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Travel Professionals' Successful Strategies for Implementing New Products

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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BA, Valdosta State University, 2014

MC, Walden University, 2019

Research Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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August 2025

Abstract

The rapid introduction of new and innovative travel products presents challenges for travel industry professionals striving to stay competitive in a dynamic marketplace. This is a significant concern for travel professionals and industry leaders, as effectively implementing strategies can improve client satisfaction and support sustained business growth. The purpose of this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study was to explore the strategies used by travel industry professionals to successfully implement new, innovative tourism products to gain a competitive advantage. Grounded by the Red Queen effect competitive advantage model, six U.S.-based travel professionals with 5 years of experience and at least $1 million in annual travel sales were interviewed about their strategies for selecting and incorporating new products into their portfolios. Publicly accessible travel product resources were used to triangulate the interview data, and all data were analyzed using a 6-step reflexive thematic analysis process. Three themes emerged as successful strategies: (a) developing and maintaining strong client relationships; (b) engaging in familiarization trips and learning opportunities, such as webinars; and (c) maintaining robust supplier partnerships and networking. A key recommendation was that travel professionals should learn about new products using familiarization trips while collaborating with other travel professionals. The implications for positive social change include the potential for travel professionals to contribute to safer, more modern, and more enjoyable experiences for their clients, allowing them to achieve a greater work-life balance.

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Dedication

This research is dedicated to the family who have stood behind me through every step of my educational journey and to the travel professionals who curate the experiences that make life rich.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Project

Background of the Problem

The travel and tourism industry is growing exponentially each year, with the number of professionals entering the industry multiplying and new travel product offerings increasing significantly. New travel products, which refer to the variety of tourism products managed by travel professionals (e.g., hotels and resorts, cruise lines and cruise itineraries, destinations, types of experiences, events, and attractions), frequently emerge from industry organizations and businesses, requiring that travel professionals learn new products and offerings. Travel professionals, a term that describes travel planners, travel agents, and travel professionals who operate at a professional degree in the industry, are often overwhelmed with the sheer volume of tourism products, leading to a troublesome work-life balance and inefficiencies within their businesses. The role of a travel professional is also referred to as a tourism intermediary because these individuals bridge the gap between consumers and tourism destinations, products, and experiences (Fernandez-Villaran & Cuenca, 2023).

The tourism industry impacts millions of people around the globe directly and indirectly in various ways. It is heavily relied upon by developing countries and for stabilizing economies. In the United States alone, some 58,000 individuals are employed as travel agents (Statista Research Department, 2024). By examining the best practices successful travel professionals use in this project, I will equip those acting as liaisons

between travelers and tourism experiences with the insights they need to enhance their businesses despite the constant evolution of the industry itself.

Business Problem Focus and Project Purpose

The specific business problem addressed through this research is that some tourism and travel professionals lack effective strategies to successfully implement new, innovative tourism products, putting them at a competitive disadvantage. Therefore, in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry project, I identified and explored the strategies used by travel industry professionals to gain a competitive advantage by successfully implementing new, innovative tourism products.

The data were collected using semistructured interviews and reviewing publicly accessible website data. I purposively located and interviewed six travel professionals who met the following criteria: (a) have 5 years of industry experience; (b) are U.S.-based, full-time employees, independent contractors, or owners of a travel service business; and (c) produce at least $1 million in travel sales annually. I recruited these participants through LinkedIn; personal networks; and travel associations, such as the American Society of Travel Advisors and the International Air Transport Association.

The conceptual framework for this research was based on the Red Queen effect (RQE), which was a model borrowed from a discussion between the fictional characters Alice and the Red Queen in Lewis Carroll's (1871) *Through the Looking Glass.* Leigh Van Valen adopted the RQE in 1973 to describe the phenomenon of organisms constantly adapting to compete with one another (Wiltshire et al., 2014). While a

biological concept, business strategists have applied the theory to those operating within specific industries (Derfus et al., 2008). In this project, RQE guided my study of travel professionals facing a constantly evolving tourism environment.

Research Question

What strategies do successful travel professionals use when implementing new, innovative travel products to obtain a competitive advantage?

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions represent how an individual perceives their reality (King, 2022). In a research study, initial assumptions are made to set a foundation for those facts accepted as true, without proof or data (Adler, 2022). I made the following assumptions as part of this study:

- The travel professionals participating in this study understood the new travel products they sell.
- The participating professionals were motivated to sell new products and actively sought to do so.
- The travel professionals participating in this research had access to the necessary tools to promote and sell the products, such as marketing platforms, tools, and materials.

Limitations

Limitations and weaknesses out of the researcher's control are commonly associated with the research design process, model, funding constraints, and other factors (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). While violating the underlying study's assumptions could create limitations in the findings, other limitations also existed. In this study, one limitation was the sample size. Recruiting enough professionals who were willing to share their experiences was an anticipated challenge to overcome in this study. Additionally, because every travel professional has a unique way of conducting business, the participants may have had vastly different experiences and incorporate various successful strategies. Using data saturation principles and an ordered study approach, I mitigated these limitations while explaining them to ensure future readers can understand the potential transferability of the study's findings.

Transition

In Section 1, I provided the background of this study, purpose, method, and design as well as explained the assumptions and limitations. The business problem regarding travel agents' need to create a competitive advantage by understanding new products was also described. Through a qualitative pragmatic inquiry, I sought to identify the strategies used by successful travel professionals when implementing new, innovative travel products to gain a competitive advantage. In Section 2, a review of the literature associated with this phenomenon will be provided to help position the importance of this research study within the current body of knowledge. In Section 3, I will describe the

process used for conducting this study, and in Section 4, I will present the study's findings, results, and implications.

Section 2: The Literature Review

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The focus of this literature review was to explore literature regarding tourism products and strategies successful travel professionals use in their businesses. The literature review is organized into seven sections: (a) the conceptual framework (i.e., RQE), (b) travel professional products and distribution methods, (c) the role of travel professionals in tourism product development, (d) tourism product innovation and market adaptation, e) travel industry regulation, (f) competitive strategies and new product integration, and (g) gaps in the literature. I accessed multiple databases specializing in business literature, including Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, and Scopus, to ensure that extant literature surrounding the whole topic was explored. The keywords search terms used were *travel industry competitive advantage, airline competitive advantage, travel professional, travel agent, travel industry success, travel industry product, Red Queen effect, travel agent success, travel agency, travel product, tourism product,* and *traditional travel agency*.

Conceptual Framework: The RQE

The RQE serves as the foundation of this study. Originally introduced as a biological evolution theory by Van Valen, this concept describes how species must continuously adapt to survive within a competitive environment (Wiltshire et al., 2014). Applied to business strategy, the RQE suggests that organizations must evolve at a continuous pace to maintain or gain a competitive advantage (Derfus et al., 2008).

