

Crafting Local Sustainability: Strategies for Attracting Tourists to Breweries and Related Activities of Beer Tourism

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Abstract

Beer tourism has become a crucial element of gastrotourism, presenting substantial opportunities for sustainable tourism development. This sector not only bolsters local economies by spending on local businesses but also promotes environmental sustainability by focusing on local brewing traditions and reducing the import of goods. The study aims to explain how different groups (based on gender, age, education, and place of residence) perceive, understand, and engage in beer tourism and thus help to adapt beer tourism offers to these groups' specific interests and improve the sustainability of related activities. The evaluation was carried out based on a questionnaire survey. Based on the variables, we tested through the Chi-square and Fisher-Freeman-Halton tests. Based on the contingency table, Monte Carlo simulation was used for the Fisher-Freeman-Halton test. The questionnaire survey results showed that most Slovak tourists prefer excursions to breweries rather than beer festivals (42.98% of men and 45.45% of women). Visitors get the most information about beer tourism activities through social networks. However, the number of respondents can be seen as a limiting factor of the research, which does not allow for generalizing the conclusions about beer tourism in Slovakia. In this case, it was a pre-test, and the questionnaire was subsequently modified and expanded to include other activities in the field of beer tourism. In the future, the data will be supplemented by personal interviews with brewery owners about their perception of beer tourism.

Key Words: beer tourism, culinary tourism, Slovakia, beer routes, consumer preferences

JEL Classification: Z3, M31, C15

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1. Introduction

Beer tourism has emerged as a vital component of food and gastronomic tourism, offering significant opportunities for countries like Slovakia to promote a unique and sustainable form of tourism (Doloreux et al., 2024). This niche tourism sector enhances the allure of local regions, providing a robust

platform for cultural engagement and economic development. By focusing on local brewing traditions and the consumption of locally produced beverages, beer tourism encourages tourists to explore lesser-known areas, thereby distributing tourism benefits more evenly across the country. It also supports environmental sustainability by reducing reliance on imported goods, which minimizes the ecological footprint associated with tourism (Bowen & Miller, 2023; Gajić et al., 2021; Kement et al., 2023; Severová et al., 2021). Importantly, beer tourism bolsters the local economy by ensuring that tourists' expenditures remain within the community, supporting local businesses, and fostering economic resilience. This form of tourism diversifies tourism offerings and plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage and promoting regional products (Wei & Korstanje, 2023). Despite the growing interest in beer tourism as a viable component of the broader tourism and gastronomy industry, significant gaps remain in understanding its impact and potential. Current research primarily focuses on established markets (Chi et al., 2022; López González & Moral Rincón, 2023; Xu et al., 2023), leaving a void in comprehensive studies that address emerging markets like Slovakia, where beer tourism is still nascent. There is a notable lack of detailed data on effective communication strategies tailored to different demographic groups that could enhance engagement and participation in beer tourism activities. This knowledge gap prevents stakeholders from fully leveraging beer tourism as a tool for sustainable economic development and cultural enrichment.

The study, therefore, aims to explain how different groups (based on gender, age, education, and place of residence) perceive, understand, and engage in beer tourism. This study thus helps to adapt beer tourism offers to these groups' specific interests and needs to improve their overall experience and participation rate, thereby improving the sustainability of these activities. By analysing and improving knowledge, information sources, and interest in beer tourism in different demographic groups, stakeholders can develop more targeted and effective strategies to promote sustainable tourism practices. This helps ensure that beer tourism becomes a significant economic contributor and a positive force for environmental protection and cultural preservation.

Exploring under-researched areas like beer tourism in Slovakia contributes to the broader academic understanding of tourism's role in economic and cultural development. This can provide valuable insights into how niche tourism sectors contribute to the diversification and resilience of the tourism industry and offers a lens through which to examine cultural identity, heritage, and social practices related to culinary traditions. This contributes to theoretical developments in how cultural and economic factors interact within the tourism sector.

The rest of the article is organized as follows. The theoretical framework lays the groundwork for understanding the dynamics of beer tourism, and then it progresses to formulating hypotheses. The methodological part describes the composition of the sample and elaborates on the methodologies employed for data processing. Subsequently, the discussion will focus on the results, as well as the theoretical and practical implications derived from the findings. The conclusion part outlines future research recommendations, highlighting potential areas of study to expand upon the findings presented.

2. Literature review

2.1 Integrating beer tourism into regional tourism strategies

In today's tourism industry, there is a growing worldwide interest in local gastronomy, which reflects unique regional tastes. Beer tourism caters to enthusiasts seeking diverse tastes worldwide, involving stakeholders from travel agencies to educational institutions (Gajić et al., 2021; Csapó & Wetzl, 2016). As an integral part of culinary tourism, which the World Food Travel Association defines as the pursuit of unique and unforgettable culinary experiences it seeks to draw travellers into local culture through authentic food and drink, strengthens economic and socio-cultural development by promoting local connections and making regional heritage accessible (Emmendoerfer et al., 2023; Wondirad et al.,

2021; Li et al., 2022). It naturally enriches cultural exploration and offers visitors experiences that not only attract them but also encourage them to share their culinary adventures online, further supporting the region's gastronomic appeal and sustainability (Moe et al., 2017; Severová, Svoboda, et al., 2021; Hasan et al., 2021; Androniceanu, 2023).

Beer tourism can be defined as visiting breweries, beer festivals, and beer performances, where the main motivating factor for visitors is tasting beer and experiencing the attributes of the beer region (Plummer et al., 2005). Beer tourism aims to provide domestic and foreign tourists with new undiscovered places suitable for visiting and at the same time to include them in the destination's marketing portfolio as one of the options for spending leisure time (Merhaut & Hán, 2012). Beer tourism participants are thus motivated by the gourmet experience of consuming different types of beer. They are also interested in the typical environment associated with beer production, possibly learning about the history of beer production (Zelenka & Pásková, 2012). The most important factor for the development of beer tourism is the existence of breweries in the area. Over the last few decades, the European beer sector has been shaken by growing consumer interest in beers produced on a small scale and with a slower fermentation process, namely craft beers (Carvalho et al., 2018). Breweries and their offerings are considered an important part of regional production and are a great reason for tourists to visit destinations and to experiment and learn about the local culture.

Berning et al., (2017) adds that some of the unique hop varieties grown in Yakima are even trademarked, giving the region and its brewers a natural territorial advantage. The Yakima Valley "Spirits and Hops Trail" connects breweries in support of agritourism, allowing the region to capitalize not only on the natural agribusiness relationships between hop growers and brewers, but also on its unique agricultural characteristics. The growth in production and consumption of craft beer has been shown to be a trigger for economic recovery or boost what helps with development of tourism areas. Countries with long-established beer industries, such as Germany and Belgium, offer a range of programs for authentic beer experiences, from Bavarian beer gardens to remote monastic breweries (Kraftchick et al., 2014).

