

DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES OF CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: CASE OF SOUVENIRS AND CRAFTS PRODUCTION IN MAURITIUS

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Original Scientific Article

DOI: 10.35666/25662880.2021.7.25

UDC: 338.487[39:688.3](698.2)

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to explore the key drivers and challenges in souvenirs entrepreneurship and to broaden understanding of souvenir production through the examination of creativity and innovation in craft souvenirs. Despite the importance of innovation to all sectors of the economy, creativity and innovation has not been sufficiently studied from the perspective of SMEs in the tourism industry in Mauritius. A qualitative approach was used to explore the entrepreneurs' understanding and experiences of creative and innovative sustainable approaches in designing and producing sustainable locally made artefacts for the tourism industry. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 SMEs using purposive and snowballing samplings to facilitate the access to hard-to-reach SMEs. The qualitative data was content analysed for prominent themes. The criteria used by the SMEs to explain creative and innovative sustainable crafts and souvenirs were workmanship, eco-friendly, originality and uniqueness of local heritage, and local inspiration. The findings further revealed that challenges such as lack of skilled labour, labour cost, availability and price of raw materials, unfair competition, and sales and marketing support impacted on the production of locally handmade and authentic crafts and souvenirs. The findings of this study can provide useful information for souvenir producers/retailers, tourism decision-makers and tourism authorities when developing crafts and souvenirs that reflect aspirational experiences for travellers and also an opportunity to use these tourism products as a powerful destination marketing tool.

Key words: Crafts and Souvenirs, Creativity and innovation, Sustainability, Destination marketing, Mauritius

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has high concentrations of entrepreneurs as small and medium sized enterprises and is a distinctive feature of the tourism industry (Morrison et al., 2010). Tourism can be identified as an exporter of such services as it is one of the largest employment generators in the world (Barringer and Ireland, 2006; Lee-Ross, 2012;). Over time, an increasing number of destinations have opened up and invested in tourism development, as it has the potential to stimulate other sectors in the economy owing to its cross-synergistic benefits and its backward and forward linkages with other sectors (Gill, 2015). With tourism development, the local entrepreneurs also have excellent opportunities to offer services or sell products to local and foreign tourists (Rogerson, 2004), hence enhancing their income and quality of life as well as protecting the local heritage (Marques et al., 2019). Moreover, Naidoo and Ramseook-Munhurrun (2016) argued that shopping and in particular souvenirs are important mementos which are an essential component of the destination experience and hence can be used as a strategy for competitive advantage.

The literature on innovation provides various perspectives on the concept of innovation and is defined as the creation of novel or advanced products, services or processes that the market sees as new or desirable (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Garcia and Calantone, 2002). Improving creativity and innovation capability in the SME sectors is critical to sustain the economic growth (Naidu et al., 2014). It is crucial for SMEs to have clues about the market needs and also niche markets to develop new and innovative products which will help the SMEs build their marketing strategy and competitive advantage. Considering the pivotal role of SMEs in the economic growth of a country, where smaller businesses represent the cornerstone of almost all national economies, it is also vital to instill this sense of environmental responsibility in smaller enterprises (Harrington et al., 2016). However, the literature revealed there is a lack of research on factors that stimulate creativity and innovation among SMEs in the tourism sector (Wolfgang et al., 2014). Past studies revealed that several factors restricting SMEs' ability to innovate, such as limited financial resources, a lack of multidisciplinary competence, the lack of time, skilled personnel, access to finance and shortage of technical knowledge or knowhow and less structured and professionalized innovation processes when compared to large companies (Taggar, 2002; van de Vrande et al., 2009; Kamalian, 2011; Parida et al., 2012). The development of souvenirs in Mauritius is developing at a slow pace and lagging behind with a lack of innovation to develop authentic, sustainable and appealing products (Naidoo, 2014). Thus, it is important to gain deeper insights

from the SMEs of the factors contributing to or hampering the production of creative and sustainable innovative crafts and souvenirs as these factors may either enhance or limit the growth of the SMEs businesses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Souvenirs