Although rooted in an evolutionary theory, the RQE is relevant in business contexts where organizations operate in highly competitive markets and are influenced by external forces (Hamra, 2021). This is evident in how firms develop new capabilities in response to industry pressures, a concept described by Barnett and Hansen (1996) in their study on organizational evolution. This phenomenon was inspired by Lewis Carroll's (1871) *Through the Looking Glass* when the Red Queen commented that it requires maximum effort to remain in pace with the competition. In business, this phenomenon manifests as organizations continuously developing new offerings, improving performance, and introducing innovations to sustain their market position (Derfus et al., 2008). Through this constant competition, organizations have the capability to propel their industry forward (Chiao et al., 2024). While industry evolution is relevant, it was not the focus of this study.

Organizations must continuously integrate new tourism products to remain competitive because stagnation can cause a competitive disadvantage and market share loss. Barnett and Hansen (1996) were instrumental in applying RQE to organizational evolution through research that found that firms engaged in Red Queen competition experience increased adaptive learning, enabling them to refine strategies and improve performance over time. However, in a later study, Barnett and Pontikes (2008) cautioned that this continuous adaptation can lead to organizational inertia, where firms become locked into specific competitive behaviors that may limit their long-term flexibility to

adapt as required. Therefore, understanding how to implement new products strategically is key to maintaining a competitive advantage for organizations in the travel industry.

The specific ways travel professionals implement new products are key to understanding success factors for organizations in the industry. Lee et al. (2021) examined how digital banking firms in Germany leveraged RQE dynamics to maintain market leadership, while Cuevas et al. (2021) explored how public health organizations responded to industry pressures by accelerating innovation in food safety regulations. While both studies focused on the importance of organizations evolving rapidly to remain competitive, digital banking firms benefited from continuous innovation, and the public health sector faced challenges balancing progress with regulatory constraints (Cuevas et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2021). Through the literature review, three predominant themes emerged: (a) the evolution of organizations through RQE, (b) competitive strategies emerging from the phenomenon, and (c) the potential negative consequences of relentless competition.

This evolutionary hypothesis explains organizations' innovative dynamics when they are in a competitive market (Oldham, 2018) and persistently changing in response to each other, reinforcing the evolutionary concept of organizations (Goodman & Ewald, 2021). The application of this biological model has been extended to business, politics, banking, and various other industries, supporting its broad applicability. This "assumption of neo-evolutionism" attempts to explain why organizations change in response to competition (Nocoń, 2024). The constant evolution forces organizations to

adapt and refine their competitive strategies continuously. Firms must innovate not only to grow but to maintain their standing, as seen in various sectors, including public health and travel.

An environment where the RQE is present is constantly evolving, increasing competition among industry players. Cuevas et al. (2021) described the state of the RQE in a study on public health and identified societal pressure for organizations to keep pace with their competition in the food industry. Cuevas et al. asserted that organizations, whether the food industry or any other industry, must constantly evolve and adapt to keep up and remain relevant. This necessity for adaptation often results in changes to product characteristics to better align with consumer demand. Within the travel industry, professionals must continuously expand their service offerings by incorporating new tourism products, experiences, and travel trends to remain competitive. As traveler expectations shift, whether due to technological advancements, emerging destinations, or shifting consumer values, advisors and tour operators must adjust their portfolios to include innovative experiences that meet these evolving demands. The constant state of evolution creates an environment of competitive rivalry amongst the players, as the actions are designed to eradicate the competition (Delacour & Liarte, 2012). Delacour and Liarte (2012) discovered that the RQE can lead to new products, new business models, and new knowledge. The level of competition and speed of evolution are equally important to note. Derfus et al. (2008) noted that firms, or organizations, that are more active achieve more excellent performance than those that are less active. Because of this,

organizations must pay constant attention to their consumers' desires and how they align with their offerings.

While intense competition can spur progress, the consequences of RQE are not always beneficial. Derfus et al. (2008) observed that organizations engaged in constant innovation often outperform less proactive competitors, but excessive competition can lead to unexpected challenges in some scenarios. One response to extreme RQE is mutual forbearance, where organizations strategically refrain from direct competition to maintain stability (Chiao et al., 2024). Another potential downside is an overinnovation risk, wherein firms introduce rapid changes without adequate strategic planning. Lee et al. (2021) illustrated this phenomenon using the global hard disk drive market, where companies that merely imitate competitors without a clear strategic direction often struggle to sustain long-term success. Similarly, in the travel industry, launching new tourism products without market analysis, branding, or differentiation can lead to inefficiencies, financial loss, or a failure to capture consumer interests adequately. Jakimowicz and Rzeczkowski (2020) warned that unchecked innovation can lead to self-inflicted operational challenges, potentially resulting in business failure. These pieces of literature support the claim that while continuous adaptation is essential, firms must approach innovation strategically to mitigate risks.

Travel Professional Products and Distribution Methods

The tourism sector is multifaceted, composed of various interdependent elements, or units, that contribute to delivering consumer tourism experiences (United Nations

Tourism, n.d.). These components include transportation, accommodations, experiences, services, and the supporting technologies that facilitate and execute them (Azmi et al., 2023). Tourism travel is broadly defined as the temporary movement of individuals to a destination for recreation, vacation, or activities (Inayatulloh et al., 2024). Within this industry, tourism products—combinations of tangible and intangible elements designed to meet traveler demands—are distributed through direct and indirect channels. Direct distribution channels include self-service bookings directly from providers, such as airline tickets or hotel reservations, while indirect channels rely on intermediaries like traditional travel professionals and online travel agencies (OTAs; Monaco & Sacchi, 2023). While OTAs dominate digital booking platforms, travel professionals continue to provide enhanced value through expert guidance and customized experiences (Azmi et al., 2023). This study focused specifically on the role of travel professionals in managing and distributing tourism products.

Travel and tourism products are curated and managed by entities broadly referred to as tourism suppliers. Suppliers offer travel packages, multiday experiences, and a variety of other products to travel professionals for distribution. Tour operators and destination management companies (DMCs) are the two most common types of suppliers for land-based travel experiences. While both entities facilitate travel experiences, they each serve a unique role and offer advantages and challenges for travel professionals. A tour operator packages and sells prearranged travel experiences, typically including transportation, accommodations, activities, and experiences as part of the itinerary. These

entities operate on a large scale, frequently serving multiple destinations, and cater to a broad range of client needs. There is convenience in working with tour operators because the itineraries are often prepackaged and offer a simplified booking process, transparent pricing and commission structures, and the ability to accommodate many different travel needs. While the advantages to working alongside tour operators are substantial, there are significant disadvantages due to customization and local expertise challenges. DMCs fill many of the desires that tour operators leave, including the ability to offer highly customized experiences. Additionally, DMCs provide more hands-on support to clients at their destinations and provide valuable insight into local experiences that tour operators lack. Similarly, challenges with DMCs do exist. Working with DMCs requires more relationship-building for travel professionals, and there may be unique pricing and commission scenarios to work through. DMCs tend to be smaller-scale businesses, leading to other challenges with the current digital transformation (Khandelwal & Thakur, 2024), but are highly in tune with their destination. In the tourism industry, partners are fundamental for growth (Gomes et al., 2024). Both tour operators and DMCs, in addition to travel professionals, rely heavily on networking with one another in order to expand their businesses.

Another layer to consider within the supplier-travel professional relationship is that of travel consortiums and host travel agencies. Travel consortiums exist as membership organizations where strength in numbers is heavily relied upon by travel agencies to increase their bargaining power with suppliers (Bronson et al., 2002).

