

Memorable tourism experience research: a systematic review of the literature

Tourism Recreation Research (2023) 48(3)

DOI: [10.1080/02508281.2021.1922206](https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2021.1922206)

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the issue of memorable tourism experience (MTE) has garnered increasing attention from scholars and tourism practitioners. This paper provides a systematic review of 52 articles on MTE listed on the SCOPUS and WOS databases from 2012 to 2020. Qualitative analysis of the literature identified nine main categories of topics in MTE-related articles. Results showed that the largest proportion of articles focused on how MTEs influenced tourists' perceptions and behaviours and how they shaped destination marketing. Co-occurrence analysis was performed to investigate trends in the keywords used by academics over the past five years. The geographic location of studies, research methods and theories applied in these articles were also analysed. Most articles were published in the current decade and China was the geographic setting for the highest number of articles in the review. The review concludes with the theoretical and practical implications of the study as well as the directions for future research.

KEYWORDS

Memorable tourism experience; tourist experience; memorability; systematic review; qualitative analysis

Introduction

Tourists' experiences in a destination have consistently been shown to shape their memories of the visit (Wang et al., 2020). The concept of overall tourist experience is the most important consideration for tourists after taking a trip (Braun-LaTour et al., 2006). Furthermore, the single most important source of information for individuals who are deciding whether or not to revisit a destination is the visitors' own memories of their travel experiences (Marschall, 2012). Therefore, providing tourists with positive and memorable experiences becomes essential on the competitive tourism market. According to Otto and Ritchie (1996), in the tourism and hospitality industry, quality of experience is a better indicator of customer satisfaction than quality of service. Therefore, the best way for tourism businesses to stay alive and succeed is to facilitate experiences that stand out in the minds of visitors and thereby encourage them to revisit the destination (Kim, 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Pearce & Packer, 2013). What visitors remember about their travel and how to recall these memories are significant factors in making future trip decisions (Barnes et al., 2016; Filep, 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011; Wirtz et al., 2003). In recent years, many tourism researchers have been studying how tourists recall positive experiences and memories. Kim et al. (2012, p.12) provides an initial definition of MTEs as 'tourism experiences positively recalled and

remembered after the event occurred'. In addition, Zhang et al. (2018) state that "tourism experiences and memorable tourism experiences are two abstractions that are interrelated, yet different in terms of connotation and extension". Put simply, not all tourism experience is unforgettable; only experiences which are selectively recalled by the visitor when describing a special travel experience should be interpreted as MTEs (Kim et al., 2012). MTE has gained increasing attention from academics and become the focus of a growing field of research: extant MTE research ranges from case studies to conceptual papers, from methodology research to behavioural model studies.

Despite the growing number of studies on MTE, a review of the literature on MTEs has yet to be published in high-ranking tourism and hospitality journals. Also, despite the proliferation of pertinent literature, the research in this field is still in its infancy. For instance, Sthapit and Coudounaris (2018) emphasised the critical approach towards the MTEs scale because other dimensions might have an impact in other contexts. A similar observation was noted by Seyfi, Hall, and Rasoolimanesh (2020) who called for more critical contextualisation of MTEs dimensions. They provide a theoretical model of memorable cultural tourism experiences (MCTEs) aiming to investigate the nature of cultural tourism experiences and the process by which they are formed (Seyfi, Hall, and Fagnoni, 2019). A similar observation on the lack of any critical and systematic review of the

MTE-related literature has also been noted by other researchers (Chen et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020).

In a rapidly evolving tourism industry that requires a fast market vision, there is a need for an up-to-date review of the existing literature on MTEs to provide a solid foundation and offer directions for future research; in other words, to fill the gap and to "identify what has already been done, capture key lessons learned from the past, and identify directions for the future" (Kilubi, 2016, p. 3). This paper thus provides a systematic assessment of the literature on MTE by examining research trends, main topics of research, geographic locations studied, theories, methodologies and directions for future research. This review applies qualitative analysis, frequency analysis and co-occurrence analysis to explore the pertinent literature.

The structure of the article is as follows: firstly, MTE research is reviewed to summarise the main categories of topics covered in the literature, the journals publishing articles on MTE, institutional collaboration, the geographic location of MTE studies, the nature of data (i.e. quantitative, qualitative and mixed, methodological procedures and statistical techniques), as well as authorship trends; secondly, this review concludes with a summary of past studies on MTE and recommendations for future research. This, in turn, provides opportunities, directions and avenues for the coming years of research into this increasingly important subfield of tourism studies.