Souvenirs as cultural artefacts are central to the tourism and travel experience, with many tourists wanting to take home mementos of places they have visited, and things they have done in the tourism destination (Swanson and Horridge, 2006; Brennan and Savage, 2012; Li and Ryan, 2018; Amaro, Ferreira and Henriques, 2019). Souvenirs might take the form clothing items (e.g., T-shirts), postcards, authentic handcrafted items, key chains, food items, miniature replicas of landmarks, or various other objects, and these souvenirs could be seen as a form of marketing the destination (Kong and Chang, 2012; 2016). Souvenirs not only provide a tangible object to take home that represents the memories of the destination visited, but also reap economic benefits for the host community in the areas of design, production and sales (Swanson and Horridge, 2006; Swanson and Timothy, 2012). Souvenirs and gifts constitute a significant part of tourist expenditures and thus account for a significant share of overall shopping revenue (Litirell et al., 1994; Turner and Reisinger, 2001; Henderson et al., 2011; Kong and Chang, 2016). Previous studies indicate that most tourists purchase souvenirs that are typical for the destination, representing authentic elements of the history or culture of the place visited (Onderwater et al., 2000; Brennan and Savage, 2012; Li and Ryan, 2018). Consequently, the production, sales and purchase of souvenirs form an integral part of the touristic experience that is worth billions of dollars (Swanson and Timothy, 2012; Amaro et al., 2019). Thus, souvenirs consumption serves as a positive reinforcement of economic impact of a destination and also revisit intentions (Swanson and Horridge, 2002; Prebensen, 2005; Lacher and Nepal, 2011).

When traveling, almost every tourist buys a broad range of souvenirs to bring back in the home country. Shopping has been viewed as an important part of the tourism experience and destination attraction as it provides tourists with a taste of local culture (Jansen-Verbeke, 1990; Hsieh and Chang, 2006). Past studies have identified souvenir shopping, a component of tourist shopping, as a primary travel motivation, an important source of enjoyment and excitement during a traveller's trip (Timothy, 2005), and an essential tourist activity such as entertainment and/or

recreation which helps shape the travel experience (Law and Au, 2000; Hu and Yu, 2007). Timothy (2005) further identified seven broad reasons that tourists shop while on vacation: 1) a desire for keepsakes and memories; 2) a quest for authenticity; 3) novelty-seeking; 4) functional needs; 5) boredom/ excess time; 6) buying gifts for people at home; and 7) altruism. Souvenirs are therefore viewed as commodities for trade in tourism and are material commodities produced, sold, and consumed (Swanson and Horridge, 2006; Torabian and Arai, 2013). Demand for souvenirs is generated by souvenir makers and vendors (Swanson and Timothy, 2013; Torabian and Arai, 2013). Souvenirs thus become exchange items with value in the marketplace and the distribution of souvenirs is organised through supply chains from their points of production and packaging and eventually to points of consumption by tourists to remind them of their travel experience (Swanson and Horridge, 2006; Swanson and Timothy, 2013). Littrell et al. (1994) stated that design, superior quality workmanship and attractive colours were the product attribute criteria of tourists when buying a souvenir. On the other hand, Turner and Reisinger (2001) found three product attributes were important to tourists: value (range, quality), product display characteristics (colour, display, packaging, size) and uniqueness (memory of the trip). Swanson (2004) further reported that the knowledge that a cultural souvenir is locally hand-made is an important ingredient in establishing authenticity as well as purchase decision by the tourists.