Consortiums negotiate elevated commission splits from preferred suppliers, industry support, and marketing efforts for those who are a part of it. In return, suppliers commit to higher commissions for the consortium members in exchange for preferential business and a closer working relationship. Travel professionals and agencies that are a part of the consortium receive elevated partner support and increased commission when working with preferred suppliers. In terms of elevated support, this may look like crisis management and client care support, commission payment support, and dedicated call centers or representatives. For suppliers, becoming a preferred partner of a consortium is highly advantageous, and for travel professionals, there is a reward for working with preferred partners.

The Role of Travel Professionals in Tourism Product Distribution

Travel professionals act as intermediaries, critical in shaping and distributing tourism products between travelers (consumers) and suppliers. Travel professionals make up a large share of tourism bookings, with 73% of cruise travelers saying that travel advisors have a meaningful impact on their cruise decision (Cruise Lines International Association, 2024). Their roles go beyond transactional booking assistance, including itinerary customization, supplier negotiations, and risk management, enhancing consumer confidence in destination selection (Monaco & Sacchi, 2023). Unlike OTAs, which function as large-scale booking engines, travel professionals cultivate relationships with suppliers to provide exclusive benefits, value-added services, and in-depth knowledge of tourism products for attributes of tourism. Prior research defined these attributes as

accommodations, articulated stories, affordability, accessibility, and attribution (Ortaleza & Mangali, 2021). As consumer preferences evolve due to changing tourism trends, travel professionals must continuously adapt by integrating new products previously unknown to travelers (Azmi et al., 2023). These consumer shifts require travel professionals to continuously enhance their expertise to remain competitive in an increasingly automated and digitalized industry (Monaco & Sacchi, 2023). Understanding the evolving role of travel professionals in product distribution provides insight into the strategies necessary for integrating new tourism products into the market.

The supplier-travel professional relationship is a symbiotic relationship where both parties mutually benefit from a strong relationship. Travel suppliers, including tour operators, cruise lines, hotel brands, and destination management companies, depend on travel professionals to market and sell their products. Suppliers recognize that, due to the advancement of OTAs and changes in tourism trends, a strong relationship with tourism product intermediaries is important (Wang, 2025). In return, travel professionals receive financial incentives, exclusive offers, and the ability to enhance their clients' experiences through a strong working relationship. For suppliers, this is access to a broader customer base without the requirement to invest heavily in consumer marketing in various demographics. Suppliers can leverage a network of existing relationships by selling through travel professionals and gain the personalized assisted sales approach the travel advisor conducts on their behalf. In exchange, suppliers offer tiered commission structures and bonuses for increased sales. Travel professionals who consistently sell

specific products receive a preferred relationship and access to exclusive promotions, upgrade incentives, and perks in exchange for their commitment. Determining which products to sell is more than a financial decision. Suppliers who back their travel professionals and ensure a positive experience for the guest, leading to a returning client for the travel professional, are highly regarded as the gold standard in the industry. One negative client interaction could result in the travel professional refusing to sell or advocate for the product in the future, placing pressure upon suppliers to maintain high integrity and standards for the client experience.

Tourism Product Innovation and Market Adaptation

Tourism products encompass many goods, services, and experiences, including hotel accommodations, cruises, guided tours, and destination management services (Monaco & Sacchi, 2023). These products are typically developed by travel suppliers, such as tour operators and destination management companies, who specialize in a destination, type of travel, or specific niche to meet evolving consumer demands. Consumers demand a degree of uniqueness in travel products, requiring travel professionals to remain knowledgeable about various product offerings (Čivre et al., 2024). In the current study, I explored the strategies employed by successful travel professionals in integrating new tourism products into their portfolios, ensuring relevance in a constantly evolving industry.

The demand for new, innovative products extends beyond the travel and tourism industry. Due to the combination of a high failure rate of new products and the demand

for new, innovative products, organizations focus on developing new products that will create a competitive advantage (Dabrowski, 2023). Within the tourism sector, industry players strive to create new destinations and products that ensure long-term competitive advantage while contributing to sustainable development (Azmi et al., 2023). Product development, a critical element of innovation, fulfills consumers' needs and maintains market relevance (Yani et al., 2023).

Travel Industry Regulation

Travel professionals in the United States operate within the boundaries of complex legal requirements. While there is no single governing body for all travel professionals, several organizations and regulatory bodies influence and support the industry, including the American Society of Travel Advisors, the International Air Transport Association, the Cruise Lines International Association, and the U.S. Department of Transportation. These organizations provide guidelines, set operational standards for travel professionals, and oversee consumer protection laws related to air travel and packaged tours. Some states, such as California, Florida, Hawaii, and Washington, have specific registration and licensing requirements, known as travel agency registrations and Seller of Travel Law. This Seller of Travel requires any person or business that sells or promotes travel-related services to register with additional organizations, such as the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (n.d.) in Florida, and pay additional fees for operating, or simply selling products, in that state.

Due to the absence of overarching regulations for the industry, travel professionals have the autonomy to sell any products they wish to their clientele. This leads to a variety of distribution methods for tourism products. These distribution methods include direct methods (through travel agency websites and supplier portals, direct consumer marketing, and in-person consultation services) and indirect methods (wholesaler partnerships that create and sell packaged tours and itineraries, destination management companies, and other travel tour operators). The specific distribution methods are dependent upon the product, and the best method for the product can be unclear. In addition, there is a risk versus reward phenomenon that appears with various distribution methods. For example, when packaging products themselves, a travel professional may fall into a legal category known as a tour operator, rather than a seller of travel. The balance between these direct and indirect methods can offer a higher level of profitability but also induce more risk (Abrate et al., 2020). The balance between direct and indirect distribution methods impacts both profitability and compliance, making it imperative for travel professionals to navigate regulatory requirements strategically and rely upon legal professionals for advice when unclear.

Travel Industry Competitive Strategies and New Product Integration

In an industry where product offerings and consumer demands constantly evolve, travel professionals must continuously refine their strategies to maintain relevance. The RQE can be used to describe the challenges faced by travel advisors. To stand out, travel professionals employ a combination of personalization, strategic supplier partnerships,

and digital marketing innovation. Many focus on niche markets, such as luxury travel, adventure tourism, or theme park vacations, to build expertise and cater to specific traveler needs, thereby defining their business niche. Others leverage exclusive supplier relationships to secure added perks, such as room upgrades, private excursions, or VIP services, leveraging the relationships and considering the value of the partnership in accruing benefits for their clientele (Alves et al., 2025). Digital marketing also plays a critical role. Travel professionals utilize content marketing, social media engagement, and influencer collaborations to establish themselves as an authoritative figure in the industry and attract new clients. The RQE ensures that travel professionals who fail to evolve risk being outpaced by competitors who are quicker to adopt new technologies, market trends, and supplier innovations.

