



Examining the Memorable Tour Experiences of Tourists Using Google Maps Reviews

Google Haritalar Yorumları Kullanılarak Turistlerin Unutulmaz Tur Deneyimlerinin İncelenmesi

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Abstract / Öz

The advent of social media and online communities has facilitated interaction, commentary and the dissemination of reviews among tourists. Google Maps, a platform utilised by travellers, has evolved into a medium for documenting travel experiences, holiday recollections and complaints. In this context, user reviews on Google Maps are not only considered digital traces that document travel experiences, but also key elements in shaping tourists' perceptions, levels of satisfaction, and the memory construction of memorable experiences. A number of studies have recently been conducted to explore or understand memorable tour experiences, as they are very important indicators of tourist behavioural intentions. The purpose of the current study is therefore to explore the underlying dimensions of memorable tour experiences. Accordingly, data was collected through online reviews (731) posted about memorable tour experiences on Google Maps platform between 1 January 2022 and 10 February 2025. The data was analysed using a phenomenological approach and content analysis technique. In the results of the current study, a theoretical model of memorable tour experiences (MTEs) was developed with eight key components: shared experiences, knowledge, accommodation, professional guide, tour staff, hedonism, novelty, and local culture. The findings of the research contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of MTEs and augment the corpus of literature on tour experiences by incorporating MTEs through online reviews. The results of this study are discussed in terms of their practical and managerial implications, and recommendations for future research are proposed.

Sosyal medya ve çevrimiçi toplulukların ortaya çıkışı, turistler arasında etkileşimi, yorumları ve değerlendirmelerin yayılmasını kolaylaştırmıştır. Gezinler tarafından kullanılan bir platform olan Google Haritalar, seyahat deneyimlerinin, tatil hatıralarının ve şikâyetlerin belgelendiği bir mecraaya dönüşmüştür. Bu bağlamda, Google Haritalar'da yer alan kullanıcı yorumları, yalnızca seyahat deneyimlerini belgeleyen dijital izler değil, aynı zamanda turistlerin algıları, tatmin düzeyleri ve unutulmaz deneyimlere dair belleklerinin yapılandırılmasında belirleyici unsurlar olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Turistlerin davranışsal niyetlerinin çok önemli bir göstergesi olan unutulmaz tur deneyimlerini keşfetmek veya anlamak için son zamanlarda bir dizi çalışma yapılmıştır. Bu nedenle mevcut çalışmanın amacı, unutulmaz tur deneyimlerinin altında yatan boyutları keşfetmektir. Bu doğrultuda veriler, 1 Ocak 2022 ve 10 Şubat 2025 tarihleri arasında Google Haritalar platformunda unutulmaz tur deneyimleri hakkında yayınlanan çevrimiçi yorumlar (731) aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Veriler fenomenolojik bir yaklaşım ve içerik analizi tekniği kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Mevcut çalışmanın sonuçlarında, sekiz temel bileşenden oluşan unutulmaz tur deneyimlerinin teorik bir modeli geliştirilmiştir: paylaşılan deneyimler, bilgi, konaklama, profesyonel rehber, tur personeli, hedonizm, yenilik ve yerel kültür. Araştırmanın bulguları, unutulmaz tur deneyimlerinin daha kapsamlı bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmakta ve çevrimiçi yorumlar aracılığıyla unutulmaz tur deneyimlerini dâhil ederek tur deneyimleri üzerine literatürü zenginleştirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, pratik ve yönetsel çıkarımları açısından tartışılmakta ve gelecekteki araştırmalar için öneriler sunulmaktadır.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is predicated on the creation of experiences, which are considered to be the fundamental aspect of travel. These experiences are frequently regarded as extraordinary, in that they diverge from the daily experiences of the individual (Cohen, 1979, p. 181). The correlation between memory and experience is a well-established concept that can be traced back to the foundational works in the field of environmental psychology (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1468). The link between memory and experience highlights the dynamic and holistic nature of the tourism experience (Kastenholz et al., 2018, p. 192). The recollections of tourists from their travels, and the manner in which these memories are stored, are of significant importance to their future travel behaviours and subjective well-being. In the

highly competitive realm of the tourism sector, the ability to offer experiences that leave a lasting impression on tourists is a crucial factor in ensuring survival (Zare, 2019, p. 316). In the contemporary tourism industry, characterised by intensified competition among destinations, the pursuit of memorable tourism experiences has assumed a heightened significance. In order to maintain their competitive edge within the contemporary global tourism market, destination managers are required to provide visitors with experiences that are both memorable and distinctive (Kim & Ritchie, 2014, p. 1). The most significant outcome for tourists following a tour is the memory of their experience. This is of particular importance when it comes to the decision of whether to return (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017, p. 1084). The impact of memory on travel choices has been demonstrated to be a more significant factor than even the most persuasive advertising campaign (Marschall, 2012, p. 323).