Creativity and Innovation

Innovation is often associated with aspects such as creativity, novelty, value creation, and economic growth (Wikhamn, 2019). The capacity to innovate is recognised today as one of the main aspects leading to competitive advantage and influencing a company's long-term success (Marques and Ferreira, 2009; Terziowski, 2010; Naranjo-Valencia et al., 2016). Today, companies adopt creative and innovation behaviours while introducing new products and services or new methods of operation in order to attract customers by adding values, improve offers, increase sales and consequently being successful (Lumpkin and Dess, 1996; Damanpour and Wischnevsky, 2006). Innovation is considered a key success factor to enhance the performance of the tourism enterprises. Given the high demand for souvenirs in destinations, it is important for SMEs to have clues about the market needs and produce crafts and art which are creative, authentic and sustainable for the tourism industry.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach comprising of semi-structured interviews was used to develop knowledge about SMEs innovative and creative approaches as well as challenges in designing and producing sustainable artefacts for the tourism industry. The target audience included (i) souvenir manufacturers and (ii) souvenir suppliers and (iii) souvenir retailers. Twenty-five participants were selected as they are the key suppliers who can influence the souvenir items, and they have the required experience and knowledge that this research demands. Purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were used to seek potential and appropriate key respondents, where individuals selected to be studied invited new people from their network to participate to facilitate the access to hard-to-reach populations and to attain the saturation point more easily (Smith and Albaum, 2012). The Covid-19 crisis has affected the data collection process. Some data were collected from March 2020 to May 2020 and data collection restarted from July to October 2020 considering the Covid-19 sanitary protocols. Both face-to-face and online interviews were used depending on the availability of the respondents. Before conducting the interviews, consent from the participants were sought, and the interviews were recorded with the interviewees' permission. The 25 interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. The interviews lasted around 45 minutes to one hour, and "meanings" were derived out of these conversations. These were then categorized through coding, under specific themes as outlined to answer the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The majority of them (88%) are souvenir producers, two are both souvenir producers (8%) and retailers and one is a souvenir retailer (4%). The sample consisted of 25 individuals aged between 32 and 72 years old. While 20% of the souvenir producers and/or retailers interviewed for this study are into this business for less than 5 years, 20% of the respondents are producing souvenirs between 5 to 10 years and 60% mentioned that they were into this business for more than 10 years. Their business activities range from manufacturing of glass souvenirs, ship models, tea, and other Made in Mauritius handicrafts products.

Drivers of Crafts and Souvenirs Production

The study explored the drivers of creative and innovative sustainable crafts and souvenirs production. The respondents seem to understand the attributes that make a souvenir creative, innovative and sustainable. They explained that the crafts and souvenirs produced reflected the culture of the destination, thus reminding the tourists of the places they have visited. The respondents mentioned that they produced souvenir products such as wall and table deco, different types of tea, accessories and jewelries, beauty and health care, baskets, purse and bags, and jewelry boxes made from “vacoas” (local raw material), key rings and re-cycled glass souvenirs. Some of the crafts and souvenirs are typical Mauritian items such as the “ravanne” (local musical instrument), the Dodo (extinct bird), map of Mauritius with Filao seeds (local raw material), ships mockups, local coffee, rum, and jam and dried fruits made from the tropical fruits. It is observed that the souvenirs produced locally ranged from handicraft items to local food, tangibles objects which the tourists purchased to remember the places they visited, the people they met and other memorable experiences of the destination. It was further observed that the respondents create objects that have functional and aesthetic value using traditional craft techniques and, in some cases, using local raw materials. The findings also revealed that most of the souvenirs produced or sold by the respondents are ‘symbolic miniatures’ and ‘pictorial images’ connected to the local culture as advocated by Gordon (1986). The respondents pointed out that their products focused on the design of the souvenirs and also depict the local cultures and traditions, which portray the characteristics of the destination.

Table 1 presents some of the extracts of the interviews to depict the drivers of creative and innovative sustainable crafts souvenirs produced by the SMEs. The foremost attributes mentioned in the interviews were workmanship, eco-friendly, originality and uniqueness local heritage, and local inspiration. Some SMEs mentioned that they wanted to preserve the local culture and history by producing and selling souvenirs and crafts that demonstrate the local heritage and inspiration, thereby testifying the culture and history of the island. They further indicated that their craft items are uniquely designed, handmade with local raw materials, different, original and cannot be found elsewhere. The findings show that the integration of creativity with traditional craftsmanship gives a unique cast to the craft souvenirs produced by the SMEs, transmitting the local culture to the tourism products to be sold as cultural artifacts.

