continued discussions about revenue and commercial development (Thanvisitthpon, 2016; Wang et al., 2021a). Innovations in technology and communications have led to improved knowledge of visitors and their expectations (Zhang & Abd Rahman, 2022; Guo et al., 2024), while augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) have offered opportunities for more meaningful and ongoing visitor/ asset engagement (Jiang et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic changed the dynamics of visitors attitudes and behavior (Charlesworth et al., 2023), and offered opportunities for increased use of technology and experience development (Agostino, 2023).

By offering an updated synthesis of visitor attraction research from 2015 to 2024, this article aims to inform both academic scholarship and practitioner strategy. As attractions continue to adapt to global uncertainties and evolving visitor expectations, the role of academic research in informing policy, practice, and strategic development becomes ever more critical. This article contributes to that endeavor by synthesizing a decade of scholarship and setting an agenda for future research that is integrative, impactful, and responsive to the challenges and opportunities facing the attractions sector.

2. Visitor attractions literature

2.1. Definitions

Over the past decade, the definition of visitor attraction has expanded significantly, influenced by technological innovation, shifting visitor expectations, and a greater emphasis on experiential value. Leask (2016) highlighted a move away from static, product-focused models toward more dynamic, visitor-centric approaches that prioritize co-creation and emotional engagement. This evolution has continued, with Leask (2018) emphasizing that attractions now include not only permanent sites but also temporary, mobile, and digital experiences, thereby redefining attractions as nodes of experience. Leask (2022) further reinforced this perspective by recognizing attractions as multi-sensory, interactive environments shaped by both stakeholders and the active role of visitors.

Recent scholarship supports this broader, more fluid definition. For example, Neuhofer (2016) discussed how technology-enabled experiences foster deeper personalization and immersion, leading to increased visitor satisfaction. Similarly, Campos et al. (2018) explored co-creation in tourism, emphasizing the participatory role of the visitor in shaping attraction experiences. These insights align with contemporary industry practices, where attractions increasingly blend physical and digital elements to engage audiences across multiple touchpoints. As a result, the modern understanding of visitor attractions extends beyond physical boundaries to include experiential, emotional, and virtual dimensions, reflecting a shift toward more adaptive and inclusive tourism models.

2.2. Type of VA in research

As shown in Table 1, the sample articles were categorized by VA type following the categorization identified in Leask (2016). The authors sought to extend the categorization to further segment heritage from an umbrella category into its component parts (castles, historic sites, industrial, archaeological). This was intended to provide a more nuanced

understanding of unique management challenges emerging within sub-categories of the wider heritage sector.

Research set within a museum and gallery context has seen significant growth since Leask's (2016) findings, almost doubling within the timeframe. The 126 articles in this category predominantly focused on both visitor experiences and satisfaction. A number of works promote visitor engagement through experiential co-creation (Antón et al., 2017) and immersive storytelling (Blumenthal & Jensen, 2019) through a variety of means such as the development of late-events to attract new audiences at National Museums (Easson & Leask, 2019), information communications technology development in Spanish Civil War museums (Alabau-Montoya & Ruiz-Molina, 2019), and experiential marketing practice in Polish museums (Nowacki & Kruczek, 2021). Much of the research surrounding wellbeing, diversity and inclusion was based in museums and galleries, particularly in areas such as meeting the generative needs for psychological wellbeing in museums (Fan & Luo, 2022), democratizing museums (Coghlan, 2017), and enhancing museum accessibility for visitors with disabilities (Chiscano & Darcy, 2023).

A small body of work continues to explore the management factors inherent to theme and amusement parks particularly in Asia and the USA. Key issues related to carrying capacity are explored by Milman et al. (2020) who explore the differing perceptions of crowding vs. popularity in US theme parks. Such issues have also prompted management tool developments to both monitor visitor movement (Zhang et al., 2017a) and craft optimal visitor routes, such as Rodríguez-Díaz and Fernández's (2018) multi-objective programming tool. Emerging debates as to the role of technology within theme park environments shed light on the potential value of AR (Jung et al., 2015), VR (Wei et al., 2019) and dark ride technology (Langhof & Guldenberg, 2019) for enhancing theme park experiences.

Further analysis of the categories indicates the previous decade of VA research has been dominated with enquiry into built attractions with over 200 papers identified. Only 60 articles focused exclusively on natural sites including nature reserves, gardens, national parks, and other outdoor VAs. Critical management challenges related to sectoral issues including sustainable and responsible practices (Chan & Tay, 2016; Sriarkarin & Lee, 2018; Strzelecka et al., 2023), visitor monitoring and compliance (Goh et al., 2017; Liang et al., 2019), and visitor management strategies (Wolf et al., 2015; Li & Xiao, 2016; Chun et al., 2020) are prevalent in this category. Similarly, in zoos, aquaria and wildlife VAs, there is continued debate as to the ethical principles of keeping animal assets (Moorhouse et al., 2016; Doodson et al., 2022), along with the educational and conservation messaging associated (Ballantyne et al., 2018a; Kruger & Viljoen, 2022).

It should be noted, however, that a small proportion of papers conduct research at sites that feature both a built and natural element, such as the work by Baniya et al. (2021)

exploring visitor experiences in both the temples and natural spaces at Angkor in Cambodia, and the study by Kuo et al. (2015) into the effects of interpretation on visitor satisfaction in Taiwanese battlefield tourism. Other studies sought to compare management issues in both the natural and built environment through cross-site comparative work (Bhati & Pearce, 2017).

Table 1. Visitor attraction article by type of visitor attraction

VA Category	354
Museums and galleries	126
Nature reserves, country and national parks, forests	53
Various	35
Theme and amusement parks	27
Historic sites and monuments (inc. battlefields)	26
Zoos, aquariums, wildlife and farm parks	19
Archaeological	17
Religious sites (churches, abbeys, cathedrals, temples)	16
Castles and palaces (inc. forts)	12
Industrial heritage and craft premises	7
Gardens	6
Science and visitor centers	6
Historic houses	3
Distilleries and breweries	1

Source: Authors

2.3. By location (rural/urban/country/destination)

Consideration of the papers from a geographic perspective revealed equal focus on VAs in both urban and rural areas. While global coverage was represented in the sample, there was a European focus, with over 120 papers based in these countries and 40 based in the UK. Meanwhile, 88 articles featured VAs in Asia, with over 40 in China. Notably, outputs related to VAs in the USA were significantly reduced in number from Leask's (2016) review, with only 18 identified up until 2024. Over 30 articles featured cross-border research in multiple countries comparing VAs within the same category, for example, typologies of visitors to World Heritage (WH) sites in the USA, Serbia, and Morocco (Adie & Hall, 2016) and accessibility features of National Parks in South Africa and Zimbabwe (Chikuta et al., 2023).

2.4. Methods used in VA research

A further analysis of the articles by research method is summarized in Table 2. The balance of methods identified a shift to predominantly quantitative methods while retaining a prominence of qualitative studies including case studies. A key observation throughout this research is the dominance of multi-method studies, making it difficult to categorize individual papers. As such, articles were coded against multiple methods to recognize both the density and prominence of individual methods within VA research.

Among the papers featuring quantitative methodology, the dominant method of choice remains surveys and questionnaires. Studies utilizing these methods often coincide with economic and operational management challenges such as willingness to pay (WTP) for VA experiences (Milman et al., 2020; Boonsiritomachai & Sud-on, 2021), revisit intentions (Barnes et al., 2016) and social impact assessment (Thanvisitthpon, 2016). Furthermore, a small number of papers used surveys to validate existing frameworks, such as Xie and Luo's (2021) work using THEMEQUAL dimensions to assess visitor attitudes toward the re-opening of Chimelong Ocean Kingdom in China. Various sampling sizes are present with these methods, from smaller-scale projects such as Güneröz and Yanar's (2023) work with 161 Turkish museum professionals on their perceptions of diversity through, to large-scale projects including Wang et al.'s, (2021b) study into the impact of COVID-19 on the operating revenues of 4,222 VAs across China.

A growth in statistical modeling methods was evident with over 90 articles making use of these. A breakdown of such methods identified structural equation modeling and partial-least squares as prevalent tools within the past decade of VA research. Large-scale data sets and robust measurements are present throughout these papers to capture wide-reaching perspectives. For example, Strzelecka et al. (2023) used place attachment measures to understand resident attitudes to Tatra National Park from 27 towns surrounding the site. Similarly, Ma et al. (2016) drew on cognitive appraisal theory and used structural equation modeling to identify appraisal dimensions of 645 theme park visitors to inform theme park design. Many of the studies employing the partial-least squares (PLS) method conducted research across national boundaries, including López et al. (2019) cross-national analysis of factors influencing performance in Spanish and Latin American museums. Similarly, Camarero et al. (2019) used PLS to explore the impact of creativity on operating performance in museums across four countries. On the fringes of the sample were studies using ANOVA, importance-performance analysis (IPA) and exploratory factor cluster analysis.

Technical methods, including global positioning system (GPS) and geographical information system (GIS) visitor tracking, were found in 15 papers. Typically combined with additional methods (such as surveys), these articles often focused on visitor mobility and movement across spatial areas, such as Zheng et al.'s (2017) work into predicting

visitor movement at the Summer Palace in Beijing. Furthermore, GIS research was dominant in research within the National Park research to inform visitor management strategies across a large geographic area. Wolf et al.'s (2015) work utilized such techniques to track mountain bikers throughout Northern Australian National Parks to inform management development. Furthermore, visitor tracking in the digital space was employed by Barros et al. (2019) by using geotagged photo sharing in Teide National Park in Spain to assess visitor behavior beyond traditional, manual visitor tracking techniques.

Within the studies using qualitative methodologies, formal and/or informal interviews continue to be the leading method, being cited in over one hundred articles. In-depth interview techniques (often within an ethnographic approach) have often been used to explore topical, sensitive and indeed contested subjects within VA management. Notable examples include the use of local intangible cultural heritage at the Qeshim Geopark in Iran (Esfehiani & Albrecht, 2016), the draw of the 'homeland' for ancestral heritage tourists to Scotland (Alexander et al., 2017), stakeholder perceptions of regulating commercial activity at Victoria National Park (Randle & Hoyer, 2016), visitor emotions and experiences at natural disaster sites (Zhang, 2021), and the experience of visitors with obesity in museums (Poria et al., 2019).

There has been a significant increase in the number of articles using netnography as a dominant research method since Leask (2016). The use of sentiment analysis and text mining of TripAdvisor was employed in a number of studies analyzing visitor behaviors. Burkov and Gorgadze (2023) used online comments and perceptions to inform targeted products within St Petersburg museums. Similar use of TripAdvisor reflections and social media monitoring sought to identify unwanted visitor behaviors in Kruger National Park (Liang et al., 2019). Significant opportunities continue to exist for VA managers to mine accessible social media analytics to inform management practice (Gerrard et al., 2017). Equally, articles citing content analysis, semiotics and/or visual methods have gained in popularity in the past decade with over fifty noted in the sample. Content analysis of documentary material remains a prominent context builder with a variety of sources captured, including court judgements and newspaper articles (Frost & Laing, 2018); student essays (Musa et al., 2017), visitor comments books (Isaac & Budryté-Ausiejienė, 2015), and exhibition documentation (Potter et al., 2023). Visual methods have been employed in a select number of articles particularly to capture perceptions, such as Roche and Quinn's (2016) use of school children's drawings to understand preconceptions of heritage. Further methods, such as rich picture building (Wyatt et al., 2021; 2024) to assess interpretative design at lighter-dark VAs and staff-led visitor journey mapping (Villaespesa & Álvarez, 2019), have been used to visualize processes. Finally, a small number of studies employed photo-elicitation techniques to assess cultural meaning in heritage (Bapiri et al., 2021) and in the natural space, an example being Wang et al.'s

(2022) use of visitor-photographs at Kairakuen Garden in Japan. The use of visitor photos not only has the benefit of rich insight but can be leveraged to inform conservation work in sites at risk of degradation (Dillon et al., 2019).

Table 2. Cited methods within visitor attraction articles

Quantitative methods	
Surveys	171
Statistical modeling	92
Qualitative methods	
Formal/informal interview	105
Case study	54
Ethnography	18
Focus groups	16
Visitor tracking – manual, GIS, GPS	15
Netnography	45
Content analysis, semiotics and/or visual methods	51
Experimentation	20
Theoretical	11

Source: Authors

2.5. By market (Gen Y, family, etc.)

Only a small number of articles made specific reference to a target market, demographic and visitor profile. Thirty-four publications cited a unique target, with the majority focusing on children, young people, and/or families. The process of experiential learning and interpretation in heritage for children and families was a recurring theme for this market (Roche & Quinn, 2016; Yang & Lau, 2019; Moorhouse et al., 2019; Chitima, 2022). Melvin et al. (2020), meanwhile, focused on the need to leverage engagement platforms and resources to encourage the co-creation of multi-generational family experiences. There is a growing interest in the perception of children and young people towards VA experiences, including Jaafar et al. (2015) and emerging research capturing young people's perception of dark VAs (Dresler, 2023; Wang & Wu, 2023). Small pockets of research related to the Generation Y and Millennial market were apparent in relation to smart museum development (Manna & Palumbo, 2018; Zhang & Abd Rahman, 2022), new product development, and specialization to appeal to this market (Barron & Leask, 2017; Easson & Leask, 2019). There was an emerging focus on the teenage and Generation Z market, particularly in relation to technological capabilities in museums and

the effect of both mobile (Cesário & Nisi, 2023) and virtual (Komarac & Ozretić Došen, 2023) platforms to encourage engagement. While presently small in terms of the number of papers, this area is likely to receive greater attention in the next decade of research.

