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Antecedents and outcomes of memorable wildlife tourism experiences

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ABSTRACT

Using a theoretical foundation based on memory-dominant logic, this study aims to develop and test an integrative model of memorable wildlife tourism experiences (MWTEs). The study first considers the role of escapism, experiencescapes, experience co-creation and education as antecedents of MWTE. It then examines the relationship between MWTE, satisfaction and hedonic well-being. Data were gathered from 202 tourists over 18 years old who had been on a wildlife safari between September and December 2022. An online survey questionnaire was distributed via Amazon Mechanical Turk. The empirical results suggest that when the importance of escapism, experience co-creation and educational experiences in the experience sought is higher and when the experiencescape is more appealing, the memorability of the experience will be stronger. More memorable experiences are associated with greater tourist satisfaction and hedonic well-being. Furthermore, this study discusses theoretical and managerial implications along with recommendations for future research.

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Introduction

An unanticipated consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic was that many people discovered the appeal of spending time in natural settings. Following the lifting of lockdown regulations and the resumption of leisure travel, demand for nature-based tourism (NBT) experiences has increased (Lee & Jeong, 2023). Wildlife tourism (WT) was already a burgeoning tourist activity before the pandemic. From a demand-side perspective, WT is a form of NBT that enables tourists to have consumptive and non-consumptive experiences with wildlife in its natural habitat (Douglas et al., 2022; Rizzolo, 2023). Consumptive WT experience result in wildlife mortality, such as hunting, trapping, and fishing (Rizzolo, 2023). This study focuses on non-consumptive WT experience. In this context, the term 'non-consumptive' refers to an activity that does not deplete or degrade the natural resources that are the subject of tourists' interest, which can involve viewing, photographing and learning about wildlife (Rizzolo, 2021). WT can also benefit local economies, support local communities and promote nature conservation (Charles & Hamid, 2022). As such, WT is frequently portrayed as a highly desirable tool of sustainable development and as one that constitutes an economically, socially and environmentally positive use of wildlife (Cong et al., 2017). This makes it highly attractive as a consumer product (Douglas et al., 2022). From a supply-side perspective, WT is increasingly being developed as a niche, luxury-end product, and as such, it represents a potentially lucrative market for destinations with abundant fauna and flora (Curtin, 2009). Tourists generally wish to interact with wildlife which they cannot typically encounter at home. As such, WT can immerse people in fragile habitats in which they closely interact with threatened or endangered rare species (Cousins, 2007). However, this may precipitate the increased risk that, somewhat ironically, WT will rapidly become consumptive and unsustainable (Szott et al., 2019).

As a result of the above trends, increasing numbers of people have travelled, both domestically and internationally, to natural areas for WT in recent years (Newsome, 2021). As WT has proliferated across ever more locations, increased in scope and scale, and become more organised, its potential to be consumptive and unsustainable has escalated as well, particularly in destinations where planning and policy provisions could be stronger. Recent studies regarding WT have therefore focused on topics related to assessing sustainability, such as conservation, welfare and governance (Fennell et al., 2023), economic counterflows (Buckley & Chauvenet, 2022) and resilience (Jones et al., 2023); other studies have focused on how to make WT more sustainable, such as by introducing virtual WT (Burns & Benz-Schwarzburg, 2023) and animal health warning labels (Fennell, 2023). Nonetheless, WT is an understudied subject (Rizzolo, 2021). Particularly little is known about how WT experiences are created, formed and remembered, including their consequences from tourists' perspectives (e.g. Van Der Merwe & Saayman, 2014).

At the same time, the production and consumption of memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) has become a central theme in tourism research (Chen et al., 2023a). MTEs are centred in the individual and represent special events in a person's life that reside in their long-term memories (Kim & Chen, 2019). Kim et al. (2012, p. 13) state that an MTE is a 'tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred'. Numerous benefits can be achieved by tourism providers who deliver MTEs (Hosany et al., 2022). Tourists who undergo MTEs are more likely to repeat the experience at a later date and to recommend it to other people (Chen et al., 2023b) and to develop

attachments to the places they visit (Peng et al., 2023). Offering MTEs is thus considered to be crucial to a destination's competitiveness (Zhang et al., 2018), and destination managers are advised to develop tourism activities, facilities and services that will make the tourist's stay memorable (Hosany et al., 2022).

A notable feature of existing empirical research into MTEs, however, is that many such studies have applied Kim et al.'s (2012) MTE scale with seven dimensions (i.e. hedonism, refreshment, meaningfulness, local culture, involvement, knowledge and novelty) and in new settings (Sthapit et al., 2019). As Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) note, however, the sample used in Kim et al.'s (2012) study was comprised of students and the MTE scale is therefore not representative of typical tourists. This means that the findings of their study, including the seven dimensions of MTE scale they identified, cannot reliably be generalised. Another potential flaw in Kim et al.'s (2012) study relates to time-lag bias due to respondents being asked to evaluate their tourism experiences within the past five years. Empirical studies indicate that memory distortion tends to intensify over time (Park & Santos, 2017).

Another shortcoming of previous studies (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022) is that relatively few have included other constructs that might explain MTEs (Zhang et al., 2018). It has been observed (Hosany et al., 2022) that because MTEs are such a multifaceted concept, there is minimal consensus about the theoretical basis for the specific constructs that determine MTEs (Hosany et al., 2022). In addition, previous studies have tended to rely upon the original seven dimensions of MTEs established by Kim et al. (2012) regardless of the specific context in which they are being applied (Stone et al., 2022). The formation of MTEs is believed, however, to be highly dependent upon the context (Ye et al., 2021). This would appear, for several reasons, to be particularly relevant in the case of WT. First, wildlife tourists frequently engage in travel that is based on visiting particular habitats and encountering new species. Second, WT tends to involve substantial investments of time and expensive equipment, such as cameras and binoculars (Curtin, 2010). Existing MTE studies do not fully account for these characteristics of WT. In the same vein, relatively little is known about the interplay between particular features of WT experiences and the process by which memories related to them are formed.

With the aim of addressing these gaps in the literature, this study discusses the relevant theoretical concepts related to memorable wildlife tourism experience (MWTE). Furthermore, it tests a new model that incorporates these concepts into existing MTE theory. This model integrates four main antecedents (escapism, experiencescapes, experience co-creation and education) and two outcome variables: satisfaction and hedonic well-being (HWB). In the context of this study, a MWTE is an experience that is positive, remembered and vividly recalled in detail.