To gain a competitive advantage and maintain success, travel professionals apply various tactics to their business strategies. Offering personalized services, exclusive benefits, and specializing in a travel style or destination, are just a few of the strategies regularly applied. Ancillary add-on products, like travel protection, dining services, private transfers, and concierge services, also enhance travel experiences and, thus, competitive advantage (Bunghez, 2020). From a travel professional business perspective, these products increase generated revenue because they typically provide higher commission value for the travel professional. The introduction of new tourism products is a routine operation that travel suppliers conduct to maintain their share of competitive advantage and market relevance.

Travel professionals who have worked in the industry for decades have seen the introduction of the internet, the evolution of the digital era, and consumer trends drastically change. Their success is built upon resilience and specific business practices that have allowed them to maintain their market share through such drastic changes. Travel professionals show great flexibility, adaptability, and strength even as emerging technologies call their professions into question and threaten them. The introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) into the tourism space is drastically reshaping the industry, particularly in relation to the ways in which consumers make tourism purchases and the tourism supply chain (Pencarelli et al., 2021). Balancing digital technologies with traditional methods (i.e., paper catalogs and documents) proves to be an effective method for enhancing the customer experience (Pencarelli et al., 2021). Similarly, the effectiveness and use of artificial intelligence is growing rapidly, and the fear of it taking over jobs looms; some professionals choose to implement it into their business practices as a time-saving and productivity-increasing tool. It is used to augment customer service, improve operators, and personalize travel experiences by travel professionals who choose to embrace this new technology (García-Madurga & Grilló-Méndez, 2023). Embracing both advanced forms of information and communication technologies and artificial intelligence is necessary for travel professionals. On the other hand, trust plays a key role in the success of the tourism industry, where the concept of uncertainty is a distinct feature for consumers (Williams & Baláž, 2021). As part of their business processes and managing the client experience, travel professionals aim to

establish the “trust, like, and know” factor with their clients early in the relationship. Doing so alleviates much of the ambiguity around destinations and the tourism experience as consumers rely on their chosen travel professional for advice.

A gap exists in understanding what specific practices have allowed these professionals to evolve with the consumers’ demands. One such tactic is working closely with niche tour operators (Harris & Duckworth, 2005). While outsiders may perceive that all travel professionals compete with one another, this is not always the case. Collaboration amongst a community of professionals whose collective support for one another builds each business is another concept that has not been widely studied. Collaboration among traditional travel agencies allows professionals to share successful strategies with one another in a meaningful way (Hernández et al., 2023). The synergy from collective cohesion by industry players supports growth and resilience.

There are several themes across the introduction of travel products that tourism suppliers and destinations consider in the design of tourism products. These include considerations of geography and resources, innovation, diversification, trend and travel patterns, and sustainability (Azmi et al., 2023). For travel professionals, staying on track with competitors is crucial and requires a deeper understanding of what is taking place within the industry. With hundreds of tour operators in the market, travel professionals realistically cannot be in tune with all. As suppliers (i.e., tour operators, suppliers, wholesalers) engage in new product development and roll the offerings out to

intermediaries, travel professionals must remain engaged and decipher what is important to their clientele and, ultimately, their businesses.

The specific ways in which travel products evolve vary. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the focus on sustainable tourism. One reason for this is that popular destinations are faced with a "tourism overload," leading to the phenomenon of "overtourism," where the local economy cannot sustain the mass amounts of visitors arriving in said destinations (Plzáková & Tittelbachová, 2024). As a result, local authorities implement visitor and tourism fees to control the number of visitors to the destination. While many tourists still visit these destinations, others opt for more tourist-friendly locations that welcome their tourism dollars. Additionally, global events impact tourism products and their evolution. One such example is the ongoing conflict in Ukraine that has impacted tourism in Ukraine, Russia, and neighboring countries (Popescu et al., 2022). While these factors can steer tourists away from specific destinations and to others, there are factors that have the opposite effect of drawing visitors towards specific destinations. Dai et al. (2022) argued that the concept of "travel inspiration" is a motivating factor OTAs use in influencing travelers and destinations. By intervening in the consumers' decision-making journey, tourism organizations have the ability to encourage a demand for a new product.

Evaluating new tourism products requires a structured approach to determine their viability and alignment with client preferences. Travel professionals assess factors, such as product uniqueness, supplier reliability, pricing structures, and customer demand.

Primary evaluation methods include analyzing supplier reputation, reviewing client feedback from early adopters of the product, and participating in trials through familiarization trips (FAMs). Additionally, understanding destination nuances helps professionals gauge the product's long-term sustainability. Assessing the individual products while simultaneously managing travel behaviors (Kruger & Viljoen, 2021) are standard processes in which travel professionals partake to determine the success of a new tourism product. By systematically assessing these elements, travel professionals can make informed decisions about incorporating new tourism products into their portfolio, enhancing value for their clients and businesses.

Implementing new products into an already robust portfolio of offerings is challenging, even when a need or desire for the product is established. The task demands additional time and expertise that many travel professionals struggle to balance. Between the multitude of duties required in running their businesses, this task becomes another layer of engagement that adds a significant workload. Travel professionals often attend supplier engagement events, such as trade shows and conferences, to understand the new products, interact with the individuals responsible for them, and understand their purpose within the travel professionals' businesses. Additionally, travel professionals participate in comprehensive training and even experience product immersion trips, such as FAM trips. FAM trips allow professionals to experience the product first-hand and deepen their understanding of the destination, hotel, or whatever the product may be. These "knots in the tourism supply chain" as they refer to travel intermediaries and suppliers (Gruchmann

et al., 2022) share a common interest in building close relationships to sell products and earn an income.

Effectively leveraging supplier engagement events, FAM trips, and digital marketing requires a strategic approach to maximize business impact. For example, attending trade shows and industry conferences offers opportunities to establish relationships with suppliers, gain firsthand knowledge of new tourism products, and negotiate exclusive benefits and commission levels. Attending these events alone is not enough. Travel professionals must follow up on these new products they learn about, such as targeted email campaigns and client education efforts, to turn these new products into bookings. While digital marketing has proven more effective than traditional methods, such as print marketing, in reaching target audiences (Chu & Tao, 2020), its success depends on consistent engagement with the audience and creating engaging content. Travel professionals measure effectiveness through key performance indicators, such as website traffic, lead conversion rates, and client inquiries, while also considering the role of traditional methods like direct mail and print advertising in specific market segments. Understanding how to implement these strategies allows travel professionals to differentiate themselves and enhance their competitive edge in an increasingly digital industry.

Collaboration between travel professionals and suppliers plays a significant role in shaping tourism product development. Many advisors provide direct feedback to suppliers based on client preferences, helping to refine and innovate travel offerings. For

example, cruise lines and tour operators frequently adjust itineraries, onboard experiences, and excursion options in response to consumer feedback from travel professionals. This collaboration between travel professionals and suppliers ensures that tourism products align with evolving consumer expectations, benefiting suppliers and industry professionals by enhancing customer satisfaction and increasing sales potential in this codependent relationship. The benefits go beyond aiding suppliers and travel professionals, as developing new tourism products supports emerging destinations and the development of specific forms of tourism that will change the lives of those living in these communities (Lin et al., 2024). By engaging in advisory boards, testing new travel products, and leveraging feedback from travel experiences, travel professionals actively influence the design and marketing of tourism products.