Beyond that, only pockets of scholarly work for different audiences appeared within the sample. The sense of place attachment for domestic visitors was examined in Prayag et al. (2018) work at Elmina Castle in Ghana. Similarly, notions of social attachment and social tendencies of domestic visitors were explored by Boyaghchi et al. (2020) at the National Museum of Iran. A small number of studies compared cultural expectations, behavior, and perceptions of Western visitors with those of other regional visitors (Prideaux et al., 2016; Almuhrzi et al., 2020), providing design insight for interpretative practice appropriate for both ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ perspectives. Regarding female solo visitors, a single article by Jin and Zhang (2022) explored the experience of such visitors within museum settings and argued for further research on gendered identity in social, cultural, and heritage spaces. Collectively, the lack of research on specific target markets indicates that there are opportunities for future VA research targeted to under-represented groups including senior visitors, unique socio-economic groups, and neurodiverse visitors.

2.6. Overview of VA research in past 10 years

Emergent themes within the analysis evidenced a growing interest in wellbeing, diversity, and equality within the VA domain. A growing focus on wellness tourism as a product was evident alongside a recognition of the benefits for VAs in supporting mental health and psychological wellbeing. Equally, critical debates in the sector around democratizing and decolonizing collections are being further debated in the literature (Haupt et al., 2022). Such debates will likely continue with a greater focus on how VAs can achieve multivocality in their design, management, and curation. Naturally, an academic focus on the impact of COVID-19, both on VA operations (Guo & Zheng, 2022; Chiscano & Darcy, 2023) and market intentions for VAs reopening to the public (Samaroudi et al., 2020; Agostino, 2023), gained attention in the past decade. Our approach to these articles was to include contributions that had a management legacy beyond immediate COVID-19 impacts. Future work may build on this to explore wider challenges for VA resilience in times of crisis.

Drawing on theoretical developments, such as co-creation and actor-network theory, several studies advocate for a collaborative approach to demonstrating value in contemporary VA experience (Mijnheer & Gamble, 2019; Bezova & Azara, 2021), and to consider VAs from a participatory approach (Jagodzińska, 2023). This calls for integrating input from local residents, communities, staff, volunteers, and visitors themselves in the creation of memorable and impactful experiences (Serravalle et al., 2019; Chen & Wu,

2021; Doyle & Kelliher, 2023). While this interdisciplinary lens has been applied in visitor-facing research, an interesting observation was the lack of focus on the VA workforce: namely staff recruitment, retention, and skills development. Notable exceptions come from Jung (2015), who identified that an unstable workplace culture in art museums led to high turnover, and Huang and Li (2022), who explored the challenges of retaining part-time amusement park workers. Beyond that, there will be opportunities for further research, integrating human resource management principles, to understand the dynamic workforce requirements in VAs that set them apart from other elements of the tourism system.

The diversification of research methodology is notable in the past decade, especially in the scale of quantitative studies employing statistical modeling. This could stem from the wider contemporary access to substantial data sets and advancements in modeling tools such as TURK. Significant growth in studies employing netnography as either a dominant or secondary method also highlights the value in utilizing the online space to gauge visitor sentiment, attitude, and reaction toward VAs. This indicates opportunities for VA managers to leverage online channels not only for indirect feedback but also a valuable data repository to influence management practice. Similarly, visual methods and elicitation have gained further prominence in the past ten years and provide additional depth in exploration beyond the textual and numerical. Such methods, while predominantly academic, have opportunities for VAs themselves in collecting insight from diverse audiences including children and families. Finally, while a niche area in this sample, the use of choice and scenario experiments (including prototyping) in VA research provide valuable avenues for trialing new product development for different audiences. This sample did not, however, find any evidence of experimentation dominant in other fields such as applied science and physiology, while largely a new frontier for VA research, the ability to test, measure, and interpret physiological responses to content (such as eye response, skin sensation and heart rate) may allow for a deeper level understanding of visitor perception in future interdisciplinary work.

3. Visitor attraction research organized by management theme

Table 3 summarizes the classification structure within four key areas: visitor management, site management, product management and resource management. As detailed in Section 1.2, articles were organized and coded initially based on Leask's (2016) classification to identify themes and sub-themes emerging throughout the sample. Table 4 extends this by presenting the specific papers aligned to these classifications and summarizes the overall content of the papers. The themes and sub-themes presented in Table 4 act to structure the narrative throughout the remainder of the paper.

Table 3. Classification categories of articles by management area, theme, and sub-themes

Visitor Management	Site Management	Product Management	Resource Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor Demand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Visitor motivations ○ Visitor preferences and expectations ○ Segmentation • Visitor experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Place attachment ○ Visitor behaviour ○ Visitor engagement ○ Visitor perceptions ○ Visitor satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder management • Staffing • Research and management practice • Technology • Impacts • Layout, facilities and infrastructure • Transport • Role within destinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product development • Product diversification • Marketing, branding and image • Financial, revenue management and willingness to pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Conservation ○ Environmental and climate change ○ Sustainable management • Designations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inscriptions ○ Impact • Interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Authenticity ○ Identity ○ Learning ○ Narratives and storytelling

Source: Authors

Table 4. VA research articles by theme, sub-theme, and focus

Key area/Theme	Study examples	Focus
VISITOR MANAGEMENT		
Visitor demand		
Visitor motivations	Alazaizeh et al. (2015); Choe et al. (2015); Lim et al. (2015); Alazaizeh et al. (2016); Chan and Tay (2016); Isaac and Çakmak (2016); Zhang et al. (2016b); Brida et al. (2017); Chen and Tsai (2017); Ivanova and Light (2017); Wu and Wall (2017); Ercolano et al. (2018); Lee et al. (2018); Lindberg et al. (2018); Prayag et al. (2018); Winter (2018); Isaac et al. (2019); Mangwane et al. (2019); Shakoori and Hosseini (2019); Mionel (2020); Oh and Kim (2020); Li et al. (2021); Prayag and Del Chiappa (2021); Smørvik (2021); Abraham et al. (2022); Zhang et al. (2022); Alrawadie et al. (2023); Carvalho (2023); Gürel (2023); Reichenberger (2023).	Studies investigating the motivations for visiting VAs including visitor views, attitudes and held beliefs.
Visitor preferences and expectations	Carr (2016); Saayman et al. (2016); Manna and Palumbo (2018); Sriarkarin and Lee (2018); Chikuta et al. (2019); Wang et al. (2022).	Investigating inherent visitor preferences and expectations for certain types of VA experiences.
Segmentation	Alazaizeh et al. (2015); Oliveira et al. (2015); Adie and Hall (2016); Kruger et al. (2016); Prideaux et al. (2016); Chen and Tsai (2017); Cicero and Teichert (2017); Bowman et al. (2019). Errichiello et al. (2019); Mangwane et al. (2019); Mgxekwa et al. (2019); Huang et al. (2020); Prayag et al. (2022); Carvalho (2023).	Studies investigating visitor segmentation and profiling including demographic, cultural, market and audience factors.
Visitor experience		
Place attachment	Ram et al. (2016); Alexander et al. (2017); Ramkissoon et al. (2017); Becker (2018); Prayag et al. (2018); Chi et al. (2019); Timoney (2020); Liu and Lan (2021); Potter et al. (2023); Strzelecka et al. (2023); Grek-Martin (2024)	The role of VAs in placemaking, authenticity and identity at both national and local levels.
Visitor behaviour	Alazaizeh et al. (2015); Chronis (2015); Haiying et al. (2015); Petr (2015); Rathnayake (2015); Wolf et al. (2015); Chan and Tay (2016); Prideaux et al. (2016); Tsang et al. (2016); Adam et al. (2017); Bhati and Pearce (2017); East et al. (2017); Forgas-Coll et al. (2017); Goh et al. (2017); Sun and Budruk (2017); Zhang et al. (2017a); Zhang et al. (2017b); Zheng et al. (2017); Antón et al. (2018); Ballantyne et al. (2018b); Manna and Palumbo (2018); Rodríguez-Díaz and Fernández (2018); Vu et al. (2018); Winter (2018); Alazaizeh et al. (2019); Barros et al. (2019); Enseñat-Soberanis et al. (2019); Esfandiar et al. (2019); Hardy and Aryal (2019); Liang et al. (2019); Poria et al. (2019); Ross (2019); Villaespesa and Álvarez (2019); Back et al. (2020); Huang et al. (2020); Jouibari et al. (2020); Milman et al. (2020); Scholtz and Van Der Merwe (2020); Ballantyne et al. (2021); Esfandiar et al. (2021); Hausmann and Schuhbauer (2021); Şimşek and Öztürk (2021); Choe et al. (2022); Farias-Torbidoni et al. (2022); Jin and Zhang (2022); Kruger and Viljoen (2022); Wight and Stanley (2022); Zhang et al. (2022); Burkov and Gorgadze (2023); Ding et al. (2023); Ponsignon et al. (2023); Smørvik (2023); Trabskaya et al. (2023); Zhu et al. (2023).	Studies investigating behavioural traits within VAs and associated impacts including visitor compliance, movement and crowding.
Visitor engagement	Griggio (2015); Antón et al. (2017); Barron and Leask (2017); Ababneh (2018); Kesgin and Murthy (2018); tom Dieck et al. (2018); Tussyadiah et al. (2018); Alabau-Montoya and Ruiz-Molina (2019); Blumenthal and Jensen (2019); Easson and Leask (2019); Hudson et al. (2019); Mijnheer and Gamble (2019); Melvin et al. (2020); Pan et al. (2020); Nowacki and	Studies exploring factors and practices influencing visitor engagement for a range of audiences.

	Kruczek (2021); Peng and Chen (2021); Fu et al. (2022); Liao and Bartie (2022); Tufail et al. (2022); Cesário and Nisi (2023); Clark and Nye (2023); Doyle and Kelliher (2023); Wang and Meng (2023).	
Visitor perceptions	Bond et al. (2015); Bryce et al. (2015); Isaac and Budryté-Ausiejienė, (2015); Rathnayake (2015); Barnes et al. (2016); Roche and Quinn (2016); Trinh and Ryan (2016); Zhang et al. (2016a); Baral et al. (2017); Ferilli et al. (2017); Kempia et al. (2017); Upton et al. (2017); Boateng et al. (2018); Goulding et al. (2018); He et al. (2018); Quintal et al. (2018); Winter (2018); Duval et al. (2019); Errichiello et al. (2019); Park et al. (2019); Poku and Boakye (2019); Wijayanti and Damanik (2019); Antchak and Adams (2020); Boyaghchi et al. (2020); Buckley (2020); Carbone et al. (2020); Luo et al. (2020); Mionel (2020); Pastor and Kent (2020); Sarial-Abi et al. (2020); Wight (2020); Bapiri et al. (2021); Oren et al. (2021); Xie and Luo (2021); Collinson and Baxter (2022); Guo and Zheng (2022); Korani and Mirdavoudi (2022); Riva and Agostino (2022); Dresler (2023); Stepchenkova et al. (2024).	Studies related to visitor perceptions and attitudes toward VA offerings and experiences.
Visitor satisfaction	Cho et al. (2015); Jung et al. (2015); Kuo et al. (2015); Lee (2015); Lim et al. (2015); Manthiou et al. (2015); Rathnayake (2015); Cheng et al. (2016); Fotiadis (2016); Jin et al. (2016); Ma et al. (2016); Rathnayake (2016); Campos et al. (2017); Forgas-Coll et al. (2017); Jensen et al. (2017); Moore et al. (2017); Wang and Zhang (2017); Beattie and Schneider (2018); Bideci and Albayrak (2018); Kang et al. (2018); Agyeman et al. (2019); Langhof and Guldenberg (2019); Mgxekwa et al. (2019); Oriade and Schofield (2019); Park et al. (2019); Shakoori and Hosseini (2019); Trunfio et al. (2019); Back et al. (2020); Blasco López et al. (2020); Chen and Ryan (2020); Milman et al. (2020); Baniya et al. (2021); Faerber et al. (2021); Wang et al. (2021a); Agyeman and Asebah (2022); Cao et al. (2022); Korani and Mirdavoudi (2022); Tsang et al. (2022); Zhang and Abd Rahman (2022); Alrawadieh et al. (2023); Jiang et al. (2023); Wang et al. (2023); Yap et al. (2024).	Research evaluating visitor satisfaction of VA offerings and perceptions of quality.
SITE MANAGEMENT		
Stakeholder management	Jaafar et al. (2015); Alazaizah et al. (2016); Jimura (2016); Ly and Xiao (2016); Randle and Hoyer (2016); tom Dieck and Jung (2017); Elsorady (2018); Frost and Laing (2018); Dillon et al. (2019); Mijneer and Gamble (2019); Serravalle et al. (2019); Kennell and Powell (2020); Li et al. (2020); Jagodzińska (2023); Lind and Lindström (2023); Ly and Tan (2023); Silva, Ribeiro, and Carballo-Cruz (2023).	Studies exploring stakeholder relationships with VAs including community partnership.
Staffing	Chronis (2015); Jung (2015); Kuo et al., (2015); Hoggard et al. (2016); Ababneh (2018); Becker (2018); Hsieh (2018); Alazaizah et al. (2019); Villaspesa and Álvarez (2019); Bezova and Azara (2021); Dragouni and McCarthy (2021); Peng and Chen (2021); Cao et al. (2022); Huang and Li (2022); Schwob et al. (2022); Doyle and Kelliher (2023); Duursma et al. (2023); Wyatt et al. (2024).	Studies related to the VA workforce and visitor facing roles including tour guides.
Research and Management practice	Jung (2015); Lillestol et al. (2015); MacLeod et al. (2015); Zakakis et al. (2015); Alazaizah et al. (2016); Chen and Chang (2016); Ly and Xiao (2016); Li and Qian (2017); Pláček et al. (2017); Elsorady (2018); Sriarkarin and Lee (2018); Camarero et al. (2019); Chi, Zhang, and Liu (2019); Dillon et al. (2019); Finastian et al. (2019); López et al. (2019); Wijayanti and Damanik (2019); Carbone et al. (2020); Li et al. (2020); Dragouni and McCarthy (2021); Nunes et al. (2021); Alawamleh and Abuqura (2022); Gatelier et al. (2022); Haupt et al. (2022); Schwob et al. (2022); Tiberghien and Lennon (2022); Cao et al. (2022); Cesário et al. (2023); Tryapkin (2023); Guo et al. (2024).	Papers exploring facets of VA management practice including structures, decision making and processes.