Literature review

This study employs memory-dominant logic (MDL) as a framework to link four possible antecedents of MWTE (escapism, experiencescapes, experience co-creation and education), with two outcome variables (satisfaction and HWB) (Figure 1). MDL is a business logic that focuses on the creation of value through the construction of memorable experiences over the course of the customer's experience journey (Harrington
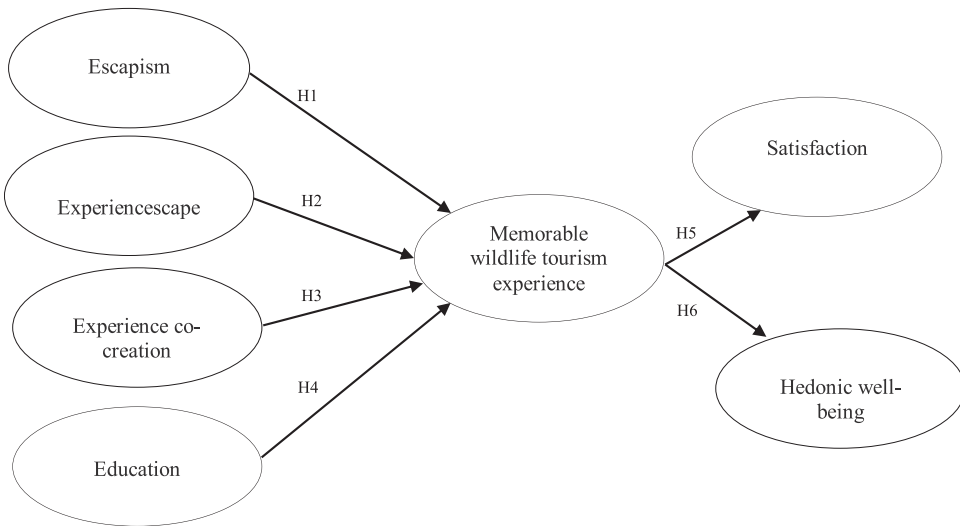
Figure 1. The conceptual model.

et al., 2019). CDL proposes that value is based on customers' experiential responses. MDL, in contrast, views the service experience as an input rather than an output and suggests that the value is derived from reminiscence (Harrington et al., 2019). As such, both the service provider and customer are involved in creating the experiences arising from service encounters (Schmitt et al., 2015). These encounters generate customers' experiences, which contribute to positive and negative memories. Customers' memories then inspire psychological and behavioural outcomes. These include, for example, perceptions of satisfaction and HWB.

Escapism

MacCannell (1973) posited that tourists are motivated to participate in tourism because they seek an escape to other contexts, times or places. Tourism can be regarded as a temporary escape from ordinary life (Barr et al., 2010) which frees people from their ordinary practises and allows them to immerse themselves in new realities and experiences (Ponsignon et al., 2021). When individuals escape, they transition from a state of being to a state of doing that is based on active participation in a particular activity (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Sipe and Testa (2018) argue that an important antecedent to many memorable tourism experiences is the desire to escape. This is because holidays enable people to escape their daily routines, which liberates them to conceptualise their lives in novel ways; this process may also enhance the memorability of an experience (Leblanc, 2003). Escapism is also believed to be a fundamental feature of NBT experiences, including WT (Buckley & Chauvenet, 2022; Conti & Farsari, 2022). In Buckley and Chauvenet's (2022) study, one of the main reasons people expressed for visiting forests and beach parks was to escape from daily life. Pine and Gilmore (1999) view some experiences as so intense and absorbing that they allow people to temporarily escape their daily lives (Farkić et al., 2020). Recent studies have uncovered a positive relationship between

escapism and MTEs (Chen et al., 2023a; Dias & Dias, 2019). Accordingly, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H1: Escapism positively influences tourists' MWTEs.

Experiencescapes

The term 'experiencescape' refers to a place in which consumers interact to create an experience (Mei et al., 2020; Mossberg, 2007). It encompasses both the context and stimuli necessary to integrate the physical aspects of the setting, participants, social actors, organisational dynamics and even features of service delivery (Campos et al., 2018). Tourists' positive perceptions of an experiencescape are believed to result in a high-quality customer experience (Dong & Siu, 2013). According to Pizam and Tasci (2019), experiencescapes encompass various factors which are constantly evolving, including physical/functional, aesthetic, cultural, social, natural and hospitality elements. The use of a space as an experiencescape gradually renders it more complex, which produces specific outcomes in terms of memorability (Chen et al., 2023a). An experiencescape could be a relatively small entity, such as a shop or restaurant, or it could be a larger entity, such as an amusement park, a whole city (Jernsand et al., 2015) or a natural area, such as a national park.

The manner in which the experiencescape is constructed and received is important in evaluating NBT and WT experiences (Fossgard & Fredman, 2019; Margaryan, 2018) and can contribute to memorable experiences (Nelson, 2023). According to Santoso, Wang and Windasari (2022), tourists achieve memorable experiences by means of interacting with the various elements of a specific experiencescape. In the case of WT, this could include a scenic landscape, sightings of wildlife, trail conditions and weather conditions (Fossgard & Fredman, 2019). As such, the nature of an experiencescape can directly affect the memorability of an experience (Mathis et al., 2016; Pizam & Tasci, 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H2: Experiencescapes positively influence tourists' MWTEs.

Experience co-creation

According to Grönroos (2011), the concept of experience co-creation relates to the creation of an 'experience-in-context' by multiple partners. This involves the integration of the resources through interactions between customers and service providers. Experience co-creation is associated with the concept of 'value-in-use', which is defined as 'the value for customers, created by them during their usage of resources' (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014, p. 209). Customers thus play an active role alongside the service provider in the co-creation of value (Mathis et al., 2016). The concept of experience co-creation thus envisages consumers to be active players in the experience. Value is thus a joint venture in which customers interact with supplies to create their own customised experiences (Zatori et al., 2018).