A review of the extant literature pertaining to travel experience reveals a substantial corpus of studies employing qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Despite the extensive research conducted on travel experience, there is a notable paucity of studies exploring memorable tour experience (Güzel, 2014; Kul et al., 2024; Park et al., 2006). One of these studies was conducted by Kul et al. (2024) using quantitative research methods. The authors sought to explore the values perceived by tourists during cultural tours and to examine the moderating role of tour guide competence in the link among the perceived value, behavioural intentions of visitors, and satisfaction. The researchers developed a tool to gather data. It was found that the quality of cultural tour experiences affects satisfaction, and the role of the tour guide is also important in this regard.

Despite the abundance of literature focusing on travel experiences in tourism, a paucity of studies has been identified in the field of memorable tour experiences. Further studies are required to have a more comprehensive interpretation of memorable tour experiences (MTEs). The present research was developed to examine the fundamental dimensions of MTEs through the use of a netnography technique, which provides rich data. The principal aim of the present study is to determine the elements that comprise a MTE. This study makes a significant contribution to the extant literature on tour experiences by investigating in depth the aspects of memorable tour experiences and by presenting the management and operational consequences for travel agencies, tour operators and destination management organisations in developing strategies for tour experience planning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Memorable Tourism Experience

In the field of memory research, scholars have identified numerous factors that contribute to the memorability of an event. These factors encompass affective feelings, cognitive evaluations, and the presence of novel events (Kim et al., 2012, p. 13). The human mind has an innate ability to process stimuli that are well-known and significant, doing so at a more profound level and with greater rapidity. It has been demonstrated that events that are unfamiliar, untypical or different are more easily remembered than those which are typical (Kim et al., 2012, p. 14).

The tourist experience is defined as a past personal event related to travelling that is able to be stored in the long-term memory (Larsen, 2007, p. 15). Within the domain of tourism marketing, it is imperative to analyse the dimensions of the tourism experience in order to ascertain how to enhance it, or indeed create a positive one (Hefny, 2021, p. 33). Destination management and service providers can facilitate the creation of effective tourism programmes by cultivating an understanding of visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds. This approach is conducive to the creation of memorable and fulfilling experiences, which in turn can lead to increased repeat visits and recommendations (Zare, 2019, p. 317). Memorable tourism experiences are those which are favourable and which are remembered and recalled by the individual once the activity has been completed (Kim, 2018, p. 857). Memorable tourism experiences can improve destination perception and personal attachment to a place (Kim et al., 2024, p. 315). It is therefore vital that the aspects of the tourist experience are assessed and managed very carefully, given their pivotal role in fostering tourist loyalty towards destinations (Hefny, 2021, p. 34). The provision of memorable tourism experiences to tourists is a key strategy for tourism destinations to maintain competitiveness in the tourism market. Due to the distinctive features and significance of these experiences, the transformation of tourism experiences into memorable ones represents the most challenging task for destinations (Li & Jiang, 2023, p. 4). In conclusion, the effective management and enhancement of the aspects of the tourist experience is essential in fostering tourist loyalty, the improvement of destination perception, and the maintenance of competitiveness in the ever-evolving tourism market.

2.2. Memorable Travel Experience

During periods of vacation, individuals typically relinquish their usual routines and become highly receptive to their surroundings. Tourists, in particular, frequently seek out novel and stimulating experiences while travelling (Zatori et al., 2018, p. 112). In the contemporary context, travellers have come to expect unique, gratifying and diverse experiences on their trips (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015, p. 292). They seek a variety of experiences that are

considered genuine, enriching, purposeful and inspiring (Hosany et al., 2022, p. 1467). It is widely accepted that a greater degree of participation results in a more memorable and rewarding experience for the consumer (Zatori et al., 2018, p. 112). While all travel memories may be used to inform future decisions, some are recalled more positively and thus carry more significance for future applications (Zare, 2019, p. 317), because travellers decide to visit a place because of positive travel experiences (Kim & Chen, 2019, p. 638).