The increasing role of social media further influences travel professionals' engagement with clients. While print marketing once dominated the tourism landscape, online advertising via social media is proving to be a successful tool (Chu & Tao, 2020). The rise of social media influencers, individuals who have a large fan base and promote travel experiences online (Chen et al., 2022), by tourism suppliers, brands and travel professionals is increasingly gaining traction as a way to influence consumers on their next trip decision (Bastrygina et al., 2024). Understanding these competitive strategies and their application to new product integration is essential for travel professionals to remain relevant and profitable in a dynamic marketplace.

Gaps in the Literature

Although the existing literature provides insight into the tourism industry, there is limited research on successful travel professionals' strategies to integrate tourism products into their business models. Additionally, very little research on the supplier-travel professional relationship exists, allowing the opportunity for researchers to explore this symbiotic relationship further. Much of the current research focuses on consumer behavior, specific destination management nuances, and the impacts of technological advancements in the tourism industry. Studies on hospitality and tourism innovation often lack exploration of emerging theories and unique perspectives, as Aladag et al. (2020) noted. When studies have focused on the role of travel agencies, they tend to have focused on OTAs, which vary vastly from traditional travel agencies in terms of business models and operating factors, leaving much to be desired in understanding how traditional travel agencies operate. Further research is needed to examine how travel professionals navigate new product integration and maintain competitive advantages in an evolving tourism industry with a myriad of daily impacts.

Transition

Travel professionals face a myriad of data when it comes to understanding and promoting new tourism products. With an industry as dynamic as the travel and tourism industry and all the nuances that impact it, I developed the research plan presented to clear up the confusion and provide business best practices. In this section, the background of this issue and the focus of this research were described. In the next section, Section 3, I

will discuss the ethics and nature of the research project as well as describe the research population and sampling. In Section 4, the findings and results from the data collection and analysis process will be provided.

Section 3: Research Project Methodology

In Section 3, I describe the project's ethical protections and processes, including the relationship between me, as the researcher, and the topic as well as my role as the researcher. The section also contains an explanation of the data collection, recruitment, analysis, and result reporting processes.

Project Ethics

The role of the researcher in the data collection process is to conduct unbiased and ethical interviews. To prepare for conducting interviews for research data, it was important for me to acquire additional knowledge and skills prior to conducting interviews (see Harerimana et al., 2024). These additional skills included the ability to conduct interviews successfully by learning more about best practices for interviews. In the process of conducting unbiased and ethical interviews, the researcher plays a central role in serving as the primary instrument for gathering qualitative data (Yoon & Uliassi, 2022). The researcher's responsibilities include recruiting participants, conducting interviews, and ensuring participants are protected.

I am a travel and tourism industry professional and have been for 5 years. Thus, I have a deep professional understanding of the topic. This has significantly contributed to my interest in the topic and shaped my understanding of the business problem being investigated through this research project. Due to my vast networking in the field, I maintain professional relationships with many of the interview participants.

As my role relates to ethics, I have read *the Belmont Report* and strictly adhered to its ethical principles. *The Belmont Report* outlines the basic ethical principles that should be considered when conducting research involving human subjects (Office for Human Research Protections, 2024). The current study met the criteria outlined in *The Belmont Report*. I received approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (Approval No. 04-15-25-0786412) before collecting data for this project. All ethical guidelines were strictly followed to protect participant rights and maintain the integrity of the research process. Additionally, participants in the study received informed consent prior to participation in the study, as required by *The Belmont Report* (see Office for Human Research Protections, 2024). Participants had the ability to willingly withdraw from the project at any time. Before interviews, participants were advised that they may do so and were informed of the procedure to withdraw. This procedure included verbally communicating with me should they choose not to continue with the interview, and it would end immediately. There were no incentives for participants to participate in the study apart from contributing to the enhancement of the industry. All participants participated willingly.

I took the following measures to ensure the ethical protection of participants: (a) participant identification was masked, and (b) participant names were kept in a separate location from the data, under lock and key. This ensures that the names of individuals participating in the study will remain confidential. I will securely store the data for 5 years, after which it will be destroyed.

Nature of the Project

The project's nature included a qualitative pragmatic inquiry. The qualitative method was appropriate for this study because it is used to explore the experiences of individuals in the profession. This research method involves "collecting, organizing, and analyzing textural data from conversations to answer specific research questions" (Sinha et al., 2024, p. 1). As explained by Metcalfe (2008), the concept of a pragmatic inquiry emerged from the need for researchers to interpret events to establish best practices for addressing the events in the future. Additionally, a pragmatic inquiry is flexible in how it can be conducted and focuses on the outcomes of a study, which aligned with the anticipated results of this research. Thus, this design worked well to accomplish the goal of this study, which was learning about travel professionals' strategies.

Population, Sampling, and Participants

The population for this study included successful travel professionals who have been in the industry for 5 years or more. To define success, these professionals must have had a self-reported annual sales of at least $1 million and revenue of at least $100,000 annually, gross, which was ensured through screening criteria. I relied on the professionals' honesty in responding to my recruitment content. I utilized industry networks and organizations to gain access to participants who fit this qualification. These networks included LinkedIn, networking groups on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook), and professional organizations (such as Signature Travel Network and the International Air and Travel Association). I sent a recruitment letter to potential

participants. There were six participants. Data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge, and enough data were collected to correctly answer the research question (i.e., *information power*), was a necessary goal for this study because it ensured the topic had been covered adequately (see Braun & Clarke, 2019). After my sixth interview, my chair and I determined I had reached information power and the interview process ended.

Data Collection Activities

In this study, I served as the main instrument by conducting semistructured interviews and reviewing publicly available documents from travel agencies. The primary data collection instrument was a semistructured interview protocol, which included open-ended questions designed to explore successful travel professionals' strategies to sell innovative tourism products. The rationale for using a semistructured interview protocol lies in its flexibility. It allows for consistency across interviews and allows researchers to explore emerging themes through follow-up questions. This instrument is beneficial for pragmatic inquiry studies, which seek to understand how people make decisions and apply knowledge in real-world settings. Regarding the process of conducting the semistructured interviews, I followed this method:

- sought willing participants and scheduled them,
- provided the participants with an informed consent form via email,
- conducted the semistructured interview using the interview questions as a guide,
- recorded each interview and will store data securely for 5 years,

- transcribed the recordings, and
- conducted member checking.

I conducted member checking to enhance the reliability and validity (i.e., trustworthiness) of the data collection process (see Birt et al., 2016). This included providing participants with a written summary of their interview responses to review and validate and offering them an opportunity to clarify or expand on any misconstrued points. This ensured that my interpretation of the topic aligned with the interviewees' intended meaning. The use of a standardized interview protocol also supported consistency across all interviews. The interview protocol for this study is included in Appendix B.

Interview Questions

The semistructured interview questions consisted of:

1. Please tell me about your experience in the travel industry and how your role has evolved over time.
2. How would you describe your client base, and what kinds of products or experiences do you currently sell?
3. Please describe a time when you were introduced to a new or innovative tourism product.
4. What specific strategies do you use when deciding whether to offer a new tourism product to your clients?