Given the socially dense nature of tourism, tourists' experiences are believed to be collective and co-created phenomena (Helkkula et al., 2012). Tourists also gain greater power regarding what they do during the trip (Mathis et al., 2016), and co-creation allows them to engage in activities aimed towards self-development to explore their surroundings and to interact with other people (Eraqi, 2011). Therefore, the tourist can no

longer be viewed as an inactive recipient of pre-existing value but as an active and engaged co-creator of value (Nangpiire et al., 2022). Memorability is considered to be a consequence of experience co-creation (Campos et al., 2017), and a memorable experience will contribute positively to the customer's sense of well-being (Dekhili & Hallem, 2020). Given the importance of interaction in NBT (Hansen & Mossberg, 2017), experience co-creation may encompass tourist encounters with wildlife, as well as with service staff (Grönroos & Gummerus, 2014) and other tourists (Malone et al., 2018). The nature of these interactions is believed to significantly impact the tourist's evaluation of a tourism experience (McCartney & Chen, 2020) and to form the core of the tourist experience (Walls & Wang, 2011). Accordingly, the following hypothesis can be proposed:

H3: Experience co-creation positively influences tourists' MWTEs.

Education

Education has long been identified as an important element of tourism (Hung & Petrick, 2011), with travel affording both planned and unplanned learning opportunities (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). Learning may be explicitly recognised or subliminal. Indeed, tourism is broadly considered to be an educational experience in itself; it is frequently portrayed as vital to personal development, as it can challenge one's thinking, provide meaning, and change how one thinks and behaves, both while travelling and when returning home (Minnaert, 2012). The desire to learn can influence the places tourists choose to visit and what they do while visiting a destination (Poria et al., 2004). Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) suggest that the consumption of experiences can deliver benefits such as enjoyment, fun and pleasure and that more meaningful learning tends to occur under such circumstances. Additionally, consumers have increasingly demanded tourist experiences that involve some form of education (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017).

Education has always been a pivotal component of WT experiences, but recently, it has been widely employed to help increase people's environmental knowledge and to foster pro-environmental attitudes, which may then promote environmentally responsible behaviour (Ballantyne et al., 2011; Packer & Ballantyne, 2004). Wildlife encounters can also contribute to education about the need for conservation and relevant practices (Pratt & Suntikul, 2016; Wilson & Tisdell, 2003). Numerous educational opportunities are available to tourists in the form of newly attained knowledge, skills, self-awareness and practical wisdom (Chen et al., 2014; Suarez-Rojas et al., 2023). These learning experiences can appreciably enhance the quality of MTEs (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Indeed, WT can result in long-lasting memories and provide life-changing experiences (Ballantyne et al., 2011). The following hypothesis can therefore be proposed:

H4: Education positively influences tourists' MWTEs.

Satisfaction and hedonic well-being

Some studies have suggested that MTE exerts a significant positive impact on satisfaction (Cheung et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). Satisfaction can be defined as a measure of the difference between what is expected and what is experienced (Zhang et al., 2019). It is believed to arise 'when an individual reaches a goal [and] the vehicles of satisfaction are

products or services that offer various levels of fulfilment' (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). In other words, an individual achieves satisfaction when they experience a positive feeling that persists in their memory which exceeds their prior expectations (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). In this study, satisfaction with the entire WT experience is postulated to depend upon a wildlife tourist's overall evaluation of their trip. This suggests the following hypothesis:

H5: MWTEs influence tourists' satisfaction.

Tourism can also increase the level of happiness of those who participate, thus resulting in HWB (Vada et al., 2019). The hedonic approach has frequently been employed in assessing subjective well-being, which is a composite measure of a person's happiness, quality of life and life satisfaction (Ahn et al., 2019). Some studies have identified a positive relationship between MTEs and HWB (Bigne, Fuentes-Medina & Morini-Marrero, 2020; Trinanda et al., 2022). HWB has also been linked to the concept of subjective well-being. It is concerned with emotional aspects of well-being (Seligman, 2002), including positive emotions such as happiness and pleasure (Vada et al., 2019). The following hypothesis can therefore be proposed:

H6: MWTEs influence tourists' HWB.

Methods

Data collection methods and instrumentation

This study used an online, self-administered questionnaire to collect data from tourists over 18 years old who had engaged in a wildlife safari experience (observing, photographing or recording wildlife in its natural state with no hunting involved) during the three months prior to the data collection period (January to March 2023). Respondents were contacted using convenience sampling because it is efficient, cost-effective and simple to implement (Sthapit et al., 2019). However, the authors acknowledge that the key disadvantage of this sampling technique is that the sample lacks clear generalisability. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first included questions about demographic variables and travel characteristics. The second consisted of the measurement items for the seven constructs in the hypothesised model, with all items scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Escapism was measured using four items adapted from Oh et al. (2007). Five items adapted from Pizam and Tasci (2019) were used to measure the experiencescape. The study measured experience co-creation using five items adapted from Mathis et al. (2016). Education comprised four items adapted from Oh et al. (2007). MWTE was operationalised using three items adapted from Oh et al. (2017), and satisfaction was measured using three items from Oh et al. (2007). Lastly, the HWB construct was measured using five items adapted from Diener et al. (1985). In total, therefore, the study used 29 items.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with five tourism researchers in March 2023 to minimise the potential for errors and to assess the relevance, phrasing, clarity and flow of the questions. The survey was distributed in April 2023 using the Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) crowdsourcing platform. An online survey link was posted on MTurk and was active for the first week of April 2023. To ensure that the data were collected from the target sample, a series of filtering questions were posed, including 'Are you over

18-year-old?', and 'Have you engaged in a wildlife safari experience (observing, photographing or recording wildlife in its natural state with no hunting involved) during January to March 2023?'. To help ensure the quality of the responses, information was provided before the completion of the survey conveying that each response would be checked and that any indication of irrelevant and random responses would result in the withdrawal of compensation. In addition, all the responses were thoroughly screened for careless responses based on same response category on all items in the questionnaire and response time, and invalid responses were discarded. Those who failed the screening during the first attempt were not offered a second chance. Out of the 214 responses received, 202 were considered to be valid responses from individuals. The sample-to-item ratio is used to decide sample size based on the number of items in a study. According to some studies, the ratio should not be less than 5-to-1 (Gorsuch, 1983; Hatcher, 1994; Suhr, 2006), which is 145 respondents. This criterion has been fulfilled in this study.

Before proceeding with the analysis, the skewness and kurtosis of the data were analysed. The analysis revealed that none of the variables indicated both skewness and kurtosis, with the exception of the items S1 and S3, which both exhibited skewness and kurtosis (Table 1). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted before hypothesis testing to examine the psychometric properties of the constructs in the research model. The model achieved its optimal performance in the 22nd run.