In recent years, the craft beer phenomenon has grown particularly in Italy and Spain, but is also developing in the case of the UK (Rogerson, 2016; Yeoman et al., 2016). For example, the UK is dedicated to traditional high quality beers that have inspired the global craft beer industry (Cabras & Higgins, 2016). Italy's craft beer industry grew by 97.6% in four years, with the number of microbreweries rising from 206 in 2008 to 407 in 2012 (Aquilani et al., 2015). While the craft beer market is promising, it still represents a fraction of the commercial one, mainly due to the lack of involvement of large-scale producers. To sustain this growth, brewers may need to either look to new beer consumers (e.g. women and younger people attracted to different flavours) or draw on current commercial beer consumers (Donadini & Porretta, 2017; G. Donadini et al., 2016).

In addition, Smotláčková & Štěpánková (2013) include among the characteristic features not only tasting and beer consumption, but also tasting specialties served with beer. And also the opportunity for tourists to get to know the different techniques of brewing beer. In addition, the distinctive features include not only the tasting and consumption of beer, but also the food tasting of specialties served with beer. Csapó & Wetzl (2016) based on research, reports that a significant problem for craft breweries is limited space to welcome visitors to show them around and do professional beer tastings. At the same time, however, craft breweries play an important role in creating themed beer tours. As beer tourism is a growing but under-explored area of tourism, it is important to study the factors that influence the brand loyalty of craft brewery visitors, especially in rural or developing regions (Murray & Kline, 2015). This is confirmed by Alonso et al. (2017), who state that beer tourism contributes to craft breweries increasingly shifting from the actual production of beer to other business activities, with promotional and marketing activities increasing interest in the craft brewery product itself. In addition, according to Chirakranont & Sunanta, (2021) strategically designing the right experiential attributes in craft beer tourism can lead to higher tourist satisfaction and higher returns for breweries.

2.2 Tailoring strategies for profitability and sustainability for craft beer tourism enterprises

The primary challenge for craft beer tourism operators lies in their capacity to thrive and expand. From a long-term sustainability viewpoint, economic stability emerges as their foremost concern. Like other enterprises, their economic viability hinges crucially on long-term profitability (Rózsa et al., 2023) and the ability to adapt to changing market conditions. To realize true profitability, craft beer tourism businesses must attract a sufficient number of customers or tourists who not only helps businesses to sustain but also enables further development of these businesses. Therefore, these operators must understand customer satisfaction deeply and employ effective marketing strategies that not only draw visitors but also enhance their overall experience, thereby securing financial sustainability and fostering business growth (Chirakranont & Sunanta, 2021). The phenomenon of beer tourism is considered a “young form of specialty tourism” (Howlett, 2013). Beer tourism is generally considered a subset of food tourism or beverage tourism (Murray & Kline, 2015). On a theoretical level, beer tourism is in most cases considered a part of culinary tourism. But knowledge levels about beer tourism across different demographics indicate how widely and effectively information about this sustainable tourism practice is disseminated. High awareness can lead to higher participation rates, directly impacting local economies and supporting sustainable tourism practices, therefore we draw hypothesis that **knowledge of the term "beer tourism" differs by gender, age, education of respondents, and respondent's place of residence (H1)**.

Dunn & Wickham (2016) state, based on research among craft breweries in the US, that promoting brand awareness, for example through tourist activities such as brewery tours or tasting bars, provides tourists with information about the given product and ultimately increases sales. Plummer et al. (2005) add that the creation of beer routes has proven to be an effective method of building cooperation between individual craft breweries in the context of sharing marketing information for tourists. Such strategic use of social media (Rózsa et al., 2022), new product development and tourist attractions are supporting the development of a 'craft beer culture' in the wider industry (Dunn & Kregor, 2014). So understanding where different demographic groups obtain their information about beer tourism can help tailor more effective communication strategies. These strategies can promote sustainable practices within beer tourism, such as supporting local breweries, reducing transportation impacts, and encouraging responsible consumption therefore we draw hypothesis that **sources of information on beer tourism differ by gender, age, education of respondents, and respondent's place of residence (H2)**.

The craft brewery sector has given rise to many new formats of spaces for beer consumption, such as beer festivals, micropubs and brewery taps, but these spaces still tend to be numerically, socially and culturally dominated by men (Thurnell-Read, 2022; Androniceanu & Tvaronavičienė, 2020). Plummer et al. (2005) perceive beer tourism primarily as visits to breweries, beer festivals and beer shows where beer tastings take place, which is the main motivating factor for visitors to a beer region. Jablonska et al. (2013) further complement beer routes or other organized beer-themed tours. Based on research, Bujdosó & Szűcs (2012) report that for some tourists the beer itself is the primary motivation and for some the location is the motivation. However, there is always ultimately a connection, as the reason for visiting such place as breweries, beer museums, festivals, etc. Interest levels provide insights into potential engagement with beer tourism activities. High interest in activities that promote local products and cultural experiences can enhance economic benefits for local communities and reduce environmental impacts, key aspects of sustainable tourism therefore draw hypothesis that **interest in beer tourism activities differ by gender, age, education of respondents, and respondent's place of residence (H3)**.

3. Methods

In the following section, we describe the composition of the sample and elaborate on the methodologies used in the data processing.

3.1 Participants and data collection

The target population for beer tourism activities was defined as Slovak residents over the age of 18. However, it is important to note that some beer tourism activities may also involve persons under the legal drinking age. However, they have not been included in the consideration as operators generally prohibit persons under 18 years of age from participating in beer tourism activities, which is related to the promotion of the consumption of alcoholic beverages. According to the data of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, there were 4 359 066 inhabitants over 18 years of age in Slovakia as of 31.12.2021. This segment of the population is considered as the core population in our research.

We drew the sample by availability-based selection, which is a non-probability sampling method. The use of this method is appropriate in the case of a pilot study, where the aim is to test research tools before using them in larger and costlier studies. This method is also appropriate for research that is exploratory in nature and aims to gain basic insight or generate hypotheses in a particular area.

