



Publisher
Sustainability for Regions



TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN VHEMBE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

Makhupu Queen Sekole ^{1*}, Mokoko Piet Sebola ²

^{1,2} University of South Africa, Pretler Street, Pretoria, South Africa

E-mails: ^{1*} 20533226@mylife.unisa.ac.za (Corresponding author); ² esebolmp@unisa.ac.za

Received 11 March 2026; accepted 14 September 2026; published 30 September 2026

Abstract. Like all other forms of pervasive disruption, COVID-19 disrupted the world's economic and social systems, while creating opportunities for some and devastating threats for others. The South African economy, through the tourism sector, was highly affected. This paper, therefore, investigated the opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector, with a focus on South Africa's Limpopo Province, specifically the Vhembe District Municipality. The study employed quantitative methods supported by a descriptive research design. For this study, a survey questionnaire was distributed to forty-two (42) tourism business owners in four (4) local towns in the Vhembe District, and convenience sampling was utilised to choose participants for the study. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A deductive analysis method was used to analyse data generated by SPSS from tables and figures.

Keywords: Business Forums; COVID-19; Local economic development; Opportunities; Tourism sector

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Sekole, M.Q., Sebola, M. P. 2026. Tourism opportunities created by the COVID-19 pandemic in Vhembe District Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa. *Insights into Regional Development*, 8(3), 318-329. <http://doi.org/10.70132/a4524567859>

JEL Classifications: Z32, R11

1. Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the COVID-19 pandemic due to its impact on economies worldwide. Several enterprises went into lockdown, demand dropped, and supply was briefly halted as a precaution against infection (Korinth & Ramasigher, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted supply chains, national networks, and organisational operations of all sizes, from micro to multinational (Xu et al., 2020). It has had a substantial effect on the global tourism industry, affecting travel agencies, hotels, cruise lines, and tour operators (Gossling, Scott & Hall, 2020). Given the disastrous impact of COVID-19 on the global tourism economy, some argue that the positives lie in market responses that were forced to change. The situation indeed provided an opportunity for 'resetting' the tourism sector, particularly in developing countries. Especially given the greatly reduced visitation numbers and profound changes in the traveller behaviour (Li et al., 2020). It is undisputed that developed countries generate more tourism dollars for developing countries. This paper, therefore, would like to answer the question: Did COVID-19 create new opportunities for tourism businesses in countries such as South Africa? Especially in the Limpopo Province, in the Vhembe District. In answering the research question, this paper will present the theoretical framework, literature review, results, discussion, and conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework: Local Economic Development (LED) Theory and the South African Context

Local Economic Development (LED) theories examine the strategies, actors, and institutions that drive economic growth in a specific local area. The study intends to use LED theory, specifically Growth Pole theory, to forecast and explain the opportunities that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic in the tourism sector. Growth pole theory, first proposed by Perroux in 1952, has been adopted across disciplines as a model of industrialisation for developing countries (Lee, 2015). The approach gained favour in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is not surprising that tourism has been exploited as a key business for district development in several nations (Rogerson, 2015).

LEDs have been used in many places in the world, particularly in the Growth Pole theory. It was most effectively used in the coastal development of Languedoc-Roussillon in France, as well as the proposed tourism resort in Cancun, Mexico. In these cases, the state's strategy included investing in tourism to promote area development and/or identifying economically disadvantaged regions with adequate fundamental tourism resources before extending tourism infrastructure to promote regional uplift (Clarke, 1981). Among the best examples of Growth Pole theory implementation were the Languedoc-Roussillon coastal development in France and the proposed tourism resort in Cancun, Mexico. In these situations, the state's approach included investing in tourism to promote area development and/or identifying economically disadvantaged regions with suitable fundamental tourism resources before using tourism infrastructure expansion to promote regional uplift (Clarke, 1981). In Indonesia, the growth pole has also been widely used. The tourism sector has emerged as one of Indonesia's primary drivers of economic growth (Haryana, 2020). Madagascar also adopted the Growth Pole Theory. The Madagascar Integrated Growth Poles Project aimed to accelerate development in three distinct regions of Madagascar, focusing on the Antananarivo-Antsirabe, Fort Dauphin, and Nosy Be development poles. The poles identified institutional capacity, skills, the business environment, infrastructure, and the availability of finance as important impediments to investment. The projects that drive the poles' growth span multiple sectors, with a special emphasis on tourism-driven growth in Nosy Be, export-driven growth in Antananarivo-Antsirabe, and mining and tourism in Fort Dauphin. Australia is a prominent example of a country that has applied the Growth Pole Theory to drive economic transformation and growth (Rodrigue, 2024). This method was developed to discourage individuals from relocating from regional areas to major cities while encouraging employment, growth, and investment in specific locations. LED theories, notably growth pole theory, have been utilised in North America, with the theory's key merits being its ease of use for analysis and forecasting, as well as its broad acceptance as a foundation for understanding North American economic development. The primary issue is its inability to see economic development as a long-term process (Malizia et al., 2020). LED theories, notably growth pole theory, have been utilised in North America, with the theory's key merits being its ease of use as a tool for analysis and forecasting, as well as its general acceptance as a foundation for understanding North American economic development. The primary issue is its inability to see economic development as a long-term process (Malizia et al., 2020). Africa, particularly South Africa, is an excellent example of a country that has adopted the growth pole method to promote national development, progress, and change. The growth pole aims to concentrate development in specific regions, creating centres where economic activity can thrive and benefit the surrounding areas. In the 1960s, the country implemented a regional development policy based mostly on this method. The government made significant investments in infrastructure and established businesses in select locations, hoping that development in those areas would eventually extend to the country's poorest and most remote regions (National Treasury, 2022). The National Department of Tourism has established a National Tourism Strategy to drive tourism growth, development, and transformation through its strategic pillars, which include: (a) effective marketing, (b) facilitating accessibility and visitor experience, (c) destination management, and (d) widespread benefits.