Literature review

Memorable tourism experience

Tourist experience is a complex amalgamation of distinctly subjective components that shape tourists' emotions and attitudes towards their visit (Chen et al., 2020). Some factors depend on the tourist's own needs, desires and motivations (Wang et al., 2020), whereas other factors depend on destination-related aspects such as the setting, accommodation, local attractions and atmosphere (Page et al., 2006). In other words, tourist experience is associated with satisfaction and is a subjective condition felt by participants (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Schmitt (1999) states that consumers are in search of experiences that 'dazzle their senses', 'engage them personally', 'touch their hearts' and 'stimulate their minds. In other words, people are increasingly looking for original, authentic experiences instead of impersonal or fabricated ones. A memorable tourism experience (MTE) is defined as 'a tourism experience that is positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred' (Kim et al., 2012). MTEs

are more significant because of their potential to affect tourists' future travel decisions (Kerstetter & Cho, 2004; Kim et al., 2010). When making choices to plan future trips, travellers rely heavily on past experiences and memories (Lehto et al., 2004; Wirtz et al., 2003). Providing memorable experiences for tourists have become perceived as being of significance for the tourism industry practitioners in recent times even more than tangible resources (Wang et al., 2020). Memorable experiences are central to successful tourism products (Chen et al., 2020), not only as a core determinant of loyalty behaviours (Zhang et al., 2018) but also as a determining factor for the competitiveness and sustainability of a destination. As Zhang et al. (2018) note, understanding and improving the recollection of these positive memories of tourists is a suitable strategy for promoting the competitive advantage on the contemporary competitive tourism marketplace. Talarico and Rubin (2003) state that remarkable, surprising, unforeseen and sensitive experiences could build extremely clear and long-lasting visions in individual minds. Tourists tend to return to destinations that they remember in a positive light (Marschall, 2012), an idea which highlights the importance of MTEs and their impact on traveller retention. However, not all tourism experiences can be considered MTEs. Rather, MTEs are experiences that are selectively recollected from tourist experiences and identified and recalled after a trip. In other words, unusual and extraordinary memories were retrieved more distinctly than regular experiences.

Kim et al. (2012) were the first scholars to develop a scale which could measure MTEs in a quantifiable manner. The scale consists of seven dimensions: hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement and novelty. MTE pioneers Tung and Ritchie (2011) had earlier proposed four key dimensions of MTEs: affection, expectations, consequentiality and recollection; in a later study, the same researchers described five qualities of MTEs: identity formation, family milestones, relationship development, nostalgia reenactment and freedom pursuits. Chandralal et al. (2015) researched MTEs in travel blog narratives and discovered seven experiential topics: local people, life and culture, personally significant experiences, shared experiences, perceived novelty, perceived serendipity, professional guides and tour operator services, and affective emotions. More recently, in their study on travel narratives of Brazilian tourists and using grounded theory, de Freitas Coelho et al. (2018) also proposed a three-dimension MTE (i.e. personal, relational, and environmental) and three stages of MTE formation (i.e. ambiance, socialisation, and emotions and reflection).

As noted earlier, over the years, several studies have attempted to investigate the dimensions of MTEs or test the originally developed framework of Kim et al. (2012) in other contexts. Nevertheless, despite this overarching attention to MTEs, the results are incongruent and the constructs proposed are often very subjective in nature and lack a structured direction (Chen & Rahman, 2017; Seyfi et al., 2020). Furthermore, the growing literature on MTEs also indicates that the extant studies are not fully capable of predicting and explaining the ME comprehensively and the constructs of an MTE could be different depending on the context. This also explains that not all experiences are memorable and the tourist experience is a very complicated, subjective construct. For instance, Seyfi et al. (2020) argue that the original framework of MTE suggested by Kim et al. (2012) and the subsequent studies on the topic do not sufficiently address the experiences of cultural tourists as a separate and a growing market segment. The authors therefore suggested a theoretical model of Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences (MCTEs). This clearly shows that there is no general agreement as to what constitutes MTEs and there is no theoretical unanimity among researchers on MTEs. The extant frameworks cannot be generalised to the entire destinations as personal, social, cultural and geographical settings are influential factors in tourist experiences.

Furthermore, the majority of studies focused on MTEs have measured the positive MTE and negative MTE dimensions have not been investigated. This is surprising given negative experiences can also generate distinct and memorable experiences (Kim et al. 2021). Thus, the MTE literature stills lacks a comprehensive study covering positive and negative dimensions related to experiences. The literature on MTE research and more particularly the framework developed such as the MTE scale by Kim et al. (2012) has been based on a limited sample which does not adequately illustrate typical tourists. Thus, the MTE scale needs to be tested in a broader range of tourism contexts and large samples in order to be comprehensively generalisable.