Technology	Badell (2015); Garibaldi (2015); Jung et al. (2015); Gerrard et al. (2017); tom Dieck and Jung (2017); He et al. (2018); Jung et al. (2018); Kesgin and Murthy (2018); Tussyadiah et al. (2018); Vu et al. (2018); Alabau-Montoya and Ruiz-Molina (2019); Duval et al. (2019); Errichiello et al. (2019); Hudson et al. (2019); Moorhouse et al. (2019); Rueda-Esteban (2019); Serravalle et al. (2019); Trunfio et al. (2019); Wei et al. (2019); Agostino et al. (2020); Chun et al. (2020); Luo et al. (2020); Samaroudi et al. (2020); Wu et al. (2020); Hausmann and Schuhbauer (2021); Orea-Giner et al. (2021); Alawamleh and Abuqura (2022); Atzeni et al. (2022); Gatelier et al. (2022); Liao and Bartie (2022); Magliacani and Sorrentino (2022); Manca (2022); Trunfio et al. (2022); Tufail et al. (2022); Wight and Stanley (2022); Zhang and Abd Rahman (2022); Agostino (2023); Aziz et al. (2023); Carignani et al. (2023); Cesário and Nisi (2023); Charlesworth et al. (2023); De Las Heras Pedrosa et al. (2023); Handoko & Nugroho (2023); Jiang et al. (2023); Komarac & Ozretić Došen (2023); Kyprianos and Kontou (2023); Sánchez-Amboage et al. (2023); Trunfio et al. (2023); Wang and Meng (2023); Zhu et al. (2023); Yap et al. (2024).	Papers related to technology adoption and use within the VA sector including mobile, AR, VR and mixed reality.
Impacts	Jaafar et al. (2015); Driml et al. (2016); Hung et al. (2016); Liu (2016); Moorhouse et al. (2016); Pietilä and Fagerholm (2016); Randle and Hoyer (2016); Tay et al. (2016); Thanvisitthpon (2016); Wu and Chen (2016); Wuepper (2016); Zhang et al. (2016b); Kim et al. (2018); Prayag et al. (2018); Alazaizah et al. (2019); Chi et al. (2019); Enseñat-Soberanis et al. (2019); Esfandiar et al. (2019); Liang et al. (2019); Chun et al. (2020); Esfandiar et al. (2021); Liu et al. (2021).	Papers exploring impacts of VAs for communities and local economies Includes the impact of visitors on VA resources.
Layout, facilities and infrastructure	Alazaizah et al. (2015); Haiying et al. (2015); Rathnayake (2016); Ababneh (2017); Díez Gutiérrez et al. (2017); Zhang et al. (2017a); Zhang et al. (2017b); Barros et al. (2019); Chikuta et al. (2019); Liang et al. (2019); Paraskevaidis and Weidenfeld (2019); Poku and Boakye (2019); Antchak and Adams (2020); Atkinson et al. (2020); Chun et al. (2020); Jouibari et al. (2020); Scholtz and Van Der Merwe (2020); Agyeman and Asebah (2022); Collinson and Baxter (2022); de Rooij et al. (2022); Guo and Zheng (2022); Hood et al. (2022); Zhao and Cheng (2022); Chikuta et al. (2023); Clark and Nye (2023); Ding et al. (2023).	Papers investigating the role of spatial layout and infrastructure provision in VAs.
Transport	Rathnayake (2016); Díez Gutiérrez et al. (2017).	Studies related to transport surrounding and within VAs.
Role within destinations	Chang and Pang (2016); Wong (2016); Chi et al. (2019); Yang et al. (2019); Pastor and Kent (2020); Silva et al. (2023)	Related to the role of VAs in the socio-economic landscape in their host destinations.
PRODUCT MANAGEMENT		
Product development	Wong (2016); Alexander et al. (2017); Barron and Leask (2017); Beer et al. (2017); Hashimoto & Telfer (2017); Wang and Zhang (2017); Kennell and Powell (2020); Li et al. (2020); Shinde (2020); Tsang et al. (2022); Tufail et al. (2022); Cesário and Nisi (2023); Cesário et al. (2023); Clark and Nye (2023); Trunfio et al. (2023).	Studies related to the development of new VA products and experiences.
Product diversification	Coghlan (2017); Bowman et al. (2019); Easson and Leask (2019); Agostino et al. (2020); Antchak and Adams (2020); Charlesworth et al. (2023); Shen et al. (2022).	Related to diversifying offerings and expanding provision.
Marketing, branding and image	Badell (2015); Petr (2015); Chang and Pang (2016); Fillis et al. (2016); Hung et al. (2016); Jin et al. (2016); Krisjanous (2016); Wong (2016); Adie et al. (2017); Cicero and Teichert (2017); Gerrard et al. (2017); Moreno-Gil and Ritchie (2017); Wang and Zhang (2017); Ballantyne et al. (2018b); Hsieh (2018); Quintal et al. (2018); Vu et al. (2018); Mgxekwa et	Explores the design and impact of VA marketing including brand development and the construction of VA image.

	al. (2019); Paraskevaidis and Weidenfeld (2019); Fronzetti Colladon et al. (2020); Can et al. (2021); Hausmann and Schuhbauer (2021); Orea-Giner et al. (2021); Manca (2022); Wang et al. (2022); Carignani et al. (2023); De Las Heras Pedrosa et al. (2023); Lind and Lindström (2023); Sánchez-Amboage et al. (2023); Ponsignon and Holmqvist (2024).	
Financial, revenue management and willingness to pay	Byun and Jang (2015); Cho et al. (2015); Oliveira et al. (2015); Rathnayake (2015); Rathnayake (2015); Driml et al. (2016); Fotiadis (2016); Jin et al. (2016); Rathnayake (2016); Saayman et al. (2016); Baral et al. (2017); Lal et al. (2017); Bowman et al. (2019); Camarero et al. (2019); Mgxekwa et al. (2019); Neuts (2019); Zou (2020); Boonsiritomachai and Sud-on (2021); Wang et al. (2021b); Shen et al. (2022); Agostino (2023); Reichenberger (2023); Zhao and Chan (2023).	Papers exploring financial management of VAs including visitor spending and willingness to pay.
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT		
Sustainability		
Conservation	Jaafar et al. (2015); Lai (2015); Lee (2015); Carr (2016); Esfehiani and Albrecht (2016); Jimura (2016); Moorhouse et al. (2016); Díez Gutiérrez et al. (2017); Li & Qian (2017); Ballantyne et al. (2018b); Ghoddousi et al. (2018); Frost & Laing (2018); He et al. (2018); Kang et al. (2018); Dillon et al. (2019); Finastiiian et al. (2019); Liang et al. (2019); Kruger & Viljoen (2022); Doodson et al. (2022); Strzelecka et al. (2023).	Research related to conserving resources both in natural and built VA environments.
Environment and climate change	Liu (2016); Tay et al. (2016); Wu and Chen (2016); Goh et al. (2017); Ballantyne et al. (2018b); Alazaizah et al. (2019); Esfandiar et al. (2019); Newell (2020); Ballantyne et al. (2021); Liu et al. (2021); Price and Rhodes (2022).	Presence of environmental messaging in VAs and global environmental issues affecting VAs.
Sustainable management	Moorhouse et al. (2016); Pietilä and Fagerholm (2016); Thanvisitthpon (2016); Adam et al. (2017); Sriarkarin and Lee (2018); Agyeman et al. (2019); Parga Dans and Alonso González (2019); Chun et al. (2020); Farías-Torbidoni et al. (2022).	Papers exploring sustainable management practices in VAs.
Designations		
Inscriptions	Jimura (2016); Adie et al. (2017); Lee and Quintal (2018); Parga Dans and Alonso González (2019). Yang et al. (2019); Kennell and Powell (2020).	Exploring the criteria for and perception of WH sites or National Park inscription.
Impact	Jaafar et al. (2015); Wuepper (2016); Baral et al. (2017a); Baral et al. (2017b); Hashimoto and Telfer (2017); Kim et al. (2018); Yang and Lau (2019); Yang et al. (2019).	Research into the impacts of WH sites or National Park inscription on communities, residents, visitors and destinations.
Interpretation		
Authenticity	Bryce et al. (2015); Hung et al. (2016); Ram et al. (2016); Baral et al. (2017a); Goulding et al. (2018); Kim et al. (2018); Duval et al. (2019); Loureiro (2019); Jin et al. (2020); Komarac et al. (2020); Sarial-Abi et al. (2020); Prayag and Del Chiappa (2021); Atzeni et al. (2022); Tiberghien and Lennon (2022); Zhang et al. (2022); Wang et al. (2023); Wang and Wu (2023); Grek-Martin (2024); Stepchenkova et al. (2024); Zhang et al. (2024).	Studies exploring perceived authenticity both in resource and interpretative practice.
Identity	Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2015); Chang and Pang (2016); Coghlan (2017); Boateng et al. (2018); Packer et al. (2019); Almuhrzi et al. (2020); Timoney (2020); Wight and Stanley (2022); Potter et al. (2023); Strzelecka et al. (2023).	Personal and perceived identity within VA interpretation.

Learning	Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2015); Brida et al. (2017); Ivanova and Light (2017); Wu and Wall (2017); Mirghadr et al. (2018); tom Dieck et al. (2018); Ballantyne et al. (2018a); Lindberg et al. (2018); Moorhouse et al. (2019); Yang and Lau (2019); Pan et al. (2020); Ballantyne et al. (2021); Şimşek and Öztürk (2021); Chitima (2022); Price and Rhodes (2022); Baker and Hover (2024).	Exploring the achievement of learning outcomes through interpretative programming.
Narratives and storytelling	Lin (2015); Quinn and Ryan (2015); Hoggard et al. (2016); Ryan (2017); Upton et al. (2017); Goulding et al. (2018); Price and Ronck (2018); Cui et al. (2019); Langhof and Guldenberg (2019); Kim (2020); Mionel (2020); Oh and Kim (2020); Pastor and Kent (2020); Bezova and Azara (2021); Liu and Lan (2021); Peng and Chen (2021); Willard et al. (2021); Campos et al. (2023); Wyatt et al. (2024).	The construction and presentation of narratives within interpretation.

Source: Authors

3.1. Visitor management

3.1.1. Visitor demand

Motivations, preferences and expectations

As found previously in Leask (2016), visitor motivation studies focusing on visitor attractions continue to be interwoven with the closely related themes of visitor experiences, preferences, and segmentation. Whereas studies on television and film tourism and their impact on attraction visitation were plentiful a decade ago, studies on dark tourism have become more prominent since that time. One such study is that of Pizam and Medeiros (2022), which explores attitudes, motivations, and emotions in the context of dark tourism sites, their study specifically exploring the desire of descendants of victims of the Holocaust to visit related sites. Earlier studies by Isaac and Cakmak (2016), on the motivations and emotions of visitors to a genocide prison museum in Cambodia, Upton et al. (2017), on travel blogs of battlefield tourist experiences, and Isaac et al. (2019) on visitor motivations to attend concentration camp memorials, contribute to the growing body of literature on dark tourist experiences. Further examples of this emerging body of literature are studies by Mangwane et al. (2019) on motivations to visit an apartheid museum, Wight (2020) and Wight and Stanley (2022) on visitor perceptions of European Holocaust heritage, and Carvalho (2023), which identified five tourist categories to dark exhibitions.