The Limpopo Development Plan 2020-2525 has highlighted Limpopo's growth poles, such as mining, agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing, with a leaning towards supporting SMEs, microenterprises, and cooperatives. The

Limpopo Development Plan's objectives are to ensure long-term development, generate decent employment through inclusive development and a sustainable way of life that enables people or communities to meet their immediate needs while preserving and enhancing their well-being over time in a way that is resilient, fair, and environmentally sound, enhance quality of life, boost the efficacy and effectiveness of developmental public services, encourage social protection, and investments, and support vibrant and equitable sustainable rural communities. The Limpopo Tourism Growth Strategy seeks to grow the province's tourism industry by leveraging its abundant natural resources and cultural heritage through the promotion of key sites, infrastructure development, community engagement, and sustainable practices. These activities are part of a larger goal to make Limpopo a popular tourist destination for both local and international visitors (LEDET, 2010). The Vhembe Tourism and Promotion Plan is consistent with the Limpopo Growth Strategy by leveraging the district's competitive edge in culture, heritage, and natural resources for tourism development and promotion. South Africa's policies and goals align with the growth pole approach, which promotes development, expansion, and change in the country.

3. Literature Review

Numerous studies on COVID-19 have been reported in various scholarly journals. Most studies about COVID-19 touched on the adverse economic impact on countries, but a larger volume of literature in that regard was published in health science journals. Yao, Xu, Skare & Wang (2024) acknowledged that "numerous published studies on the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 are predominantly written from the biomedical and social science perspectives". One of the few post-COVID-19 studies was conducted by Mandlakosi and Nyasha (2023) to assess the effectiveness of the South African government's response to COVID-19. Although government publications around the globe reported such impacts, few, if any, studies have targeted tourism opportunities generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the opportunities some small firms have taken to their advantage (Mandlazi & Nyasha, 2023). The literature in this study, backed by its empirical findings, explored that gap.

Innovation and Creativity in the Tourism Sector

According to Cheshmehzangi, Su & Zou (2023), a notable development was the widespread use of technologies across various work and service environments (Kitkowska, Alaqra & Wästlund, 2024). Along with its wide-ranging negative impacts, COVID-19 problems might be viewed as an opportunity to promote more sustainability in the pre-pandemic travel business (Schmidt, Sieverding, Wallis, and Matthies, 2021). According to Ost and Saleh (2021), the pandemic might be viewed as an opportunity to spur greater innovation and creativity in the tourism sector, thereby contributing to resilience and sustainability. When international borders were closed, domestic travel increased in places like Thailand and South Africa. The shift from "sustainable" tourism, which focuses on minimising harm, to "regenerative" tourism, which actively improves the destination, was cited as a benefit for "economic diversification," which lessens the dependence of local businesses on unstable international markets. This includes "building back better" by emphasising the welfare of local communities rather than just visitor numbers (Sigala, 2020; Gössling et al., 2021; Dube-Xaba, 2023).

The Emergence of New Destinations, Higher Hygiene and Sanitation Standards

Other positive effects of the pandemic on the tourism industry include the promotion of eco-friendly products, an increase in nature-based tourism activities, the emergence of new destinations, higher hygiene and sanitation standards, and a heightened awareness of biodiversity conservation. The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred additional innovation and positive impact by exposing previously unexplored destinations. For example, COVID-19 has prompted passengers to explore new forms of tourism, such as six-foot tourism, staycations, workcations, and so on. (Goel et al., 2022). The creation of new types of tourism that adhere to safety rules is proof of "innovations to lead the way during difficult times". Thus, continuous innovation in new types of tourism, combined with adequate planning and organisation, can help the business endure crises (Seabra & Bhatt, 2022).