Table 1: Drivers of Creative and Innovative Crafts and Souvenirs Production

Key theme	Sub-theme	Quotes
Functional and aesthetic value	Workmanship	<p><i>“We make natural and authentic Mauritian jewellerys made from “fish scales” and watermelon seeds” – Respondent 21</i></p> <p><i>“We produce Mauritian souvenir like the map of Mauritius with the filao seeds. It’s all hand-made” – Respondent 6</i></p> <p><i>“We use recycled glasses to product tourist products such as Dodo paperweight” – Respondent 6</i></p>
	Eco-friendly	<p><i>“Our baskets, purse, and jewel boxes are made from ‘vacoas’ a local raw material” – Respondent 8</i></p> <p><i>“The main source of our raw materials is recycled bottles. Even the furnace is run not by diesel or any other fuel, we recycle cooking oil which we collect from the hotels and from fast-food outlets”- Respondent 13</i></p>
	Originality and Uniqueness	<p><i>“We produce ‘ravannes’ of different sizes as tourists like to buy this local music instrument. What we do is unique and is not made by machines.” – Respondent 18</i></p> <p><i>“We make Dodo paperweights, magnets and key rings and use bright colours and sea shells to represent our sea and sky. Each of our products are unique as they are handmade”– Respondent 15</i></p>
	Local Culture and Heritage	<p><i>“I try to depict the Mauritian culture through my artefacts” – Respondent 25</i></p> <p><i>“I manufacture Dodo birds which reflect the history of our island.” – Respondent 3</i></p>
Symbolic value	Local Inspiration	<p><i>“I have never been given any training to create the souvenirs we design and produce. There was a coconut tree at home, at fifteen years old, one day after having eaten a coconut, its shell was outside and I started playing with it by making graphitises on it with a nail. I made a cross on the coconut shell and everyone told me it was beautiful. These words encouraged me where I got the inspirations since now where my brother and I make souvenirs with coconut and wood” – Respondent 7</i></p> <p><i>“Our souvenirs production is inspired by the sea, things that you see in nature, and around us. We try to depict the four colours of our island in our design” - Respondent 6</i></p>

The SMEs produced a wide range of souvenirs that are crafted by hands, possessed originality and uniqueness, authentic, green and eco-friendly, made with local natural raw materials, re-cycled materials and some are handmade but also using imported raw materials. They also highlighted that besides experience and know-how, it is the demand and product uniqueness that drive producers to manufacture

such souvenirs. It is thus observed that the entrepreneurs put greater emphasis on producing local crafts and souvenirs which are interconnected with culture and heritage of the island, thereby, connecting their products to the tourism industry using their creative ideas and innovative capabilities. The respondents are motivated to create different crafts and souvenirs, and need to always innovate and modernize their crafts, in order to follow the market needs. Past studies also stated that handicraft businesses stand out by the high degree of manual skill, creativity and the design their products require and their close link with the history and cultural traditions of the specific countries (Storey, 2018; Marques et al., 2019).

Challenges of Crafts and Souvenirs Production

The respondents were asked about the challenges they face to produce creative and innovative sustainable souvenirs. Table 2 provides some insights of the challenges faced by the SMEs, namely, labour characteristics such as lack of knowledge and skilled labour and lack of labour cost, availability and price of raw materials, unfair competition, and sales and marketing support impacted on the production of locally handmade and authentic crafts and souvenirs. These barriers can be categorized as internal and external barriers experienced by the respondents, who are from the supply side. Table 2 depicts some of the extracts of the interviews illustrating the challenges experienced by the SMEs to create and produce creative and innovative sustainable crafts souvenirs.