Methodology

The systematic review

Systematic reviews are often conducted to analyse the literature in the tourism and entertainment fields (e.g. Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020; Seyfi, Hall, and Kuhzady, 2019). Systematic reviews offer several advantages over narrative reviews in that the systematic process used to select the relevant literature is more precise

(Mays et al., 2005). In recent years, several systematic reviews have been carried out in various tourism and hospitality journals, addressing topics such as the sharing economy (Cheng, 2016; Kuhzady et al., 2020; Prayag & Ozanne, 2018), residents' attitudes to tourism (Hadinejad et al., 2019; Nunkoo et al., 2013), risk and gender (Yang et al., 2017), diversity and diversity management (Manoharan & Singal, 2017), structural equation modelling (Nunkoo et al., 2013), sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020), and risk in nature tourism and recreation (Gstaettner et al., 2018). This study, by contrast, provides a systematic review of published articles focusing on the topic of memorable tourism experience from 2012 to 2020.

Data collection

This study restricted its analysis to articles published in scholarly journals since, as Xiao and Smith (2006) pointed out, scholarly journals include significant sources of knowledge and information that have contributed to research in an area. The first step involved finding eligible articles for the review. The following databases were selected as sources: SCOPUS, WOS, Sage Journals Online, Science Direct, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis Online, and the Wiley Online library (Buhalis & Law, 2008). The search was performed in late February 2020 using the following search terms: 'memorable experience', 'unforgettable experience', 'memorable travel', 'memorable trip', 'memorable tourism', 'hedonism', 'involvement', 'novelty', 'meaningfulness', 'refreshment', 'local culture' and 'knowledge'. This was followed by a subsequent iterative search for papers, including Google Scholar, that were not otherwise identified in the original search because they may not have had an abstract or keywords. This was especially important in identifying older papers. The next step involved screening and selecting eligible articles by applying inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) The study must be a peer-reviewed publication; (2) the study must be in English; (3) the study must be related to the defined keywords; (4) no time span was applied. The exclusion criteria were as follows: (1) Any studies not meeting the inclusion criteria; (2) book chapters, proceedings, editorials and editorial material; the initial search yielded a total of 171 publications from 2012 to 2020, 96 from SCOPUS and 75 from WOS. To identify duplicated articles and eliminate any overlapping between SCOPUS and WOS (Gavel & Iselid, 2008; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016), the documents were imported to Excel, ultimately yielding a total of 52 articles.

Data analysis

Several types of analyses were conducted in this review. Qualitative analysis was conducted to identify the main focus of the research in selected articles. Frequency analysis was conducted to analyse articles by year of publication, research category, research region, and theories applied. Co-occurrence analysis (by keywords) was conducted using VOSviewer software to examine trends in keywords over the past five years, while co-authorship analysis (by countries) was conducted to examine the relative contributions made by different institutions and countries to MTE research.

Findings

Number of articles published per year

The initial analysis focused on the number of articles published per year from 2012 to 2020. Publications on MTE can be traced back over the past two decades when it became an important topic for marketing researchers. In 2012, studies on MTE started to gain academics' attention. In 2014 and 2015, the number of articles on MTE started to increase. The number remained constant in 2016. In 2017 5 articles and 2018 when 6 of the 52 articles in this review were published. A peak of 20 articles was published in 2019, a rising trend which continued in 2020, when 6 articles on MTEs were published in just the first two months of the year when the research was completed (Figure 1).

By journal

An analysis of the number of articles by journal provides insight into trends in hospitality and tourism research. Table 1 lists the number of articles on MTE published in each of the journals included in this review. Of the 52 total articles, 16% were published in the Journal of

Travel Research (JTR), followed by Anatolia (12%) and the Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality Tourism and Tourism Management Perspectives (8%).

Main research categories

Analysis of content was carried out to investigate the main topics covered in the 52 articles under review. Figure 2 shows the main topics of research by category. Some papers covered more than one category, due to the interdisciplinary nature of tourism. Therefore, three steps were followed by the researchers to classify the 52 MTE articles selected: firstly, several rounds of preliminary discussions were held to determine primary categories; secondly, the researchers read the title, abstract and keywords of each article to determine which category it fell into; and thirdly, dubious article categories were discussed by the authors until a consensus was reached. Through this process, the selected articles were ultimately divided into 9 major categories. These categories are as follows: MTEs and Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, MTEs and tourist behaviour and intention, MTEs and gastronomy tourism, MTEs and marketing, MTEs and accommodation and quality of service, MTEs and creative tourism, MTEs and cultural tourism, MTEs and rural tourism, MTEs and social media.