The COVID-19 issue has resulted in increased innovation and a positive impact due to several unexplored potential avenues. COVID-19, for example, has allowed passengers to explore new forms of tourism, such as six-foot tourism, staycations, workcations, and so on (Goel et al., 2022). The emergence of such new kinds of tourism that adhere to safety rules demonstrates "innovations to lead the way during difficult times". Thus, continuous innovation in new types of tourism, together with adequate planning and organisation, can help the business endure during times of crisis (Seabra & Bhatt, 2022).

Hastened Digital Change

According to Nawaz et al. (2024), the COVID-19 pandemic has hastened digital change. The pandemic emphasised the importance of "contactless" interactions, hastening a decade of technological development. The use of AI, IoT, and Big Data for "crowd management" became critical. This enables Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to monitor tourist movements in real time, hence minimising congestion. The rise of virtual experiences and "untact" (no-contact) tourism has created new revenue streams and increased accessibility for those unable to travel physically (Demir et al., 2021; Busulwa, 2022). Automation in the hospitality business (check-ins, service robots, and digital menus) has enhanced long-term operational efficiency and safety requirements. The pandemic spurred the adoption of technological solutions such as virtual reality, online tours, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and other state-of-the-art technologies that adhere to COVID-19 protocols, thereby shifting the tourism industry toward more innovative and sustainable practices. In addition to providing visitors with a more complex experience, the use of such human-machine interaction technologies in the tourism sector can lead to more intelligent and sustainable destination planning (Van et al., 2021).

Reassessment of Local Park Management Approaches

The COVID-19 situation presents an unparalleled opportunity to reassess local park management approaches by leveraging a range of direct and indirect techniques to reduce overpopulation. The travel limits provided temporary relief from the environmental impacts of unsustainable tourism practices, such as overuse of nature-based tourism sites and wildlife disturbance (Sumanapala & Wolf, 2021). Swart, Dube and Ezeuduji (2025) found that "under-tourism" can help restore vulnerable ecosystems. Notable examples in the literature include the cleansing of Venice's canals and the restoration of animals in protected areas that tourists had previously overrun.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach within a descriptive research design. The quantitative approach involved distributing a survey questionnaire to forty-two (42) tourism business owners in four (4) local towns in the Vhembe District, and convenience sampling was utilised to choose study participants. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The goal of collecting data from tourism businesses via survey questionnaires was to obtain general perspectives on prospects arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and to solicit data that will either confirm or deny the *hypothesis that, behind the disastrous effects of COVID-19, the positives prevail*.

4. Results and Discussion

The study presents results from a survey questionnaire administered to tourism businesses in Vhembe District Municipality. The results are quantitative, and data generated from the survey are presented in tables and figures. Both deductive and inductive analyses will be done to analyse the results. The questionnaire examined the following regarding tourism opportunities created by COVID-19.

4.1 Types of sectors in the tourism business

The type of company determines enterprise resilience, government assistance, regulatory compliance, and employment policies. It also impacts operational flexibility and the ability to respond to disruptions. Furthermore,

identifying business types helps assess their contribution to the local economy and guides the focus of governmental initiatives. Table 1 below presents the types of businesses in the tourism Sector. The respondents had an option to tick more than one applicable answer.

Table 1. Types of sectors in the tourism business

Business	Frequency	Percentage
1. Tour operators	5	7%
2. Tourism agency	6	8%
3. Tour guiding	2	3%
4. Tourism experiences or activities (such as fishing, riding horses, safaris, etc.)	2	3%
5. Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibition (MICE)	8	11%
6. Tourism for business, which includes MICE	3	4%
7. Ecotourism (conservancies, reserves, coastal/beach, etc.)	2	3%
8. Sport tourism	1	1%
9. Cultural tourism	6	8%
10. Accommodation	25	34%
11. Transport	2	3%
12. Restaurant	10	14%
13. Retail of goods targeting tourism	1	1%
14. Other (specify)	0	0%
Total	73	100%

The results show that the dominating business in the study is accommodation services at 34%, followed by restaurants at 14%, and MICE at 11%. Travel agencies, tour operators, and cultural tourism are relatively significant business sectors, whereas others have a limited impact on the tourism industry. Therefore, this result shows that the largest business in the tourism sector is accommodation, and the lowest is retail goods, which target tourism and sports tourism.

4.2 The opportunity for new venture creation for businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic

It is vital to examine the possibilities for economic ventures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has had unique consequences and created new market demands. The epidemic has caused massive changes in tourist behaviour, supply chains, and the economy, making conventional tourism business models obsolete.