The conversations depicted that one of the main challenges which most of the SMEs faced was the characteristics of labour such as lack of interest, knowledge and skills of the younger generation as well as labour cost as critical factors hampering creative and innovative production. The respondents highlighted that the younger generation was more eager to join other more lucrative sectors of the economy such as the clothing and food sector, rather than souvenir production. Some respondents also pointed out that lack of knowledge and skills among the young generation regarding sustainable issues such as recycling also influence the production of creative and authentic souvenirs. Furthermore, they mentioned that most of them are already finishing their professional career and there are no young people to follow in their footsteps. Consequently, various types of handicrafts will cease to exist, and, with them, a part of regional culture and history will also be lost. The other characteristic of labour which posed a challenge was the labour cost. The respondents mentioned that they lack the fund to employ full-time employees as they are small enterprises, and when they receive large orders, then they recruit part

time employees for a small period of time. Lacher & Slocum (2013) also stated that lack of capital and knowledge are concerns for souvenir providers.

Being a small island, Mauritius has limited local raw materials to manufacture innovative, green and authentic souvenirs and the SMEs are sometimes left with no option but to import their raw materials from other countries, mainly China. Availability and price of raw materials were very prominent in the discourses of the respondents as illustrated in Table 2. Some of the souvenir producers also stated that the raw materials to make green and authentic souvenirs are expensive and this makes it even more difficult for them to sell it as customers do not find it value for money. They also mentioned that since the use of plastic is banned in Mauritius, natural raw materials such as ‘vacoas’ and ‘vertiver’ can be used to produce souvenir items, which are sustainable and authentic, however, they stated that very few people are interested in the plantation of ‘vacoas’ and ‘vertiver’ as this is not a profitable business and thus have to import the raw materials.

The absence of a dedicated and strategic place for SMEs to sell their products has also been put forward by the respondents. They mentioned that they have to pay to exhibit their souvenirs in exhibitions and fairs. They further pointed out that there is lack of visibility of their souvenir products and there should be more exposure of ‘Made in Morris’ crafts, thus supporting the authenticity of local craft and souvenir products. Respondents also voiced out the difficulties encountered to market their products as they are not trained in marketing. The respondents have also expressed concern for networking and finding partners who are willing to trust, support and also promote their business activities, so that these entrepreneurs can sell their crafts and souvenirs in strategic places such as the boutiques of the hotels, shopping malls and duty-free shops of the airport. The findings of this study also revealed that tourists like to buy authentic souvenirs, and this is in line with past studies (Littrell et al.,1993; Anderson and Littrell, 1995; Soukhathammavong and Park, 2018; Storey, 2018).

Unfair competition was another challenge faced by the SMEs in the local souvenirs market. The respondents explained that their hand-made products are produced and consumed on a small scale, thus they cannot compete with the mass production, large volume and cheaper souvenirs produced by China and other countries. However, some of the respondents also pointed out that despite imported souvenirs are cheaper, tourists do look for souvenirs that are locally produced and authentic.

Table 2: Challenges of Creative and Innovative Crafts and Souvenirs Production

Theme	Sub-theme	Quotes
Labour Characteristics	Labour cost	<i>"I work on my own. I can't employ someone as I can't pay the salary, and people are not willing to do enter in this business because they feel they will not get enough money" - Respondent 4</i>
	Lack of Interest	<i>"The young generations are not interested in this sector because they are more interested to join other sectors such as clothing or food than craft as other sectors are more profitable nowadays – Respondent 11</i>
	Lack of knowledge and skills	<i>"... nowadays people, especially the young ones just want a job. They don't have any experience in the industry and they don't want to learn the craft, they don't have new ideas. You have to tell them everything, do this and do that and they still do it wrong. – Respondent 15</i>
	Raw materials (availability and price)	<i>"We can't afford to use green materials to produce souvenirs as either they are not available or they are expensive, and at the end making the souvenirs is not value for money and may results in low sales" – Respondent 8</i> <i>"We don't have raw materials in Mauritius, we need to import from other countries, and they are expensive" – Respondent 19</i>
Support and Exposure	Sales and Marketing Support	<i>"We don't have a proper place to sell our crafts. It is very important to have access to the airport because when somebody is leaving, he got a few rupees left and that's when he's going to buy a small souvenir and unfortunately, we don't have that window at the airport. We need support to sell our local products." – Respondent 1</i>
		<i>"There is no place to sell our products, we have to pay for exhibitions and fairs. We don't have enough exposure and publicity for our products and have difficulty to market them to tourists." – Respondent 21</i>
	Unfair Competition	<i>"The concerned authorities must support the local products and provide a platform where we can promote the local products as 'Made in Morris'. The tourists want to but crafts that are produced in Mauritius and not elsewhere." – Respondent 5</i> <i>"I guess the real difficulty is to manage the competition with the souvenirs Made in China" – Respondent 5</i> <i>"Competition from China discouraged us as their products are cheaper than us." – Respondent 11</i> <i>"We must encourage the local crafts and promote the label 'Made in Morris' instead of selling souvenirs that are manufactured in China" – Respondent 15</i>

