

Strategic Visitor-Centric Approaches to the Promotion of Cultural Heritage Tourism sites in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Often, cultural heritage tourism is marketed and promoted without knowing exactly what potential visitors/tourists are looking for or what their preferences for promotion are. This article explores the type of promotional activities which motivate tourists to visit cultural heritage sites in Gauteng. Closed-ended questionnaires were distributed to a total sample of 376 respondents at three of the main cultural heritage sites in Gauteng, namely Maropeng (the cradle of humankind), Vilakazi Street, and the Voortrekker Monument. The statements comprising the questionnaire were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The findings indicated that the respondents had different expectations of promotional activities with some activities deemed more important than others. Maropeng was highlighted for the quality of its amenities, Vilakazi Street's status was stressed and Voortrekker Monument's cultural elements were emphasised. Moreover, the association of the sites with prominent organisations like UNESCO also played a significant role as a promotional push for these sites. This study highlights the importance of the involvement of cultural heritage stakeholders in promoting cultural heritage tourism by integrating visitor feedback in promotion strategy and implementing regular visitor surveys, feedback systems and digital review analysis to ensure ongoing alignment between promotional content and visitor expectations.

Keywords: promotion, visitor-centric, cultural heritage sites, visitors' expectations, tourism.



1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa (SA) boasts an abundant and diverse cultural heritage that offers a rich array of experiences for tourists. This wealth of cultural assets includes everything from historical landmarks and indigenous traditions to vibrant festivals and local cuisines. As a result, cultural heritage stakeholders are increasingly motivated to promote these cultural sites effectively, encouraging visitors to engage with the country's unique history and traditions. By highlighting the experiences these cultural sites offer, heritage site managers aim to attract more tourists who will experience the richness of SA's cultural landscape.

Existing studies on cultural heritage tourism (CHT) in SA primarily focus on site preservation, economic impact, or generic tourism promotion (Mokabe & Kruger, 2024). There is limited research on strategic marketing approaches that place visitors' needs, motivations, and experiences at the core of promotion efforts. In addition, there is insufficient integration of visitor feedback into heritage promotion strategies (Jing & Joang, 2024). Cultural heritage promotion in SA often lacks mechanisms to incorporate real-time visitor insights and feedback, resulting in misaligned promotional content and experiences that may not resonate with target audiences. There is limited empirical data on tourist behavioural patterns related to cultural heritage sites as well as a scarcity of data-driven research that investigates the behaviour, preferences, and satisfaction levels of tourists visiting cultural heritage sites in SA. This has resulted in limited development of evidence-based promotional strategies (Ncube & Ngulube, 2025). Moreover, the neglect of digital and experiential marketing tools in CHT, results in most heritage tourism promotion efforts still relying on traditional methods (Kumar & Swain, 2025). Research is lacking on how digital tools (e.g., social media, virtual tours, personalised content) and experiential marketing can be strategically used to engage modern tourists in a culturally sensitive way. The findings obtained from this research can find applicability in industries like tourism, hospitality, and entertainment, where understanding and catering to visitor expectations can significantly enhance satisfaction and loyalty

2. Literature review

The marketing concept of promotion includes the methods that marketers and managers use to inform, persuade, and remind consumers directly or indirectly of a product's attractiveness and value (Alexandrescu & Milandru, 2018; Czinkota *et al.*, 2021; Hackley & Hackley, 2021). Promotion incorporates all the techniques that managers/marketers/promoters can use to provide information on market offerings, including advertising, direct marketing, publicity, public relations, personal selling, sales promotional efforts, and interactive channels (Matviiets & Kipen, 2021; Helmold, 2022; Kurniawan & Suhermin, 2023). Because consumers differ from one another and come from different backgrounds, sensitive and integrated marketing communication tools which include promotion, can help reach every potential customer regardless of their differences.