While Prayag et al. (2018) argue that dark tourism research has been lacking in depth and variety of analysis regarding the psychological factors that impact tourist satisfaction, a number of studies in the field demonstrate a range of approaches to the analysis of tourist satisfaction at dark attractions. Such approaches include the application of applied discourse analysis to websites of contested sites (Krisjanous, 2016), factor segmentation analysis in the context of battlefield sites (Chen & Tsai, 2017), and the study of motivations and experiences at 'lighter' dark attractions through semi-structured interviews (Ivanova & Light, 2017). The diverse nature of dark tourism studies over the past decade is further evidenced by the study by Xie and Sun (2018) that examined different visitor senses on their 'embodied' experiences, and the relationship between dark tourism and folk culture (Mionel, 2020).

Beyond studies on dark tourism, the role of the tourist in the planning and management of attractions has been a prominent study focus. Studies by Alazaizeh et al. (2015, 2016) represent two examples that argue for sustainability to be pursued in the context of heritage tourism, the views and experiences of tourists need to be effectively considered. The latter of these studies explores how different tourist value orientations impact

management actions. A related study by Winter (2018) offers insight into “commenting” and how the voice of the tourist is heard in the process of attraction management.

In terms of the study of motivations, preferences, and expectations more broadly, a plethora of studies exists, ranging from an examination of visiting heritage museums with children (Wu & Wall, (2017), to studies that investigate responsible tourism practices at attractions (Chan et al., 2016), and the role of learning, cultural capital accumulation and attraction motivations (Brida et al., 2017). Studies that are likely to be of interest to all attractions are two that examine the varying motivations between first-time and repeat visitors (Lim et al., 2015; Shakoori & Hosseini, 2019), and the study by Zhang et al. (2016b) that explores the contribution of local residents to the touristic ‘ambiance’ of attraction visitation.

In the specific context of visitor preferences and expectations, Carr (2016) provides an intriguing study on the ‘ideal’ traits of zoo animals as viewed by the general public, Manna and Palumbo (2018) offer insight into how museums can be made more attractive to young people, while the myriad of attributes that come together for sustainable development in the context of attractions is central to the study by Sriarkarin and Lee (2018) (note that the sustainability of VAs is further considered in Section 3.4.1). These studies represent examples of the rich variety of studies in this domain and highlight the challenge for those researching attractions to draw neat boundaries around the various themes and sub-themes.

Segmentation

Studies on segmentation featured strongly in Leask’s (2016) review and continue to do so in the present one. Authors are particularly keen to identify changing patterns of visit behavior. One such study is that of Adie and Hall (2016) who build on the rich source of material on heritage tourism by exploring the demography of visitors to WH sites. They concluded that although visitors were primarily well educated, limited similarities in relation to age, income, or residence countered the traditional stereotype of a heritage tourist. In the context of cultural heritage sites, Alazaizeh et al. (2019) and Prayag et al. (2022) are two examples of studies that examine segmentation through visitor experience and satisfaction, and self-concept and psychological antecedents, respectively. A study that offers insight into the means by which price or free admission impacts visitor behavior is that of Bowman et al. (2019), who explored the market differences of visitors who attended on free-admission days as compared to regular days when there was a charge for admission.

National parks, meanwhile, continue to serve as a case context for attraction segmentation studies, with studies by Esfandiar et al. (2019; 2021) exploring visitor binning behavior in national parks, an important contribution in determining sustainable patterns of behavior when visiting such attractions. Huang et al. (2020), meanwhile, explore more traditional perceived benefit segmentation of visitors in the context of national parks. Beyond national parks, further examples of the many segmentation studies conducted over the past decade include the role of children in influencing visits to museums (Cicero & Teichert, 2017), the implications of wearable VR technologies (Errichiello et al., 2019), visitor WTP at attractions for recreational benefits (Oliveira et al., 2015) and a study of segmentation by birth generations (Prideaux et al., 2016). Although diverse in context, each study adds to our understanding of segmentation in visitor attractions more broadly, along with the means by which such understanding impacts the ability to deliver a satisfactory visitor experience.

3.1.2. Visitor experience

Place attachment

Authenticity, place attachment, and identity are important themes within the wider domain of attraction research (as advocated by Ram et al., 2016, and Timoney, 2020). The increasing acknowledgement of ‘ancestral’ or ‘homeland’ tourism (Alexander et al., 2017) provides deeper insights into the place-attachment agenda, as does Becker’s (2018) study that sheds light on post-migrant generations in Berlin and the management of ‘difference’ and ‘belonging’. These, and similar studies, offer insight into deeply personal experiences on the part of the visitor, while the study by Chi et al. (2019) provides an example of a study examining the impact of tourism on local community managers and their own attachment to their communities. Taking a slightly different perspective, the recent study by Potter et al. (2023) reveals the complexity of relationships between the tourism landscape and ‘black’ placemaking in the historical context of anti-Black racism in the United States.

Although the number of studies on this sub-theme were not plentiful, their breadth spanned a range of quite diverse studies that encapsulated digital storytelling (Liu & Lan, 2021), ‘memoryscapes’ in the context of authenticity and heritage trails (Grek-Martin, 2024), and the relationship between quality-of-life and place satisfaction (Ramkissoon et al., 2017).

3.1.3. Visitor behavior

Compliance and pro-environmental behavior

Inappropriate visitor behavior at attractions serves as a small but growing strand of literature, with studies conducted in theme parks (Tsang et al., 2016), US national parks (Goh et al., 2017), and South Africa (Liang et al., 2019), indicating increasing scholarly interest in this growing trend. Non-compliance when visiting attractions appears widespread, with the desire to go 'off trail' adding to the visitor's so-called sense of adventure. Vandalism caused by visitors, meanwhile, is a theme taken up by Bhati and Pearce (2017) in the contrasting destinations of Bangkok and Singapore, while a study by Liang et al. (2019) using online tourist photographs suggests that approximately 7% of all visits demonstrate evidence of non-compliant behavior. The cost of securing compliance, either in terms of introducing compliance measures or monitoring them, can be prohibitive.

In contrast to studies on deviant behavior, studies have also been conducted over the past decade investigating the evidence for and practices of more responsible forms of tourist behavior. Whether from the perspective of the tour operator (Chan & Tay, 2016), or of visitation to wildlife attractions (Ballantyne et al., 2018b; 2021; Kruger & Viljoen, 2022), it would appear that developing solutions to engender positive, more responsible patterns of visitor behavior at attractions are likely to be more fully under the research spotlight in years to come than maybe has been warranted in the past. This is in part driven by the perennial challenge of overtourism in many parts of the world.

Visitor movement and crowding

With overtourism a recurring theme in the broader tourism literature in recent years, studies on visitor crowding and the flow of visitors in and around attractions have become more prevalent over the past decade. Several studies conclude that crowding, be it actual or perceived, decreases visitor satisfaction with there being a need for those managing attractions to understand what can be done to protect and/or enhance the visitor experience. Studies on visitor crowding include those by Rathnayake (2015a) conducted in Sri Lanka, that of Antón et al. (2017) on the contributory role of co-creation of the visit experience with museum visitors as a means to maximize satisfaction, and that of Scholtz and Van Der Merwe (2020) on efforts to minimize overcrowding and their impact on the visit experience in a national park. Although particularly challenging at heritage sites – as evident in the study by Ding et al. (2023), archaeological sites (Enseñat-Soberanis et al., 2019), and national parks, where there is a tendency for visitors to stray from the directed route (Farías-Torbidoni et al., 2022) – it is of note that such studies are equally valid in planned touristic environments such as theme parks and museums. Examples of studies that examine spatial layout, route planning, and the need for visitor journey maps in theme parks include Zhang et al. (2017a), Villaespesa and Álvarez (2019), and Rodríguez-Díaz

and Fernández (2018) respectively, with the recent study by Milman et al. (2020) confirming the negative impact of crowding on the theme park visit experience.

A number of emerging technologies are increasingly being used to study these phenomena. Example studies that investigate the use of such technologies include the examination of visibility analysis and neural network simulation (Jouibari et al., 2020), the use of GPSs (Zheng et al., 2017; Choe et al., 2022) and public-participation GISs in the specific context of mountain biking for park visitor management (Wolf et al., 2015), geotagged data from social networks (Barros et al., 2019), and global navigation satellite system technology that enables the automated tracking of tourist behavior (Hardy & Aryal, 2019)

Visitor engagement and perceptions

As evident in studies by Barron and Leask (2017), Easson and Leask (2019) and Cesário and Nisi (2023), the engagement of younger audiences in museums remains fertile ground for research. Such attractions are generally eager to cultivate the next generation of visitors. Beyond more traditional approaches, Fan and Lou (2022) examine the contribution of generativity as a form of engagement for younger audiences, while Collinson and Baxter (2022) explore actions that can induce more transformative patterns of behavior across age groups in the context of historic and cultural attractions. The co-creation of visitor experiences across a range of attractions also represents a rich vein of research. Example studies include the co-creation of tourism experiences in historic houses (Doyle & Kelliher, 2023), co-creation between local stakeholders and management (Mijnheer & Gamble, 2019), and experience marketing of visitor attractions in Poland (Nowacki & Kruczek, 2021). Family interactions have been found to be an integral component of visitor co-created experiences at attractions, as evidenced in the study by Hood et al. (2022) and in their contribution to the spatial design of heritage museums as demonstrated in the study by Melvin et al. (2020).

Visitor immersion, often through storytelling and interpretation, contributes greatly to memorable visit experiences. A myriad of studies has explored this domain over the past decade with the study by Isaac and Budryté-Ausiejienė (2015) scrutinizing visitor comment books, that by Manthiou et al. (2015) using script theory, and the study of consumer immersion by Blumenthal and Jensen (2019) and Fu et al. (2022) examples of studies that seek deeper understanding of visitor engagement at attractions.

The increasing use, and integration, of VR, AR, and wearable technologies has changed the dynamics of visitor engagement at attractions. Papers on this topic range from studies of the implementation of augmented reality at cultural attractions, the contribution of

wearable technologies to the tourism experience (Tussyadiah et al., 2018) and the role of non-immersive VR experiences in attractions (Zhu et al., 2023), as also outlined in Section 3.2.4. One notable study is that of Alabau-Montoya and (Ruiz-Molina (2019) who examine the role of such techniques in the specific case of war attractions.

Perception studies are an integral part of tourism research, with perception being seen as an important element in determining visitor satisfaction and behavioral intention in the context of visitor attractions, especially revisit intentions (see, for example, the study by Barnes et al., 2016). Perceptions of authenticity and authentic experiences provide input to the design and delivery of attraction experiences (Wang et al., 2023), while cultural and individual personal values contribute to the authentication of attractions (Stepchenkova et al., 2024). One emerging area of interest is that of wellbeing and the contribution to happiness and quality of life of engagement in nature-tourism attractions. The study by Ferilli et al. (2017) embodies this research trend, with its examination of visitor behavior, museum environments and well-being.

3.1.4. Visitor satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction studies continue to represent an important contribution to the wider attraction literature. Such studies provide a critical lens for changing trends and insights for the future development of visitor attractions. To meet and exceed the changing needs and expectations of visitors, understanding what factors contribute to a truly satisfactory experience is critical, irrespective of the attraction context be they national parks (Agyeman et al., 2019), zoo attractions (Lee, 2015; Agyeman & Asebah, 2022), or heritage attractions (Kempiak et al., 2017). The impacts of service type and/or service quality on satisfaction have been studied by Beattie and Schneider (2018) and Oriade and Schofield (2019) among others. Studies on visitor type (Bideci & Albayrak, 2018), tour guides and interpretation (Kuo et al., 2015), authenticity and AR (Jung et al., 2015; Park et al., 2019), and co-creation and active participation (Campos et al., 2017), represent examples of research that contributes to our deeper understanding of satisfaction.

The study by Faerber et al. (2021) provides a critical synthesis of 30 years of satisfaction research at attractions. More recent studies have begun to shed light on the emotional dimensions of visitation and their impact on satisfaction (Alrawadieh et al., 2023), the contribution of sentiment analysis using big data analytics (Jiang et al., 2023) and increasing levels of digitalization and digitization across attractions (Yap et al., 2024) and the emergence of smart museums (Zhang & Abd Rahman, 2022). A sub-theme within the satisfaction literature relates to studies on loyalty and memorability, including studies on loyalty and repeat visitation offering operational and strategic insight for those managing

attractions. Studies by Moore et al. (2017) on visitor loyalty to a national park in Australia, that by Shakoori and Hosseini (2019) on the Golestan Palace in Iran, and the examination of archaeological tourism by Blasco López et al. (2020), illustrate the varied works in this domain.

3.2. Site Management

Papers included in this section covered a wide range of topics relevant to site management. Consistent with Leask (2016), stakeholder management continues to represent one of the largest in terms of the volume of papers. The task of identifying stakeholder interests and managing the VA site to meet these thus continues to be a major focus of research into the management of VA sites.

Technology was also found to be a prominent sub-theme, with many papers emphasizing the critical role that technology plays in VA site management. The kinds of technology, however, have changed considerably, with VR, AR and mixed reality (MR) now taking center stage alongside the use of social media by VAs.