The results show that the topic of 'MTEs and tourist behaviour and intention' accounted for the largest percentage (30%), comprising 15 articles. Articles in this category examined the influence of MTEs on consumer behaviours during and after travel and used keywords such as 'emotions', 'perceived satisfaction', and 'behavioural outcomes of memorable tourism experiences'. The category of 'MTEs and Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale' accounted for 11 articles (22%). Articles in this category were often labelled with keywords such as 'tourism experience', 'memorable experience', and 'scale

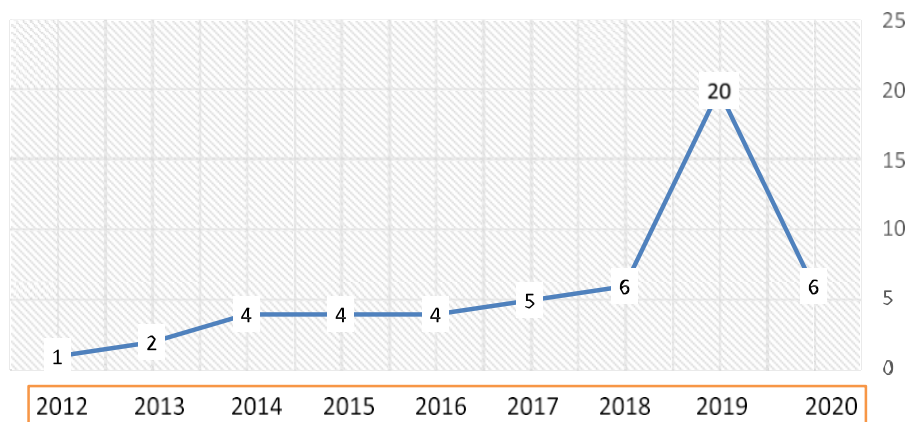


Figure 1. Number of articles published by year.

Table 1. Academic journals publishing studies on MTE from 2012–2020.

No.	Journal Name	Indexed	No. of studies	%
1	Journal of Travel Research	WOS-Scopus	8	16
2	Anatolia	WOS-Scopus	6	12
3	Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	Scopus	4	8
4	Tourism Management Perspectives	WOS- Scopus	4	8
5	Current Issues in Tourism	WOS-Scopus	3	6
6	Tourism Analysis	Scopus	2	4
7	Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	WOS-Scopus	2	4
8	Annals of Tourism Research	WOS-Scopus	2	4
9	Tourism Review	WOS-Scopus	2	4
10	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	Scopus	2	4
11	Journal of Psychology & Marketing	Scopus	1	2
12	Tourism Management	WOS-Scopus	1	2
13	Journal of Destination Marketing & Management	Scopus	1	2
14	Forests	WOS-Scopus	1	2
15	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	WOS-Scopus	1	2
16	Journal of China Tourism Research	Scopus	1	2
17	Journal of Heritage Tourism	Scopus	1	2
18	Journal of Economics, Business and Management	WOS-Scopus	1	2
19	Information Technology & Tourism	Scopus	1	2
20	Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing	Scopus	1	2
21	Tourism & Environment, Social and Management Sciences	Scopus	1	2
22	Sustainability	WOS-Scopus	1	2
23	Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change	Scopus	1	2
24	Contemporary Management Research	Scopus	1	2
25	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	Scopus	1	2
26	International Journal of Tourism Research	WOS-Scopus	2	4
	Total		52	100

Source: Authors.

development'. These articles addressed the topic of developing a valid and reliable scale to understand and measure memorable tourism experiences to improve effective management. The category of 'MTEs and marketing' accounted for 7 articles (14%) and used keywords such as 'purchase' and 'service marketing'. 6 articles (12%) focused on the topic of 'MTEs and cultural tourism', while 5 articles (10%) dealt with 'MTEs and gastronomy tourism'. The category of 'MTEs and social media' included 4 articles (8%), while the last three categories were 'MTEs and accommodation', which

included 3 articles (6%), followed by 'MTEs and creative tourism' and 'MTEs and rural tourism', which included 1 article (2%) apiece.

MTE dimensions

The growing interest in MTEs represents an ongoing attempt to heighten our knowledge of the basic 'product' that the tourism industry supplies to its travelers. Pioneers such as Cohen (1979), Mannell and Iso-

