From Memories to Intentions: How Memorable Travel Experiences Enhance Well-being and Drive Future Travel

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Introduction

Travel is more than visiting destinations; it significantly influences individuals' emotional and psychological states, creating memorable experiences that contribute to long-term well-being. Surveys highlight travel's unique value: PMI's "Most Memorable Issues of 2023" selected travel as a top impactful experience. Expedia found that most Korean respondents travel to create "unforgettable experiences," suggesting travel as a meaningful escape from routine. Research corroborates this: memorable travel experiences (MTEs), as Tung and Ritchie (2011) observed, are integral goals for travelers. The tourism industry plays a crucial role in creating these experiences, as MTEs positively affect satisfaction and revisit intentions, which is crucial for its vitality (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Huang & Choi, 2019; Kim et al., 2012). Jefferies and Lepp (2012) add that such experiences, rich in emotional depth, can even transform individuals' lives.

Recent research on the psychological effects of MTEs reveals their significant impact on various aspects of well-being, such as mindfulness and psychological capital (Tyagi et al., 2023), and recovery experiences (Kawakubo & Oguchi, 2022). This study contributes to the literature by examining the psychological effects of MTEs on travelers. Specifically, we are interested in how recalling MTEs supports well-being through emotions, ultimately shaping future travel intentions. Previous research has shown that positive memories from travel experiences enhance current emotional states (Talarico & Rubin, 2003), reduce stress, and sustain satisfaction beyond the journey (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004; Hong et al., 2017). During the pandemic, recollecting past travel helped people mitigate stress and reinforced future travel motivation (Gursoy & Chi, 2020). Additionally, recalling positive experiences has fostered stability and diminished negative emotions (Kim et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2024).

With the growing focus on psychological well-being (PWB) in contemporary society, the long-term influence of MTEs is gaining significance (Hosany et al., 2022). This study explores how MTEs influence tourists' emotions, PWB, and future travel intentions, and examines the potential mediating effects between these relationships. The findings offer valuable insights for fostering sustainability and growth in the tourism industry by promoting long-term engagement, responsible travel behaviors, and psychological resilience.

Literature Review

Memorable Travel Experiences (MTEs)

MTEs are defined as travel memories that are positively recalled long after the event (Kim et al., 2012). Not all travel experiences become memorable; tourists selectively retain unique or novel ones (Skavronskaya et al., 2020; Stone et al., 2018). Kim et al. (2012) identify seven key dimensions of MTEs: hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge, with each aspect enriching the emotional depth of the experience (Morgan & Xu, 2013).

The significance of MTEs has been widely explored, particularly in influencing future behaviors like satisfaction and revisit intentions (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Zhao et al., 2022). Studies such as Tukamushaba et al. (2016) and Mahdzar et al. (2015) show that attractions,

services, hospitality, and activities at a destination positively impact MTEs. Psychological factors, including hedonism and meaningfulness, further enhance subjective well-being (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). Additionally, Servidio and Ruffolo (2016) highlight that recalling MTEs evokes positive and mixed emotions, with a notable association with happiness and other positive affective states.

In Korea, MTE-related research links these experiences with satisfaction, loyalty (Yoon et al., 2017), and PWB (Kim & Lee, 2023), suggesting that memorable experiences significantly influence well-being through refreshment and involvement. Given the lasting impact of MTEs on emotions and well-being, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: MTEs will have a positive effect on positive emotions.

H2: MTEs have a negative effect on negative emotions.

H3: Positive emotion have a positive effect on PWB.

H4: Negative emotions have a negative effect on PWB.

H5: PWB positively influences future travel intentions.

In addition to examining direct relationships, this study also tests for potential mediating effects within these reationships.

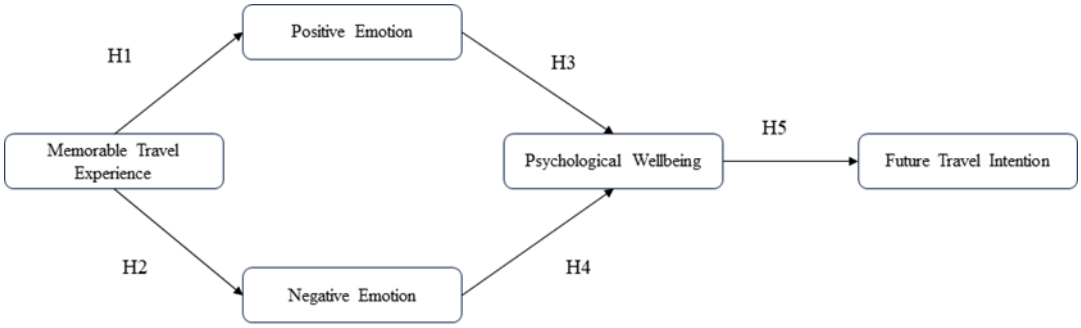

Figure 1. Proposed Model

Methodology

An online survey was conducted in Korea from November 24 to December 12, 2022, targeting a sample of 440 respondents recruited via the survey panel Macromill Embrain Co. After excluding unreliable responses, the final dataset comprised 400 adult respondents aged 20–69. These participants provided data on memorable domestic (n=100) and international (n=300) travel experiences. Data analysis employed a two-stage Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach using Smart PLS 3.0, chosen for its suitability with small, non-normal samples and its emphasis on predictive relevance over traditional fit indices (Hair et al., 2019).