2.1 TOURISM PROMOTION

Tourism promotion is a form of marketing promotion which aims to attract visitors to a particular location or tourism-related offering. This location or tourism offering could be a state, a city, a particular heritage site or tourist destination spot, a hotel, or even a convention centre (Sianipar, 2019; Kęprowska, 2021; Moza & Olimpia, 2022). Despite SA's rich and diverse cultural heritage, the country faces challenges in effectively leveraging this cultural heritage asset to promote sustainable tourism growth. Current promotional strategies often prioritise generic marketing approaches that do not adequately engage or consider the specific interests, expectations, motivations, and experiences of cultural heritage tourists (Arumugam, Nakkeeran & Subramaniam, 2023). As a result, many heritage sites remain underutilised,

and local communities see limited economic and social benefits. There is a pressing need for strategic, visitor-centric approaches that align cultural heritage promotion with tourists' evolving preferences and expectations. Without such targeted strategies, SA risks missing out on critical opportunities to enhance its global tourism appeal, preserve its cultural assets, and support inclusive development for heritage custodians and local communities.

2.2 TOURISM PROMOTION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

Morrison (2023) identifies tourism promotion as an emerging yet rapidly evolving field within management sciences. Despite its relative novelty, it has significantly advanced the understanding of CHT. Tourism promotion specifically addresses the unique challenges associated with CHT's development, production, and marketing (Ribeiro *et al.*, 2018; Nargis & Hossain, 2021). Consequently, effective promotional strategies in CHT are vital for securing a competitive advantage in the tourism industry.

Scholars and industry stakeholders concur that tourism promotion is inherently customer-focused, advocating for strategies that prioritise the needs and preferences of tourists (Boane, 2024; Hinson *et al.*, 2024). Building on this perspective, Dixit (2025) emphasises that each promotional channel and message should be tailored to resonate with specific customer segments and tourism markets. Managers must develop more responsive and strategic approaches to meet these diverse expectations (Morrison, 2023).

The promotional efforts in CHT are primarily directed towards identifying and engaging appropriate target markets and audiences in the form of market segmentation for the offerings available (Mokabe & Kruger, 2024). Market segmentation is a critical factor in successful promotion, as it facilitates the alignment of customer needs and desires with the available offerings (Dolnicar, 2022). Promoting aims to generate interest among tourists in a product and ensure its subsequent delivery.

Ke and Mustafa (2024) highlight the significance of promoting cultural heritage by fostering active engagement between tourism marketing organisations and heritage sites. This engagement involves collaborative decisions about cultural heritage offerings and profit generation for community stakeholders. Manwa *et al.* (2013) observe that marketing activities surrounding CHT yield positive outcomes for culture and heritage in SA. Building on this promotional perspective, there is a need to identify strategic tourism promotional considerations for developing marketing strategies within CHT, focusing on specific aspects to enhance promotional effectiveness. Identifying strategic considerations for developing marketing strategies within CHT, particularly those that are visitor-centric and tailored to the motivations and expectations of target audiences, is needed. This is important because many existing promotional approaches in South Africa fail to engage meaningfully with tourists' cultural interests, resulting in underwhelming visitor experiences and low repeat visitation (Mgxekwa-Qumba & Kruger, 2024). By focusing on specific aspects such as audience segmentation, experience personalisation, and digital engagement, these strategies can bridge the gap between heritage site offerings and tourist expectations.

2.3 PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM

Various strategies are employed to promote tourism; however, it is important to note that many of these strategies are not specifically tailored for CHT. Some of the strategies identified which attract tourists to the sites are.

- Utilising social media with storytelling: Since many tourists rely extensively on digital technology to access information and engage with social media, incorporating storytelling into social media posts is essential. This approach helps reach potential clients, capture their attention, and foster interaction. (Mokabe, 2024)

- Implementing augmented or virtual reality (VR): Using VR in marketing strategies can provide visitors with memorable and exceptional experiences, setting a destination apart from its competitors. (Neuburger *et al.*, 2018).
- Creating valuable content: Developing tailored strategies for individual tourism products and different forms of tourism ensures that content resonates with diverse audiences. (Rezene, 2023).
- Managing online reviews: Effectively managing reviews is crucial to maintaining a positive reputation. While reviews can benefit offered products and services, they can also be harmful if not managed strategically. (Lui *et al.*, 2018).