Main research categories

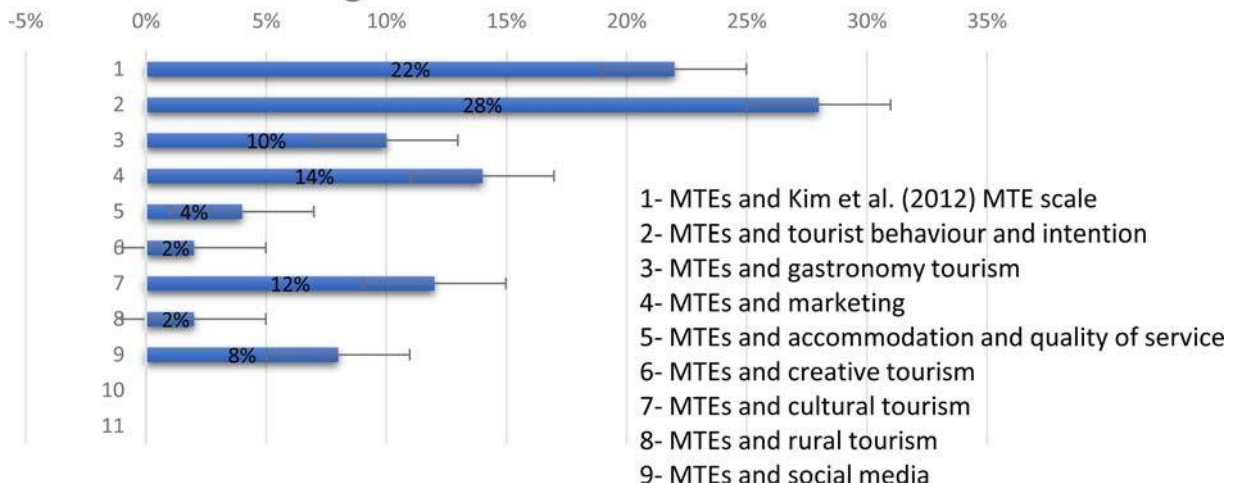


Figure 2. Articles by category.

Ahola (1987), Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) undertook early research into tourism experiences. More recent research contributions have advanced us to the point that 'satisfaction' and 'quality' alone no longer constitute sufficient descriptors of what today's travellers are looking for. To effectively glean the components of tourism experiences that have a significant effect on travellers' future decisions, the authors reviewed the research on MTEs from 2012 to 2020 and summarised the underlying MTE dimensions addressed in each study, as shown in Table 2.

From 2012 and 2014, most dimensions focused on Kim's MTE scale (refreshment, involvement, novelty, hedonism, meaningfulness, local culture, and knowledge). The findings confirm that MTE-related factors should be taken into consideration when designing and promoting tourism programmes. Authors also suggest that the MTE scale can generally be used to evaluate MTEs in different cultural contexts. For example, Kim and Ritchie (2014) developed a cross-country study (focused on the USA and Taiwan) to describe the relationship between a tourist destination's attributes and MTE's. Studies proposed a competencies-based framework for frontline employees in the hospitality industry that would expand the concept of hospitality and elevate a guest's travel experience from a simple interaction to a memorable experience. Findings from 2015 to 2017 showed that travellers reported mostly positive MTEs in their social media narratives. In addition, memorable tourism experiences are associated with affirmative emotions, such as pleasure and excitement, which highlight the effective components of those experiences. Tourists who have a better understanding of the characteristics of the destination are also more presumably to have positive memorable tourism experiences, thereby increasing their behavioural intentions to revisit. Likewise, MTEs have a direct and indirect impact on future behavioural intentions by shaping destination image and tourist satisfaction. For example, Lee (2015) confirmed that culinary attractions, cultural heritage and nostalgia impacted the MTEs of visitors. Apart from focusing on Kim's MTE scales, articles from 2015 to 2017 included dimensions such as behavioural intention, destination image, loyalty, satisfaction, word-of-mouth (WOM) intention and revisit intention. From 2018 to 2020 most studies focused on finding the antecedents and consequences of MTEs. In addition, most studies considered the dimensions of the MTE scale as being interdependent and closely related to the MTE in question. Studies also examined factors such as the environment, cultural tourism, accommodation, culinary

attraction, as well as social and personal considerations as they relate to MTEs; some of these factors were not present in the original MTE scales but, as some studies showed, they made tourists' experiences become particularly memorable. All researchers confirmed that memorable tourist experiences must be considered in the process of developing tourism programmes for any destination. Furthermore, tourism experiences may afford an opportunity to increase the distribution of local produce outside and beyond the holiday season. For example, Seyfi, Hall, and Kuhzady (2019) argued that in general, the essence of memorable tourism experiences (and, more specifically, cultural tourism experiences) lies in their ability to affect tourist behavioural intentions, such as advertising by the WOM, willingness to revisit, and increased loyalty to a destination.

Trends in MTE-related keywords

Keywords are very important because they summarise the main concepts that the author wishes to convey to the audience. Also, an analysis of keywords can provide useful insight into the topics and approaches that journals focus on. Co-occurrence analysis was conducted to analyse trends in MTE-related keywords used in the literature. The results have been presented below in Figure 3, using VOS viewer software.

The results of the analysis show the three main clusters of keywords used by academics in the five-year study period. 'Memorable tourism experience', 'tourism experience' and 'memorable experience' were some of the most common keywords, as shown in Figure 3. Table 3 provides a list of the 10 most frequently used keywords in the articles under review.