Uncovering the components of memorable travel experiences has been the focus of a growing number of researchers. Tung and Ritchie (2011) utilised an in-depth interview to unearth the fundamental elements of memorable travel experiences, which they defined as comprising four dimensions: affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection. Kim et al. (2012) developed a measurement scale to understand and manage memorable experiences. Hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaning, knowledge, involvement and novelty are the domains of the scale. Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015) developed a reliable and valid instrument for measuring memorable travel experiences. This instrument comprises 34 items across ten experiential dimensions. Kim et al. (2019) examined the complex meaning of memorable travel experiences, identifying five thematic views: social interaction, destination attractiveness, excitement, novelty and learning. Kim and Chen (2021) aimed to ascertain whether there were variations in the ways in which individuals evoke memorable travel experiences. The findings of the study demonstrated that individuals retrieving the recollections using the recall method exhibited greater levels of trip satisfaction than individuals retrieving their trip recollections based on their beliefs. Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) conducted a study to investigate memorable tourism experiences and behavioural intentions. The results show that hedonism, local culture, involvement, and knowledge significantly impact behavioural intentions. This suggests that memorable travel experiences are influenced by emotional, cultural, cognitive and social factors.

2.3. Tour Experience

It is important to note that tours play an integral role in shaping the tourist experience by guiding tourists to explore specific attractions within a destination. The quality of these tours is fundamental in determining whether the experience is positive or negative (Ghanem & Shaaban, 2022, p. 210). Tours offer new information, relaxation, insight into other people's lifestyles and enjoyment, and well-planned experiences create fond memories that can increase satisfaction (Teichert et al., 2021, p. 2).

A review of the extant literature on tour experience revealed studies on tour guide performance, tour satisfaction, tour services and bus tour experience. Bowie and Chang (2005) sought to identify the variables that influenced customer satisfaction during a guided package tour service encounter. The principal objective of the study was on the quality of service provided by suppliers, and the importance of the tour leader with specific attention directed towards the itinerary and auxiliary support. The findings indicated that the tour leader's role was pivotal to the success of the tour product. In their study, Huang et al. (2010) examined the effectiveness of tour guides and their association with tourist satisfaction in the scope of package tours. Their findings indicated that tour guide performance exerts a significant direct effect on the satisfaction of tourists. Güzel (2014) conducted a study to explore the aspects of tour experience. The results indicated that tourists' emotional arousal positively affects post-experience behaviour, thus demonstrating it to be a main determinant of satisfaction and intentions related with post-experience. Atsız and Seyitoğlu (2023) investigated travellers' experiences of a day-long local guided shopping tours and identified primary elements of a day-long local guided shopping tour experiences: hedonic experience, guide, shopping companion, local interaction, learning, memorable experience and shop characteristics.

It is evident that tour guides are very important for visitor satisfaction, and the quality of the tour guide's performance affects both direct and indirect satisfaction. Emotional involvement in the tour has a positive effect on future behaviour and intentions, and good organisation of the tour, the quality of service and the attractions visited are all important for a memorable and satisfying tour experience.

3. Methodology

A phenomenological approach was employed to investigate the dimensions of memorable tour experiences using a netnography method. Phenomenology, as a methodological approach, aims to gain a profound understanding of direct experiences based on conscious actions (Ziakas & Boukas, 2013, p. 97). In particular, content analysis represents one of the most frequently employed data analysis techniques in the field of netnography (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019, p. 51). Netnography, also referred to as online ethnography, enables researchers to obtain data in a more expedient and straightforward manner, circumventing direct contact with people (Vo Thanh & Kirova, 2018, p. 33).

3.1. Sample Group

The two leading travel agencies in the South-eastern Anatolia Region, which are featured on an online platform where users are able to post reviews, were selected as the focus of this research. A purposive sampling method was employed, with KT and MT travel agencies chosen for their high ratings and extensive reviews.

3.2. Data Gathering Method

For the objective of this study, user-generated content based on reviews by tourists on Google Maps platform was utilised for the purpose of data analysis. Google Maps platform was chosen for data collection, as online communities represent an optimal setting for netnographic research due to the abundance and accessibility of data they offer, particularly in light of the rapid expansion of the internet (Belz & Baumbach, 2010, p. 305). Additionally, Google Maps website satisfies five criteria for online communities, as outlined by Kozinet (2002, p. 63), which are useful for identifying suitable online communities in netnography research. These are: (1) a more focused group; (2) a greater number of posts; (3) a greater number of posters; (4) a more detailed data set; and (5) a greater number of interactions. Google Maps is a digital platform that enables all users to submit reviews and assign ratings to various services on a scale of 1 to 5. These publicly accessible reviews and ratings offer insights into user experiences (Akkaya et al., 2024, p. 381). The utilisation of reviews in this study is not regarded as human-related studies, given that Google Maps is accessible to the general public. Consequently, in this particular instance, ethical approval and consent from subjects is not a prerequisite for the study (Kozinets, 2010). Google Maps reviews have been conducted and employed as a means of assessing consumer behaviour, specifically in relation to the evaluation of products and services, and in the current digital age, characterised by the growth of the internet, e-commerce and online platforms, ratings and reviews have become more accessible, familiar and important than ever before (Laghbi & Al Dhoayan, 2024, p. 2). Most of the tourists utilise social media platforms such as Google Maps and TripAdvisor as a means of disseminating information and experiences acquired during the travel process (Aksoy & Kurt, 2024, p. 80). Tourists who have engaged with a tourism product or service are able to share their reviews related with their experience on social media at any point in time. Consequently, tourists may discuss their memorable travel experiences long after the fact, should they retain a recollection of their travels (Kodaş & Aksoy, 2022, p. 384).