Vaničková and Szczepańska-Woszczyna (2020) highlight that marketing strategies aim to increase visits and should not be viewed solely as business activities. These marketing strategies require regular evaluation to determine their effectiveness. Riyadi (2019) further affirms that tourism marketing strategies are not merely governmental tools but are also benchmarks for success in tourism, aiding in building tourist preferences. Consequently, the tourism industry has invested significant time and resources into promoting its offerings. The advent of social media has created another promotional platform for new marketing strategies that promote tourism more rapidly and reach broader audiences. Bearing all these strategies in mind, specific components of promotional activities and messages are instrumental in addressing tourists' demands and opening new destinations for exploration (Afren, 2024).

2.4 VISITOR-CENTRIC PROMOTION

Visitor-centric promotion is defined here as a marketing strategy/approach which utilises messages, slogans, images and activities that prioritise individual needs, preferences, and behaviours of visitors to create personalised and engaging experiences (Walhimer, 2021; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2024; Kosiada-Sylburska & Bryła, 2025). Visitor-centric promotions can capture visitor attention more effectively than generic campaigns (Philippopoulos *et al.*, 2024; Davidson, 2025) by adapting messages to individual visitor profiles, preferences, and behaviours (Mohamad *et al.*, 2024). In addition, engaging visitors through interactive elements such as virtual tours, VR features, or hands-on activities that allow them to connect more deeply with the brand or destination (Çeltek, 2021; Belenioti & Kypri, 2024) forms part of a visitor-centric approach. By actively seeking and incorporating visitor feedback to refine offerings and demonstrate responsiveness to visitor needs trust is enhanced and repeat visits encouraged. This can lead to higher satisfaction levels as visitors may feel understood and valued are more likely to return and recommend the experience to others (Bahçeci, 2024; Pál & Albert, 2025). Utilising data analytics to understand visitor behaviour and preferences, enables more effective targeting and personalisation of promotional efforts. These added analytics will have relevance to a diverse audience of different cultural backgrounds, languages, and abilities (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2023; Montagud *et al.*, 2020).

2.5 CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROMOTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

Promoting CHT is not solely about marketing products, services, or brands; heritage curators, managers and stakeholders may prioritise other motives over profit. In some cases, CHT marketing aims to facilitate the regeneration of a locality, conserve landscapes, or present heritage properties, rather than generate income through commercial means (Nag & Mishra, 2024).

As suggested by An *et al.* (2022), challenges in CHT promotion involve the heritage promoter's ability to recognise the connection between visitors' emotional states and their satisfaction, identify varying emotional states among

potential visitors, and organise appropriate on-site promotional messages in response, along with providing other support services. Success in CHT marketing largely depends on the heritage promoter's talent, imagination, and creativity (Bhattacharya & Dutta, 2022) and failure to detect or be sensitive to visitors' emotional desires or motivations may lead to limited success or failure. However, accurately detecting visitors' preferences is challenging, as these differ from person to person (Deng & Liu, 2021).

The cultural heritage sites themselves provide challenges to visitor-centric promotion. Some local communities and cultures in SA regard specific cultural heritage sites as sacred places. The cultural sensitivity of these sites makes it difficult, if not impossible, for them to be open to visitors or tourism development, except for local visitors and entrepreneurs (Ivasciuc, & Ispas, 2023). Promoting such sites when not open for public access is inappropriate and insensitive. Some sites are open to visitors but have restrictions, allowing only a specified number of visitors. Promoting these sites to potential visitors may lead to overcrowding and overuse, necessitating some form of de-promotion (Medyńska-Gulij, 2025; Lucas, 2025). Additionally, these cultural sites face threats from the negative impacts that CHT can generate (Cooper, 2025; Bauer, 2025). Therefore, CHT promotion should consider ways to make cultural heritage sites not only accessible but also understandable to visitors, which may involve interpreting or mediating it to visitors (Ji & Heath, 2023; Pai, 2025). This raises the possibility and risk of incorrect or insensitive interpretations of aspects of this cultural heritage.