Data analysis and results

Regarding the overall profile of survey participants, most were male, accounting for 54% of the sample. Respondents' ages ranged from 20 to 68 years, the largest group being those in their 30s. The majority were married and US American. More than half were first-time visitors who had participated in a wildlife safari organised by a tour operator. Many had travelled with their family members or with their partner and friends. Nearly all of the visits were domestic, with most visits occurring in January 2023 (Table 2).

The results of the initial output of the structural equation modelling (SEM), particularly the CFA, revealed the following statistics: the number of parameters for each model (NPAR) = 108, chi-square = 743.916, degree of freedom (df) = 356, significance level (p) = 0.000, chi-square/df = 2.090, normed fit index (NFI) = .781, relative fit index (RFI) = 0.750, incremental fit index (IFI) = 0.872, Tucker-Lewis coefficient (TLI) = 0.852, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.870, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.074, lower boundary of the 90% confidence interval of the index of the model fit (LO 90) = 0.066, higher boundary of the 90% confidence interval of the index of the model fit (HI 90) = 0.081, and the p-value for close fit (PCLOSE) = 0.000. The unidimensional model was found at the 13th run, revealing the following statistics: NPAR = 96, chi-square = 756.569, df = 368, P = 0.000, chi-square/df = 2.056, NFI = 0.777, RFI = 0.754, IFI = 0.872, TLI = 0.856, CFI = 0.870, RMSEA = 0.072, LO 90 = 0.065, HI 90 = 0.080 and PCLOSE = 0.000.

The CFA was then conducted for another nine runs to address the issue of the modification indices by correlating the errors (Figure 2). The last run revealed the following statistics, indicating the optimal solution; however, RMSEA is only 0.067, which is below the conventionally acceptable value of 0.080 (Hair et al., 2019): NPAR = 105, chi-square = 683.874, df = 359, P = 0.000, chi-square/df = 1.905, NFI = 0.798, RFI = 0.772, IFI =

Table 1. Operationalisation of the constructs used in this study and some important statistics (N = 202).

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Escapism (Oh et al., 2007)						
ES1: I felt I played a different character during my recent wildlife tourism experience	3.64	1.219	-.893	.171	.007	.341
ES2: My recent wildlife tourism experience let me imagine being someone else	3.71	1.132	-.817	.171	.127	.341
ES3: I completely escaped from reality during my recent wildlife tourism experience	3.79	1.128	-.895	.171	.338	.341
ES4: I felt like I was living in a different time or place during my recent wildlife tourism experience	3.87	1.096	-.854	.171	.166	.341
Experiencescape (Pizam & Tasci, 2019)						
EX1: The atmosphere during my recent wildlife tourism experience was appealing to my senses	4.00	.901	-.712	.171	.205	.341
EX2: The level of crowd was comfortable during my recent wildlife tourism experience	4.01	.909	-.703	.171	.127	.341
EX3: The employees at the site were friendly	4.12	.838	-.842	.171	.810	.341
EX4: The customers were sociable	4.11	.882	-.796	.171	.345	.341
EX5: The environment reflects nature	4.08	.932	-.903	.171	.533	.341
Experience co-creation (Mathis et al., 2016)						
ECO1: Working alongside service staff and other tourists allowed me to have a great social interaction during my recent wildlife tourism experience, which I enjoyed	3.93	.897	-.479	.171	-.349	.341
ECO2: I felt comfortable interacting with service staff, other tourists and wild animals during my recent wildlife tourism experience	3.94	.898	-.497	.171	-.332	.341
ECO3: The setting allowed me to effectively interact with service staff, other tourists and wild animals during my recent wildlife tourism experience	3.89	.921	-.505	.171	-.192	.341
ECO4: My recent wildlife tourism experience was enhanced because of my participation in the experience	3.91	.934	-.774	.171	.520	.341
ECO5: I felt confident in my ability to interact with service staff, other tourists and wild animals during my recent wildlife tourism experience	4.04	.937	-.895	.171	.521	.341
Education (Oh et al., 2007)						
EDU1: During the recent wildlife tourism experience I learned a lot	4.05	.968	−1.007	.171	.719	.341
EDU2: My recent wildlife tourism experience stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	4.04	.935	-.780	.171	.272	.341
EDU3: My recent wildlife tourism experience was a real learning experience	4.01	.906	-.840	.171	.640	.341
EDU4: My recent wildlife tourism experience has made me more knowledgeable	4.05	.907	-.946	.171	.851	.341
Memorable wildlife tourism experience (Oh et al., 2007)						
MWTE1: I have wonderful memories of my recent wildlife tourism experience	4.06	.936	-.754	.171	.000	.341
MWTE2: I will not forget my recent wildlife tourism experience	3.93	1.055	-.902	.171	.421	.341
MWTE3: I will remember my recent wildlife tourism experience	3.96	.940	-.828	.171	.567	.341
Satisfaction (Oh et al., 2007)						
S1: The recent wildlife tourism experience made me feel: Very Satisfied	4.20	.943	−1.280	.171	1.494	.341
S2: The recent wildlife tourism experience made me feel: Very Pleased	4.17	.893	-.973	.171	.465	.341
S3: The recent wildlife tourism experience made me feel: Delighted	4.11	1.028	−1.230	.171	1.176	.341

Table 1. Continued.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Hedonic well-being (Diener et al., 1985)						
HW1: In most ways, my recent wildlife tourism experience was close to ideal	4.00	.938	-.683	.171	.093	.341
HW2: The conditions of this wildlife tourism experience were excellent	4.08	.984	-.982	.171	.536	.341
HW3: I am satisfied with my recent wildlife tourism experience	4.04	.977	-.954	.171	.552	.341
HW4: I achieved the most important things on this trip	4.00	.980	-.747	.171	-.022	.341
HW5: I would not change the plans I made for this recent trip	3.85	1.069	-.935	.171	.620	.341
Valid N (listwise)	202					

Table 2. Demographic and travel characteristics of respondents (N = 202).