The data were collected from Turkish-language reviews posted on Google Maps (n = 731), and the dates of the reviews were between January 2022 and February 2025. The Turkish reviews were translated into English by three professional translators proficient in both languages. 731 reviews were available at the end of this process.

3.3. Analysis of the Data

Netnography represents a significant methodology to analyse tourist experiences, because it enables the examination of reviews and feedback from individuals who have completed their travel experiences and shared their insights online. This approach enables the acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of tourist experiences (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017, p. 320). In order to ensure that online communications occurred in an uninhibited and natural manner, passive netnography was employed to analyse the data. This approach entailed the observation of discussions in a covert manner, without engaging in interactions with the users (Tomej et al., 2023, p. 8).

In netnography, data can be categorised in a number of ways. Firstly, archival data can be considered, as well as co-created data and fieldnote data. Any existing data that has been collected by a researcher without the necessity of direct engagement in data collection or elicitation is defined as archival data. This data serves a historical record and cultural baseline (Kozinets, 2015, p. 10). Therefore, archival data were selected to analyse online reviews in this study.

Table 1. Open coding

Reviews	Open coding (line-by-line coding)
<i>"I had the chance to see very marvellous landscapes on the eastern black sea tour with KT Batman. Everything was very nice 😊 I would like to thank our bus drivers, tour attendant Engin and our professional guide Ali Rıza. Our guide was wonderful. He keeps the places visited alive at the same time with his narration. Tour staff made our trip unforgettable with their sincere and warm approach. In addition, the hotels we stayed in were very nice and the hotel food was delicious."</i>	Marvellous landscapes, our guide was wonderful, tour staff made our trip unforgettable, the hotels we stayed in were very nice, the hotel food was delicious

The reviews were collated and transferred to a Microsoft Word document for analysis. The data were subjected to three stages of analysis. Initially, the data were scanned to gain an in-depth understanding of them. In the second stage, the reviews were read and categories of MTEs were identified. Finally, the coding was completed. The coding process was

conducted in three phases: open coding, entailing a thorough analysis of all phrases and words (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 119) axial coding, involving the process of associating themes with their sub- themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 123); and selective coding, including the process of integration and refinement of themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 119).

Table 2. *Example of coding processing practice*

Open coding (line-by-line coding)	Subthemes (axial coding)	Main themes (selective coding)
Our tour guide was very energetic; We participated in many fun activities; invaluable learning experience; everything was perfect, very enjoyable and fun; We became a family; the tour was great!; It was something I had not experienced before; We made new friends; Our guide was very sincere and very, very friendly; We learnt a lot; The guide was very knowledgeable and professional; Tour staff made our trip unforgettable; The driver and tour staff deserve the most thanks; Hotels were very good; It was an unforgettable holiday; energetic tour guide.	Professional guide, bus driver, tour attendant, hotel	Professional guide, tour staff and accommodation as components of MTEs.

Each transcript of the reviews was subjected to a comprehensive analysis in order to extract specific information. The researcher identified 218 codes that summarised the data. The process of data analysis resulted in the axial coding of the data, which in turn permitted the reduction of the database to a limited set of themes. The process of axial coding enabled the components of MTEs to be defined. Subsequently, selective coding was undertaken, which entailed the integration of categories derived from the open and axial coding processes.

4. Results

4.1. Memorable tour experience components

Eight sub-themes emerged from the netnography of tourists' memorable tour experiences, as follows: (1) shared experiences, (2) knowledge, (3) accommodation, (4) professional guide, (5) tour staff, (6) hedonism, (7) novelty, and (8) local culture. Furthermore, to provide additional support for the above sub-themes, extracts from the data were also included (Figure 1).