5. Once you've decided to adopt a new product, how do you position or present it to clients?
6. How do you build trust with clients when recommending something new or unfamiliar?
7. What tools, training, or resources help you successfully sell innovative products?
8. How do you stay informed about emerging products or trends in the travel industry?
9. What impact does new product releases by your competition have on your strategy decisions in selecting and promoting new products?
10. What challenges have you faced when trying to introduce new tourism offerings, and how did you overcome them?
11. How do you adapt your sales approach when a product doesn't resonate with your client base?
12. In your experience, what distinguishes successfully selling a new product from struggling to gain traction?
13. Please share a specific example of a product launch or strategy that worked particularly well, and what contributed to its success.

Data Organization and Analysis Techniques

Thematic analysis was the technique I selected for my research project. Thematic analysis, a term used to describe a family of flexible categorization methods (Braun &

Clarke, 2024), was employed to analyze the interview data and any publicly accessible travel data I found on relevant websites. Using thematic analysis, I became familiar with the data by reviewing it, organizing it, and ensuring the accuracy of the transcripts. This process includes six phases of analyzing and categorizing data efficiently, including:

1. Becoming familiar with the data.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The logical and sequential process for data analysis involved color coding and categorization using Microsoft Excel. The data were first color-coded by theme and then input into Excel for analysis of these themes. All raw data and analysis documents will be securely stored for a period of 5 years.

Reliability and Validity

Research quality is crucial in conducting studies and generating new knowledge. Because future processes, procedures, and business designs can be developed using the new data, the information needs to be accurate and reliable. With the introduction of social media and the advancement of internet technologies in the modern era, it has become increasingly important for researchers to have a firm grasp on the data they collect and use as sources in studies. The most critical component for evaluating the

quality of quantitative and qualitative data is whether the study can be replicated and whether it is considered trustworthy. By outlining a clear and concise process for collecting data and ensuring that other researchers can conduct it, ambiguity can be eliminated. Additionally, disclosing the research methods, data collected, and all study components allows individuals to critically review the data to ensure they are practical and accurate. As Damian et al. (2022) described, a lack of transparency causes issues with validating findings. Ensuring that transparency issues do not exist is vital in research studies.

Reliability

In qualitative research, it is crucial to ensure the reliability of the data collection process to produce accurate findings. Reliability refers to the consistency in the analytical procedures (Noble & Smith, 2025). Within a qualitative study, using established practices can help minimize bias and promote trustworthiness to produce more reliable findings (Goddymkpa & Akpan, 2021). Additionally, reliability contributes directly to trustworthiness by emphasizing accurate measurements to repeat the study with the same results (Coleman et al., 2024). As part of my research process and system, I conducted a transcript review after each interview. This Level 1 form of member checking requires outside entities to verify the data and results of the interview (Birt et al., 2016; Muzari et al., 2022). This form of member checking included a transcript of the interview. Along with the transcript, I summarized the themes from that interview in an email to the individual participants. I asked them to review both the transcript and my interpretation

of the themes and let me know if they see anything that needs correction. I gave them 5 days to respond and let them know that if I did not hear within 5 days, I assumed the data interpretation was accurate. This form of member checking was a synthesis of Birt et al.'s (2016) concepts of using synthesized data (from the whole) and using a follow-up interview. This middle-ground method provides credibility without burdening the participants (recognizing the value of their time).

Additionally, I requested transcript reviews from my committee chair to confirm that my analysis of emerging themes was on track. Completing this process after each interview allowed me the opportunity to adapt future interviews to a better process and incorporate committee members' feedback. These steps not only enhanced the credibility of the findings but also ensured that the participants' perspectives were accurately analyzed. Through these processes, the reliability and dependability of the data were ensured.

Validity

Validity is equally essential in qualitative research. Validity refers to the level of accuracy that the data reflects (Noble & Smith, 2025). To ensure validity, my process included member checking. Member checking is the process of returning an interview transcript (i.e., transcript review) and a summary of the themes from that interview to the participant for validation, thus involving the research participant in confirming the results (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking aids in credibility, ensuring data are accurately transcribed and analyzed. Additionally, I provided enough details about my research

process and participants to allow for transparency regarding the transferability of the findings. Transferability describes whether readers feel that the findings of the study might apply to other similar populations (Drisko, 2025). Confirmability refers to the degree to which the researcher describes clearly and follows the stated analysis process and the extent to which the same results can be achieved by other researchers (Chung et al., 2020). Using an audit trail through a data log is one way to achieve confirmability, and I kept a log during data collection and analysis. To alleviate any confirmability concerns, I ensured the data themes matched the text while conducting thematic analysis, a process described by Chung et al. (2020). To ensure an accurate amount of data were collected, I interviewed participants until I reached data saturation, using Braun and Clarke's definition of information power as my guide.

Transition and Summary

In Section 3, I defined the ethical considerations for the research project. This includes my role in the data collection process and the study as a whole. Additionally, I described the measures taken to protect participants in my research study. The nature of the project was also described, including the method and design for the study, why they were selected, and why they are appropriate. I defined the population of the research participants and the relationship between these individuals and the research topic, including how they were selected. Section 3 also included the data collection activities for this research study, specifically the primary data collection instrument, the technique applied, and the interview questions, which are listed to ensure they align with the

research question. Finally, the process by which I ensured the reliability and validity of the data collected was described. In Section 4, I will provide an overview of the findings from conducting thematic analysis. The section also includes my recommendations for future studies and a conclusion of the study.

Section 4: Findings and Conclusions

Presentation of the Findings

The specific business problem addressed through this research is that some tourism and travel professionals lack effective strategies to successfully implement new, innovative tourism products, putting them at a competitive disadvantage. The data for this study were sourced from publicly accessible travel documents and from semistructured interviews with six participants. I assigned the interviewees distinct pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Data from the interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word, with themes being extracted into Microsoft Excel and labeled with their coordinating pseudonyms (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Years in industry	Role	Validated transcript?
I1	Female	6	Agency owner	Y
I2	Female	35	Agency owner	Y
I3	Female	36	Independent agent	Y
I4	Female	30	Agency owner	N
I5	Female	6	Agency owner	N
I6	Female	6	Travel advisor	N

After completion of each interview, I conducted memberchecking via email. This process consisted of sending the redacted transcript to the participant. One participant responded with a minor correction, two participants responded with confirmation of accurate transcription, and three did not respond. After reviewing interview transcripts with my chair, we determined that data saturation had been met.

Data analysis was done manually with Microsoft Excel to determine and organize codes. Table 2 represents the themes and codes that were presented from the data. Appendix C, Figures C1–3, provides coding process examples.

Table 2

Theme Table With Supporting Categories and Codes

	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
Themes	Developing and maintaining strong client relationships	Engaging in FAM trips and learning opportunities	Maintaining robust supplier partnerships and networking
Category	Consultative approach (versus sales approach)	Personal travel experiences	Supplier partnerships
Codes	Phone consultation to get to know clients, taking a consultative versus sales approach, selling best value and best experience, being honest with clients	Traveling to know a destination, FAM trips, attending events	Attending partnership events, building supplier relationships, Connecting with BDMs,
Category	Being aware of clients' needs	Learning opportunities	Industry networking
Codes	Knowing what clients want and need, being cognizant of budget, designing FIT itineraries	Supplier training, webinars, attending industry events	Facebook groups, networking with colleagues in industry,
Category	Getting to know clients	Research	Collaboration
Codes	Relating to clients on a personal note, taking interest in clients, knowing and targeting ideal clients	Reading consumer reviews, reading newsletters, travel industry publications, having product knowledge	Networking with colleagues in industry, attending events, maintaining relationships, supporting one another

Note. FAM = familiarization; BDM = business development manager; FIT = free independent touring.