Gender		Have you visited this place/destination before?	
Characteristics	Number of respondents	Characteristics	Number of respondents
Male	110	Yes (Repeat visitors)	84
Female	92	No (First-time visitors)	118
Age		Was this trip organised by a tour operator?	
20–29	68	Yes	154
30–39	79	No	48
40–49	38	Travel companion	
>50	17	Family	77
Relationship Status		Partner	58
Single	44	Friends	53
Engaged	6	Colleagues	7
Married	149	Boyfriend	4
Divorced	3	Alone	3
Nationality		Type of travel	
American	148	Domestic	181
Indian	34	International	21
Italian	9	Trip undertaken	
British	7	January	116
Brazilian	4	February	30
		March	56

0.893, TLI = 0.877, CFI = 0.891, RMSEA = 0.067, LO 90 = 0.059, HI 90 = 0.075 and PCLOSE = 0.000. Moreover, the 69th case of the sample had a high value of Mahalanobis (104.635) and was thus considered for elimination. Doing so, however, deteriorated the statistics of the model as follows: NPAR = 105, chi-square = 697.555, df = 359, $P = 0.000$, chi-square/df = 1.943 NFI = 0.790, RFI = 0.762, IFI = 0.886, TLI = 0.869, CFI = 0.884, RMSEA = 0.069, LO 90 = 0.061, HI 90 = 0.076 and PCLOSE = 0.000. The 69th case was therefore not extracted from the sample. There was no need to extract any item from the model, as the standardised regression weights of the items were all above 0.500.

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix associated with the CFA. The squared values of the average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs are indicated in Table 5. The squared values of AVE were higher than the values of the correlations horizontally and vertically. In addition, the discriminant validity criterion was satisfied, as all values of the AVE were above 0.5.
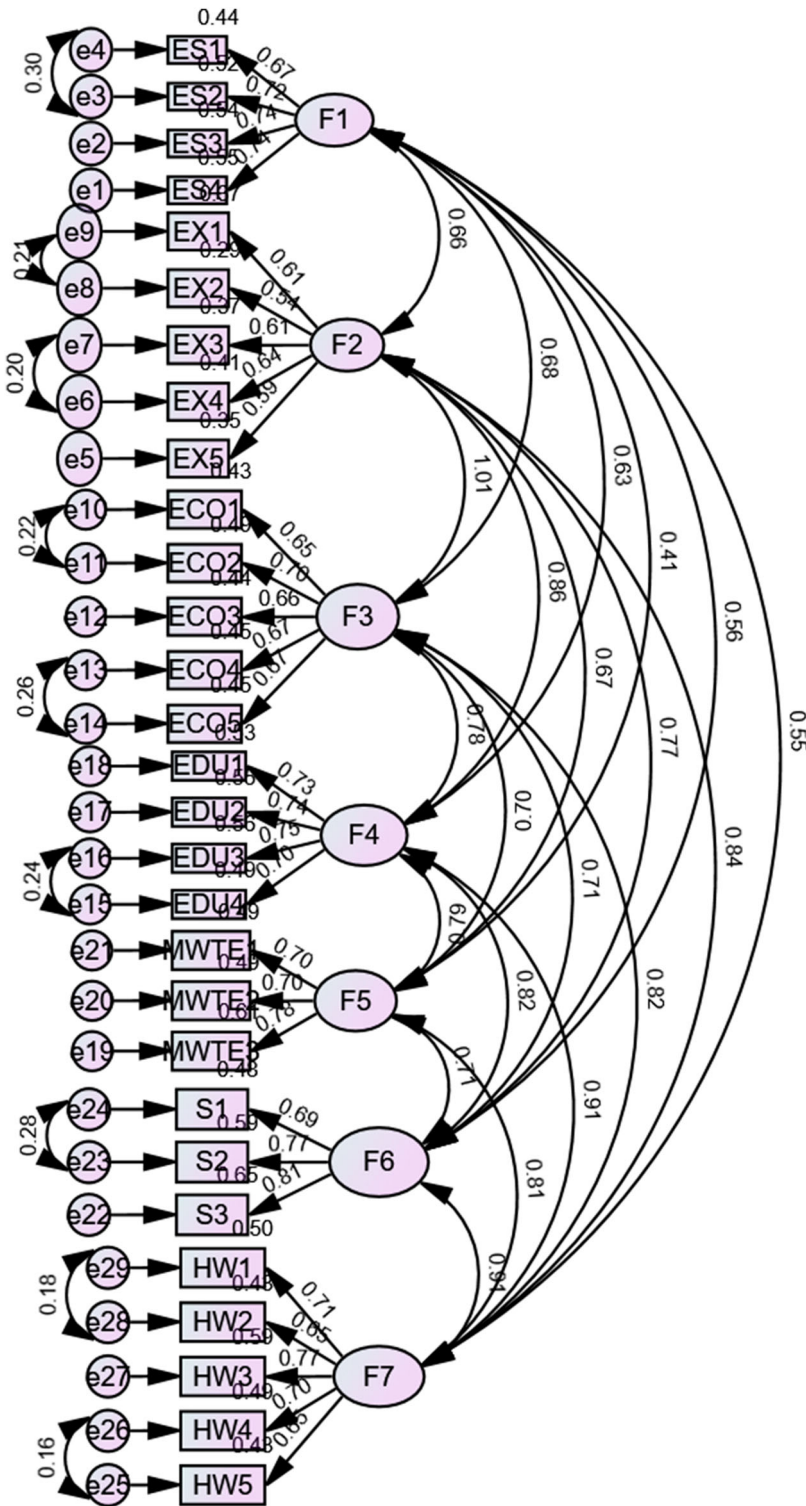
Figure 2. Final solution of the CFA model based on the sample of (N = 202)* Note*: Constructs: F1: Escapism, F2: Experiencescape, F3: Experience co-creation, F4: Education, F5: Memorable wildlife tourism experience, F6: Satisfaction, F7: Hedonic well-being.

Table 3. Correlation matrix (N = 202)*.

Constructs	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7
F1	0.847						
F2	0.456	0.774					
F3	0.484	0.639	0.819				
F4	0.434	0.656	0.583	0.764			
F5	0.213	0.467	0.504	0.591	0.853		
F6	0.364	0.569	0.509	0.618	0.514	0.870	
F7	0.348	0.642	0.620	0.685	0.614	0.690	0.834

Note*: Constructs: F1: Escapism, F2: Experiencescape, F3: Experience co-creation, F4: Education, F5: Memorable wildlife tourism experience, F6: Satisfaction, F7: Hedonic well-being. Diagonal shows the square root of AVE.

Table 4. Testing of the hypotheses using CFA (covariances) via AMOS 28 (N = 202)*.