Two small clusters of papers did not fit easily into any of the sub-themes developed here: one concerned with transport and traffic modeling (Rathnayake, 2016b; Díez Gutiérrez et al., 2017), the other comprising a diverse set of studies on the role of VAs within destinations (Chang & Pang, 2016; Chi et al., 2019; Silva et al., 2023). A prominent study in this group is that by Yang et al. (2019), which presents a meta review of 43 studies the effect of WH status on tourism demand. The study concludes that despite the commonly held view that WH status serves as a powerful brand, it tends not to play a significant role in attracting tourists (see also Section 3.4.2).

3.2.1. Stakeholder management

Stakeholder management continues to be an important emphasis in VA research. A prominent conclusion of studies in this grouping is the importance of ensuring that all salient stakeholder groups are effectively included in stakeholder management practices (Ly & Tan, 2023). Serravalle et al. (2019) and tom Dieck and Jung (2017) both make a strong case for including a broad set of stakeholder interests in the development of AR. In contrast, the systematic review of 138 studies on theme parks by Li et al. (2020) suggests that the main focus of research has been on factors influencing visitors' behavioral intentions, almost to the exclusion of all other topics, including stakeholder management. This suggests that research into stakeholder management practices by VAs has tended to be uneven in terms of its application to different parts of the sector.

Community participation

While Leask's (2016) review noted that community participation was a popular thread in the literature on stakeholder management at VAs, the present review found relatively few studies in this area. These serve to confirm the difficulties in building community participation in VA management (Jaafar et al., 2015; Jagodzińska, 2023). In terms of how to overcome these obstacles, Mijnheer and Gamble (2019) argue that a positive, open relationship between managers and local communities is necessary. Maintaining this kind of relationship is necessary for co-creation to flourish and to add value to VAs. It is notable that the depiction of site management as a co-creative process overlaps with the growing attention being paid to co-creation in several other themes in this review.

Conflict

Studies in this sub-group were few in number and diverse in subject focus, although most adopted a stakeholder approach to understanding the causes and effects of conflict. Jimura (2016) found that management conflicts at a WH site in Japan, particularly between tourism and religious practices, were due to a lack of effective stakeholder consultation. Alazaizeh et al. (2016), meanwhile, found that tourists with stronger heritage motivations tended to favor direct management interventions at heritage VAs. This reinforces the view that stakeholder groups are rarely homogenous in terms of their interests. Randle and Hoyer (2016) do, however, provide an example where stakeholder groups are agreed at least on the need for a clearer government vision for tourism in their national park. Kennell and Powell's (2020) study also suggests that stakeholders at a WH site generally did not wish it to become sensationalized, tacky, or inauthentic. On this matter, at least, stakeholders could agree.

Partnership

A relatively small number of papers were found on this topic, covering diverse subjects such as the benefits of working in partnership with VA stakeholders (Elsorady, 2018; Lind & Lindström, 2023) and the forms such partnerships can take, such as distributed co-management arrangements (Ly & Xiao, 2016). A few papers focused on more innovative partnership practices, such as making visitors a 'researcher for the day,' and their feedback providing potentially useful information for those involved in curation and site management (Dillon et al., 2019). Frost and Laing's (2018) paper is instructive in that it examines the case of a public-private partnership that failed, most other papers focusing on those that are considered successful.

3.2.2. Staffing

Scholars have evidently been active in filling the gap identified by Leask (2016) in terms of research on paid staff and management personnel. Papers in the current review consider a variety of issues relevant to VAs, including the role of the curator in determining visitor satisfaction (Caso et al., 2022), the impact of leadership style on museum workers' job satisfaction (Dragouni & McCarthy, 2021), determinants of self-governance by front-line workers in VAs (Schwob et al., 2022), and the organizational benefits of cross-training of employees in a variety of visitor-facing roles (Villaespesa & Álvarez, 2019). In contrast, while there were many papers in the 2016 review examining volunteers, few featured in the current review. An exception was that by Duursma et al. (2023).

Two new topics have opened up in the literature since Leask (2016): a larger body of work on tour guides and a smaller one examining staff recruitment, retention, and skills. Regarding the latter topic, Huang and Li (2022) examine the structural relationships between recruitment information, employment satisfaction, and retention in the context of part-time seasonal workers at an amusement park. Jung (2015), meanwhile, considers the problem of leadership turnover in art galleries, and questions the suitability of traditional, hierarchical management structures in such circumstances.

Tour guiding

A growing number of papers has been published on various aspects of tour guiding in the VA context. The breadth of focus of studies in this theme reflects the wide range of roles that tour guides perform at VAs, confirming the key part they play in site management. Indeed, the tour guide is found in papers in this sub-section to be important in influencing visitors' behavior (Alazaizeh et al., 2019), including their connection to and engagement with the site (Becker, 2018; Bezova & Azara, 2021; Doyle & Kelliher, 2023), actors in the 'staging' of visits (Chronis, 2015), narrative storytellers (Quinn & Ryan, 2015; Hoggard et al., 2016; Wyatt et al., 2024), and key agents of visitor satisfaction (Kuo et al., 2015; Peng & Chen, 2021). Such studies suggest that tour guides are far from neutral players in the management of VA sites, with such staff playing various roles that need to be better understood.

3.2.3. Research and management practice

Leask (2016) noted an urgent need for more research into how VAs can themselves undertake more effective market research and develop their management practice to demonstrate the value of the experiences they offer and to win public financial support.

While this need has by no means melted away, recent research suggests that the core of the problem is not so much with a scarcity of market research, or even with the lack of adoption of modern organizational management processes, but with the traditional, largely hierarchical and inflexible management structures that are still the basis of many VAs, especially museums and other VAs based in the public sector (Jung, 2015).

The literature generally accepts the need for change; the main bone of contention is what form it should take. Alazaizeh et al. (2016), for example, recommend a bottom-up management structure, in which management practice is directly informed by the value orientations of visitors. In contrast, Cesário et al. (2023) and Li and Qian (2017) both identify a lack of involvement by heritage professionals in the management of VAs Dragouni and McCarthy (2021), meanwhile, argue for the greater empowerment of workers in the management of VAs Nunes et al. (2021) argue that transformative leadership, combined with contextual ambidexterity, can positively influence a museum's performance. Elsorady (2018) makes a more general case for including visitors, governing bodies, and community in management decision making

Other research has focused on the fundamental management task of objective-setting. Camerero et al. (2019), for example, indicates the importance of management decision making striking an appropriate balance between artistic creativity and economic viability. Haupt et al. (2022) argue that there is a need to disrupt organizational culture so that diversity, equity, access, and inclusion initiatives can gain traction in museums. López et al. (2019) argue that museums need to become more innovation- and marketing-oriented if they are to improve their operational performance.

Few papers, in contrast, propose specific management processes or tools. Examples include Carbone et al. (2020), who recommend the wider use of the total quality management framework. Sriarkarin and Lee (2018) discuss the use of choice experiments to shape management and strategy, while Chen and Chang (2016) demonstrate the use of a novel technique for demand modeling. Gatelier et al. (2022) present a business model innovation methodology for the introduction of technology into VAs. Some of the tools that are recommended are, perhaps surprisingly, very traditional. Finastiian (2019), for example, makes the case for the use of SWOT to inform organizational strategy, while Li et al. (2020) recommend a macro-micro framework for strategy development in theme parks which incorporates the conventional 'STEER' approach to macro-environmental scanning. Plaček et al. (2017) presents a customizable set of optimal performance indicators for museums, which has long been a widely accepted technique in other industry sectors.

3.2.4. *Technology*

As anticipated in Leask (2016), most of the papers in the section reflected the growth of mobile devices and their potential to transform the visitor experience, particularly in terms of visitor interpretation and engagement. Among the few exceptions are Aziz et al. (2023) and Wu et al. (2020), which consider the use of interactive kiosks at museums and temples respectively.

The studies in the current review concerning the use of digital technologies can be grouped according to three types of application: AR, VR, and MR. In the AR group, studies focused particularly on how far AR could enhance visitor learning (tom Dieck et al., 2018; Moorhouse et al., 2019; Cesário & Nisi, 2023) and the visitor experience more generally (Jung et al., 2015; tom Dieck & Jung, 2017; Jiang et al., 2023). The findings of such studies have generally found that AR does indeed have such potential. Much was found to depend, however, on the design of the AR application. Cesário and Nisi (2023), for example, recommend the use of co-design to develop AR applications for teenage visitors to museums. Serravalle et al. (2019) suggest engaging all stakeholder groups in developing a more digitized visitor experience at museums. He et al. (2018) consider the impacts of information type and degree of immersion, while Tussyadiah et al. (2018) examine the role of embodiment. Jung et al. (2018), meanwhile, raise the possibility of significant cross-cultural differences in visitors' readiness to use AR in VAs.

In the rather smaller VR group, research has focused on the relationship between VR and authenticity, particularly in terms of how this may affect visitor satisfaction and (re)visit intention (Atzeni et al., 2022; Komarac & Ozretić Došen, 2023). Some studies have found that the sense of presence is an important factor in determining visitors' satisfaction with VR in museums (Wei et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2023). Hudson et al. (2019) found that, contrary to findings from the online gaming industry, social interaction among VR participants was a significant determinant of visit satisfaction. Errichiello et al. (2019), meanwhile, present a profile of museum visitors based on their perceptions and attitudes regarding the use of VR.

Regarding the use of MR, studies are clustered around the concept of 'Museums 4.0,' a model in which museums offer an individually customized and essentially 'footloose' experience for their visitors (Trunfio et al., 2022). Driven partly by the forced closure of museums during parts of the COVID-19 period (Sánchez-Amboage et al., 2023), VAs have been experimenting with MR technologies that provide virtual access to their sites (Rueda-Esteban, 2019; Trunfio et al., 2019). Trunfio et al.'s (2023) study is one of the first to demonstrate that the use of MR can not only enhance heritage exhibition management but also effectively improve visitor satisfaction.

A fourth, relatively large group of studies relates to the use of social media by VAs. Such studies fall into two main categories: those that consider the use of social media by VAs (e.g., Badell, 2015; Carignani et al., 2023; Kyprianos & Kontou, 2023; Manca, 2022) and those that use social-media data as 'big data' for research (Vu et al., 2018; Wight & Stanley, 2022). Examples of the latter include Gerrard et al. (2017), which uses data from Twitter (now 'X') to understand the phenomenon of inspiration at museums. Luo et al. (2020) consider how big data drawn from social media platforms can be used by theme parks to investigate visitor behavior. Chin et al. (2020) make innovative use of social-media data to plot the spatial behavior of visitors at national parks through the geospatial data associated with their posts.

Such is the increasing pace of technological change in the new millennium, that many studies in this sub-section undeniably now appear somewhat dated. It must be conceded that this trend is only likely to grow as the pace of change further accelerates. Given that the time-to-publication in traditional academic journals is in many cases lengthening, it can be conjectured that important work on the technological aspects of VAs may not appear in journals in the future but rather be published in conference proceedings and as working papers.

Concerns expressed about the collection and use of visitor data employing technology noted in Leask (2016) have, meanwhile, apparently subsided. Indeed, such practices are said to be now entirely commonplace in many VAs (Hausmann & Schuhbauer, 2021) and no studies in the present review were specifically focused on this issue.

3.2.5. Impacts

Impacts of various kinds have been discussed in many papers elsewhere in this review. This sub-section considers those focusing particularly on impacts in the context of VA site management. Three groupings emerge, those being community, economic and visitor impacts.

A small number of papers consider community impacts. These find that impacts are often mixed, not only in terms of their magnitude but also their direction. Chi et al. (2019), for example, examine the attitudes of WH site managers towards corporate social responsibility, which were found to be partly driven by their emotional response to the various impacts of tourism on the local community. Another example is the study by Thanvisitthpon (2016) which found that the potentially positive impacts of local residents on a historical park in Thailand were limited because locals were prohibited from active commercial participation.

Another cluster of studies, also relatively small, considers the economic impacts of VAs in the context of site management. Kim et al.'s (2018) study, for example, examines the economic value of two WH sites in Korea. Driml et al. (2016), meanwhile, consider the long-term economic benefits that can be associated with the presence of pandas in an urban zoo.

The cluster on visitor impacts is much the largest of those in this sub-section. Many such studies focus on visitor impacts at cultural heritage sites (Prayag et al., 2018; Alazaizeh et al., 2019), while others examine natural sites (e.g., Pietilä & Fagerholm, 2016; Tay et al., 2016). A particular emphasis has been on promoting sustainable visitor behavior: for example, encouraging them to dispose of their trash responsibly (Esfandiar, 2019, 2021). Liang et al. (2019) use visitors' social media as a source of information about the types and incidence of such unwanted behaviors. Wu and Chen (2016), meanwhile, demonstrate the use of satellite remote sensing to identify visitor impacts on vegetation in the ecological environment. Enseñat-Soberanis et al. (2019) propose a management model to minimize negative visitor impacts at archaeological sites, a pivotal feature of which is to use a range of methods to redistribute visitor flows in time and space.