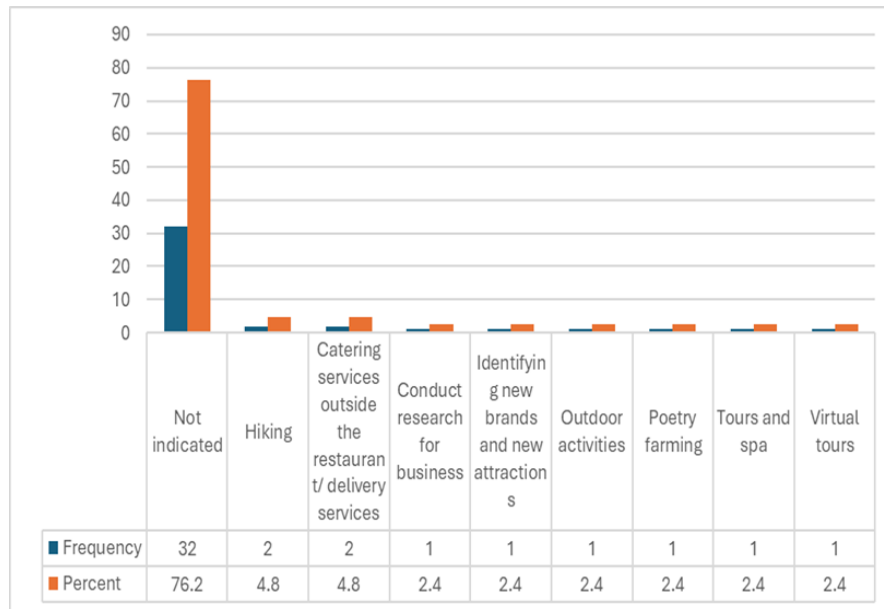


Figure 2. New venture creations

Figure 2 above shows that 4.8% of respondents stated that the new enterprises they ventured into were in hiking; similarly, respondents who ventured into catering services, including food delivery, accounted for 4.8%. A total of 2.4% of the respondents ventured into new businesses in outdoor activities, 2.4% into poetry farming, 2.4% into spas, and 2.4% into virtual tours. Most respondents did not start new businesses. Respondents stated that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted them to consider starting new businesses in hiking, catering services outside of restaurants and delivery services, conducting business research, identifying new brands and tourist attractions, outdoor activities, poultry farming, tour operating, spas, and virtual tours. This pattern suggests that, for some firms, the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for entrepreneurship and innovation, particularly in industries that could implement social distancing, adapt to changing consumer needs, or leverage digital technology.

4.3 Product diversity

The evaluation of product diversification chances during outbreak events considers both short-term and long-term recovery. It is a strategic authority tasked with building a more resilient, imaginative, and successful organisation for the future. Firms that understand and adapt to major changes in tourist behaviour and market dynamics can turn a crisis into a long-term competitive advantage. Figure 3 below illustrates the products of the tourism sector.

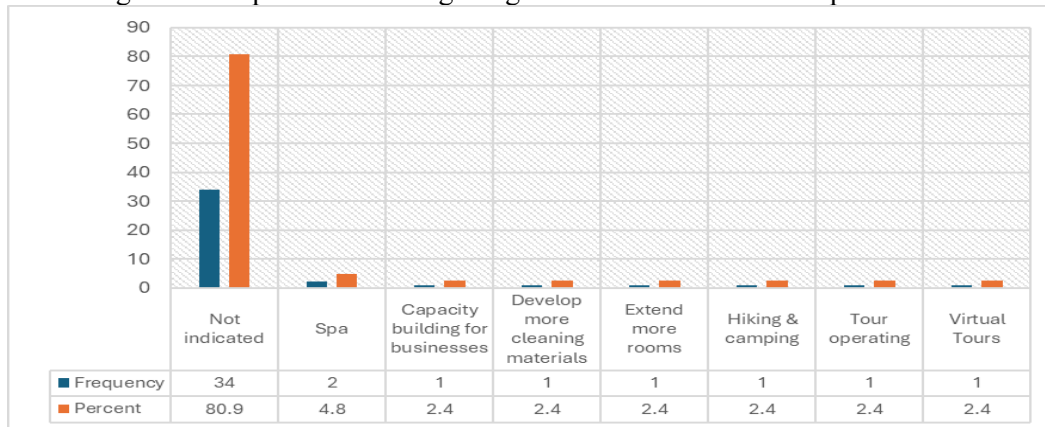


Figure 3. Product diversity

Figure 3 above illustrates that 80.9% of the respondents did not diversify their businesses. The participants indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to diversify their product offerings in spa services, which accounted for 4.8%, capacity building for businesses, which accounted for 2.4%, the development of more cleaning material, which accounted for 2.4%, the extension of rooms, which accounted for 2.4%, hiking and camping, which accounted for 2.4%, tour operation, which accounted for 2.4%, and virtual tours, which accounted for 2.4%. Tourism products include diverse offerings such as spas, capacity building for businesses, the development of additional cleaning materials, expanded room options, hiking and camping, touring, and virtual tours. This trend indicates a clear shift toward comprehensive, personalised, and resilient tourism experiences, driven by the need to address evolving consumer preferences, adapt to new operational challenges, and leverage technological innovations.