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Crafts and souvenirs are integral part of the tourism industry and key contributor in commercialising the tourist products. This study was concerned to gain an understanding of the drivers and challenges of creative and innovative crafts and souvenirs from the SMEs in Mauritius and tourist is an important economic pillar of the island economy.

The findings of this study showed that crafts and souvenirs play an important role in supporting cultural, environmental and social entrepreneurship in producing local tourism products that show workmanship, are eco-friendly, display originality and uniqueness of local heritage, and are local inspiration of SMEs. The crafts and souvenirs products display the functional and aesthetic as well as symbolic values of the creative and innovative production. These different attributes of the crafts and souvenirs produced by the SMEs are from their imagination and inspiration, representing the culture and heritage of the island, and thus displaying the identity of Mauritius. These findings are similar to the past studies where the craft souvenirs contain original qualities of workmanship, use natural materials based on traditional designs and incorporated attributes of the places visited (Littrell et al., 1993; Swanson, 2013; Wilkins, 2011; Soukhathammavong and Park, 2018).

Although, the respondents consider the creativity and innovation to be an essential component in crafts and souvenirs production, the entrepreneurs face several challenges. They are struggling to grow and boost their businesses because of lack of resources, support and exposure. The respondents indicated that lack of skilled labour, labour cost, availability and price of raw materials, unfair competition, and sales and marketing support impacted on the production of locally handmade and authentic crafts and souvenirs. Though, SMEs often face challenges in creating and implementing innovations because of their small size and resource limitations (Pikkemaat and Peters, 2005; van de Vrande et al., 2009), one way to overcome these limitations is to establish and maintain networks and collaborations to develop and implement creative products and services. In addition, with the evolution of the technology, modernizing and innovating the entrepreneurs' talent is important. The development of skills and knowledge will help SMEs to perform better and will aid them in developing new ideas for existing products (Jitnom and Ussahawanitchakit, 2009). Most of the small entrepreneurs do not have large financial resources, however, they have knowledge, and creative and innovative ideas to create

sustainable crafts and souvenirs which can add significant value to the products they produce to the local and international markets.

This study concludes from the supply side that the creative and innovation capability of SMEs consisting of long experience of the craftsmanship, use of local and sustainable raw materials, linked to the cultural heritage as well as improvements in financial, marketing, human resources, and regulatory policies that support the development of quality and authenticity local crafts and souvenirs are important in order to secure this industry in the tourism market. Hence, creativity and innovation in the crafts and souvenirs sector based on the tradition and capacity of the SMEs, who are trying hard to attract tourists, and preventing the authenticity of their products and cultural heritage from dying out, should be an integral part of the tourism industry for the economic development as well as socio-cultural gain of the destination. The findings of this study can provide useful information for souvenir producers/retailers, tourism decision-makers and tourism authorities when developing crafts and souvenirs that reflect aspirational experiences for travellers and also an opportunity to use these tourism products as a powerful destination marketing tool.

Acknowledgment: This paper is the result of the research grant from Higher Education Commission.

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