The findings from this qualitative, pragmatic inquiry yield several valuable contributions to professional practice, grounded in the lived experiences and strategies shared by successful travel professionals. As travel professionals navigate a changing

marketplace, evolving trends, and increased demand, the strategies they employ to successfully integrate new products into their portfolio can support sustainable growth, customer retention, and competitive differentiation. The findings from this study support three pivotal strategies travel professionals use when selling new products: (a) developing and maintaining strong client relationships; (b) engaging in FAM trips and learning opportunities, such as webinars; and (c) maintaining robust supplier partnerships and networking.

Theme 1: Developing and Maintaining Strong Client Relationships

A consistent finding of the study was the importance of deeply understanding client needs, preferences, and behaviors, effectively "playing matchmaker" as I6 described. Travel professionals who develop close, consultative relationships with their clients are better positioned to introduce new offerings that align with personalized expectations. This consultative approach of "getting their [the clients'] expectations," as I6 went on to explain, enables travel professionals to advise clients on the most suitable travel options tailored to their needs as opposed to a sales approach where professionals heavily focus on closing the deal. Participants consistently described their client relationships as foundational to product introduction success. This theme emerged through repeated references to trust, personalization, and long-term relationships as critical to matching clients with the right new offerings. I1 mentioned in reference to selectively taking on new clients, "my role is really more consultant and giving advice." In practice, interviewees reported having their admin team "do some discovery calls to

get preliminary information" in order to "know what clients really want and need," as described by I2, and taking the consultative approach rather than an "order taking sales approach," as I5 referred to it. The importance of being honest with clients is represented through this theme. I6 explained, "If they're looking at a particular resort…and this does fit our budget, I'll be like… 'that's not somewhere that would fit my expectations, and here's why.'" I6 goes on to elaborate in their response to that scenario, "I would say, I'm your friend in this situation, I'm always giving recommendations. I'm always blunt. I'm always honest." This approach aligns with Travel Agent Pro's (n.d.) recommendations for travel agent success: building client loyalty. To further implement this, organizations should invest in training programs that enhance emotional intelligence, active listening, and customer feedback engagements for their teams.

Theme 2: Engaging in FAM Trips and Learning Opportunities

The active participation of travel professionals in FAM trips and ongoing learning opportunities, such as webinars, emerged as another success factor. FAM trip experiences serve a dual function: They provide firsthand knowledge of destinations and suppliers while simultaneously building rapport for the travel professionals' expertise. This theme emerged when interviewees spoke on the importance of knowing a destination firsthand. "To go is to know," I1 reported, while I4 mentioned to be a good travel professional, "you have to travel yourself." Business leaders on the supplier side should consider incorporating experiential learning as a core component of professional development,

allocating resources and time for staff to participate in these immersive opportunities. I1 stated,

> I wasn't really familiar with FAMs, or what that entailed, but…after COVID, when so many things started opening up, I took every opportunity I could to go travel and learn. I have found that opened up a whole new world for me in terms of knowledge and clientele and partnerships.

Additionally, FAM trips can be strategically aligned with new product launches, providing immediate relevance and context for advisors and clients alike. Several industry-specific publications and resources support the evidence of the importance of FAM opportunities. TripMapper (2023), for example, highlighted the importance of FAMs for networking, collaboration, showcasing destinations and experiences, and generative publicity. Beyond the importance of networking, it is important to gain first-hand destination experience, as described by I3, "if you didn't get out there and do these things… you have no idea how to tell your clients how to navigate a train in Italy, if you haven't navigated a train in Italy yourself." Additionally, industry publications prove to be a recurring category, as I4 mentioned staying up to date by "listening to every travel podcast that exists," and I2 elaborated "read[ing] every single email that comes into my inbox."

Theme 3: Maintaining Robust Supplier Partnerships and Networking

The data collected through this study also revealed that high-performing travel professionals leverage strong relationships with supplier partners to cocreate value. When

referring to attending industry events, such as Global Travel Marketplace and Future Leaders in Travel, I6 mentioned, “meeting with people [suppliers] face-to-face has been really beneficial for making those connections.” Additionally, having close relationship with supplier business development managers enhances the supplier-travel professional relationship, as evidenced when I6 referred to a business development manager who has become a friend: “he is one of my favorite people to see at events because he recognizes me, he knows my name… we have that personal connection.” These suppliers, with whom strong relationships have been established, are often referred to as “preferred suppliers” to those within the industry. They enable advisors to negotiate better terms, access exclusive products, and respond swiftly to client demands. This theme consistently emerged within the interview data and is further supported by educational leaders in the industry. For example, Host Agency Reviews, a resource for travel professionals seeking insights into host agencies, supports this theme (Lee, 2024).

For organizational leaders, the concept of closer partnerships supports the need to shift supplier engagement from transactional to relational models. Businesses can benefit from developing strategic partnerships that encourage shared goals, regular communication, and mutual investment in product success. From an operational standpoint, these findings suggest that investing in people, both internally (through training and experiential learning) and externally (through relationship building), is a critical driver of success. Leaders in the travel sector should consider adopting a “relationship capital” mindset, recognizing the value of trust-based connections with

clients and partners as intangible assets that shape organizational performance. In addition to this, the interviewees expressed the importance of collaboration within the travel professional community, such as I3 stating, “it [FaceBook groups for travel professionals] is a lifeline in this business, it really is.” All interviewees expressed the importance of supporting and receiving support from other travel professionals rather than maintaining a competitive environment; I5 referred to this concept as “community over competition.” I4 stated, “value the expertise that another advisor has, especially if they’re niching down into a particular destination. Make friends with them… it’s not competition, it’s community.”

Business Contributions and Recommendations for Professional Practice

These data and findings offer a glimpse into the professional practices of travel professionals within the travel industry. As travel professionals face increasingly competitive markets, evolving consumer expectations, and a growing complexity of global travel products, the ability to strategically incorporate new travel products into portfolios is essential for sustaining competitive advantage. For business leaders and those scaling travel businesses, it is imperative to utilize the data from this study effectively. To do this, it is important to implement relationship-centric business practices. The findings from this study support the evolution from a sales approach to a consultative approach when selling travel products and determining which to incorporate into the professionals’ portfolios. This supports long-term loyalty, enhances consumer experience, and generates a higher rate of referrals.

Due to the importance of FAM trips and ongoing learning opportunities, it is foundational for suppliers and tourism partners to introduce learning opportunities with new products. Often, travel professionals do not understand new products due to an oversaturated market and ambiguity. Increased learning opportunities would allow travel professionals to know whether a product fits their clientele immediately.