Another issue related to CHT promotion is funding. Promotion is costly, and sufficient funds are often unavailable for marketing and promotional activities (Bakari, 2021). For example, South African Tourism (SAT), a national marketing organisation, sometimes develops generic promotional material for CHT without regard or respect for local differences and cultures due to a lack of funds. In other words, SAT's lack of funds may restrict specialised and sensitive promotional activities (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021). Additionally, the funding of marketing bodies or destination marketing organisations (DMOS) rely heavily on the government, which influences and controls activities in a centralised rather than a local way. Moreover, DMOS struggle to make profits and are not financially independent (Ozdemir & Celebi, 2023).

Nag and Rathore (2025) recommend that CHT promoters adopt a balanced approach, creating and fostering a mediation between visitor impacts and the preservation of heritage resources. To address this concern, Nag and Rathore developed a strategy for integrating management and promotional strategies at heritage sites. Perry (2023) argues that fears of 'sell-out' tendencies surrounding cultural heritage have always existed. Over the years, these fears have been more considerable than the pressure to secure economic survival through appropriate promotional measures. He recommends that appropriate marketing strategies be designed with more accurate, researched, sensitive, and relevant measures and applied accordingly. Fyall *et al.* (2022) summarise that all promotional activities should encourage demand and satisfy the visitor without compromising what needs to be preserved for future generations.

The application of Push and Pull Motivation theory (Dann, 1977) could explain why people travel (push factors) and why they choose specific destinations (pull factors). In the context of CHT, push factors may include the desire for cultural enrichment or nostalgia, while pull factors relate to the appeal of specific sites, cultural festivals, or heritage narratives. Similarly, Visitor-centred Interpretation Theory (Tilden, 1957; Ham, 1992) could be applied to CHT. This theory emphasises the importance of interpretation (storytelling, signage, guides) in making heritage meaningful and accessible by enhancing learning, enjoyment, and emotional engagement. When applied to the survey instrument used in this study, it ensures that the instrument is not only methodologically sound but also directly aligned with the

research objectives and gaps. By applying these theories, this study can uncover nuanced insights into how strategic, visitor-centric promotional efforts can be designed and implemented effectively in the South African heritage tourism context.

3. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES

This article addresses the research gap created by the limited availability of research on strategic marketing approaches, specifically visitor-centric approaches that place visitors' needs, motivations, and experiences at the core of promotion efforts. The objectives of this study are therefore to take a visitor-centric approach to determine what type of promotional material attracts visitors most and motivates them to visit a cultural heritage site. A second objective is to identify and recommend strategic visitor-centric approaches that can enhance the promotion and sustainability of CHT in SA and in so doing propose innovative, inclusive, and evidence-based solutions.

4. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This section outlines the research methodology, detailing the approaches taken for sampling, the determination of sample size, and the techniques employed for data collection.

4.1 QUANTITATIVE APPROACH, SAMPLING, SAMPLE SIZE AND DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

This study adopted a positivist paradigm, which supported the collection of quantitative data to objectively measure and analyse the relationship between CHT promotion strategies and visitor responses. Positivism is appropriate because the research sought to identify measurable patterns and statistically test the effectiveness of current promotional approaches. The cultural heritage sites chosen were Vilakazi Street in Soweto, the Voortrekker Monument, and the Cradle of Humankind Heritage Site (Maropeng). These were selected based on the cultural heritage products they offer, the experiences they provide, and the diversity of the visitor demographic they attract. Considerations such as cost-effectiveness and accessibility also influenced the site selection.