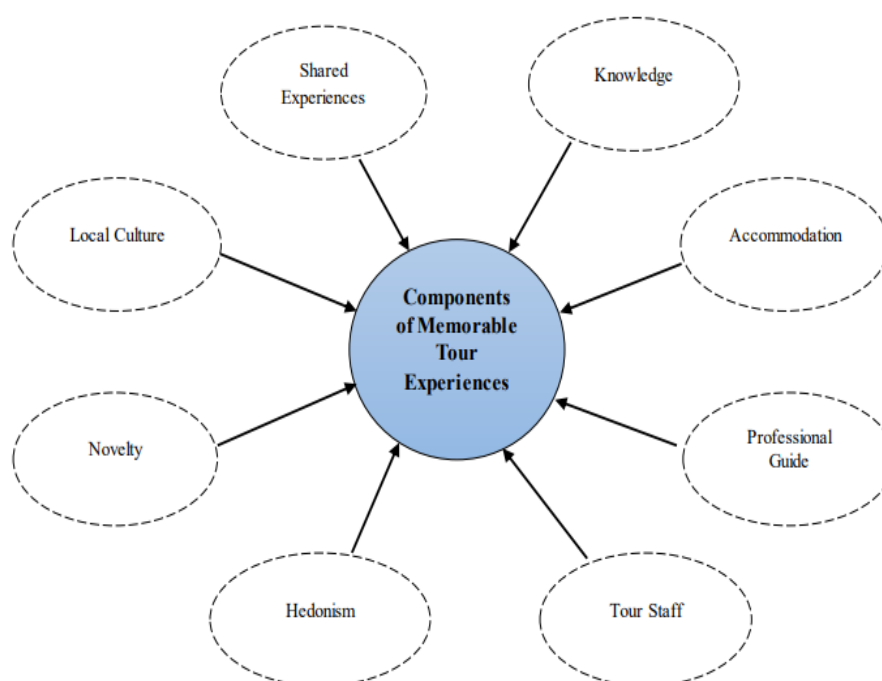


Figure 1. *The theoretical framework of tourists' memorable tour experiences*

- *Shared experiences*

Sharing experiences and the feeling of a family atmosphere were emphasised in several reviews. Codes extracted from these reviews such as “we became a family”, “we participated in many fun activities”, “friendly approach and sincerity”, “made us feel like family” and “thanks for the warm family atmosphere” underline the importance of shared experiences. This is evidenced by the comments below:

“I have participated in a lot of tours, I have met lots of guides, but I have never had so much fun on a tour as I had fun with my Tevkeli guide. Thanks for the sincere and warm family atmosphere. I hope we will come across again in the next tour because it made us experience the most beautiful and fun.”

“Great tour...I participated in the Black Sea tour and I would like to thank the whole tour team, especially our Savaş guide and Bayram, the bus driver. Our guide Savaş made us feel like family with his beautiful narration, smiling face and sincerity. We went to different destinations other than the destinations included in the tour, so I would like to thank Mr Savaş again.”

Tourists frequently travel in groups with the intention of spending time with family, friends, or significant others. This allows for the co-creation of shared experiences and memories, as well as the strengthening of familial or social ties (Liao et al., 2022, p. 1). The experiences of tourists shared with travelling groups and other tourists are often regarded as fond memories by those who have participated in the activity (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 686). The extent to which travellers and employees share empathy and proximity influences the experience that is delivered to the tourist (Coelho et al., 2018, p. 161). The pleasure and enthusiasm of a trip is often heightened if it is undertaken with friends or as part of a group, rather than on your own (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 686). Morgan (2006) posited that tourists’ positive memories were more likely to result from a plethora of options, moments of astonishment, shared experiences, local distinctiveness, and positive values (p. 312).

- *Knowledge*

The results show that knowledge is an important component of MTEs. Interpretive codes such as “broadened our horizons”, “opportunity to learn traditions and customs”, “we travelled and learnt”, “we learnt everything”, “the guide developed our cultural intelligence”, and “I learnt new things” are indicative of the significance of knowledge. The following reviews highlight the tourists’ search for knowledge:

“The tour was great! I had a lot of fun and learnt new things. I plan to join their tours to other cities.”

“On a weekday, we travelled, learned and rested within a tour programme with the daily Diyarbakır culture tour. I experienced a pleasant tour. Thanks to our guide Mr Azat.”

“The tour was full of fun and the guide was competent, we both travelled, had fun and learned, we were very satisfied. I am glad I chose this travel agency.”

Knowledge is a cognitive aspect of traveller which involves learning and educating (Cutler & Carmichael, 2010, p. 6). The knowledge gained from travel and leisure activities in destinations can be regarded as a component of overall travelling experience (Falk et al., 2012, p. 912). In recent times, tourism and leisure settings have emerged as a significant conduit through which individuals can gain insight, foster innovation and shape new perspectives for themselves and their communities (Moscardo, 1998, p. 4).