4. 4. Discovering a New Target Market

Identifying a new target market is critical to determining how the COVID-19 outbreak has affected travel-related enterprises. Evaluating potential in new target markets is a proactive, data-driven approach that enables the tourism sector to adapt, develop, and prosper in a radically changed world. Figure 4 below illustrates an opportunity for a new target market for the tourism business in Vhembe District Municipality.

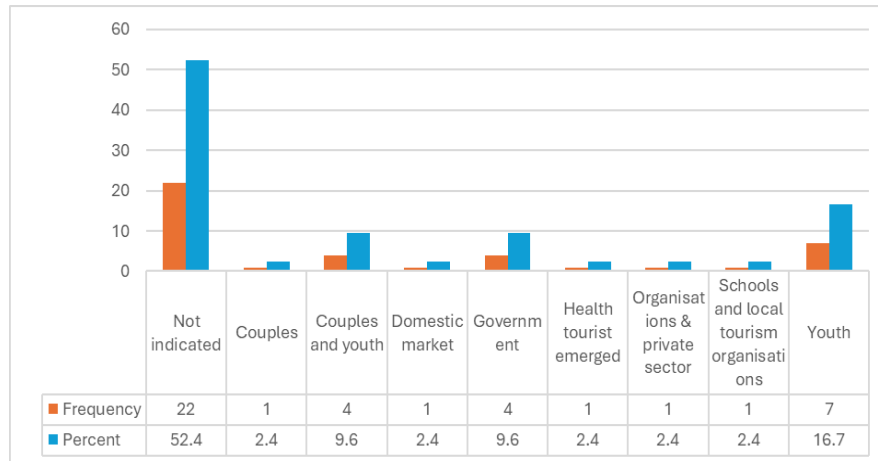


Figure 4. Discovery of a new target market

Figure 4 above shows that the new target markets identified were youth (16.7%), couples and youth (9.6%), the government (9.6%), couples only (2.4%), the domestic market (2.4%), health tourists (2.4%), the organisationorganisation and private sector (2.4%), and school and local tourism organisationsorganisations (2.4%). The figure depicts how the COVID-19 outbreak created opportunities to identify new target audiences, including couples, youngsters, the home market, the government, health tourists, organisations, the private sector, schools, and local tourism organisations. This shows that the tourism sector is actively working to diversify its client base beyond traditional markets, reduce reliance on a single segment, such as international leisure travel, and strengthen resilience to future disruptions. The inclusion of the home market represents a move toward local and regional tourism, which was widely implemented during the pandemic in response to international travel restrictions and is now recognised as critical to a speedy recovery and long-term growth. The emphasis on government and institutional clientele reflects a desire to revitalise MICE and business travel, as well as encourage corporate, institutional, or health-related tourism ("health tourists").

4. 5 Discovering New Marketing Tools

Discovering new marketing tools is a significant variable in the study, as they can help the tourism industry adapt to new tourist behaviour, gain a competitive edge, and improve marketing effectiveness and efficiency. Figure 5 below illustrates new marketing tools that were discovered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