A non-probability sampling approach was employed with data being collected by distributing questionnaires by field workers and site personnel at the three selected locations. The face-to-face distribution method proved effective, allowing for real-time question clarification during data collection. According to Jones *et al.* (2022), in face-to-face surveys, a facilitator is present to administer the questions and assist respondents, offering significant advantages over mail and telephone surveys regarding data complexity and quality. Furthermore, this mode of delivery provided the researcher with greater control over the data collection process than other methods (Jones *et al.*, 2022). Questionnaires were distributed to visitors present at the sites during the time of the research with the aim of gathering a combined total of at least 400 completed questionnaires from the three sites. This figure was based on the sampling guidelines proposed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), who suggest that for a population of 1,000,000, a minimum sample of 383 respondents is sufficient to ensure a 95% confidence level with a $\pm 5\%$ margin of error. The estimation was that the sites have 1 million visitors monthly, and it is also important to mention that the total of 376 completed questionnaires that were obtained was considered sufficient.

The questionnaire comprised closed-ended questions, and was designed to explore the promotion and activities of cultural heritage sites from visitors' perspectives. Respondents were asked to indicate, from a choice of various promotional messages/methods, what types of messages they thought the marketing and promotion of South African cultural heritage would convince them, or tourists like them, to visit a site. In other words, what were the respondents'

preferred promotional/activities methods for cultural heritage sites? The questionnaire had 19 statements for respondents to rate. The statements were rated on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided (Neutral), 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree. The development of the questionnaire was based on the following studies (Ivanovic, 2018; Nyawo & Mashau, 2019; Timothy, 2020).

The data collected were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software for analysis. Analytical techniques consisted of descriptive statistics, the primary objective of which was the analysis of respondents' preferred promotional messages for visiting and the communication channels they found most effective.

4.2 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reliability refers to the consistency and stability of the measurement instrument over time (Kennedy, 2022; Revicki, 2024). A reliable study produces similar results when repeated under the same conditions. This study employed the use of a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions using a 5-point Likert scale, which was designed to ensure consistent responses across different respondents. A pilot test was conducted with a small group of 15 to 20 visitors to cultural heritage sites to test the clarity and coherence of the questions. Based on feedback, revisions were made to improve reliability.

Validity refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the measurement (Ahmed & Ishtiaq, 2021); and was addressed by consulting a senior academic expert in tourism who verified that the questionnaire comprehensively covered key aspects of visitor-centric marketing, visitor satisfaction and promotional strategies. An assessment was also conducted through pilot testing and feedback from actual visitors to heritage sites, ensuring that questions appeared logical and understandable from the respondent's perspective. Efforts were made to use a diverse sample (domestic and international tourists, different age groups, and site types) to improve the generalisability of the findings across the broader CHT context in SA.

Ethical approval and the protection of respondents were central to this research process (Amirrudin *et al.*, 2021; Ruslan *et al.*, 2023). All respondents were provided with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the study, how their data would be used, and their rights to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation. Respondents were not required to provide personal identifiers such as names or contact details. Data were stored securely, and responses were anonymised during analysis and reporting. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no form of coercion or pressure. Respondents had the option to skip questions or terminate the survey at any time. Given the nature of cultural heritage, care was taken to ensure that all survey instruments and interactions respected the diverse cultures, traditions, and values of both the sites and the visitors.

5. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Respondents in the survey were invited to indicate which messages effectively promote South African cultural heritage and would encourage them to visit a specific site (Table 1). To gauge their opinions, 19 distinct statements were presented, and respondents evaluated them using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented "strongly disagree" and 5 signified "strongly agree." For each statement, a mean value (\bar{x}) was computed, providing an average score out of 5 to better understand the level of agreement among the respondents.