- *Accommodation*

A number of reviews indicate that accommodation accounts for a significant proportion of tourists’ MTE. An example of this can be seen in the codes taken out of the reviews, including “delicious food”, “a luxurious hotel”, “a wonderful hotel”, “kind hotel staff”, “a clean hotel” and “a nice hotel”. The importance of accommodation as a component of MTEs is underscored by the following reviews:

“The energy of the tour was very high and I enjoyed it very much. The hotel we stayed in was very clean and the food we ate at the hotel was very tasty. In addition, the hotel staff were extremely kind. According to this, it was one of the best hotels I have ever stayed in. If I go on tour again, KT agency will definitely be my only choice.”

“The tour staff took care of us perfectly from the beginning to the end of the tour. I stayed in such a luxurious hotel for the first time. The breakfast we had at the hotel was delicious.”

Hotels are regarded as vital amenities for tourists, offering a haven of comfort and security after a day spent navigating unfamiliar surroundings (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016, p. 146). A positive experience with the components of a tourist destination, such as accommodation, food and transportation, is a significant predictor of overall satisfaction with the trip (Sangpikul, 2018, p. 111). Tourists have a strong tendency to retain vivid memories of their holidays, and they often express a desire to return. Sharing opinions via social media constitute the most significant factors affecting accommodation preferences (Bose & Biju, 2020, p. 13032).

- *Professional guide*

A majority of reviews show that professional guide plays a crucial role in MTEs. Most of the visitors attended to a tour mentioned issues such as “very friendly”, “very intimate”, “knowledgeable and humorous” and “constructive and moderate nature” in the reviews they posted. This is illustrated by the following reviews:

“In September, we participated in the Antalya Olympos tour. Our guide, Mr Tevkeli, was very very friendly. He took care of us very well. He had fun with us and laughed with us. We thank him very much. The journey is very tiring because it is a bit long, but it is really worth it. It will be an experience worth all your tiredness.”

“Everything went much better than I expected. Our tour was great. Our guides Mr Ramazan and Mrs Nurcan were very intimate. They were so sincere that I would like to go on my next tour with them. The quality of the tour increased a lot with our knowledgeable and humorous guides. I learnt a lot of new information at the end of the tour.”

Tourist guides represent a crucial aspect of the tourist experience. As frontline personnel, they frequently serve as the initial encounter with tourists, and their performance can significantly influence the overall perception of the trip (Kapa et al., 2022, p. 1350). The quality of tourists' experience may be influenced by the services provided by tourist guides. Consequently, the provision of qualitative services by a tourist guide is essential to ensure tourist satisfaction (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014, p. 33). The performance of a tour guide has been demonstrated to have a profound impact on the experience of visitors (Yu et al., 2004, p. 2). A significant proportion of tourists' experiences are shaped by the manner in which guides elucidate the intrinsic value of tourism assets in specific destination areas. This is because, the act of explanation facilitates a more profound comprehension among tourists of the authentic essence of the product under interpretation (Chilembwe & Mweiwa, 2014, p. 33). Therefore, a guide can be an invaluable resource for any tourist seeking to gain a deeper understanding of a foreign destination and to enhance the quality of their travel experience (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015, p. 304).

- *Tour staff*

A substantial body of reviews have demonstrated that the tour attendants and drivers play a pivotal role in shaping travellers' MTEs. The majority of reviews indicated that the tour attendants and drivers were welcoming, entertaining and helpful. Codes such as “very friendly”, “helpful staff”, “fun tour staff”, “very careful” and “very kind and sincere” are indicative of the significance of tour staff when it comes to tourists' MTEs. This is demonstrated by the given reviews:

“The Aegean tour we participated with KT was very enjoyable. Our driver Süleyman and the tour attendant Erdal were very kind and sincere. It was a very nice, fun and reliable trip.”

“An excellent tour agency, carried out the programme without any disruption. It was a decent and pleasant tour. I would like to thank Mr Mehmet the guide, Mr Erdal the tour manager, Mr Serhat the driver. Our driver Mr Serhat was very careful and the tour attendant Mr Erdal was very friendly.”

The quality of the interaction between staff and passengers is associated with MTEs, based primarily on the information gathered from passengers' observations. In some instances, either the driver or the tour guide served as an intermediary in facilitating communication between customers (Carreira et al., 2013, p. 238). It is evident that tourist guides and tour agency attendants can play a pivotal role in creating memorable experiences for leisure travellers. For those who prefer organised tours, guided by knowledgeable guides and other tour staff, the input of such professionals can be invaluable (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015, p. 304). Additionally, the quality of service provided by bus drivers and their social abilities are considered to be of considerable importance to tourists' experiences, given that they represent the human interface with whom passengers interact directly during their journey (Carreira et al., 2013, p. 238).