Hypotheses	Relationship*	Estimate		Critical Ratio (t)	Significance (p-value)	Status of hypothesis
		Beta	Standard. Error			
H1	F1 to F5	0.248	0.057	4.349	0.000	Supported
H2	F2 to F5	0.274	0.046	5,959	0.000	Supported
H3	F3 to F5	0.319	0.048	6.619	0.000	Supported
H4	F4 to F5	0.396	0.054	7.381	0.000	Supported
H5	F5 to F6	0.435	0.067	6.543	0.000	Supported
H6	F5 to F7	0.436	0.060	7.290	0.000	Supported

*Note: F1: Escapism, F2: Experiencescape, F3: Experience co-creation, F4: Education, F5: Memorable wildlife tourism experience, F6: Satisfaction, F7: Hedonic well-being.

Table 4 presents the results from the hypothesis testing. All six hypotheses were supported, and all were positive in direction and statistically significant at the 99% confidence level.

Table 5 indicates the values of the important statistics of the seven constructs of the model: AVE, composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha. Regarding the AVE, the discriminant validity criterion of Fornell and Larcker (1981) is satisfied, as all of the individual constructs have AVE values above 0.500. The mean of the AVEs is 0.837, which is well above the criterion value of 0.7 (Table 5).

Regarding reliability, Table 5 demonstrates that all of the Cronbach's alpha values are very good and above the criterion value of 0.7; the mean average Cronbach's alpha value is 0.804. In addition, the composite reliability values are all above 0.5, and the average composite reliability is 0.837.

Since there is a problem with the convergent validity of the measurement model, we opted to calculate the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios (Henseler et al., 2015) to assess the discriminant validity. Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) criterion to provide evidence of discriminant validity was used. To do this, we compared a single-factor model with a two-factor model based on the chi-square difference test. Furthermore, the discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT ratios (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT ratios between the constructs are below 0.85, which is the acceptable threshold. Therefore, this method reveals that there is discriminant validity.

Moreover, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in Table 5 demonstrates that the items for at least six constructs are identified by their items, namely the constructs of F1: escapism, F3: experience co-creation, F5: MWTE, F6: satisfaction and F7: HWB. Particularly, the constructs F1: escapism, F5: MWTE and F6: satisfaction are fully identified by their items (all factor loadings are above 0.5). However, the three constructs, namely

Table 5. Completely standardized factor loadings, variance extracted, estimates of construct reliability and EFA results (N = 202)*.

Items	Mean	EFA factor loadings**	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7		$\Sigma(Li)^2$ n	CR	δ = 1-item reliability
					Standardised Regression Weights								
ES1	3.64	**.806**	.666							.666			**.334**
ES2	3.71	**.819**	.724							.724			**.276**
ES3	3.79	**.758**	.738							.738			**.262**
ES4	3.87	**.599**	.741							.741	**.717**	**.879**	**.259**
EX1	4.00	-.011		.607						.607			**.393**
EX2	4.01	.184		.540						.540			**.460**
EX3	4.12	**.639**		.612						.612			**.388**
EX4	4.11	**.702**		.639						.639			**.361**
EX5	4.08	.439		.595						.595	**.599**	**.817**	**.405**
ECO1	3.93	.392			.653					.653			**.347**
ECO2	3.94	.488			.699					.699			**.301**
ECO3	3.89	**.648**			.664					.664			**.336**
ECO4	3.91	**.534**			.671					.671			**.329**
ECO5	4.04	.420			.669					.669	**.671**	**.873**	**.331**
EDU1	4.05	.300				.731				.731			**.269**
EDU2	4.04	.488				.741				.741			**.259**
EDU3	4.01	.448				.751				.751			**.249**
EDU4	4.05	.193				.698				.698	**.584**	**.835**	**.302**
MWTE1	4.06	**.687**					.699			.699			**.301**
MWTE2	3.93	**.754**					.702			.702			**.298**
MWTE3	3.96	**.651**					.781			.781	**.727**	**.867**	**.219**
S1	4.20	**.769**						.693		.693			**.307**
S2	4.17	**.774**						.769		.769			**.231**
S3	4.11	**.640**						.809		.809	**.757**	**.703**	**.191**
HW1	4.00	**.542**							.707	.707			**.293**
HW2	4.08	**.629**							.652	.652			**.348**
HW3	4.04	.477							.771	.771			**.229**
HW4	4.00	.224							.698	.698			**.302**
HW5	3.85	.071							.652	.652	**.696**	**.888**	**.348**
Average Variance Extracted			.717	.599	.671	.584	.727	.757	.696	**Mean AVE = .679**			
Construct Reliability			.879	.817	.873	.835	.867	.703	.888	**ACR = .837**			
Cronbach's alpha			.830	.758	.833	.814	.765	.809	0.817	**MCα =.804**			

*Note: The following formulae are used for calculating the AVE and CR of the constructs: AVE is computed as the total of all squared standardized factor loadings (squared multiple correlations) divided by the number of items (Hair et al., 2019, p. 676) or AVE = Σ (standardised regression weights)^2/n or Σ(Li)^2/n CR = (Σ of standardized regression weights)^2 / [(Σ of standardized regression weights)^2 + (Σδ)], MAVE = mean average variance extracted, ACR = average construct reliability, and MCα = mean Cronbach's α.

Constructs: F1: Escapism, F2: Experiencescape, F3: Experience co-creation, F4: Education, F5: Memorable wildlife tourism experience, F6: Satisfaction, F7: Hedonic well-being.

**We have used the Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 15 iterations.

F2: experiencescape, F3: experience co-creation and F7: HWB are only identified by two items (above 0.5 factor loadings). The construct F4: education is not well identified using its four items (all factor loadings are below 0.5) (Table 5).

Appendix A shows whether MWTE is a mediator between antecedents and satisfaction and antecedents and HWB. For this purpose, we used mediation with AMOS. The results suggest that MWTE is a significant mediator (partial mediator) in eight relationships, namely between all four antecedent factors and satisfaction and between the four antecedents and HWB.

Discussion of Results

The MTE concept has received a lot of attention from researchers and has become a central theme in tourism research (Chen et al., 2023a). Guided by the MDL framework, the aim of this study was to propose and test an integrative theoretical model of MWTEs. The empirical results support all the six hypotheses. Contrary to studies replicating Kim et al.'s (2012) MTE scale in new settings, the present study extends their study by incorporating other antecedents (escapism, experiencescapes, experience co-creation and education) that may impact MTE, in this context, MWTEs. This study responds to the call from tourism studies to examine other constructs that might explain MTEs (Sthapit et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2018). Given that in today's experiential marketplace, tourism service providers have focused on making their offers more memorable to optimise the tourist experience and gain a competitive advantage over their competitors (Hosany et al., 2022), this study contributes to the existing on MTE and WT as well as has important managerial implications for WT product owners and service providers to effectively facilitate MWTEs.