The final sample consists of 235 respondents. In determining the sample size, we sought to maximize available resources to achieve the best results within existing constraints. The decision on the sample size was based on an assessment of the realistic opportunities and needs of this study. The size of the sample set can be considered sufficient due to its use for a pilot study to obtain initial data and test hypotheses before conducting a larger survey. We also designed the survey so the results would have the required 95% confidence level. At the same time, we used statistical methods that allow calculations and provide representative results even with smaller sample sizes. At the same time, it should be noted that the sample is well stratified in terms of important socio-demographic criteria. On this basis, the conditions are in place to ensure that even a smaller sample size is statistically significant and provides representative results.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Question	Number	% of total respondents
Gender structure		
Male	114	48,5
Female	121	51,5
Age structure		
18-32	132	56,2
33-50	77	32,8
51 and more	26	11,0
What is your highest level of education?		
Elementary school	9	3,8
High school	164	69,8

University	62	26,4
Place of residence		
Western Slovakia	139	59,1
Middle Slovakia	46	19,6
Eastern Slovakia	50	21,3

Source: questionnaire survey, own processing

Table 1 provides an overview of the demographics of the survey respondents based on the structure of gender, age, education, and place of residence. The gender structure among respondents is relatively balanced, with a slight female predominance. Of the total respondents, 114 are male (48.5%) and 121 are female (51.5%). The structure of the sample is close to that of the baseline sample (males 48.9% and females 51.1% in 2021). In terms of the age distribution of respondents, the largest group is made up of 18-32-year-olds, of which there are 132 (56.2%). This is followed by the 33-50 age group with 77 respondents (32.8%), and the least represented group is those aged 51 and over with 26 (11.0%). In view of the disparity of the age ranges observed, no comparison with the structure of the base population can be made. However, based on the structure of the sample in the research part we take into account the predominance of younger respondents. In terms of highest educational attainment, 9 respondents (3.8%) have primary education, 164 respondents (69.8%) have secondary education and 62 respondents (26.4%) have university education. The structure of the respondents in this case is close to the structure of the base set (13.89% primary education, 62.35% secondary education and 23.76% university education in 2021). The distribution of respondents by place of residence is as follows - the largest group lives in Western Slovakia (139 respondents, 59.1%), followed by Middle Slovakia with 46 respondents (19.6%) and Eastern Slovakia with 50 respondents (21.3%). In this case, the structure of the sample does not reflect the structure of the core sample.

The data collection process was carried out continuously from July to September 2021 in Slovakia. Respondents filled out the questionnaires in Google Forms. Pilot testing was conducted on a small sample of respondents to obtain feedback on the comprehensibility of the questionnaire. This research was inspired by a study by Stone et al.(2020), that examined the demand side of beer tourism, particularly the characteristics of beer-motivated travellers among American vacationers.

3.2 Statistical analysis

We evaluated the dataset obtained from the questionnaire survey using appropriate statistical tests. Statistical analysis was performed in the SPSS 22 program. Through appropriate statistical tests, we assess the validity of the stated hypotheses on the basis of the calculated p-values, which represent the probability of the error we commit if we reject the null hypothesis. The significance level is set at 5% for all tests.

To detect the dependence of two nominal variables we use chi-square test of independence (Řezanková, 2011; Rakesh & Singhal, 2015). It is based on the assumption that if two features are independent, then the distribution of the counts in the contingency table is proportional to the row and column marginal counts. These frequencies are called expected frequencies. If we denote the relative abundance in the base set as π_{ij} , then we write the null hypothesis of independence in the form $H_0: \pi_{ij} = \pi_{ij,0}$, where $\pi_{ij,0}$ is the relative abundance expected in the case of independence, given by the relation $\pi_{ij,0} = \pi_i + \pi_j$. We test this null hypothesis against hypothesis $H_1: \pi_{ij} \neq \pi_{ij,0}$ for at least one pair i, j ($i \neq j$). The Pearson chi-squared statistic can be used as a test criterion, which is expressed by the relation:

$$\chi_P^2 = \sum_{i=1}^R \sum_{j=1}^S \frac{(n_{ij} - m_{ij})^2}{m_{ij}} \quad (1)$$

The prerequisite for using this test is that the expected frequencies in each cell of the contingency table do not fall below a value of 5 in at least 80% of the cells, and that the remaining cells have values of at least 1. If this prerequisite is not met, we use the Fisher-Freeman-Halton test, which can be thought of as a generalization of Fisher's exact test for the R x S table (Auken & Kebschull, 2021; Ozturk et al., 2023)

For large or unbalanced data sets, we use Monte Carlo simulation to increase the reliability of the asymptotic results (Mehta & Patel, 2011; Bal et al., 2009). Cramer's V coefficient is used to find the degree of dependence between qualitative traits. Cramer's V coefficient is used to find the degree of dependence between qualitative traits. Cramer's V is an alternative to Phi Coefficient in tables bigger than 2×2 tabulation. Cramer's V varies between 0 and 1 without any negative values. Similar to Pearson's r, a value close to 0 means no association (Akoglu, 2018; Prematunga, 2012). If the sampling results are arranged in a contingency table of type r x s, then Cramer's V is defined by the relation:

$$V = \frac{\chi^2}{\min\{(r - 1), (s - 1)\} \cdot n} \quad (2)$$

when χ^2 is the Pearson test statistic and $n = \sum_{i=1}^r \sum_{j=1}^s n_{ij}$.

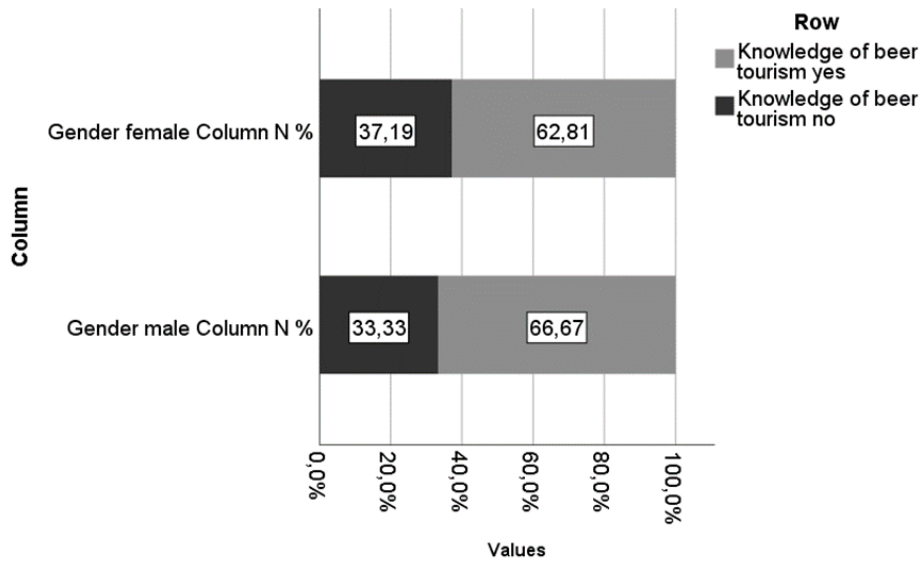
Given the limited sample size and the unverified reliability and validity of the questionnaire, the results are interpreted with caution and are applied for the purposes of the pilot study. Given the identified limitations, further studies with larger sample sizes and with validated instruments to obtain more comprehensive results would be useful after taking into account the results of this pilot study.