- *Hedonism*

Hedonism was emphasised in several of the reviews, and the codes such as “a lot of fun”, “a very pleasant time”, “unforgettable experience”, “this enjoyable tour”, “an unforgettable holiday”, “trip was really great”, “I enjoyed a

lot” and “a very exciting tour”, underline the importance of hedonism. This is evidenced by the following reviews:

“We participated in the Gaziantep tour organised by MT travel agency. We had a lot of fun and had a very pleasant time.”

“Although it was my first tour experience, it was a tour that I enjoyed a lot and we had a lot of fun. They were really excellent as a team. It was an unforgettable experience for me.”

The hedonic component of tourism activities has been a long-standing focus of research in the field. When engaging with tourism products and experiences, individuals tend to prioritise enjoyment and pleasure, which differentiates tourism from other activities and products (Kim, 2014, p. 36). Otto and Ritchie (1996) emphasised that tourism products and services are a form of consumption that is driven by hedonic motives and the pursuit of positive emotions and experiences, which are closely linked to feelings of happiness (p. 167).

- **Novelty**

The results of the review process indicate that the element of novelty plays a significant role in tourists’ MTEs. This is evidenced by the codes that emerged from the reviews, including “my first tour experience”, “a great memory for my first experience”, “new places”, “new people”, “for the first time” and “my first paragliding experience”. The importance of novelty is further highlighted by the following reviews:

“I would like to express my love to our friendly guide Helin. For the first time I joined the tour of a woman guide and I was very pleased.”

“Normally I would never think of travelling with a tour, but I wanted to experience my first tour experience and I’m glad I did. It was a very very good, magnificent, legendary tour. I would like to thank especially our tour guide Mr Tevkele and our valuable captain Mr Sinan for their efforts. I would also like to thank the nice people we met on the tour.”

The concept of novelty is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing various dimensions that have been previously identified in the literature. These include the experience of change from routine, escape, thrill, adventure, surprise, and the alleviation of boredom (Lee & Crompton, 1992, p. 738). Novelty can be defined as the experience of something new or unique, and it is associated with the desire to enjoy a distinctive, inaugural experience (Tugade et al., 2023, p. 11). The desire for novelty has become a significant factor motivating individuals to engage in travel (Kim, 2014, p. 36). The significance of the novelty factor for MTEs lends further support to the assertion that novel and distinctive events are more memorable than those that are mundane (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 690).

- **Local culture**

A number of reviews demonstrate that local culture exerts a significant influence on tourists’ MTEs. This assertion is substantiated by the following excerpts from reviews, including “local culture”, “local songs”, “local people” and “local food”. The importance of local culture as a component of MTEs is emphasised in the following reviews:

“Last week, I participated in a Diyarbakır cultural tour programme organised by KT travel agency. I experienced a pleasant tour with a wonderful guide. I learned a lot about the local culture and local people. We listened to some local songs in the bus and they were very energetic. I would like to thank our guide for the detailed information he gave about the local culture.”

“2 days ago I joined a Mardin tour. It was a very fun tour and the tour staff were very interested. We have a guide who knows the local people well and knows the local culture very well. I learnt a lot of new information about history, local food and local culture. It was my first time in Mardin, the shopkeepers I shopped and the local people I had the opportunity to chat with were very friendly and hospitable.”

The recall of past experiences is high among tourists who have experienced local culture during their trip (Kim, 2010, p. 791). Morgan and Xu (2009) suggested that travellers who engage with the local culture and people are more likely to construct a distinctive and memorable travel experience (p. 230). It has been observed that tourists are more likely to be impressed by local experiences than by typical or prearranged tourist activities. These experiences may include visiting local villages, chatting with local people, and sharing local lifestyles and cultures (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 685).

5. Conclusion and implications

It is of paramount importance for travel agencies and destination management organisations to investigate and comprehend the elements that contribute to a memorable tour experience. This process offers invaluable insights to

travel agencies, destination management organisations and tourism marketers, enabling them to devise effective strategies that enhance the travel experience of tourists. Travel experiences are a prominent area of study within the field of tourism, as they constitute a fundamental aspect of the tourism experience. Despite the existence of a substantial body of research on travel experiences within the field of tourism literature, (Bose & Biju, 2020; Kim et al., 2019; Kim, 2010; Morgan & Xu, 2009; Tugade et al., 2023) the extant body of studies pertaining to memorable travel experiences of travellers in the domain of tours is, at this juncture, in its nascent stages. In view of the paucity of literature investigating the characteristics of memorable tour experiences, the principal purpose of the present study is to elucidate the unexplored dimensions of such experiences through the utilisation of netnographic analyses. The results of the research contribute to a more sophisticated comprehension of MTEs and augment the corpus of literature on tour experiences by incorporating MTEs through online reviews. Moreover, this study provides a substantial addition to the existing literature by offering new perspectives on the concept of the memorable tour experience. This is achieved through the utilisation of the netnography approach, which has not previously been employed in the examination of MTEs. Consequently, the findings of this study represent a valuable contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