First, escapism was found to positively affect MWTEs. Thus, this finding supports H1 and corresponds with studies that suggest that the pursuit of escapism contributes to MTEs (Chen et al., 2023). This finding suggests that a higher level of immersion during a WT experience is correlated with a more memorable experience for wildlife tourists. The degree of novelty involved in the experiences was found to have greater predictive power with respect to memorability.

Second, experiencescapes were found to exert a positive impact on MWTEs (H2). This corresponds to the findings of studies indicating that favourable interactions with the various elements of the experiencescape will create more memorable experiences (Pizam & Tasci, 2019; Santoso et al., 2022). Thus, the results confirm the prominent role of experience co-creation in the formation of memorable experiences.

Third, experience co-creation is a positive and statistically significant factor affecting WT experiences, as proposed in H3; this supports studies (Campos et al., 2016; Sthapit et al., 2019; Williams, Yuan & Williams, 2019) indicating that tourists' experiences tend to be memorable when they have the opportunity to interact with others. Tourists who are able to engage actively with wildlife and to co-create a non-consumptive experience with it (by watching, hearing, observing, studying it, as well as perhaps touching or feeding it) are thus more likely to have a memorable experience. The same applies to human interaction, as tourists who actively engage with their service providers (e.g. tour guides) and other tourists on the tour are more likely to have MWTEs.

Fourth, education appears to be another crucial predictor of MWTEs, indicating that education exerts a direct and positive impact on tourists' MWTEs. This finding supports H4 and corroborates studies indicating that education is derived from positive experiences during trips that tourists can recall after returning home from a trip and is linked to memorability (Ballantyne et al., 2011).

Furthermore, the study confirms the relationship between MWTEs and satisfaction. This further underscores the insights from studies indicating that MTEs contribute to satisfaction (Cheung et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022; Sthapit et al., 2019; Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

In addition, a positive association between MWTEs and HWB was confirmed by our results, thus supporting H6. Hence, when tourists have MWTEs, they are more likely to experience positive emotions, happiness and pleasure (HWB). This result is consistent with existing studies that have identified a positive impact of MTEs on HWB (Bigne et al., 2020; Trinanda et al., 2022).

Theoretical implications

This study offers three key contributions to the extant literature. First, it responds to demands from the tourism management literature for research that identifies and confirms other decisive antecedents of tourists' MTEs (Stone et al., 2022) in the context of WT experiences. This study introduces and tests new factors as determinants of MTEs, and specifically MWTEs, namely, escapism, experiencescapes, experience co-creation and education. The findings suggest that higher levels of escapism, experience co-creation and educational experiences and more appealing experiencescapes are associated with more memorable experiences, which supports H1–H5.

Second, the findings also contribute to the literature regarding WT, laying the foundation for future research about this topic. Beyond examining the various antecedents of MWTEs, this study also identified MWTEs as a significant predictor of satisfaction and HWB. The importance of MWTEs as an enabler of satisfaction and HWB was highlighted in our study. This advances the field's collective understanding of the outcomes related to MWTEs.

Third, while some studies concerning MTEs have examined MTEs through a positive psychology lens, drawing from theories such as savouring, the theory of planned behaviour, script theory as well as environmental psychology, sociology, organisational management and psychology (Hosany et al., 2022), no studies have used MDL to examine MTEs as a concept. The present study thus complements this literature and offers a theoretical model that uses MDLs to demonstrate not only the significant determinants of MWTE but also the outcomes (satisfaction and HWB).

Managerial implications

This study has important managerial implications for WT product owners and service providers to effectively facilitate MWTEs. The planning and delivery of WT experiences should consider means by which they can incorporate escapism, experience co-creation, experiencescapes and education into their design.

First, WT product owners and service providers should offer experiences for visitors that allow them to immerse themselves in their WT experiences. This could include

activities that enable tourists to achieve a state of flow by matching the level of challenge involved in the activity with participants' skills. A scuba-diving site could, for example, provide more-experienced divers with the opportunity to observe marine wildlife on a shipwreck, giving them additional opportunities to test their diving skills. A marine wild-life expedition, meanwhile, could use kayaks to enable tourists to get onto the water. Combining a nature expedition with another recreational interest, such as photography, may also help tourists to lose themselves in the activity.

Second, different stakeholders in WT, such as local authorities, WT managers and product owners, should take active steps to protect the vegetation, aesthetic beauty and wildlife in any given setting. These ae features of the experiencescape that visitors encounter during wildlife tours. The focus should be on the sustainable uses of experi-encescapes, with targeted efforts to offer MTEs that are compatible with such uses. Environmental protection needs to be embedded into the activities and the status of the environment monitored regularly. Ideally, WT operations should aim to be regenera-tive, insofar as they make a positive net contribution to the conservation status of the natural area in which the activities are taking place as well as to the indigenous commu-nities that live there. In addition, WT managers and product owners should emphasise on staging the WT experiencescape by offering different options for visitors to learn about the setting and wildlife, for example, through the use of interpretive signage and information in multiple languages.

Third, visitors participating in wildlife safaris should not be viewed as passive agents but rather as active co-creators of their own consumption experiences. Therefore, WT managers and product owners should actively interact with visitors who want to co-create their experiences. An example could be sharing information with tourists about the natural history of different wildlife species and their habitats and by helping tourists to interpret the behaviours they witness. Another example is to the provider of a dolphin-watching tour providing tourists with basic observations skills and equipping them with binoculars so that they can help sighting the animals and recording their reactions to the presence of humans. The focus should be on training guides and encouraging them to facilitate opportunities for tourists to co-create their experiences as they are the frontline staff present when visitors begin experiencing the activity. Such on-site participatory experiences involving social interaction and focused mental engagement will help capture and maintain tourists' interest and enable them to maximise the use of their time during their WT experience. During on-site WT experience co-creation, visitors should be the focus of attention, while interactions should be used to help visitors acquire memorable experiences. This calls for a shift in service providers role from WT managers and product owners to memorable experience co-creators.