Lastly, these data point to higher success rates when travel professionals can maintain strategic partner relationships and networking within the industry. The "collaboration over competition" theme emerged frequently, indicating travel professionals do not wish to work in an environment where they compete with their colleagues. Instead, the interviewees mostly expressed the idea that there is plenty of business for all professionals and supporting one another builds synergy not otherwise available. These findings lead to key recommendations that travel professionals should learn about new products using FAM trips while collaborating with other travel professionals.

Implications for Social Change

This study holds potential for contributing to positive social change by representing the ways in which travel professionals can directly and indirectly benefit individuals, communities, and societies that rely on tourism for economic development. Across the globe, entire communities depend on tourism as a primary economic driver. The findings of this study reinforce the value of conscientious product development by travel professionals, especially in how they vet, promote, and sustain relationships with

emerging or lesser-known destinations. As societies evolve and global safety uncertainties become a relevant discussion across the tourism space, the importance of travel professionals increases.

By maintaining close relationships with clients and cultivating trust, travel professionals hold the unique power to shape future travel behaviors. When these professionals promote new products that emphasize cultural immersion, environmental consciousness, and support for locally owned accommodations and experiences, they encourage more responsible tourism. This emerging shift in travel behavior can lead to improved cultural understanding, preservation of heritage, and greater appreciation of diversity.

The study's emphasis on advisor-client relationships and supplier partnerships also has a great impact on the whole of the industry. As travel professionals become more intentional in how they design and sell products, they elevate industry standards and contribute to a more transparent, ethical service environment. Organizations that invest in these ethical principles foster trust not only with their clients but within the communities they impact through travel.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings provide an understanding of the current strategies that successful travel professionals implement when introducing new products to their clients. However, the dynamic nature of the travel industry, combined with evolving consumer behaviors

and global economic shifts, suggests several opportunities for future research to build upon this work and improve business practices across the industry.

Future research should explore how implementation strategies differ across various types of travel professional business structures, such as independent contractors, host agency affiliates, and brick-and-mortar agencies. Comparative analysis could reveal specific best practices and inform organizational leaders on how to better support advisors within different business structures. Given the rapid and nonstop evolution of digital tools and platforms, studies could examine how the adoption of artificial intelligence, advanced customer relationship management systems, itinerary builders, and booking automation systems influence the success of new product rollouts. Research could focus on how digital integration supports, or even hinders, the overall sales process.

Investigating the connection between ongoing professional development, including FAM trips, certifications, and business coaching, and innovation capacity could uncover strategies for strengthening the travel professional workforce. Business leaders could use this research to design more effective training programs that drive innovation and a consultative approach to selling travel. Finally, future studies could examine how global disruptions (e.g., pandemics, economic recessions, geopolitical instability) affect the way travel professionals adopt and launch new products. Understanding how adaptability is built into implementation strategies may help organizations enhance resilience across the industry.

Conclusion

In this pragmatic qualitative inquiry, I explored successful strategies used by travel professionals when selling new, innovative products. The study comprised semistructured interviews with six travel professionals. Thematic analysis of the data collected during the semistructured interviews resulted in three pivotal strategies travel professionals use when selling new products: (a) developing and maintaining strong client relationships; (b) engaging in FAM trips and learning opportunities, such as webinars; and (c) maintaining robust supplier partnerships and networking. The study revealed insights into the business practices of travel professionals and the ways in which they successfully sell new tourism products. The findings specifically indicate that travel professionals must maintain strong relationships with clients, suppliers, and their industry networks to maintain success in addition to participating in new tourism products physically through FAM trips and educational opportunities. By knowing their clientele well, travel professionals are able to focus on products that would appeal to their clientele, and by networking with others in the industry, they are able to obtain knowledge they might not be able to gather on their own.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

The interviews with participants will begin by introducing myself, asking if they are comfortable, and then going over the informed consent form. If no questions about consent exist, I will let them know I will start the recorder and ask them not to state their name or organization name for the recording. We will remain off camera for the recorded portion of the call. I will ask my criteria-based screening questions on the recording, to support that my participants are qualified as experts in the field of travel. Then, I will ask the interview questions:

1. Please tell me about your experience in the travel industry and how your role has evolved over time.
2. How would you describe your client base, and what kinds of products or experiences do you currently sell?
3. Please describe a time when you were introduced to a new or innovative tourism product.
4. What specific strategies do you use when deciding whether to offer a new tourism product to your clients?
5. Once you've decided to adopt a new product, how do you position or present it to clients?
6. How do you build trust with clients when recommending something new or unfamiliar?

7. What tools, training, or resources help you successfully sell innovative products?
8. How do you stay informed about emerging products or trends in the travel industry?
9. What impact does new product releases by your competition have on your strategy decisions in selecting and promoting new products?
10. What challenges have you faced when trying to introduce new tourism offerings, and how did you overcome them?
11. How do you adapt your sales approach when a product doesn't resonate with your client base?
12. In your experience, what distinguishes successfully selling a new product from struggling to gain traction?
13. Please share a specific example of a product launch or strategy that worked particularly well, and what contributed to its success.

After the last question is answered, I will ask them if there are any other comments they might want to provide. Then, I will thank them for their time and discuss the member checking process. I will ask them to reply to my follow-up email to them within 72 hours, if possible, to let me know if they have any comments, concerns, changes, or questions about my summary of their interview answers. Then, I will turn off the recording and the interview will end.

Appendix B: Examples of Categories and Codes from Data Analysis

Figure B1

Example of Coding Process for Theme 1

INTERVIEWEE 1	**INTERVIEWEE 2**	**INTERVIEWEE 3**	**INTERVIEWEE 4**	**INTERVIEWEE 5**	**INTERVIEWEE 6**
focus on the overall experience, not price	having a good reputation	business from referrals and word of mouth	relating to clients on a personal note	knowing the ideal client	collaborative approach in the industry
qualiFy clients well	like, know, trust	knowing what clients want/need	taking interest in your clients		
consultative approach	knowing clients really well	cognizant of clients budget	sell best value and best experience		
	quiz/call to get to know clients		honesty		

Figure B2

Example of Coding Process for Theme 2

INTERVIEWEE 1	INTERVIEWEE 2	INTERVIEWEE 3	INTERVIEWEE 4	INTERVIEWEE 5	INTERVIEWEE 6
consumer reviews	independent research	specialize in FIT	webinars	education and gaining knowledge	background knowledge from events
personal experience	you have to travel yourself		experiencing a destination		webinars/training
supplier trainings	experiences/FAMs		certification courses		
newsletters					
FAM trips			travel industry news- Travel Weekly, etc.		

Figure B3

Example of Coding Process for Theme 3

INTERVIEWEE 1	INTERVIEWEE 2	INTERVIEWEE 3	INTERVIEWEE 4	INTERVIEWEE 5	INTERVIEWEE 6
Facebook groups	Facebook groups	learning from other advisors	GTM	Travel agency owners conferences	events/networking
	networking and colleagues in the industry	Facebook groups	networking and industry connections	Travel Leaders Edge	GTM
		networking		GTM	FAM trips
		networking- GTM		agency owner friends	build relationship with supplier
		connections and supplier relationships		industry talk	