TABLE 1: THE PROMOTIONAL MESSAGES AND ACTIVITIES OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES

	Maropeng		Vilakazi Street		Voortrekker Monument	
	Mean Value	Standard Deviation	Mean Value	Standard Deviation	Mean Value	Standard Deviation
The promotion messages and activities of cultural heritage sites 5-point Likert scale of agreement (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=undecided, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree)						
Videos of local people portraying local customs and traditions	3.96	0.802	4.01	0.711	4.10	0.530
Images and videos showing cultural arts, different foods, and clothing	3.98	0.779	4.14	0.711	4.27	0.592
Images and videos of famous figures from the country's past	3.98	0.821	4.09	0.714	4.18	0.628
Images, sound and narration that sensually enhance the visitor experience	4.06	0.789	4.13	0.731	4.24	0.615
Personal testimonies from previous visitors	3.98	0.882	3.98	0.897	4.07	0.841
Practical information, e.g. entrance fees, location (Province) and logistics	3.91	0.890	3.95	0.945	4.14	0.842
Only images that tell a story and evoke emotion and interest without any narration	3.72	0.965	3.96	1.083	4.02	0.972
Narration, along with images that tell a story to evoke emotion and interest	3.86	0.851	4.01	0.935	4.12	0.841
Traditional music in promotional videos	4.12	0.704	4.07	0.723	4.12	0.677
Incorporating storytelling to enhance the experience	4.03	0.752	4.13	0.711	4.02	0.707
Using virtual reality to enhance the experience	4.01	0.960	3.93	1.043	4.03	0.888
Perceived personal experience, e.g., GoPro (first-person sharing/narrative)	4.02	0.789	3.86	0.998	3.93	0.999
Videos/images of the cultural landscape	4.20	0.737	4.15	0.700	4.24	0.603
Images of traditional architecture	4.28	0.735	4.27	0.660	4.31	0.640
Videos that accommodate the audio-impaired, e.g., sign language	4.33	0.848	4.32	0.732	4.27	0.628
Accommodating the visually impaired by braille image descriptions or slogans	4.25	0.797	4.36	0.688	4.24	0.701
A slogan that conveys or encapsulates the experience and the importance/significance of the site	4.12	0.828	4.29	0.764	4.20	0.756
Amenities, e.g. onsite facilities, surrounding attractions, Wi-Fi, curio shops, restaurants, etc.	4.34	0.703	4.21	0.744	4.20	0.727
Status/ classification of the site, e.g., UNESCO	4.22	0.742	4.13	0.819	4.14	0.837

The results in Table 1 show that respondents at the three sites rated the statements differently and highlighted aspects they deemed important to be included in promotional messages.

5.1 MAROPENG

Respondents surveyed at Maropeng rated (4.34±0.703) highest. Promotional messages that include videos that accommodate the *audio-impaired*, (4.33±0.848), images of traditional architecture (4.28±0.735), accommodating the visually impaired (4.25±0.797) and videos/images of the cultural landscape (4.20±0.737) were also deemed important. The site's classification in terms of its level of status (which could have been provincial, national and international level) (4.22±0.742) played a role in respondents' choosing of the site. Videos or images of the cultural landscape (4.20±0.737)

and the inclusion of traditional music in promotional videos of the site was also rated high by respondents (4.12 ± 0.704). Using a slogan yielded findings that indicated its importance for the promotion of sites (4.12 ± 0.828). In addition to slogans, images, sound and narration that sensually enhance the visitor experience were also preferred (4.06 ± 0.789) by respondents. The inclusion of storytelling to enhance the visitors' experience was favoured as a selling point for promoting the site (4.03 ± 0.752). Personal testimonies by visitors relating to past experiences (4.02 ± 0.789), as well as the use of augmented reality to enhance the experience (4.01 ± 0.960) was also ranked with a mean value above four by respondents.

5.2 VILAKAZI STREET

For the respondents surveyed at Vilakazi Street, accommodating the visually impaired (4.36 ± 0.688) was rated the highest. This was followed by videos that accommodate the audio-impaired (4.32 ± 0.732), a slogan (4.29 ± 0.746), images of traditional architecture (4.27 ± 0.660) and (4.21 ± 0.774). Other variables that had a mean value that was well above four, which meant that the variables were deemed important, included videos/images depicting the cultural landscape of the site (4.15 ± 0.700), images and videos showing cultural arts, different foods, and clothing in the promotion of cultural heritage associated with the site (4.14 ± 0.711), the inclusion of images, sound and narration that sensually enhances the visitor experience while visiting the site (4.13 ± 0.731) and the status/ classification of the site (4.13 ± 0.819). On the Vilakazi Street site, pictures and videos of the country's icons were also preferred (4.09 ± 0.714), followed by videos of traditional music (4.07 ± 0.723), videos of local people showcasing their way of living through the display of their local customs and traditions (4.01 ± 0.711), and narration and images that evoke emotions in respondents (visitors) (4.01 ± 1.083). The mean values for all the statements in the Vilakazi Street questionnaire were above 4.0, except for using past personal experiences (3.93 ± 0.999). This meant that all the other promotional aspects listed in the questionnaire were deemed important.