4. Results and Discussion

Beer tourism is not yet fully developed in Slovakia compared to other European countries. Therefore, we were interested in whether the respondents had any knowledge about what beer tourism is. As many as 66.67% of men and 62.81% of women stated that they know what beer tourism is (Graph 1).

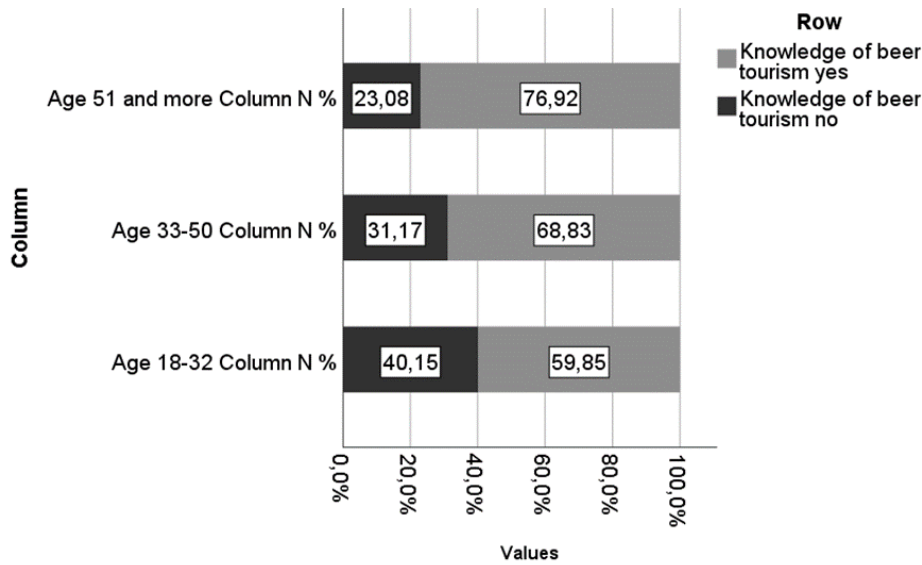
In terms of age, respondents aged 51 and over were the most informed (76.92%). But even in other age categories, almost 60% of 18-32 year olds and almost 70% of 33-50-year-old respondents reported that they were familiar with the concept of beer tourism (Graph 2).

Graph 1. Knowledge of the term "beer tourism" by gender of respondents



Source: SPSS 22 program

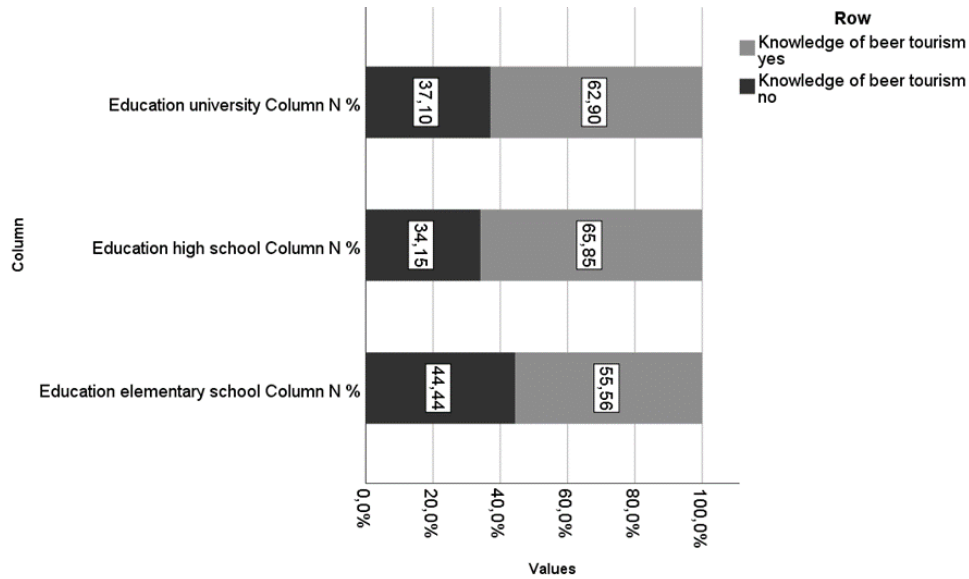
Graph 2. Knowledge of the term "beer tourism" by age structure of respondents



Source: SPSS 22 program

As in the case of the age structure, where no significant differences were observed between the different categories, no significant difference in the knowledge of the concept of beer tourism was observed in terms of education. Across all education groups, more than 60% or almost 60% of respondents reported that they were familiar with the concept of beer tourism (Graph 3).

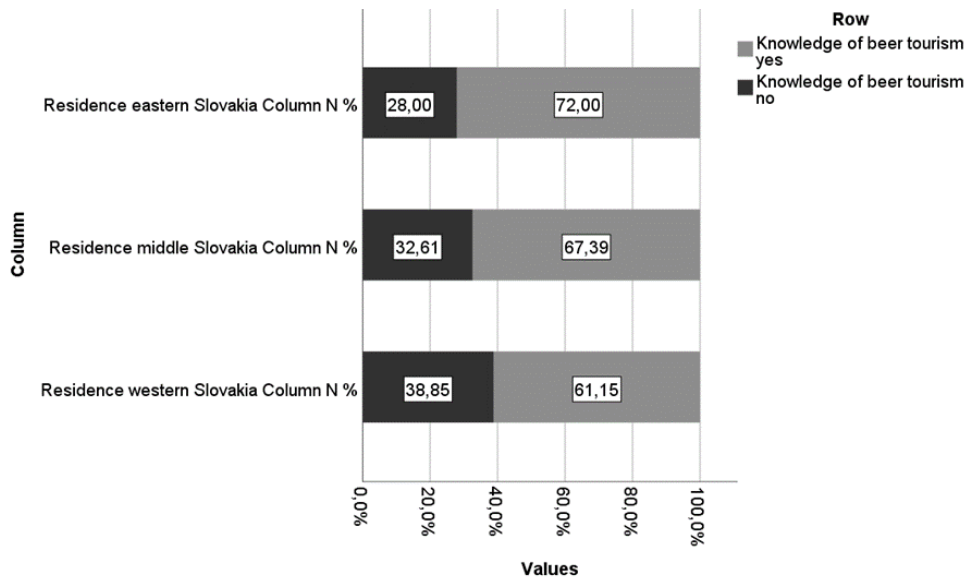
Graph 3. Knowledge of the term "beer tourism" according to the educational structure of respondents



Source: SPSS 22 program

In the same way, in every part of Slovakia, respondents are more familiar with beer tourism than not. The highest number of respondents did not know the concept of beer tourism in western Slovakia (38.85%) (Graph 4).