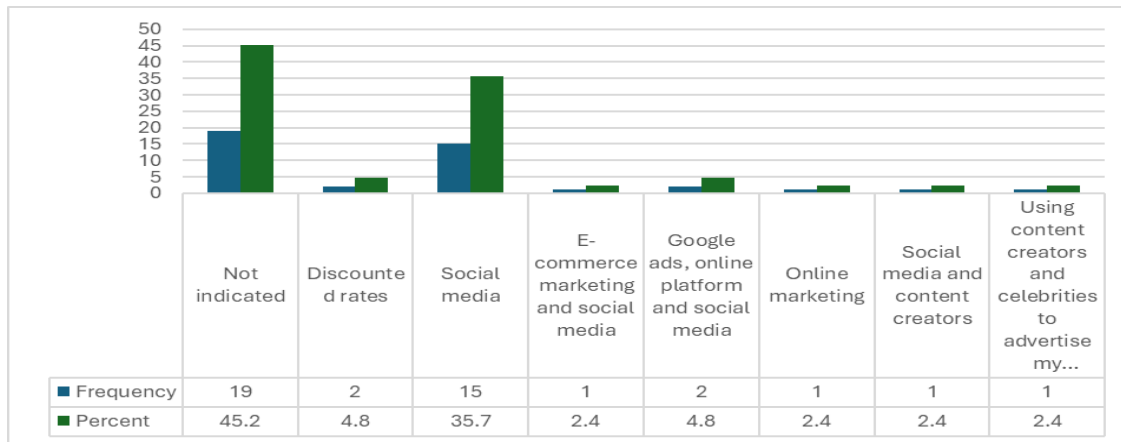


Figure 5. Discovery of new marketing tools

Figure 5 above shows that 35.7% of the new marketing tools identified were social, 4.8% were discounted, 4.8% were Google ads, 2.4% were online platforms and social media, e-commerce marketing and social 2.4% were online marketing, 2.4% were social media and context creators and celebrities to advertise, and 2.4% were content creators and celebrities to advertise. The majority of respondents reported discovering social media as a new marketing tool. Others reported discovering new marketing tactics such as discounted rates, e-commerce marketing, Google AdWords, online marketing, and the usage of content creators and celebrities. This trend implies a significant, rapidly accelerating shift in business marketing strategies toward digital platforms that are measurable and focused on relationship building.

4. 6 Discover new innovative approaches to running the business

Researchers must examine new economic opportunities arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, as the pandemic has caused long-term changes in visitor behaviour, market shifts, and operational needs. Businesses that evaluate these opportunities can adjust and establish long-term resilience. Table 2 below illustrates innovative approaches to running the business identified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2. New innovative approaches to running the business

Discovering new ways to operate the business	Frequency	Percent
Not indicated	26	61.9
Change operating times and rotate employees	1	2.4
contactless meeting/online meetings	1	2.4
Develop strategies for disruption due to pandemics	1	2.4
Diversify	1	2.4
Introducing part-time workers	1	2.4
Online marketing	1	2.4
Online operation	1	2.4
operate from home	1	2.4
Safety and health conscious, sanitisers	1	2.4
Social distancing	3	7.2

Virtual tours and using a content creator to advertise my business	1	2.4
Working from home and virtual meetings	3	7.2
Total	42	100

Table 2 above, shows that the new innovative approaches to run the business that was discovered after the COVID-19 pandemic was to change operating times and rotate employees (2.4%), contactless meetings/online meetings (2.4%), diversify (2.4%), introduce part-time workers (2.4%), online marketing (2.4%), online operations (2.4%), operate from home (2.4%), develop strategies for disruption due to pandemics (2.4%), safety and health consciousness, sanitiser/sanitiser (2.4%), social distancing (7.2%), virtual tours and the use of content creators to advertise my business (2.4%), and online/ virtual meetings and working from home (7.2%). Social media, virtual/online meetings, and working from home are emerging as new ways to operate businesses. This trend indicates that businesses have shown considerable flexibility and adaptability during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.7. The degree to which tourism businesses support or oppose the COVID-19 pandemic's statement opportunities

Assessing the opportunities that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic for the tourism sector is important because it provides essential insights to develop a more flexible and resilient tourism economy in the event of future catastrophes. The epidemic was more than a calamity; it was a "watershed" moment that compelled the industry to innovate and adapt. By analysing these changes, academics might develop new business models and tactics that can help the tourism sector not only survive but also prosper in a post-pandemic world. Figure 6 below illustrates the extent to which tourism businesses support or oppose the statement below regarding the COVID-19 pandemic's opportunities.

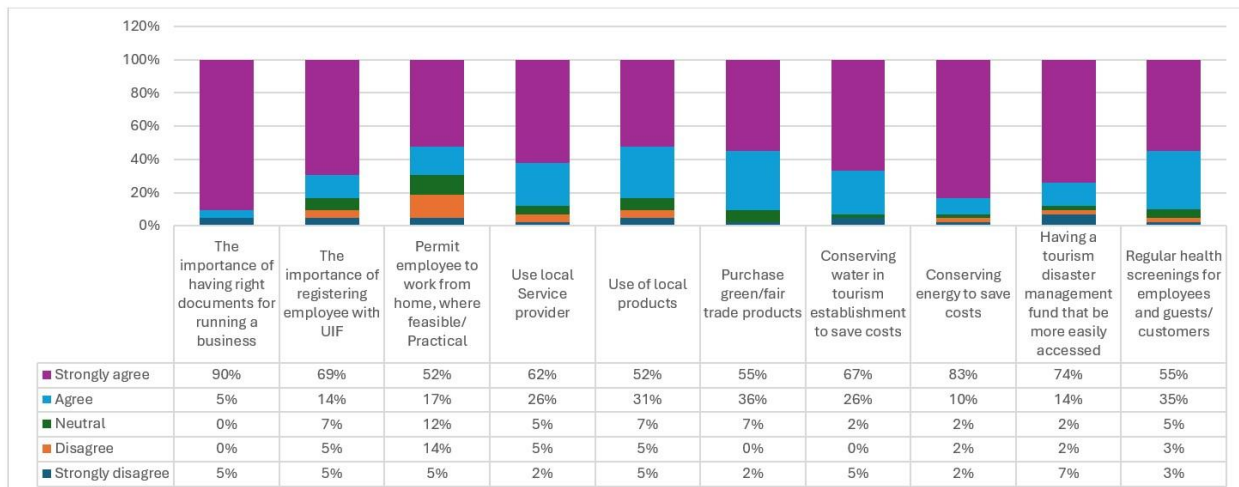


Figure 6. The degree to which travel agencies support or oppose the COVID-19 pandemic's statement opportunities