3.2.6. Layout, facilities, infrastructure

A theme identified in this review, which was not included in Leask (2016), concerns the layout, facilities and infrastructure of VA sites. Those concerned with VA site layout include Barros et al. (2019), who use geotagged photographs taken by visitors and posted on social media platforms to assess visitors' spatial behavior. Chun et al. (2020) adopt a similar approach. Studies such as Díez Gutiérrez et al. (2017), Rathnayake (2016b) and Zhang et al. (2017a; 2017b) consider the causes and solutions to spatial congestion at national parks.

Studies on VA facilities and infrastructure more specifically have tended to take a consumer-oriented approach, attempting to determine how the functionality, design and quality of facilities contribute to the visitor experience (Antchak & Adams, 2020; Agyeman & Asebah, 2022; Guo & Zheng, 2022; Clark & Nye, 2023). Collinson and Baxter (2022) and Hood et al. (2022) take this further to characterize VAs as liminal space that has a significant transformative potential for visitors. Two papers also open up a new stream of research into the accessibility of VAs for people with disabilities (Chikuta et al., 2019, 2023).

Two clusters in this sub-section are of further particular interest: a larger set of studies focusing on the identification and implementation of carrying capacities, and a smaller one examining safety and security concerns at VAs. Overcrowding occurs when a VA

site's carrying capacity is exceeded. Partly due to growing public concerns about crowding during and following the COVID-19 pandemic, several studies in this group consider the causes, effects, and possible solutions to crowding at VA sites (Ding et al., 2023; Zhao & Cheng, 2022). While conducted in pre-pandemic times, Haiying et al.'s (2015) study proposes a model to optimize visitor flow through a large metropolitan zoo to avoid levels of crowding that may reduce visitor satisfaction. Scholtz and Van Der Merwe (2020), in contrast, take a very different approach of investigating how far overcrowding perceptions of visitors to a national park might be reduced by emphasizing particularly memorable aspects of the visit. Six peak experiences were identified, which could be useful when measures to reduce visitor crowding are not feasible. Regarding the identification of effective carrying capacities, Zhao and Cheng (2022) demonstrate a novel visual methodology for use in museum settings. Zhang et al. (2017a; 2017b) propose and test a conceptual framework to classify the determinants of the carrying capacity of theme parks.

A small but important cluster of research in this review focuses on safety and security at VA sites. As Poku and Boakye (2019) note, the focus of the great majority of studies examining safety and security in the tourism context has been at the destination level, with few studies examining such issues at the micro-level of individual sites. A study by de Rooij et al. (2022) examined safety concerns with respect to hygiene measures associated with COVID-19. Atkinson et al. (2020), meanwhile, explore counter-terrorism security practices at UK museums, which may be especially at risk from jihadist terrorism both for instrumental and symbolic reasons.

3.3. Product management

3.3.1. Product development and diversification

Only a limited number of studies reflect the need for attractions to diversify and 'pivot' through and after the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly when so many have been negatively impacted by varying periods of closure and visitor controls. One such study, by Agostino et al. (2020), touches upon this theme in the context of state museums in Italy and their 'pivot' to showcasing their collections online and through social media. Shen et al. (2022), meanwhile, provide an example of the impact of government stimulus policies on museum visitation in Taiwan, concluding that diversifying to outdoor exhibits served as an effective mitigation strategy to minimize the negative visitation impacts of the pandemic. A more expansive study was conducted by Charlesworth et al. (2023) of websites and social-media platforms for museums in the UK, with the study in part serving as a benchmarking platform for future studies for museums and other attractions that see the need to diversify beyond their traditional offering to alternative virtual visitorscapes.

Beyond the pandemic, a number of studies, including that of Barron and Leask (2017) and Easson and Leask (2019), review the strategies adopted to diversify primarily heritage attractions and museums to younger audiences (see also Section 3.1.1.). In the specific context of teenage audiences, Cesário and Nisi (2023) identify various interactive options to engage this often-neglected segment far more effectively than has been the case previously. More traditional examples of new attraction development and diversification relate to emerging attractions that focus on renewable energy, such as visits to wind parks and geothermal power plants (Beer et al., 2017), the ongoing transformation of industrial sites to heritage attractions (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2017), and the development of religious theme-park-style attractions that have wider implications for the future management of both religious sites and more traditional heritage attractions in the future (Shinde, 2020).

3.3.2. Marketing, branding and image

The marketing of attractions continues to serve as a dominant theme of research, the past decade witnessing a transformation in respect of technological change in the marketing context. Hausmann and Schuhbauer (2021) provide a valuable overview of how information communication technologies have become an integral element of cultural and heritage attractions, not only as part of the visit experience but also to gather information for the more effective and efficient management and marketing of attractions. This theme is taken up in the study by Orea-Giner et al. (2021) of how new technologies contribute to a better understanding of attraction performance and play their part in the co-creation of more effective management processes and visitor experiences.

Digital environments are now commonplace in the context of value creation at visitor attractions. The hyperconnected world we now occupy opens the door for creative interactive and multimedia content to complement the more traditional visit experience. Carignani et al. (2023), for example, examine the impact of TikTok on the visit experience. The earlier study by Gerrard et al. (2017) delved into data from Twitter, now known as X, as an opportunity to study evidence of visit inspiration. The study of De Las Heras Pedrosa et al. (2023), and an earlier study by Badell (2015), represent two examples of studies that explore how art museums in Spain accommodate and continue to leverage benefit from social media. Many museums have already embraced 'contactless culture,' with AR, VR, blockchain technologies, and emerging forms of AI all serving as agents of change, i.e., disruptors to the wider attractions sector (Sánchez-Amboage et al., 2023).

Branding and image studies are far from unique among attractions. Ponsignon and Holmqvist (2024), for example, offer insights into the world of global luxury brands and

how they are interwoven into a viable visitor experience. The maintenance of a high-level, luxury image is critical to the visitor experience, a key contributor to the enhancement of brand perceptions. The online presence of attractions has changed greatly over the past decade, with user-generated content changing the dynamics from one of control to the encouragement of more online posting, as evidenced in the study by Fronzetti Colladon et al. (2020). Irrespective of the traditional, virtual, or hybrid nature of the attraction, understanding attraction image is key to managing and marketing attractions more effectively. For example, Moreno-Gil and Ritchie (2017) study the impact of visitor socio-demographics on attraction image, while Jin et al. (2016) explored the connectivity between image, price, and loyalty in the context of water parks, an underexplored segment of the wider attractions sector.

3.3.3. Financial, revenue management, and willingness to pay

Pricing generally, and more specifically visitors' WTP, represents a strong thread of research. The study by Baral et al. (2017b) provides a thoughtful analysis of the economic value of an attraction with World Heritage designation and visitors' WTP for admission (see also Zhao & Chan, 2023). Typical of many is the study by Rathnayake (2016a) that employs the contingent valuation method to estimate the most appropriate price for admission to view elephants at the Minneriya National Park in Sri Lanka. A similar study was conducted by the same author, this time at the Kaudulla National Park, Sri Lanka, with the emphasis being on WTP and the search for a novel ecotourism experience (Rathnayake, 2016b).

With many publicly owned sites in the visitor attractions sector, pricing for admission is a sensitive issue, both economically and politically, with broader admission agendas sometimes at odds with strategies designed to maximize revenue. This sensitivity helps explain the emergence, and growth of 'pay-what-you-want' strategies at attractions. Indeed, the study by Boonsiritomachai and Sud-on (2021) highlights the adoption of such in cultural services and museums. It is interesting to note that evidence from their study suggested that pay-what-you-want is not positively correlated to altruism or fairness, with the actual amount paid by visitors not impacting their revisit intention. This corresponds closely to an earlier study by Neuts (2019) concluding that attraction pricing strategies rarely mirror market demand due to multiple other agendas at play. Despite this apparent nonchalance with pricing, the need to understand the dynamics of pricing and revenue management by policymakers is critical. With decreasing public funding available in many countries, and consequent inflationary pressures post-COVID-19, pressure will continue on those managing attractions to seek alternative and more innovative approaches to revenue raising while at the same time protecting the integrity of the attraction,

maintaining positive stakeholder relations, including those with residents, and satisfying the demands of government (Zou, 2020).

3.4. Resource management

3.4.1 Sustainability

Conservation

The focus of research into conservation from the perspective of visitor attractions management has widened since Leask (2016) to include nature conservation in captive settings such as zoos. Some studies have investigated the demand for zoo visits, including Carr's (2016) study into which animals visitors prefer to see and the study by Doodson et al. (2022) of the emerging 'meet-and-greet' (the animals) experience market. Other studies consider how best to use visitor education to balance the preferences of visitors and the welfare of zoo animals (Moorhouse et al., 2016; Kruger & Viljoen, 2022). Visitor education is also the subject of Ballantyne et al.'s (2018b) study, which considers how action-based website materials can help turn zoo visitors' learning into positive conservation behavior.

Research continues, nevertheless, to embrace nature conservation issues in non-captive settings such as national parks and protected areas. This includes the task of balancing development and conservation (Díez Gutiérrez et al., 2017; Liang et al., 2019). Other studies examine the delicate but vital role of local communities in supporting conservation efforts at natural WH sites (Jaafar et al., 2015; Jimura, 2016) and natural areas more generally (Strzelecka et al., 2023). Attention has also widened to consider how tourism based on intangible cultural resources may support nature-conservation initiatives (Esfehani & Albrecht, 2016).

The role of visitor attractions in the conservation of cultural and built-heritage resources also continues to be a prominent research subject. The focus on visitor motivations continues, with Finastiiian et al. (2019) considering the role of museums in the conservation of intangible heritage. Their study uses the case of the Traditional Weaving House in Isfahan, which they describe as a 'last-chance tourism' opportunity. Li and Qian (2017), meanwhile, examine how the interpretation methods used by archaeological museums to engage tourists could be improved

Environment and climate change

While previous studies have focused mainly on understanding the impacts of nature-based tourism and ecotourism on the natural environment, more recent studies have considered how these impacts can best be addressed. Ballantyne et al. (2018b) consider the role of zoos in educating visitors about the natural environment and sustainability. Ballantyne et al. (2021), meanwhile, examine how well interpretation aimed at general visitors tends may resonate with those who hold ethical values that favor positive behavior change. Esfandiar et al. (2019) consider the role of personal norms in determining the extent to which individual national park visitors disposed of their trash responsibly. Goh et al. (2017), meanwhile, explore the role of personal norms with respect to the likelihood of tourists venturing off trails.

The literature has also recently begun to focus more fully on global environmental issues, specifically climate change. Liu (2016) and Liu et al. (2021), for example, considered the effect of changes in rainfall and temperature on theme park visits. Newell (2020), meanwhile, investigates how five specialist climate museums are helping visitors to understand and personally respond to the climate crisis.

Sustainable management

Contrary to Leask (2016), which found that studies in this category tended to focus on funding and stakeholder-engagement issues, most of the papers in this cluster were concerned with practical aspects of sustainable management. This may reflect a shift in focusing on what hinders sustainable management to consider what needs to be done to achieve its objectives. Some authors argue that sustainable management practices can and should take account of tourists' expectations, motivations, preferences and satisfaction (Adam et al., 2017; Sriarkarin & Lee, 2018; Agyeman et al., 2019). Chun et al. (2020), for example, combines visitor surveys with big data to identify spaces of potential conflict between the touristic and ecological objectives of national parks in Korea. Pietilä and Fagerholm (2016) suggest that citizen participation systems can provide serviceable and cost-effective data. Moorhouse et al. (2016), however, take a contrasting view. As non-experts, tourists tend not to be sufficiently reliable data sources upon which to make crucial decisions about nature conservation or animal welfare.

While most papers in Leask (2016) focused on the environmental or ecological pillar of sustainability, there appears to be a growing recognition that the socio-cultural (Parga Dans & Alonso González, 2019) and economic (Thanvisitthpon, 2016) pillars are of equal importance in the sustainable management of resources used for tourism purposes.

3.4.2. Designations

As was the case in Leask (2016), this section was dominated by papers concerned with UNESCO's WH inscription and its effects. For the purposes of consistency, this updated review considers only papers where the content of the paper related specifically to the motivations for seeking WH status and/or the implications of achieving it.

Inscriptions

Regarding the drivers for seeking inscription, all of the papers in this section related to inscription of sites on UNESCO's WH list. Unlike the Leask (2016) review, where studies focused mostly on sites in Asia, the geographical spread was greater in the present review. Kennell and Powell's (2020) study is based in Greenwich in the UK, while Parga Dans and Alonso González's (2019) examine Altamira, Spain. Adie et al. (2017), examine three sites on different continents – USA, Morocco, and Serbia – thus being one of the few extant comparative analyses of the motivations for WH inscription. There is an emerging view among studies of WH inscription that the reasons VAs have for seeking WH inscription may have more to do with political aspirations than using it to serve as a foundation for tourism development (Yang et al., 2019; Kennell & Powell's, 2020).

Impact of WH inscription

With the exception of Wuepper (2016), all the papers under this heading focused on WH sites in Asia. This corresponds Leask (2016), suggesting that the main focus for investigating the tourism impact of WH sites remains on sites in that continent. A new development in the literature is that researchers are increasingly applying economic valuation methods to determine the value of WH status in enhancing the site as a tourism attraction (Wuepper, 2016; Baral et al., 2017b). Yang et al. (2019), meanwhile, present an important meta review of the impacts of WH status in terms of changes to visitor numbers. While their paper suggests that there is no consistent evidence to suggest that WH inscription inevitably leads to greater visitor numbers, where there has been an increase, the effect is significantly greater in more recent time periods, at cultural sites, and in developing countries. Meanwhile, natural sites have a greater enhancing effect on visitor numbers at WH sites located in developed countries.