Graph 4. Knowledge of the term "beer tourism" by respondent's place of residence

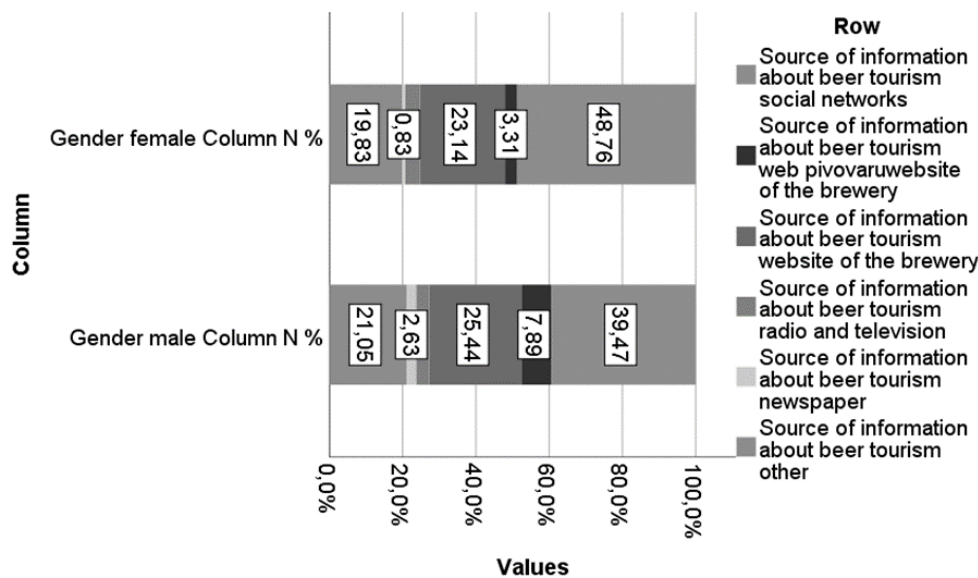


Source: SPSS 22 program

The development in technologies and the existence of new communication channels have enable businesses to take quick actions for their customers' demands also through the innovation of their technology and products (Kozubiková et al., 2017). To satisfy their customers' needs, many SMEs use those developed marketing communication tools that provide less costly but more innovative solutions for their functional business areas (Civelek et al., 2021). Such these firms with innovative capabilities can increase their market share and ensure greater success in selling their products (Ključnikov et al.,

2022). Understanding tourist behavior provides additional information on how to increase their satisfaction and attract loyal visitors. Ratings and reviews provide customers with a rich source of information about product quality from the perspective of other customers with similar preferences (Stefko et al., 2020; Lukac et al., 2021). In the food and beverage industry, consumers seek information about a product and experience the product through its taste attributes, thereby acquire information and form consumer preferences (Dimara, Skuras, 2005). In the craft beer sector, consumers are likely to try new craft beers while looking for more information about them (Lerro et al., 2020). Brewery tourism is closely linked to 'word of mouth marketing', where visitors return home and tell their friends and family about the experience. Such marketing could lead to new tourists making the trip to enjoy the breweries (Howlett, 2013). However, this source of information came second in our research, with 25.44% of men and 23.14% of women preferring it. In the case of Slovak beer tourists, social networks were the most preferred area for obtaining information about beer tourism. This method was preferred by 39.47% of men and 48.76% of women (Graph 5).

Graph 5. Sources of information on beer tourism by gender

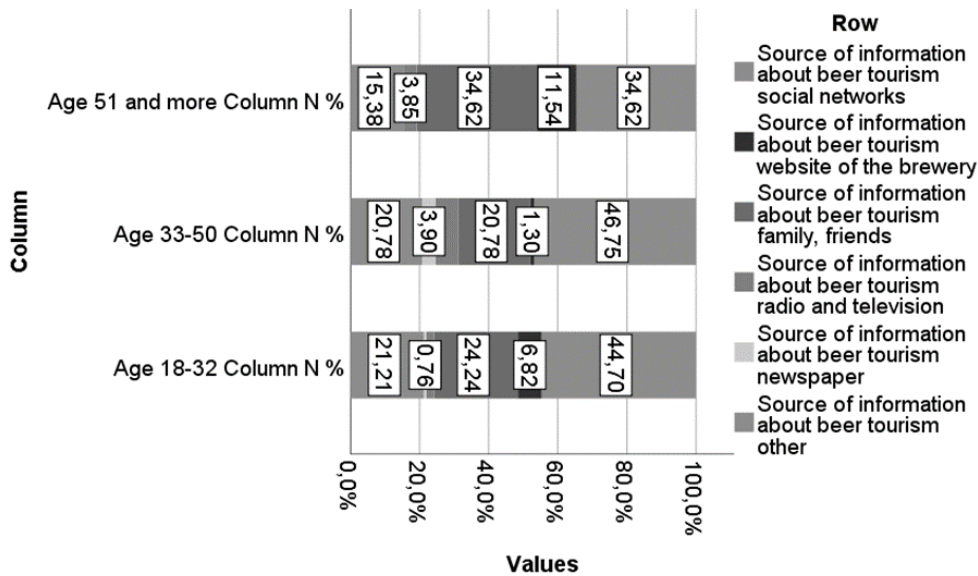


Source: SPSS 22 program

The managerial approach to publicity and communication should be understood as a complex of possibilities, where interaction and their correct use can contribute to better performance of the enterprise (Kovács et al., 2022) and at the same time social networks are one of the factors of a quality business environment (Durda & Ključnikov, 2019). Interestingly, although breweries themselves are involved in beer tourism, only a very small percentage of respondents preferred to obtain information directly from their websites. However, it is highly likely that breweries offer this type of tourism directly through social networks rather than their websites. And these research preferences did not change even within the age structure (Graph 6).