Institutional contribution

In order to determine the contributions made by institutions to MTE research from 2012 to 2020, the address information of the articles in the review was examined. Table 4 lists the universities where the authors of the articles in this review are from, including the number of articles per institution and country. Of the total of 52 articles in this literature review, Sun Yat-sen University in China had the highest number with 6 articles (12%). The University of Vaasa in Finland ranked second with 5 articles (10%), followed by Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Finland, Griffith University in Australia and the University of Tartu in Estonia, with 3 articles (6%) each.

Table 2. MTE dimensions.

Author	Date	Title	Variable/Dimension
Kim et al.	2012	Development of a Scale to measure memorable tourism experiences	hedonism, involvement, novelty, meaningfulness, refreshment, local culture, knowledge
Bharwani & Vinnie	2013	An exploratory study of competencies required to co-create memorable customer experiences in the hospitality industry	Emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, hospitality, experiential intelligence
Kim	2013	A cross-cultural comparison of memorable tourism experiences of American and Taiwanese college students	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, purpose, type of accommodation, travel costs, travel party, mode of transportation
Otoo & Amuquandoh,	2014	An investigation into the experiences of international volunteer tourists in Ghana	Involvement, hedonism and socio-cultural interaction
Kim & Ritchie	2014	Cross-cultural validation of a memorable tourism experience Scale (MTES)	MTE intentions, antecedents of behavioural intention, Kim's MTE scales
Kim & Jang	2016	Memory retrieval of cultural event experiences: examining internal and external influences	Recollection, vividness of the event memory
Kim	2014	The antecedents of memorable tourism experiences: the development of a scale to measure the destination attributes associated with memorable experiences	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, infrastructure, accessibility, local culture and history, physiography, activities and events, destination management, quality of service, hospitality, place attachment, superstructure
Chandralal et al.	2015	An application of travel blog narratives to explore memorable tourism experiences	Local people, life and culture, personally significant experiences, shared experiences, perceived novelty, perceived serendipity, professional guides and tour operator services, affective emotions
Lee	2015	Creating memorable experiences in a reuse heritage site	Culinary attraction, cultural heritage, nostalgia knowledge, personal emotions
Chandralal &Valenzuela	2015	Memorable tourism experiences: scale development	Authentic local experiences, novel experiences, self-beneficial experiences, significant travel experiences, serendipitous and surprising experiences, local hospitality, social interactions, local guides, tour operators, the fulfilment of personal and affective travel interests
Mahdzar et al.	2015	The role of destination attributes and memorable tourism experience in understanding tourist revisit intentions	Hospitality, value, activities, novelty, interaction, involvement, meaningful, revisit intention
Knobloch et al.	2017	Experience, emotion, and eudemonia: a consideration of tourist experiences and well-being	Memorable, extraordinary, special, peak
Tsai	2016	Memorable tourist experiences and place attachment when consuming local food	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, MTE → place dependence MTE → place identity MTE → behavioural intention
Kim	2016	Memorable tourism experiences: conceptual foundations and managerial implications for programme design, delivery and performance measurement	Place Identity → behavioural intention
Park & Santos	2017	Exploring the Tourist Experience: A Sequential Approach	Hedonism, refreshment, novelty, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, and adverse feelings.
Zhong et al.	2017	A model of memorable tourism experience: the effects on satisfaction, affective commitment and storytelling	Memorable Pretravel Experiences, Memorable On-site Experiences, Memorable Post travel Experiences
Zhang et al.	2018	A model of perceived image, memorable tourism experiences and revisit intention	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, satisfaction, affective commitment, storytelling
Sthapit	2018	An ethnographic examination of tourists' memorable hotel experiences	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, destination image →MTEs, country image →MTEs, MTEs → revisit intention
Coudounaris, & Sthapit	2017	Antecedents of memorable tourism experience related to behavioural intentions	Comfortable bed, the friendly attitude of hotel staff, delicious breakfast, good restaurant service
Sthapit	2018	Exploring tourists' memorable food experiences: a study of visitors to Santa's official hometown	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, behavioural intentions, adverse feelings
Chen& Rahman	2017	Cultural tourism: an analysis of engagement, cultural contact, memorable tourism experience and destination loyalty	Taste, authenticity, novelty, togetherness and social interaction, hospitality, services cape, food souvenirs
Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto	2018	Exploring tourists' memorable hospitality experiences: An Airbnb perspective	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, revisit intention, visitor engagement, cultural contact, intention to recommend.
Stone et al.	2017	Elements of memorable food, drink, and culinary tourism experiences	Attitude and social interactions with the host and location of the accommodation contributed to a positive memorable Airbnb experience.
Sthapit & Coudounaris	2018	Memorable tourism experiences: antecedents and outcomes	Food or drink consumed, location/setting, companions, the occasion, tourist elements
Kim	2018	The impact of memorable tourism experiences on loyalty behaviours: the mediating effects of destination image and satisfaction	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, subjective well-being
de Freitas Coelho et al.	2018	Tourism experiences: Core processes of memorable trips	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, destination image, satisfaction, revisit intention, WOM intention
Sthapit	2019	Memories of gastronomic experiences savoured positive emotions and savouring processes	Travel purposes, lived emotions, fulfilment of dreams and desires, degree of perceived novelty, travel companionship, interpersonal interaction, cultural attractions, cultural exchange, travel planning
			Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, local food experiences