Contrary to the findings of Leask (2016), few studies in the present review examine the involvement of local residents in WH site management. Exceptions include Baral et al. (2017a), who consider international visitors' perceptions of the authenticity, preserved integrity and universal value of the Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park, Nepal, and Kim et al. (2018), who examine that visitors' perceptions of authenticity at two WH sites in South Korea. It is likely that the paucity of studies in this area should not be taken to

suggest that such matters are considered solved; rather that other issues are considered more pressing.

3.4.3 Interpretation

Authenticity

Many papers in this group in Leask (2016) focused on how VA managers should best balance the competing demands of authenticity and visitor experience, particularly in terms of the over-riding need to provide entertainment for visitors. Researchers continue to suggest that interpretation strategies based around combining education and entertainment (i.e., edutainment,' see Komorak et al., 2020) may be part of the solution. Importantly, studies such as Hung et al., (2016) situate this management task in the realm of sustainable development, hence the inclusion of this sub-section in the sustainability section of the present paper.

Studies in Leask (2016) suggested that there was little evidence that attraction visitors valued authenticity over entertainment. In the present review, however, Baral et al. (2017a) found that visitors to the Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park in Nepal strongly valued its authenticity, while Wang et al. (2022) found that perceived authenticity can be a significant determinant of satisfaction in a dark tourism context. Prayag and Del Chiappa (2021), meanwhile, question the importance of perceptions of authenticity when they are not associated with emotional outcomes such as nostalgia.

Papers in the present review have further developed the understanding of authenticity in the VA context, many by deepening the analysis to examine different kinds of authenticity. Several, for example, seek to distinguish between objective and existential authenticity (Jin et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2018; Atzeni et al., 2022). Zhang et al. (2024), meanwhile, note that not only do different types of attraction (in their case a religious-based one) be managed according to different understandings of authenticity but that different types of visitors, even to the same attraction, will themselves tend to have different understandings of authenticity. As such, they will engage with the attraction in different ways.

There has been increased focus on the use of technology in interpretation at VAs since Leask (2016). Atzeni et al. (2022) consider different kinds of authenticity in the context of a VR version of Nuraxi WH site in Italy. This is not to suggest, however, that non-digital technologies are not of interest to academics. Stepchenkova et al. (2024), for example, considers the impact of staged authenticity on the propensity to visit different visitor groups. The literature is divided with respect to the use of replicas for interpretation. Duval et al. (2019) examine the effect of hyper-real physical replicas – in their case of the Cave

of Cahuet in France – and find that, perhaps surprisingly, visitors can overlook the inauthenticity of the replicas and subconsciously mesh simulation with reality. In contrast, in the empirical study of visitors at Egypt's Luxor Tutankhamun tomb by Sarial-Abi et al. (2020), which exists in both 'real' and 'replica' versions, suggests that visitors do not feel strongly about objective authenticity when their main goal is to have pleasure and fun.

Identity

While this was one of the smaller sub-sections in terms of the number of papers, this is not to suggest that identity has waned in significance since Leask's (2016) review. Indeed, the theme continues to produce important investigations into the identities of those associated with cultural and heritage sites on the one hand and those who visit them on the other. This is typified in the study by Almuhrzi et al. (2020), which explored differences in the interpretational needs and preferences of visitors according to whether they identify as 'insiders' or 'outsiders' of the attraction theme (Nizwa Fort, Oman). Other studies find that visiting attractions can shape visitors' identities at various levels. Examples include studies on the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana (Boateng et al., 2018), the Australian War Memorial and the Gallipoli battlefields (Paker et al., 2019), African American museums in the USA (Potter et al., 2023), heritage sites in Scotland (Timoney, 2020), and Holocaust sites (Wight & Stanley, 2022). It is important to note that cultural and heritage sites dominate the literature in this section, with little consideration of how visiting nature-based attractions may affect or be affected by conceptions of identity, one exception being Strzelecka et al. (2023).

Learning (including environmental education)

Studies in this section tended to focus on addressing the challenge of achieving meaningful learning outcomes through the use of interpretation. Such challenges may arise, for example, when the visit motivation is mainly recreational (Brida et al., 2017), or when visitors have limited interest in the attraction theme (Ivanova & Light, 2017). Chitima (2022), meanwhile, considers the challenges of using interpretation among very young (pre-school) children. Several studies have considered the use of digital interpretation technology to inspire visitor learning. Moorhouse et al. (2019), for example, explore the use of AR technology to encourage interactive learning by schoolchildren visiting a museum. Şimşek and Öztürk's (2021) examined whether visitors to a science museum preferred interactive exhibits. The study by tom Dieck et al. (2018), meanwhile, explores the potential of wearable AR to promote visitor learning.

Most papers in this section, as was the case in Leask's (2016) review, examined the links between interpretation and learning in cultural and heritage attractions, notably museums.

The number of papers that focus particularly on environmental education has, however, grown appreciably, thus warranting special attention. Examples include the study by Ballantyne et al. (2018a) which examines the role of wildlife tourism attractions in promoting environmental education, while both Ballantyne et al. (2021) and Lindberg et al. (2018) examine the importance of customizing environmental interpretation to the specific interests and values of particular groups of visitors. Baker and Hover (2024) also consider the importance of connecting with visitors' identities. The study by Price and Rhodes (2022) stands out by focusing on the potential for interpretation to deliver environmental education not in nature-based but industrial heritage attractions.

Narratives and storytelling

Many of the studies in this group continue to highlight the role of tour guides and other attraction staff in choosing between or resolving discordant interpretation narratives (Lin, 2015; Quinn & Ryan, 2015; Hoggard et al., 2016; Cui et al., 2019; Kim, 2020). Goulding et al. (2018), meanwhile, observe that the absence of an issue in interpretation of difficult heritage can speak more loudly than its presence. Other actors identified as being closely involved in constructing and delivering the narrative include museum curators (Ryan, 2017), dramatized exhibits (Willard, 2021) or re-enactor tour guides (Wyatt et al., 2024).

Several studies in Leask (2016) suggested that interpretation was best undertaken through a co-creative process with visitors. There were fewer such studies in the present review, a rare exception being Bezova and Azara (2021), which suggests that the process tends to be more one of co-production than co-creation, pinpointing the lack of knowledge among tour guides of how to undertake co-creative interactions as a major challenge to genuine co-creation.

Storytelling meanwhile emerged as a growing theme in the present version of the review. Campos et al. (2023), for example, explore the impact of storytelling on visitors' emotional engagement, imagination and memorability. Upton et al. (2017) examine the role that storytelling can play in helping visitors resolve cognitive dissonance concerning armed conflict. Fu et al. (2022), meanwhile, develop a conceptual model of the theme-park storytelling process, focusing particularly on how visitors interact with stories.

4. Future research agenda

By reviewing articles explicitly within the same scope as Leask (2016), it is possible to take stock of areas of relative progress, stagnation, and neglect in the field, and thereby make a number of observations and recommendations for future research. As such, this

section of the article provides a proposed agenda for future research in the field of visitor attraction management.

4.1. Visitor management

Perhaps the most significant change since Leask (2016) is that attractions today are operating in a post-COVID-19 environment, where constant crises appear to be the norm. Whether responding to inappropriate, non-compliant visitor behavior (Liang et al., 2019), managing the risks and behavioral impact on the visitor experience of extreme heat (Chang et al., 2024), air pollution (Duan et al., 2025), or overtourism (Milano et al., 2024), a subject that was only in its infancy a decade ago, those managing attractions have much to consider over and above the day-to-day operational management of their attractions. This may, in part, explain the growth in the number of studies examining dark tourism, with the surge in crises waking everyone up to the realities of our past and the surge in support for the politics of 'denial' where historical narratives are subject to change.

In addition to the challenges posed in the wider attraction ecosystem, multiple agendas are likely to impact the future management of visitor attractions. Although visitor satisfaction studies are not new, increasing value will be sought from studies that explore the emotional dimensions of visitation (Alrawadieh et al., 2023), sentiment analysis through data analytics (Jiang et al., 2023), and studies that investigate the increasing proliferation of 'smart' museums (Zhang & Abd Rahman, 2022). There also exists scope for more research scrutiny of the increasing cultural diversity of visitors, ever-changing visitor segments, and the changing social environments including multiple-generational visits. This may manifest in the form of designing and developing more sensitive visitor immersion strategies, with studies on storytelling and interpretation coming to the fore.

The means by which changing technologies, and increasingly wearable technologies (see Errichiello et al., 2019), are to impact the visitor experience will be welcome in future studies as will studies that explore the need for many attractions to appeal to younger audiences and generativity (Fan & Lou, 2022). The changing dynamics of the population, especially elderly markets, will warrant particular research scrutiny, as will the need to accommodate more seamlessly visitors with physical and intellectual accessibility challenges. Studies by Chiscano and Darcy (2024) on accessible value co-creation and studies by Sisto et al. (2022), Weiler et al. (2024), and an earlier study by Saayman et al. (2016), together provide a launch pad for future accessible attraction studies in the context of natural spaces and national parks.

In response to the changing political climate in many countries, and perhaps most notably in parts of Eastern Europe and the USA, the rollback on LGBTQ+ agendas invites future

studies on how attractions become more inclusive and emotionally safe places to visit (Li, 2025). This is despite the ‘white homonormativity’ of many attractions (Vo, 2021), and how ‘queer-friendly’ initiatives impact levels of visitation and satisfaction (Algueró Boronat et al., 2024). This changing political climate is also likely to serve as a catalyst for studies that investigate the impacts of travel bans and sanctions (Hall & Seyfi, 2021), anti-tourism movements driven by overtourism, most notably in Europe (Screti, 2022), and the role of race and its impact on the management of attractions, the study by Potter et al. (2023) on ‘black’ placemaking of relevance here.

Consistent with the expanding body of knowledge on tourism, wellbeing and quality of life, future studies that consider the broader challenges facing society and their impact on these themes are welcome. The study by Ramkissoo et al. (2017) provides a platform for future studies on quality of life and place satisfaction while a small number of studies are beginning to look at the role of more regenerative forms of tourism (Hajarrahmah et al., 2024), and the role of tourists and residents coming together to co-create the experience (Zhang et al., 2016b).

A final theme for future research in the management of attractions emanates from Leask (2016), which calls for further studies that explore, and develop, more critical conceptual and theoretical frameworks. This especially is the case for studies that are inclusive and explanatory of the visitor attraction experience. Previous studies on theme parks (Chen & Wu, 2021), nature-based tourism (Qiu et al., 2021), and religious theme parks as systems (Shinde, 2021) have begun to expand our conceptual understanding while studies on a range of emerging methodologies that include visibility analysis and neural network simulation (Jouibari et al., 2020), the use of GPSs (Zheng et al., 2017; Choe et al., 2022) and geotagged data from social networks (Barros et al., 2019) offer many opportunities for future studies. Crucial within many attraction studies in the future will be the role played by social media, whether as a marketing tool (Susanto et al., 2023) or as a vehicle to shape the visit experience and visitor behavior (Owuor et al., 2023).

4.2. Site management

Papers of relevance to site management covered a broad range of topics, with frequent overlap with other key themes in this review. As was the case with Leask (2016), a major emphasis was the highly complex and dynamic context of VA site management. With a wide range of stakeholder groups, each with their often overlapping and frequently competing interests in how the site is managed, many papers focused specifically on how such interests can better be identified, understood, and reconciled. Possible strategies range from consulting with stakeholders (Jimura, 2016) to developing new management structures and frameworks in which stakeholders effectively become co-managers (Ly & Xiao, 2016). What is clear, however, is that VA management practice has not advanced

appreciably in this respect: they are still largely based on traditional management structures and practices. As Elsorady (2016, pp.377-378) notes, while “stakeholders’ contributions [are] being recognized as a competitive advantage [...] their roles still need empowerment and development”. Future research needs to examine how site management can be better structured and organized to enable the full integration of stakeholder groups.

Recognition of multiple roles played by tour guides in site management therefore represents an emerging sub-theme within the review. Mijnheer and Gamble (2019) and Bezova and Azara (2021) both characterize tour guides as co-creators, along with management, in the VA experience. As such, they play a key role in site management, which warrants further investigation in future research.

Another positive development is the growing academic interest in the problem of how to deal with rising numbers of visitors at VAs with limited capacity constraints. More effective visitor management is essential, not only to ensure that the site’s resources are protected but also to shed further light on the ‘overtourism’ problem, which is the direct analogue of managing site capacity at the broader destination level (Hardy & Aryal, 2019). There is potential, therefore, for future studies at the site level and the destination level to be designed so that they can inform one another.

While the growth in the number of papers that consider the application of technology in the case of VAs is certainly welcome, most focused on just four technologies: AR, VR, MR and social media. Smart tourism will undoubtedly use a wider range of digital technologies than these, so it is vital that future research broadens its focus to include other innovative technologies, such as chatbots, AI, near-field communications, and wearable devices (tom Dieck et al., 2018).