5.3 VOORTREKKER MONUMENT

The respondents surveyed at the Voortrekker Monument rated images of traditional architecture the highest (4.31 ± 0.640), followed by images and videos showing cultural arts, different foods, and clothing (4.27 ± 0.592) and videos that accommodate the audio-impaired (4.27 ± 0.628). This was followed by a promotion showing images, sound and narration that sensually enhances the visitor experience (4.24 ± 0.615), videos/images of the cultural landscape (4.24 ± 0.603) and accommodating the visually impaired (4.24 ± 0.701). Among other highly rated aspects were amenities on the site (4.20 ± 0.727). Slogans (4.20 ± 0.756), images and videos of important people (4.18 ± 0.628), status and classification of the sites (4.14 ± 0.837), important information about the site, such as entrance fees, location and logistics (4.14 ± 0.842), storytelling (4.12 ± 0.841) and using traditional music in promotional videos (4.12 ± 0.677) all ranked above a mean of four.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 INCLUSIVE PROMOTIONS

Inclusive messages or approaches taking audio and visual impairments into account, were considered as very important in all three sites, underscoring the importance of inclusive messaging in promotional communication. Halpern *et al.* (2024) caution that people with disabilities are likely to experience significant difficulties accessing information in tourism promotional materials. Their research demonstrated a clear awareness of the diverse needs of individuals with audio and visual impairments, ensuring that content was accessible and considerate of these audiences. At each site, respondents highlighted those specific strategies that were employed to convey information effectively. This supports

the recommendation by previous studies to improve accessibility by using accessible message formats and media to encourage inclusion, avoiding the use of stereotypes, and by ensuring that disabled people have a more integrated and integral role in tourism promotional materials, thereby representing the diversity of disabilities (Cloquet et al., 2018). Hutchinson (2019) and Helpert *et al.* (2024) also expressed a commitment to creating environments where everyone, regardless of their sensory abilities, could engage with the material presented.

The emphasis on inclusivity in the results not only reflects a growing recognition of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities but also highlights a collective responsibility to foster a more equitable and accessible community (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Gillovic & McIntosh, 2020; Liasidou & Stylianou, 2024). In this regard, inclusive tourism has the aim of accommodating people with disability from all walks of life.

6.2 STATUS OF THE SITE AND QUALITY OF THE AMENITIES

Respondents in the survey conducted at Maropeng highlighted the exceptional quality of the amenities available, pointing to how these facilities enhance the overall visitor experience. In a study by Nian *et al.* (2024), it was found that, regardless of the sizes of heritage sites, these sites remain the masterpieces of mankind that are meant to offer remarkable experiences; however, if the supporting facilities around the sites are unpleasant, that on its own can ruin the experience of the tourists. Piramanayagam *et al.* (2021) write that the amenities and facilities around the site amount to the total image of the site, which can elevate or ruin it. It is therefore not surprising that the respondents deemed the amenities and facilities around all three sites to be very important. Moreover, sites are linked to particular broader destinations. If the sites' amenities are poor, not only is the experience of the site compromised but also the visitor's impression of the whole destination. In contrast, those surveyed at the iconic Vilakazi Street drew attention to the undeniable significance of this site, which holds a prominent place in history and culture. The connection to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or other esteemed accreditation bodies not only serves as a testament to a site's standards but also elevates its status and highlights its importance in the heritage landscape (Khalaf, 2020; Anini & Benamar, 2023; Delbono, 2024).