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Author	Date	Title	Variable/Dimension
Sthapit & Björk	2019	Relative contributions of souvenirs on memorability of a trip experience and revisit intention	Uniqueness, usability, functionality
Kim & Chen	2019	The memorable travel experience and its reminiscence functions	(MTE) directive function, (MTE) self-function, (MTE) social function
Yu et al.	2019	Assessing visitors' memorable tourism experiences (MTEs) in forest recreation destination	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, revisit intention, WOM intention
Skavronskaya et al.	2020	Collecting memorable tourism experiences: how doWeChat?	Stories, picture, textual data, visual data, mediated data
Zare	2019	Cultural influences on memorable tourism experiences	Togetherness, spontaneity and flexibility, independence and control, distinctiveness
Seyfi et al.	2020	Exploring memorable cultural tourism experiences	Authenticity, engagement, cultural exchange, quality of service, culinary attraction
Sthapit et al.	2019	Extending the memorable tourism experience construct: an investigation of memories of local food experiences	Hedonic, well-being, services cape, experience co-creation, novelty experience interfacisation, lack of choice overload
Elfiondri et al.	2019	Indigenous tradition based- tourism development: foreign tourists' memorable tourism experience	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, revisit intention, intention to recommend
Wong et al.	2019	Memorable ethnic minority tourism experiences in China	scenery, ethnic interaction, ethnic entertainment, word-of-mouth intention to revisit
Dias & Dias	2019	Memorable tourism experience design: an affective destination marketing tool	Education>MTE, escape>MTE, novelty>MTE, meaning>MTE
Zare	2019	Psychological factors affecting memorable tourism experiences	Hedonism, novelty, involvement, social interaction, serendipity, meaningfulness, recollection, vividness
Wong et al.	2019	Sharing memorable tourism experiences on mobile social media and how it influences further travel decisions	Scenery, ethnic interaction, ethnic entertainment, behaviour of sharing tourism experience on mobile social media
Vada et al.	2019	The influence of tourism experience and well-being on place attachment	MTE, frequency of visits, memorable tourist experience, hedonic well-being, well-being, place attachment.
Skavronskaya et al.	2020	The psychology of novelty in memorable tourism experiences	Relationship between novelty and memorable tourism experiences
Vada et al.	2019	The role of positive psychology in tourists' behavioural intentions	Hedonic goals, eudemonic goals, memorable tourist experience, hedonic well-being, eudemonic well-being, behavioural intentions
Wang et al.	2019	The right brew? an analysis of the tourism experiences in rural Taiwan's coffee estates	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale
Sthapit et al.	2019	Tourism experiences, memorability and behavioural intentions	Kim et al. (2012) MTE scale, satisfaction, behavioural intentions, co-creation of experience
Di-Clemente et al.	2020	Tourists' involvement and memorable food-based experiences as new determinants of behavioural intentions towards typical products	Involvement, behavioural intention, memorable experience, self-expression, attraction, centrality, WOM, intention to buy
Sharma & Nayak	2019	Understanding memorable tourism experiences as the determinants of tourists' behaviour	Memorable tourism, experience, destination image, satisfaction, revisit intention, recommendation intention
Bose & Biju	2020	Accommodation preferences, memorable tourism experience and its outcomes – a comparative study on homestays and other accommodation amongst tourists	Memorable tourism experiences (MTE)
Wan et al.	2020	Finding synergy between oral and visual narratives on memorable and meaningful tourism experiences	Digital footprints, oral narrative, visual narrative
Wang et al.	2020	Impact of tourist experience on memorability and authenticity: a study of creative tourism	Escape, interactivity, learning, recognition, relaxation, memorability, authenticity
Chen et al.	2020	Make it memorable: tourism experience, fun, recommendation and revisit intentions of Chinese outbound tourists	Hedonism, novelty, meaningfulness, social interaction, emotional, recommendation intention, revisit intention, perceived risk.
Sterchele	2020	Memorable tourism experiences and their consequences: an interaction ritual (IR) theory approach	Memorable tourism experiences, trans-local appropriation