Another important finding is that studies still tend to be inwardly focused, in that they are concerned with visitor impacts on the site rather than on the broader natural environment, economy, and/or community in which it is located. These impacts may be either positive or negative. There is, therefore, a need for more research to highlight the contribution VAs make to economic development, environmental protection, and community vitality, which will draw the attention of policy makers, planners and funders.

4.3. Product management

One of the universal outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the need to ‘pivot’, or diversify, beyond traditional norms and/or markets to survive. This is no different for those managing visitor attractions with the study by Charlesworth et al. (2023) advocating the need for attractions to reach out beyond their traditional market(s). Reinforcing the theme noted in Leask (2016), the advocacy for more ‘edutainment’ in the context of

'lighter' dark attractions (Wyatt et al., 2022) suggests that even quite established attraction sub-sectors are open to pivoting to retain relevance in the visitor marketplace.

The growing commercialization of attractions for other, and frequently non-tourism purposes, offers an emerging arena for research with studies that explore the role of attractions as a backdrop for television and filming gaining prominence. Studies by Shi and Pande (2023) on religious sites, Malihah et al. (2021) on cultural tourism sites more broadly, and Lyu et al. (2024) on historic towns and destination 'attractions' provide a foundation for future studies. This is also true for studies on the US National Park Service (Greenberg, 2022), which in addition to reduced resources is managing growing demand and environmental challenges, challenges that are likely to be shared by attractions in many parts of the world many countries.

As mentioned in Section 4.1., in an increasingly polarized world, especially politically, the very essence and meaning of attractions is subject to change. This is evident in the recent study by Reagin (2024) that introduces a 'new' interpretation of white colonial settlement in response to the changing political climate in the USA, while in Italy Mariotti and Stanziano (2024) illuminate the political polarization shaping dark attractions and their changing meaning. Changing political trends may also impact attraction pricing and the value and 'worth' attached to the price of admission. With a reduced public purse and increasing debt levels in many countries, more innovative and creative solutions will be required to adapt and maybe even protect attractions for longer-term survival. This is especially warranted with inflationary pressures and increasing price sensitivities in many markets.

Finally, the increasing omnipresence of technology suggests there will be no let-up in the contribution of technology in all its forms to the reshaping and transformation of attractions for future audiences, many of which will need to deliver a hybrid (in person and online) experience. Contactless culture has already been embraced by many attractions with the recent study by Sánchez-Amboage et al. (2023) providing an avenue for studies that cover the myriads of technology disruptors such as AR/VR, blockchain technologies and emerging forms of AI.

4.4. Resource management

Leask (2016) noted that sustainability was widely predicted to become a predominant issue in academic research on VAs. The present review suggests that this prediction may have been somewhat optimistic, as the sustainability theme still represents a relatively small number of papers in relation to others. What has happened instead is that the body of work has become less concerned with the barriers to pursuing sustainability in the VA context and has focused instead on what strategies might be most practice and effective in doing so. Such strategies will inevitably need to be based firmly on visitor perceptions,

motivations, and behavior if they are to be truly effective (Alazaizeh et al., 2015; Adam et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2022).

VAs are involved both as perpetrators and victims of climate change. They are perpetrators because they serve as primary pull factors motivating tourist travel. They are victims because they will experience the impacts of climate change directly, for example through less predictable rainfall patterns affecting their ability to plan (Liu, 2016), and indirectly, such as landscape change making the VA less attractive to potential visitors (Liu et al., 2021). This review suggests that relatively few papers have been published that consider this dilemma for VAs. Further research is therefore needed into how VAs can effectively adapt to the emergent realities of climate change.

Regarding the role of interpretation in resource management, the growing importance of effective storytelling has been noted in this review. Future research needs to build upon this, since, as Campos et al. (2023) note, interactive storytelling taking place live, in the setting where the stories took place, may have considerable potential to engage visitors. This emotional potential may be even greater than through the use of technologies such as multimedia displays or audio guides, which merely enhance traditional methods of interpretation.

4.5 Approaches and Methods for Future Research

In a period of significant challenges and innovations in the management of visitor attractions, the role of academic research in informing policy, practice, and strategic development has become ever more critical. This is also true of the role of attractions within broader tourism systems and their potential to contribute positively to cultural, social, and ecological wellbeing. Reflecting on progress since Leask (2016), significant strides have been made in terms of the sheer volume of articles focused on visitor attractions in the past decade (555 in initial sample). However, a smaller proportion of these articles ($n = 61$, 19%) were accepted into 4* world-leading publications than in the previous review ($n = 108$, 24%). This ignites the quantity versus quality debate in academic publishing, a debate that continues to remain a contentious issue for the scholarly community. As suggested by Khaliq and Shahwar (2025, p.3), “By resisting the demand for constant output, academics can reclaim their time and energy for research that matters”. The present article found that while the volume of papers focusing on visitor attractions has increased, many of those had to be rejected from the review because they were only tentatively linked to visitor attraction management per se. Many such studies used VAs as a research context or setting, but lacked the theoretical or managerial implications to extend knowledge in the field. As evidenced in this review, however, many meaningful contributions have nevertheless been published in the past decade and have advanced the research agenda in innovative ways. Hence, while strong progress has

clearly been made, the analysis presented in this article identified several areas for future research activity. Chief among these is the lack of research related to the VA workforce, leadership and staffing. This was identified in Leask's (2016) review and remains an area where study has been limited. Future studies rooted in human resource management concepts including recruitment, retention and talent management for the VA workforce of tomorrow would be highly valued. The lack of research in this domain remains problematic, bringing with it a concern for the study of tourism more widely. Indeed, Mooney and Baum (2019) comment that for a truly sustainable workforce to exist, more attention needs to be given to the neglected needs of women, younger and older members of the workforce, people with disabilities and migrant workers.

The findings presented here also highlighted a lack of research focused on unique market groups (see Section 2.5). Hence, as well as more research on the varied needs of the workforce, future scholarship could investigate the varied visitors' needs, expectations and preferences of particular groups such as local residents, visitors, children, marginalized groups and visitors with neurodiversity. The need for attractions to be more accommodating for people with disabilities is likely to underpin much research in the future. This theme is taken up by Chiscano and Darcy (2023) in their recent study on critical inclusive tourism with 'value co-creation', a proposed approach to reduce exclusion. Despite the contributions related to the sector's reliance to COVID-19 (such as Agostino et al., 2020), wider research into crisis management, continuity, and response in the VA domain remains an area for further scholarship particularly in response to uncertainty afforded by global health concerns, economic shocks, and geopolitical change. Although the majority of such studies have focused on the destination, rather than individual attractions, the increasing sophistication of ride technologies, safety concerns and the need for increasing legal protections is likely to expand more micro-level crisis studies, studies that to date are primarily conducted in the field of civil engineering (see for example Kim & Ri, 2022).

The rapid proliferation of technology and the perceived benefits/threats associated with artificial intelligence makes this a relevant theme for future targeted VA research particularly considering public concern surrounding data security, cyber-attacks and consumer privacy. As a vehicle for data collection, future research is likely to also witness the increasing use of drones and drone technology to monitor visitor flow, visitor impact and assist with crisis mitigation strategies (e.g., Ancin-Murguzur et al., 2020; Donaire et al., 2020; Ilkhanizadeh et al., 2020).

While the past decade of VA research has seen diversification in the range of methodological approaches, such as netnography, data mining and content analysis, the findings of this review highlight that interviews and self-completion surveys remain dominant in VA scholarship. As a driving, this study sought to explore the implications of scholarly VA research for management practice and theory. The growth in statistical

modelling methods raised the observation that many of these contributions often had limited tangible outcomes that could influence VA management. This was evidenced in the shortlisting process where many publications were rejected that largely focused on the implementation of the method, such as SEM, as opposed to theoretical contributions and/or applied management solutions in the VA sector. This provides opportunities for further studies to make use of large-scale data sets that can convert into meaningful practice to enhance the management of the sector. Similarly, our findings provide scope for further diversification in research methodologies prominent in other disciplines. These can include social experiments to identify causal inference between variables (Mize & Manago, 2022) and physiological responses to VA stimuli, among others.

Exploration of these methods paves the way for interdisciplinary research projects between tourism scholars and social/applied scientists. The move towards interdisciplinary work in tourism that addresses real-world problems in a multi-perspective approach (Okumus et al., 2018) was not widely evident in this study and make a call for action for VA researchers to consider collaborative activity in wider disciplines. Moreover, the need for universities to demonstrate societal impact both locally and internationally encourages a bridging of the gap between academia, education, and industry (Pang et al., 2024). Within VA scholarship, this brings fruitful future opportunities for collaborative research with and led by VA practitioners to create mutually beneficial knowledge exchange.

5. Conclusion

This review has demonstrated the increasing breadth, depth, and sophistication of VA management research over the period 2015 to 2024. The field has expanded significantly in response to shifting societal dynamics, technological innovation, and heightened environmental awareness. Building explicitly upon Leask's (2016) article, the current review reveals an increasingly diverse body of scholarship, reflecting a more interdisciplinary and methodologically varied approach to the study of visitor attraction management. A change in focus from resources and products to the recognition of assets and experiences can be seen in the literature.

The past decade has seen the emergence of new and salient research themes, including wellbeing, digital engagement, crisis resilience, and ethical and inclusive interpretation. Thematic developments have been matched by greater methodological sophistication, particularly in the use of quantitative modeling, digital analytics, and visual and participatory techniques. However, notable gaps persist. Areas such as workforce development, inclusive visitor engagement, and organizational transformation remain underexplored, despite their centrality to the effective management and sustainability of attractions.

Looking ahead, future research in VA management should continue to engage critically with the evolving challenges and opportunities facing the sector, including crisis management, overtourism and increasing politicization. There is a need for theoretically informed, practice-oriented scholarship that addresses issues of resilience, equity, sustainability, and innovation. Developing actionable models for co-creation, inclusive governance, and technological integration will be essential in supporting attraction managers operating in increasingly complex environments.

Ultimately, this review contributes to the development of a more coherent and forward-looking research agenda for visitor attraction management. It calls for continued reflection on the role of attractions within broader tourism systems and their potential to contribute positively to cultural, social, and ecological wellbeing. In doing so, it reinforces the importance of rigorous academic enquiry in informing adaptive, inclusive, and sustainable attraction practices over the decade to come.

5.1. Limitations

This article set out to review the published, peer-reviewed academic literature on visitor attractions, both in a manner and using a structure consistent with the previous study conducted by Leask (2016). Such a singular focus resulted in the omission of published textbooks in the field, as did it the omission of related studies and publications from government, industry practitioner and third-party 'association' sources, such as IAAPA in the USA. With pressure on academics to amplify their 'impact' beyond the world of academia, it is reasonable to assume that this study excludes some important perspectives that would have added to the richness of the analysis and critical reflection of the themes and sub-themes presented.

The adoption of an approach that mirrors the previous study by Leask (2016) also inadvertently gives the impression that the future will be structured in the same way as the past. This is not the intention of the paper, with the discussion of the themes and sub-themes opening up a number of areas that contrast with the previous findings so introducing new insights for the future study of visitor attractions. However, with the emergence and increasing prevalence of AI-generated material that affords academics new research capabilities, and the frustration caused by the typical delays to articles being published in traditional, high-quality peer-reviewed journals, future studies of this nature may arguably look very different. This is particularly possible regarding the methodology adopted, and the consequent structure, thematic identification and analysis. Although this may be viewed as a refreshing and more inclusive approach to the review and synthesis of visitor attraction research, similar challenges as to how to conduct such a large and complex review as at the same time generate sophistication and theoretical dissection will remain.

With the speed of change in the external environment and changing world of academic publishing, perhaps studies of this nature will begin to lose their relevance with AI-generated tools and techniques able to deliver similar reviews in a matter of seconds. However, the strength of previous research in the field, including many of the studies featured in this review, is the experience and applied knowledge gained by authors while conducting their research, their interactions with creators, their discussions with operators, and engagements with industry and government leaders. Although evident in many applied fields, this is especially true of studies in the domain of visitor attractions due to the predominance of small-scale and local attractions, their varied ownership and governance structures, and their proximity and integral importance to resident communities. It is for this latter reason, and the seemingly unstoppable force of ‘too many tourists’ that the role, meaning and impact of attractions to local communities is gaining research traction, albeit in more ‘academic’ outlets that span urban development, community place making, and public administration. This also can be said to be true for studies that focus on technology and its contribution to existing and future real and virtual attraction ‘experiences.’

Despite these comments and limitations, it can be argued that that academics and academic inquiry will continue to benefit from studies that explicitly seek to draw on the past and seek to guide future research in specific fields. Understanding the ‘journey’ of where research has originated may indeed become more important in a world that is rapidly being taken over by instantaneous, AI-generated solutions. As a generator of income, jobs, foreign exchange, and tax reviews, as a guardian of our cultural and natural resources, and as the provider of leisure satisfaction for millions of people worldwide every day, the VA sector needs – even, we might say, deserves – the kind of in-depth, critical, scholarly attention it has received here.

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