Figure 6 above presents tourism businesses' agreement and disagreement regarding opportunities related to the COVID-19 pandemic. While they presented immense challenges and hardships globally, they also spurred great innovation and generated new opportunities across a variety of tourism sectors. A much greater percentage strongly agreed or agreed with the variables indicated in Figure 6. Most businesses indicated that it is important to have the correct documents to conduct business. The importance of having the right documents for conducting a business accounted for 90% of the variables. Conserving energy to save costs (for instance, switching to solar power, using energy-efficient appliances and lights, etc.) accounted for 83%, with respondents strongly agreeing, which shows that many businesses surveyed see conserving energy to save costs as important. The other variables that respondents strongly agree with are having funds for tourist disaster management that are easier to access, at 74%, and the importance of registering employees with UIF, at 69%. The businesses also agreed on using local

service providers and conserving water in tourist establishments to save costs (for instance, reusing towels and greywater), as these accounted for between 60% and 67%. The purchase of green/fair trade products and the use of local products allow employees to work from home, if practical, and frequent health tests for employees and customers are reported by 52% to 55% of businesses that value their importance. A very small percentage strongly disagreed with or disagreed with the variables indicated in Figure 6. The highest percentage strongly disagreed that the variable was creating a more accessible tourism disaster management fund, accounting for 7%. The overall results indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic offered opportunities for business owners in tourism, highlighting the importance of all the variables shown in Figure 6 and the need to implement them in their businesses.

6. Conclusion

Tourism destinations in Vhembe District Municipality took advantage of the pandemic to implement good practices aimed at tourism recovery. Despite these negative consequences, it has been argued that the COVID-19 pandemic provided opportunities for transformation and that rural tourism areas could thrive. Because of their area and capacity to enforce health and safety rules, these areas have had the potential to drive the revival of domestic and international tourism. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for rural tourism sites to modify their offerings and plan for long-term growth. The study contributes to both academic knowledge and the practice of tourism economics and is useful to both researchers and practitioners of tourism studies. The study area was confined to one district municipality in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, which is likely to be a biased sample for generalising to the 9 provinces of South Africa, with different tourism potential and challenges. This study is, however, insightful and provides significant data that could be useful for policymaking in South Africa's tourism sector, especially in regions with similar ecotourism characteristics.

References

- Busulwa, R., Pickering, M., & Mao, I. (2022). Digital transformation and hospitality management competencies: Toward an integrative framework. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 102, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2021.103132>
- Cheshmehzangi, A., Su, Z., & Zou, T. (2023). ICT applications and the COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts on the individual's digital data, digital privacy, and data protection. *Front. Hum. Dyn.* 5, 971504. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fhumd.2023.971504>
- Clarke, A. (1981). Coastal development in France: Tourism as a tool for regional development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 8(3), 447-61 [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(81\)90008-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(81)90008-6)
- Demir, M., Demir, Ş. Ş., Ergen, F. D., & Dalgıç, A. (2021). The factors affecting hotel choice of consumers during the COVID-19 process. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education Research*, 7(1), 82-94. <https://doi.org/10.24289/ijsser.857679>
- Dube-Xaba, Z. (2023). COVID-19 and Rural Tourism Destinations in South Africa: Impact, Transformation Opportunities and Potential. In: Dube, K., Mensah, I., Chapungu, L. (eds) COVID-19, Tourist Destinations and Prospects for Recovery. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24655-5_12
- Goel, P., Garg, A., Walia, N. Kaur, R., Jain, M., & Singh, S. (2022). Contagious diseases and tourism: a systematic review based on bibliometric and content analysis methods. *Qual Quant*, 56, 3085-3110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01270-z>
- Gössling, S. & Scott, D., & Hall, C. (2020). Pandemics, tourism and global change: a rapid assessment of COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1758708>
- Kitkowska, A., Alaqra, A. S., & Wästlund, E. (2024). Lockdown locomotion: the fast-forwarding effects of technology use on digital well-being due to COVID-19 restrictions. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 43(6), 1178-1205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2023.2203268>