Respondents at the Voortrekker Monument emphasised cultural elements. According to Menor-Campos *et al.* (2020), visitors informed about the world heritage status of a site is an added motivation for visiting a site. For many individuals visiting a heritage site, understanding the site's prestige and its recognition by globally respected organisations or other reputable accrediting bodies often adds to their appreciation and engagement with the experience. Recognition by local bodies or UNESCO is viewed as an assurance of authenticity. This is because of the verification and processes followed in the recognition of the sites (Myint, 2022; Herman et al., 2024).

6.3 APPEALING MESSAGES THROUGH AUDIO AND IMAGES

Adamus-Matuszyńska *et al.* (2021) write that the use of an appealing visual image involves the presence of design components which are closely connected to give a long-lasting impression. In addition to the strategic implementation of memorable slogans, respondents indicated a strong preference for the inclusion of captivating images that visually resonate with potential visitors. Slogans, symbols and images are increasingly becoming important in promoting tourism sites due to their ability to represent ideas, objects, and events (Lameed, 2023). These images, along with carefully selected sounds that evoke specific emotions and enhance the ambience, play a crucial role in creating an immersive environment for site promotion. Kalimullina (2024) and Mandangi *et al.* (2024) are of the view that tourism promotion transcends just having good slogans, symbols and visual identity, messaging and the experience, ideally resonating deeper with tourists. Engaging narration, whether through guided tours or audio descriptions, further enriches the visitor's journey, providing context and depth to their experience.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of appealing slogans, symbols and images as a powerful tool in enhancing the visitor experience. Kastenholz and Gronau (2022) suggest that such messages in tourism are a powerful way of developing 'involving and meaningful' experiences of services, places, and cultures that tourists have contact with. Cultural heritage should thus not only attract the passive "tourist gaze" but rather stimulate the curious visitor to engage creatively with this heritage in ways that cultural heritage providers may creatively imagine (Kastenholz & Gronau, 2022).

Through the weaving of narratives that connect with the site's history, culture, or unique features, storytelling serves not only to engage visitors on a more personal level but also fosters a deeper appreciation for the site. This multifaceted approach to promotion, which combines visual, auditory, and narrative elements, positions itself as an effective strategy for attracting visitors and creating lasting memories.

7. LIMITATIONS

This study was limited to the Gauteng province due to time, budget, or accessibility constraints. A further limit is the generalisability of findings across all cultural heritage sites in SA, particularly in remote or under-researched regions. The study depends heavily on a questionnaire which involves self-reported data thereby introducing risks of social desirability bias or inaccurate recall. This may affect the reliability of responses regarding motivations, satisfaction, or experiences. Visitor perceptions are captured at a specific time and does not account for seasonal changes in tourist behaviour or evolving trends in tourism marketing and technology but it does provide guidance on the importance of visitor-centric promotion of CHT.

8. CONCLUSION

Implementing a visitor-centric promotion strategy requires a deep and genuine commitment to understanding the diverse perspectives and unique experiences of visitors who visit cultural heritage sites. This process begins with actively gathering insights through various methods, such as surveys, feedback platforms, and direct conversations, to uncover the preferences, needs, and motivations of visitors. Once these insights are collected, promoters can harness this valuable information to craft tailored promotional strategies that resonate on a personal level. Each promotional message can be thoughtfully customised, reflecting the interests and values of the target audience.

Promoting CHT in SA is not just an opportunity for economic growth, it is a vital responsibility that requires a sensitive, well-rounded approach. CHT has the power to foster social cohesion and celebrate SA's diverse heritage, but it must do so without compromising the cultural integrity or values of local communities. To truly harness the potential of CHT, future research should focus on storytelling that is authentic, ensuring active community involvement, and implementing sustainable practices that combat over-tourism and safeguard our resources. Furthermore, addressing critical challenges like inadequate funding and limited digital infrastructure is essential for successfully incorporating heritage sites into the broader tourism economy. By crafting a holistic strategy that merges conservation efforts with an enriching visitor experience, SA can ensure its extraordinary cultural heritage is honoured and preserved for generations to come.

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