Fourth, WT product owners and service providers must devise strategies that maxi-mise learning opportunities for tourists. For example, WT product owners and service providers should introduce guided active learning tours where visitors learn about the history of setting, different animals, tradition and culture of the indigenous people groups living in the area, both in general and in terms of their relationship with wildlife. Tourists should be informed of the need for appropriate behaviour during wildlife encounters and of conservation efforts to protect the environment and wildlife. An effective means of achieving this could be to hire more indigenous local guides, who are often able to provide authentic educational experience for tourists. They should be

trained, encouraged to share their own passion and knowledge of the site and wildlife and be considered as new source of information by visitors. Educational activities are often most effective as they combine learning with fun. Many people enjoy friendly competition, and gamifying the learning experience may be one means of achieving this.

Implementing operational measures such as those suggested above are unlikely to sufffice in themselves. WT product owners and service providers need to ensure that the principles are carried through to all aspects of the business. This would include, for example, ensuring that the marketing strategies and assets that are used reinforce each of these four antecedents of the MWTEs identified in this paper.

Limitations and suggestions for future studies

The research delineated in this paper is subject to numerous limitations. First, it was limited to four antecedents and two outcomes of MWTEs. Examinations of wider antecedents and outcomes would further enhance the understanding of MWTEs and contribute to the findings of this study. Second, a relatively small number of participants were included, and these were primarily US Americans. Future cross-cultural research, using samples from different populations, could be undertaken to validate the findings of the current study. Third, the data for this study were collected during the post-visit stage of the trip using convenience sampling and the findings including managerial implications cannot be generalised to the broader populations, in this context, wildlife tourists. In addition, the use of convenience sampling also indicates that the sample may not be typical of the greater population, and the findings may not apply to other groups. Moreover, the authors also acknowledge that the authors chose participants who are easily accessible, this may have lead to a lack of variety in the sample and potentially narrow spectrum of opinions and experiences represented in the sample. Future studies could collect data from tourists on-site or immediately after their visit. Fourth, the study adopted a web-based survey questionnaire, the likely biases of which are well documented. Adopting a wider array of data collection methods could help to overcome this limitation. Finally, comparative studies of first-time and repeat, domestic and international tourists could yield meaningful insights to add to those gained through the present study.

Conclusion

Using MDL as the theoretical foundation, this study examined the relationship between escapism, experiencescapes, experience co-creation and education as antecedents of MWTEs. It also examines the relationship between MWTE, satisfaction and hedonic well-being. Data were gathered from 202 tourists over 18 years old who had been on a wildlife safari between September and December 2022, using an online survey questionnaire via Mturk. All six hypotheses were supported. The findings support the relationship between escapism, experiencescapes, experience co-creation and education as antecedents of MWTE. In addition, MWTE appears to be a crucial predictor of tourist satisfaction and hedonic well-being. Rather than to follow studies that replicate Kim et al.'s (2012) MTE scale in new settings, this study builds and tests a bespoke model that incorporates alternative concepts, those being escapism, experiencescape, experience co-creation and education as antecedents, and satisfaction and HWB as outcome variables.

WT product owners and service providers are advised to implement strategies based on these antecedents, rather than those associated with Kim et al.'s (2012) MTE model, to achieve the specified outcomes variables most effectively.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Appendix

Mediator 'memorable wildlife tourism experience' before and after entering into the models*

Impact of variables*	Beta Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	p-Value	Result***	Status of mediation
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F6 to F1 Partial						
F6 to F1	0.535	0.094	5.672	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F6 to F1						
F6 to F1	0.983	0.100	9.827	0.000	*Significant*	
F5 to F1	0.312	0.087	3.604	0.000	Significant	
F6 to F5	0.805	0.066	12.150	0.000	Significant	
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F6 to F2 Partial						
F6 to F2	1.249	0.091	13.726	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F6 to F2						
F6 to F2	1.023	0.069	14.829	0.000	*Significant*	
F5 to F2	0.427	0.074	5.792	0.000	Significant	
F6 to F5	0.666	0.073	9.185	0.000	Significant	
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F6 to F3 Partial						
F6 to F3	0.944	0.056	16.825	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F6 to F3						
F6 to F3	0.902	0.037	24.813	0.000	*Significant*	
F5 to F3	0.829	0.032	18.742	0.000	Significant	
F6 to F5	0.058	0.096	0.602	0.547	Non-significant	
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F6 to F4 Partial						
F6 to F4	1.050	0.047	22.155	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F6 to F4						
F6 to F4	0.714	0.041	17.397	0.000	*Significant*	
F5 to F4	0.635	0.040	15.709	0.000	|Significant	
F6 to F5	0.683	0.066	10.374	0.000	Significant	
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F7 to F1 Partial						
F7 to F1	0.852	0.129	6.593	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F7 to F1						
F7 to F1	1.273	0.101	12.618	0.000	*Significant*	
F5to F1	0.604	0.064	9.373	0.000	Significant	
F7 to F5	0.465	0.058	8.058	0.000	Significant	
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F7 to F2 Partial						
F7 to F2	1.135	0.054	20.969	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F7 to F2						
F7 to F2	1.004	0.037	26.843	0.000	*Significant*	
F5 to F2	0.699	0.035	20.071	0.000	Significant	
F7 to F5	0684	0.035	19.636	0.000	Significant	
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F7 to F3 Partial						
F7 to F3	1.031	0.049	21.124	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F7 to F3						
F7 to F3	1.001	0.038	26.453	0.000	*Significant*	
F5 to F3	0.692	0.035	20.052	0.000	Significant	
F7 to F5	0.668	0.034	19.474	0.000	Significant	
Before mediator F5 enters into the model F7 to F4 Partial						
F7 to F4	1.003	0.039	25.851	0.000	*Significant*	
After mediator F5 enters into the model F5 to F7 to F4						
F7 to F4	0.943	0.039	24.397	0.000	*Significant*	
F5 to F4	0.675	0.035	19.382	0.000	Significant	
F7 to F5	0.702	0.035	20.125	0.000	Significant	

Notes: * Estimates are found by AMOS28. ** Constructs: F1: Escapism, F2: Experiencescape, F3: Experience co-creation, F4: Education, F5: Memorable wildlife tourism experience, F6: Satisfaction, F7: Hedonic well-being. *** Results in italics help to decide upon the status of mediation whether it is either a complete mediation or a partial mediation or there is no mediation.