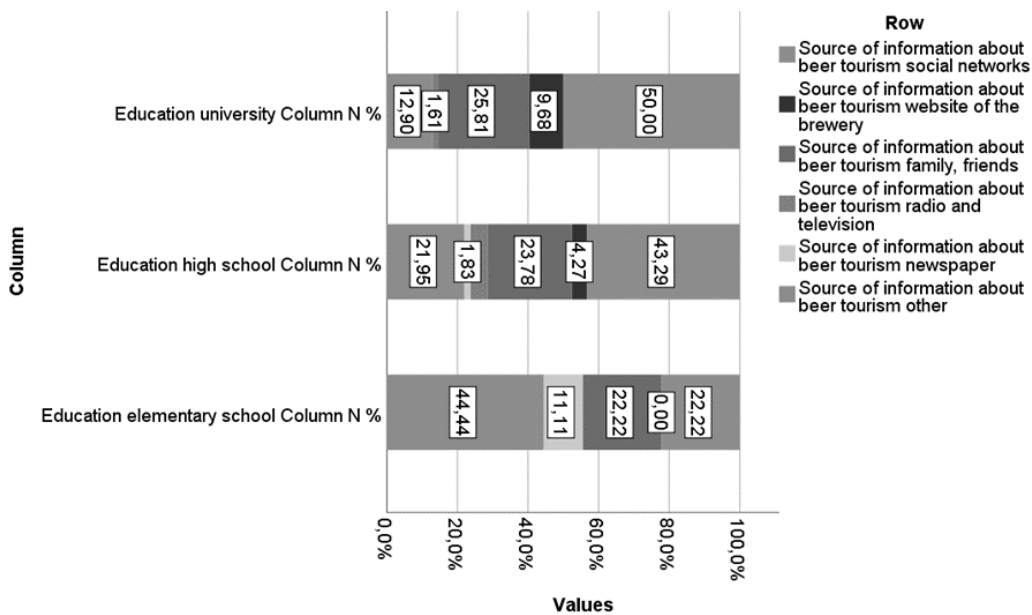
Even in terms of educational structure, other sources of information, such as social networks or information from friends and family, were not significantly more prevalent. Social media is a variable that is experiencing worldwide success with hundreds of millions of users, which is evidenced by the huge interest of the business world, as well as the investments already made or planned in this new section of advertising. to state that this field is still young and constantly developing (Štefko et al., 2013; Rózsa et al., 2024). The fact that social networks are gradually displacing print media is confirmed by the fact that only 11.11% of respondents with primary education, 1.83% of respondents with secondary education and no respondents with university education received information about beer tourism (Graph 7).

Graph 6. Sources of information on beer tourism by age structure



Source: SPSS 22 program

Graph 7. Sources of information on beer tourism by educational structure

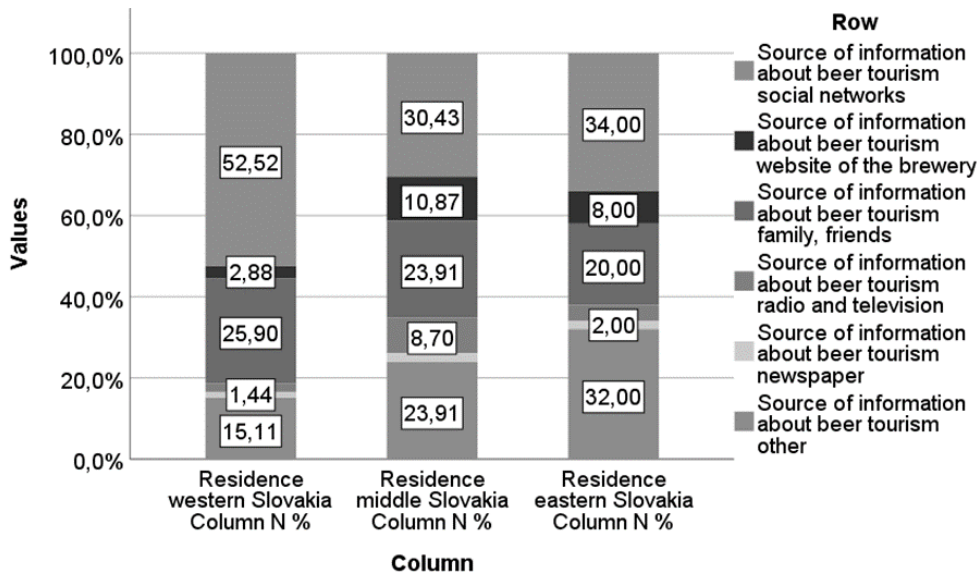


Source: SPSS 22 program

In middle Slovakia, radio, TV and the brewery website are still significant sources of information about beer tourism compared to western and eastern Slovakia (Graph 8).

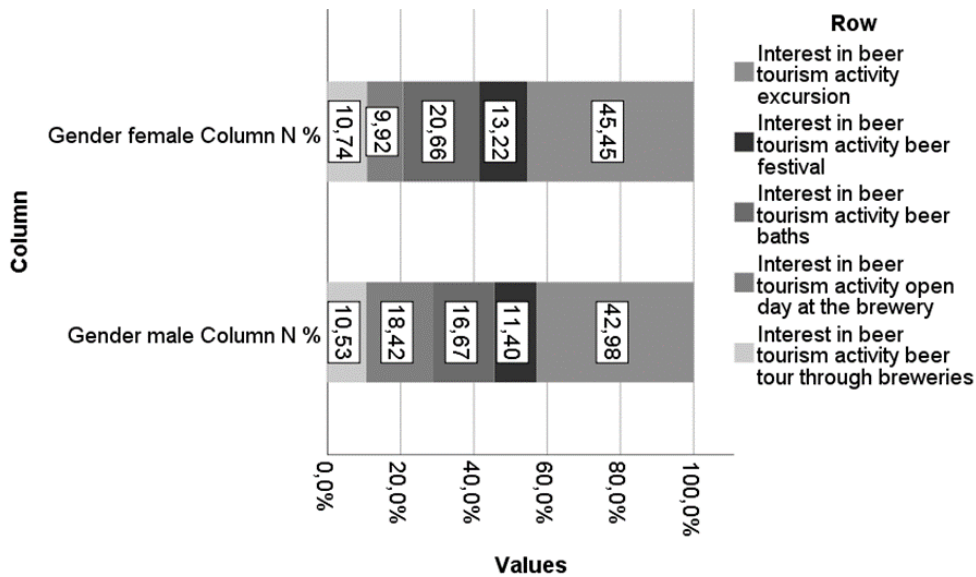
Beer festivals are mostly perceived as a place to have fun and gain new experiences and knowledge, with a common theme - beer and its (current rather than future) consumption. Compared to this, wine tasting and tasting together with family and friends seems to be the main reason for attending beer festivals (Krajíčková, Šauer, 2018). Research conducted during beer festivals revealed that in addition to having fun, participants come because they are interested in tasting new craft beer products. Participants get information about the festivals from social networks, word of mouth, friends and relatives (Rogerson, Collins, 2015).