Results

The measurement model met acceptable standards (Hair et al., 2019). Composite reliability values ranged from 0.795 to 0.910, indicating high internal consistency. All factor loadings ranged between 0.620 and 0.910, exceeding the threshold of 0.5, while AVE values were between 0.582

and 0.818, demonstrating sufficient convergent validity. The Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio remained below the recommended threshold of 0.9, confirming satisfactory discriminant validity.

Five hypotheses were tested regarding the relationships between MTEs, positive emotions, negative emotions, PWB, and future travel intentions. The findings confirmed significant positive paths between MTE and positive emotions (path coefficient = 0.776), position emotions and PWB (0.667), and PWB and future travel intentions (0.494), supporting Hypotheses 1, 3, and 5. Negative relationships were also observed between MTE and negative emotions (-0.341) and between negative emotions and PWB (-0.110), supporting Hypotheses 2 and 4.

Additionally, mediation effects were verified. MTE had a significant indirect impact on future travel intentions through positive emotions and PWB (indirect effect = 0.256), indicating a partial mediation. Similarly, MTE's indirect impact on future travel intentions via negative emotions and PWB was 0.018, demonstrating partial mediation. Positive emotion's indirect effect on future travel intentions via PWB was 0.330, while negative emotion's impact on future travel intentions through PWB was -0.054. These results, illustrated in Figure 2, empirically verify the structural relationships, confirming that emotions and PWB play critical mediating roles in linking memorable travel experiences to future travel intentions.

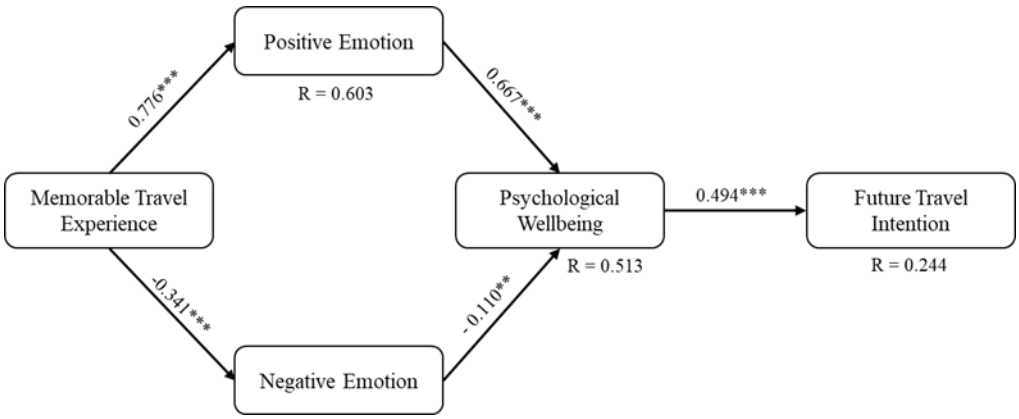

Figure 2. PLS-SEM Results

Conclusion and Discussion

This study empirically examines the structural relationships among MTEs, emotions, psychological well-being, and future travel intentions, contributing significantly to tourism and well-being research. Findings indicate that MTEs enhance positive emotions and reduce negative emotions, aligning with previous studies and offering valuable theoretical and practical implications.

Firstly, the positive link between MTEs, positive emotions, and PWB highlights the critical role of positive emotions in shaping travelers' psychological states, supporting Fredrickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (2001) and reinforcing the importance of emotions in predicting future travel behavior (Nawijn, 2010; Dolnicar et al., 2012). Additionally, the negative impact of negative emotions on PWB aligns with emotional regulation research (Larsen & Prizmic, 2004), suggesting that MTEs mitigate negative feelings, reducing adverse effects on well-being.

The significant indirect effect of negative emotions on future travel intentions through PWB indicates that managing negative travel emotions can shape future intentions.

The study also confirms a positive relationship between PWB and future travel intentions, implying that PWB is a vital predictor of long-term travel intentions, resonating with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These results empirically validate PWB as a core driver of repeat travel intentions, suggesting that well-being-centered tourism products can foster sustained customer loyalty.

This research extends existing studies by demonstrating the lasting impact of MTEs on future travel intentions through direct and mediated pathways. It addresses a theoretical gap by showing how emotions and well-being influence future behaviors. Moreover, by verifying the mediating role of positive emotions via PWB on FTI, this study applies Fredrickson's theory within tourism, showing that positive emotions foster continued engagement in travel.

The practical contributions of this study are threefold. First, it highlights the importance of emotionally enriching travel experiences, suggesting that the tourism industry can design immersive programs (e.g., Airbnb's Experiences platform which offers unique, locally-hosted activities designed to immerse travelers in authentic, hands-on experiences beyond traditional accommodations) to enhance positive emotions, ultimately boosting customer loyalty. Second, the findings underscore the need for strategies that reduce negative travel experiences, such as Ritz-Carlton's Empowerment Program, which effectively mitigates negative emotions and enhances well-being. Lastly, the study suggests a strategic emphasis on well-being in tourism product design, as programs that promote wellness, like Miraval Resorts' activities, increase well-being and revisit intentions.

Limitations include the study's Korean sample, potentially limiting cultural generalizability, and reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce cognitive biases. Future research could explore the role of MTEs in fostering social connections or self-growth, utilizing experimental and longitudinal methods to observe the enduring emotional impact of travel experiences over time. This approach could deepen understanding of the multidimensional benefits of travel on well-being, social ties, and self-development.

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