The findings of this study align with those of previous research in the field illustrate that tourists' experiences of tours contribute to the memorability of their overall travel experience (Bigne et al., 2020; Chandralal et al., 2015; Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Kim, 2010; Kim et al., 2019). While previous studies have identified the links between travel and memorable experiences, this study goes further by pinpointing the specific elements that contribute to MTEs. This provides invaluable insights into how tourists engage with their tours. In summary, the present study identifies the constituent elements of MTEs. These are shared experiences, knowledge, accommodation, professional guide, tour staff, hedonism, novelty, and local culture. The components of MTEs identified in this study contribute to the existing body of literature, which has yielded similar results (Bigne et al., 2020; Chandralal et al., 2015).

From a theoretical perspective, the present study employed a netnographic approach to elucidate the constituents of memorable tour experiences. This is the inaugural attempt to comprehend MTEs through the lens of netnography. Furthermore, this study contributes to the existing literature on the dimensions of MTEs in several ways. In the study by Kim (2010), memorable travel experiences were explored using a structural equation modelling analysis. However, this study employed a netnographic technique to gain insight into the key dimensions of MTEs, and revealed notable differences in certain dimensions, such as tour staff and professional guide.

In terms of the practical implications of the research, it makes a notable enhancement to the extant body of literature regarding the function of tour experience in engendering memorable experiences. Furthermore, the study has managerial implications for travel agencies. The findings of the study indicate that data regarding tourists' perceptions of their memorable tour experiences is vital for the development of tour experiences that align with tourists' expectations and preferences. In particular, the findings of this study indicate that professional guides should possess a comprehensive understanding of the local culture. Tourists who engage with local culture during their travels exhibit a high level of recall regarding their past experiences (Kim, 2010, p. 791). In addition to this, travel agencies and professional guides should incorporate novel and distinctive activities into the itinerary, as new or different experiences are more memorable than more conventional and routine tourism experiences (Chandralal et al., 2015, p. 687). As tour experiences constitute a significant component of the tourism experience, the findings of the research emphasise the importance of the tour experiences obtained during the tour for travel agencies. The quality of the tour experience has a profound effect on the memorability of the overall tourism experience. Furthermore, the strength of this effect is amplified when the tour includes novel activities, is conducted in a comfortable manner, and the tour guide and tour staff are friendly and possess effective communication skills. The findings of the study indicate that shared experiences, knowledge, accommodation, professional guides, tour staff, hedonism, novelty, and local culture are of particular importance. The findings of this study suggest that travel agencies and tour operators should consider incorporating distinctive activities and fostering a family-like atmosphere through increased social interaction between visitors and service providers. Furthermore, it is recommended that all staff members exhibit kindness and hospitality in their interactions with customers and prioritize the delivery of high-quality service. By taking the findings of this research into account and acting in a proactive manner to address them, the travel industry can adapt to the changing needs and preferences of travellers, thereby promoting sustainable growth and development.

In terms of the limitations of the study, it should be noted that the findings cannot be generalised, given that the research was conducted utilising online reviews concerning memorable tour experiences of tourists attending a tour conducted by two leading travel agencies in the South-eastern Anatolia Region. Therefore, further research could be conducted in the context of travel agencies and tour operators providing services in other regions with a similar approach. Another limitation is the method of the study; future studies should utilise a quantitative research method

to examine MTEs. Finally, reviews posted regarding tourists' memorable tour experiences on Google Maps were investigated, so other travel websites such as Tripadvisor.com and Withlocals.com can be used to perceive MTEs, thus making valuable contributions to the existing literature.

Etik Kurul İzni / Ethics Committee Permission:

It is hereby declared that all scientific and ethical principles were observed in the preparation of this study, and that all referenced sources have been properly cited in the bibliography. Ethics Committee Approval from the institution was not required for this study.

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanmasında tüm bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu, kullanılan tüm kaynaklara atıf yapılarak kaynakçada yer verildiği beyan edilir. Bu çalışma için kurumdan Etik Kurul Onayı alınması gerekmemektedir.

Conflict of Interest/ Çıkar Çatışması:

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest with any individual, organization, or institution.

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