- Korinth, B., & Ramasigher, R. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on tourism in Poland occurred in March 2020. *Geojournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 3(3), 987-999. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.31308-531>
- Lee, S. E. (2015). The sociocultural impact of Growth-Pole Theory (GPT) tourism development. *Anatolia*, 27(2), 268-270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13032917.2015.1111245>
- LEDET, 2010. Limpopo Tourism Growth Strategy (TGS 2009 - 2014). Polokwane: LEDET <https://www.ledet.gov.za/>
- Li, J., Nguyen, T. H. H., & Coca-Stefaniak, J. A. (2020). Coronavirus impacts on postpandemic planned travel behaviors. *Annals of Tourism Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102964>
- Ma, X., de Jong, M., Sun, B., & Bao, X. (2020). Nouveauté or Cliché? Assessment on island ecological vulnerability to Tourism: Application to Zhoushan, China. *Ecological Indicators*, 113, Article 106247. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolind.2020.106247>
- Malizia, E., Feser, E. J., Renski, H., & Drucker, J. (2020). Understanding Local Economic Development: Second Edition (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367815134>
- Mandlazi, M. & Nyasha, S. (2023). An Assessment of the COVID-19 Pandemic in South Africa: From its Impact on the Economy to the Rebuilding Strategy. *Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series*, 23(4), 441-476. <https://doi.org/10.26458/23425>
- National Department of Tourism, 2017. National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) 2016-2026. Pretoria: Government printer
- National Treasury. (2022). Public-sector infrastructure update. Pretoria: National Department of Treasury. Pretoria: Government printer
- Nawaz, S, Bhowmik, J, Linden, T, Mitchell, M. (2024). Adapting to the new normal: Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on technology usage and human behaviour. *Entertainment Computing*, 51, 100726. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.entcom.2024.100726>
- Ost, C., & Saleh, R. (2021). Cultural and creative sectors at a crossroad: From a mainstream process towards an active engagement. *Built Herit.*, 5, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43238-021-00032-y>
- Rodrigue, J. P. (2024). The Geography of Transport Systems (6th ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003343196>
- Rogerson, C. M. 2015. Tourism and regional development: The case of South Africa's distressed areas. *Development Southern Africa*, 32(3), 277-291. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2015.1010713>
- Schmidt, K., Sieverding, T., Wallis, H., & Matthies, E. (2021). COVID-19 - a window of opportunity for the transition toward sustainable mobility? *Transp. Res. Interdiscip. Perspect.*, 10, 100374 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2021.100374>
- Seabra, C., & Bhatt, K. (2022). Tourism Sustainability and COVID-19 Pandemic: Is There a Positive Side? *Sustainability*, 14(14), 8723. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14148723>
- Sigala, M. (2020). Tourism and COVID-19: Impacts and Implications for Advancing and Resetting Industry and Research. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 312-321. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.06.015>
- Sumanapala, D. & Wolf, I. D. (2022). The changing face of wildlife tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic: An opportunity to strive towards sustainability? *Curr. Issues Tour.*, 25, 357-362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2021.1960281>
- Swart, M.P., Dube, K., & Ezeuduji, I.O. (2025). Building Inclusive and Sustainable Tourism Resilience in an Era of Climate Change: A Practical and Policy Perspective for Southern Africa. In: Dube, K., Ezeuduji, I.O., Swart, M.P. (eds) Climate Change and Sustainable Development Goals Discourse in Rural and Tourism-Protected Areas. Sustainable Development Goals Series. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-87337-9_11
- Van, N.T.T., Vrana, V., Duy, N.T., Minh, D.X.H., Dzung, P.T., Mondal, S.R., & Das, S. (2020). The role of human-machine interactive devices for post-COVID-19 innovative sustainable tourism in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. *Sustainability*, 12, 9523. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229523>
- Vhembe District Municipality. (2020). Integrated Development plan. Thohoyandou: Vhembe District Municipality.
- Vhembe District Municipality. (2022). Tourism Development and Promotion Strategy. Thohoyandou: Vhembe District Municipality

Yao, X, Xu, Z, Škare, M, Wang, X. (2024). Aftermath on COVID-19 technological and socioeconomic changes: A meta-analytic review. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 202,123322, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2024.123322>

Xu, Z, Elomri. A., Kerbache, L., & El Omri, A. (2020). Impacts of COVID-19 on Global Supply Chains: Facts and Perspectives. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, 48(3), 153-66. <https://doi.org/10.1109/EMR.2020.3018420>

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation: *Makhupu Queen Sekole, Mokoko Piet Sebola*; methodology: *Mokoko Piet Sebola, Makhupu Queen Sekole*; data analysis: *Mokoko Piet Sebola, Makhupu Queen Sekole*, writing—original draft preparation: *Makhupu Queen Sekole*, writing; review and editing: *Mokoko Piet Sebola*; visualisation: *Makhupu Queen Sekole*. The authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Makhupu Queen SEKOLE

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7548-1450>

Mokoko Piet SEBOLA

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8003-3715>

This is peer-reviewed scientific journal <https://jssidoi.org/ird/page/peer-review-policy>

Copyright © 2026 by author(s). Publishing rights by [UAB Sustainability for Regions](#)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access