Graph 8. Sources of information on beer tourism by respondent's place of residence



Source: SPSS 22 program

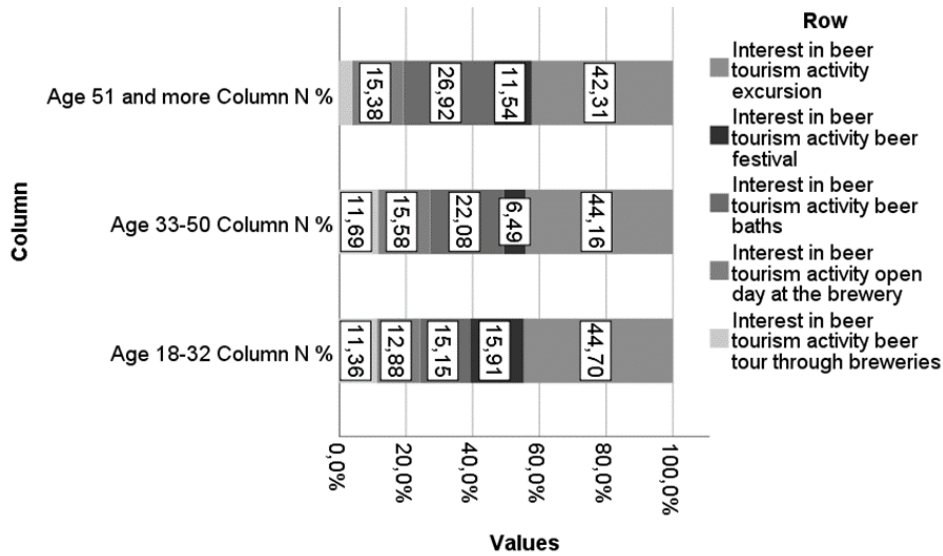
Graph 9. Interest of beer tourism activities by gender



Source: SPSS 22 program

Slovak tourists prefer excursions to breweries rather than beer festivals (42.98% of men and 45.45% of women). Beer festivals are preferred by 11.4% of men and 13.22% of women. Recently, beer spas have been gaining in popularity. This attraction is preferred by 16.67% of men and 20.66% of women (Graph 9).

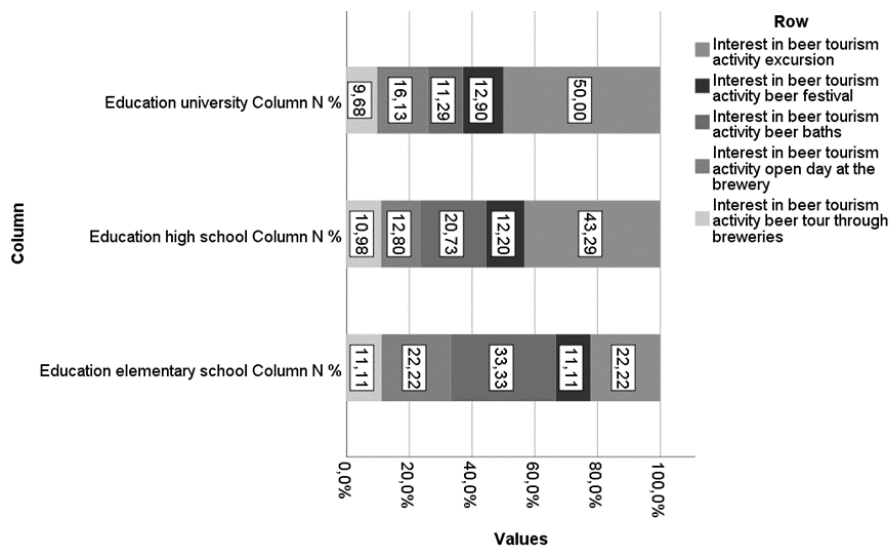
Graph 10. Interest of beer tourism activities by age structure



Source: SPSS 22 program

In terms of age structure, respondents preferred excursions in beer tourism (44.70% of 18-32 year olds, 44.16% of 33-50 year olds and 42.31% of 51+ year olds). More than beer festivals, 33-50 year olds and 51+ year olds preferred beer baths. For the younger generation (18-32 year olds), the preference for beer festivals and beer baths is at the same level. Only 11.36% of 18-32 year olds and 11.69% 33-50 year olds prefer beer tour through breweries (Graph 10). In Slovakia, wine tours are more popular than beer tours, despite the fact that there are several craft breweries in Slovakia that are also part of such tours (e.g. Bratislava Wine Route, etc.).

Graph 11. Interest of beer tourism activities by educational structure

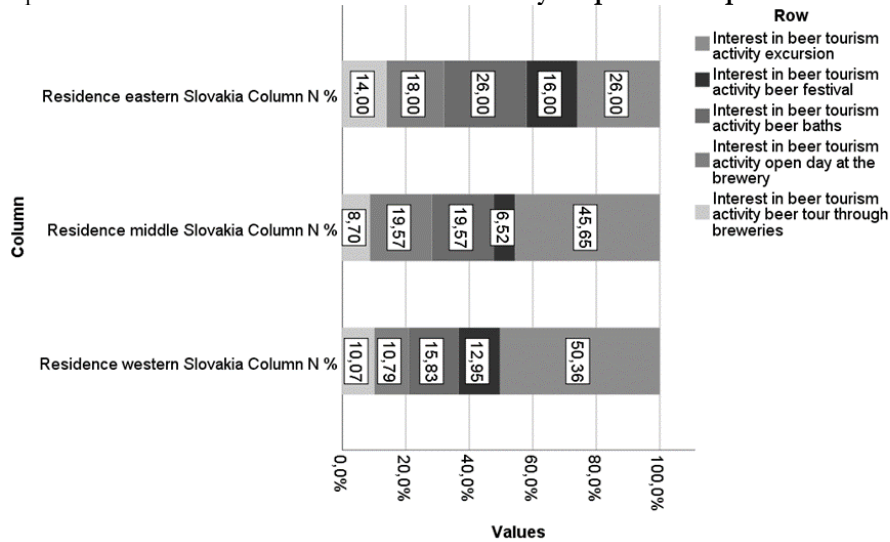


Source: SPSS 22 program

There was no significant variation in preferences for beer tourism activities between the different education groups. Respondents with elementary education had a higher preference for open days in breweries (22.22%) compared to high school and university educated respondents. Conversely, the least

number of respondents with a university education preferred beer baths (11.3%) compared to respondents who had elementary or high school education (Graph 11).

Graph 12. Interest of beer tourism activities by respondent's place of residence



Source: SPSS 22 program

Despite the fact that there is a beer route in every region of Slovakia (Western, Central, Eastern), within western Slovakia even 2 (Bratislava Beer Route, Záhorská Beer Route), the interest in this type of attraction within beer tourism in all regions was relatively low (Western Slovakia 10.07%, Central Slovakia 8.7%, Eastern Slovakia 14%) (Graph 12). One of the reasons for this is the lack of marketing associated with this type of attraction. There is no portal in Slovakia where these beer routes can be found in one place with complete information. Promotion is rather up to the individual breweries that are part of the beer route and they also include on their websites the information that they are part of such a beer route. Although there are organizations that are involved in the promotion of tourism activities, entrepreneurs do not feel that they are sufficiently dedicated to this activity (Beresecka, 2011; Dusek, 2017).

This is also confirmed by Lingeberzins, Jenzis (2022) who, based on research conducted in Lithuania, found that although 52.13% of gastronomic establishments cooperated with tourist information centers as well as other destination management organizations in marketing, as many as 32.66% of them stated that there were no activities in their place of business to promote gastronomic tourism, such as traditional markets, street markets, gastronomic festivals, etc. Although beer festivals that take place in Slovakia are relatively small and not as well-known as, for example, Oktoberfest in Munich, they are extremely popular with all respondents in all parts of Slovakia. One of the reasons for the popularity of such events is the fact that the visitor becomes at the same time part of the gastronomic but also cultural tourism. The complex tourism product thus created becomes attractive to visitors.

In the next section, we will focus on the evaluation of hypotheses, the results of which will contribute to the achievement of the stated objectives. The validation of the hypotheses was carried out on the basis of the primary data obtained from the questionnaire survey, which is presented in the material and methods section. We hypothesized that there is a statistically significant relationship between each of the professional questions focusing on beer tourism and the socio-demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. Based on the variables, the size of the contingency table and the fulfilment of the stated assumptions, we conducted the testing through the Chi-square test and the Fisher-Freeman-Halton test, respectively. And based on the contingency table, Monte Carlo simulation was used for the Fisher-Freeman-Halton test. Testing was conducted at the 5% significance level, i.e. if the p-value is less than the chosen significance level $\alpha = 0.05$, we reject the hypothesis tested at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

The null hypothesis assumes the independence of the nominal variables under study. Given the result of the p-value, we can reject the null hypothesis in only one case, and that is when examining the relationship between the source of beer tourism marketing information and the respondent's place of residence. For all other relationships examined, the calculated p-value was greater than 0.05 and hence we cannot reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, which means that a statistically significant relationship was not confirmed in the other cases (Table 1).

Table 2. **Expression of the relationship between beer tourism related issues and socio-demographic issues**

Variable		Knowledge of beer tourism	Interest in beer tourism activities	Source of information about beer tourism
Gender	value	0,382 *	3,764 *	4,659 †
	p-Value	0,536 *	0,439 *	0,464 †
Age	value	3,636 *	7,397 *	12,327 †
	p-Value	0,162 *	0,495 *	0,206 †
Education	value	0,652 †	6,457 †	13,424 †
	p-Value	0,765 †	0,566 †	0,142 †
Residence	value	2,079 *	12,196 *	20,500 †
	p-Value	0,354 *	0,143 *	0,016 †
* tested by Chi Square test				
† tested by Fisher-Freeman-Halton test with Monte Carlo simulation				

Based on the testing result of the relationship between the respondent's place of residence and the source of information about beer tourism, we proceeded to investigate the degree of the relationship between these variables. Based on the variables as well as the size of the contingency table, we chose to use the non-parametric Cramer's V coefficient. The null hypothesis assumed that there is no dependence between the nominal variables under study. Based on the calculated p-value, the null hypothesis can be rejected. The result of examining the relationship between the variables from the previous testing was confirmed and thus the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables under study is valid. The calculated value of the Cramer's V coefficient statistic was 0.206, indicating a weak to moderate dependence between the respondent's place of residence and the source of information about beer tourism (see Table 3).

Table 3. Expression of the degree of relationship between the respondent's place of residence and the source of information on beer tourism

		Value	Approximate Significance	Monte Carlo Significance		
				Significance	99% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0,292	0,029	0,026	0,022	0,030
	Cramer's V	0,206	0,029	0,026	0,022	0,030
Number of Valid Cases		235				

4.1 Theoretical implications

This study provides an insight into beer tourism in the context of selected socio-geographical characteristics, which appears more in foreign research than in Slovak conditions, therefore the research from abroad was also an inspiration. It is this pilot survey that provides specific results concerning not only information on beer tourism, but especially on tourists' preferences in the field of beer tourism. Obtaining such information will contribute to the creation of an effective strategy for sustainable tourism development. However, in terms of methodological approaches, we found that for future research in this area, it is necessary to use a more rigorous methodology and to use additional analyses in order to better assess the knowledge of the term and activities of beer tourism differs by gender, age, education of respondents, and respondent's place of residence.

4.2 Practical implications

The results of the research provide potential for setting up an appropriate marketing strategy for beer tourism. Although this type of tourism is very slow to take off in Slovakia, well-adjusted marketing can contribute to the sustainability and prosperity of craft breweries in particular, which represent a potential for the development of the entire region. The survey results show that tourists prefer excursions to breweries. This finding can not only contribute to the development of the brewery itself, but breweries can also be places that promote other attractions within the region that beer tourists can visit in addition to beer consumption. One possibility is to network all tourism operators in the region and create joint marketing activities, e.g. in the form of a joint calendar of events in the region.

5. Conclusion

Beer tourism is a specific form of tourism and currently represents a big potential in the development of gastronomic tourism. However, this type of gastrotourism is not very widespread in Slovakia. This fact is also confirmed by the minimal amount of research carried out in this area under the conditions of Slovakia. This was also one of the reasons for conducting research in this area. The aim of the study was to evaluate the knowledge of beer tourism in the condition of Slovakia. The results showed that education, gender, age, and place of residence have no influence on knowledge about beer tourism. As many as 66.67% of men and 62.81% of women stated that they know what beer tourism is. The population gets the most information about beer tourism through social networks. This method was

preferred by 39.47% of men and 48.76% of women. However, we do not consider this to be a sufficient marketing tool and therefore marketing activities can be perceived as a limiting factor in the development of beer tourism in Slovakia. Slovak tourists prefer excursions to breweries rather than beer festivals (42.98% of men and 45.45% of women). Hypothesis testing showed that a statistically significant relationship was confirmed only between the respondent's place of residence and the source of marketing information about beer tourism. More respondents (55.4%) from Western Slovakia prefer information about beer tourism via social networks or brewery websites compared to respondents from Middle and Eastern Slovakia.

However, the number of respondents can be seen as a limiting factor of the research, which does not allow generalizing the conclusions about beer tourism in the conditions of Slovakia. In this case, it was a pre-test and the questionnaire was subsequently modified and expanded to include other activities in the field of beer tourism. In the future, the data will be supplemented by personal interviews with brewery owners about their perception of beer tourism, and then a comparison in several European countries will be possible.

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