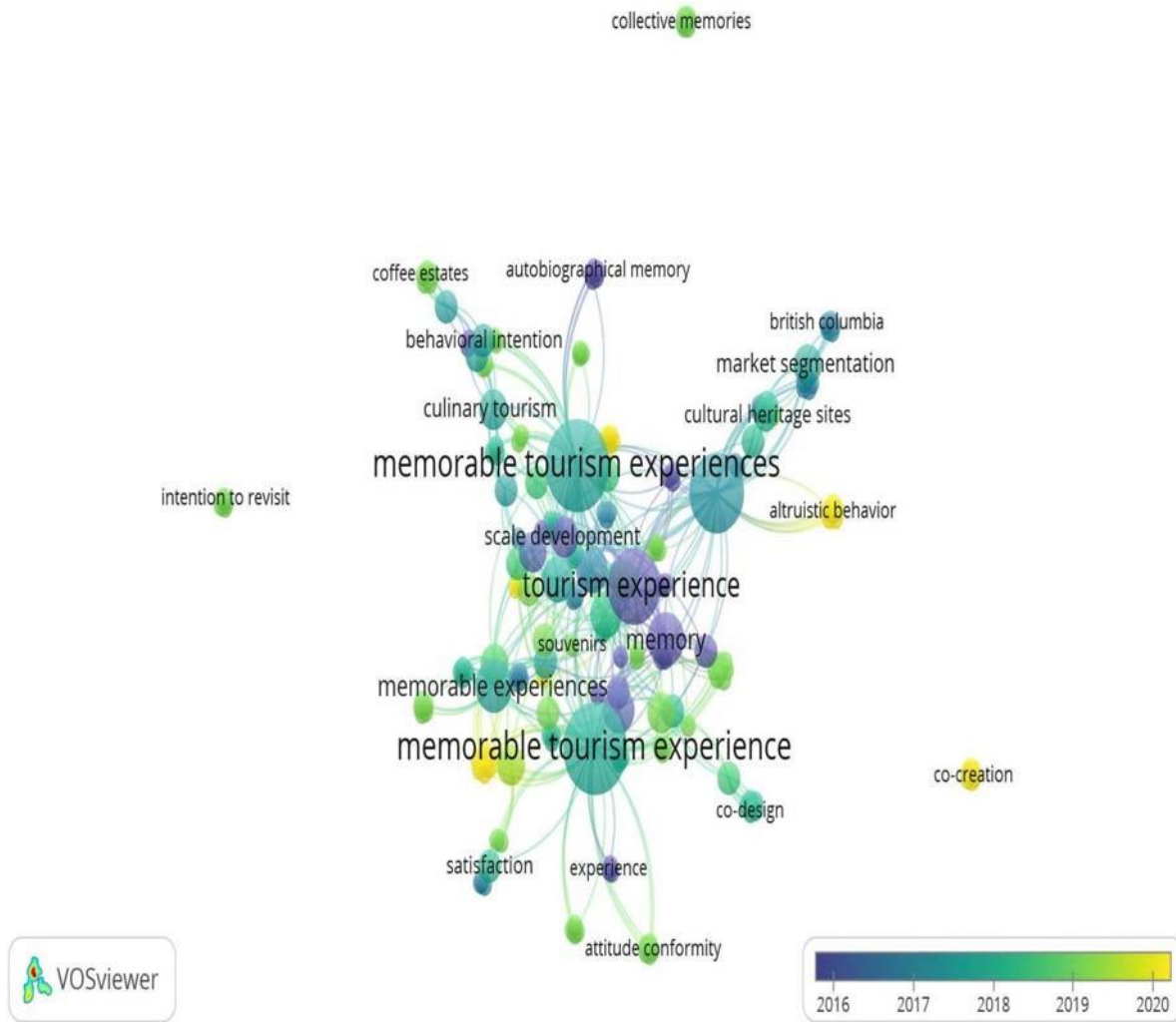


Figure 3. Co-occurrence analysis on the trends of keywords in MTE-related articles over five years (2015–2020).

Geographic locations studied in published articles

The articles in this review presented research that was conducted in over 20 different countries or regions around the world. Table 5 lists all the geographic locations which were studied more than once. China was selected by academics frequently and accounted for 11 articles, 22% of the total. Australia, the United

States and Finland were the settings of 6 articles each, followed by Taiwan with 5 articles and the United Kingdom and Malaysia, with 3 articles each. Italy, Indonesia and Canada were each the settings of two articles in the review.

Table 3. The 10 most frequent keywords in MTE-related articles.

Rank	keyword	Occurrence	strength
1	Memorable tourism experience	15	71
2	Memorable experiences	15	60
3	Tourism experience	11	53
4	Memorability	10	44
5	Behavioural intention	7	26
6	Tourist destination	6	25
7	Tourist satisfaction	6	17
8	Revisit intention	5	16
9	Scale development	5	16
10	Memory	4	13

Source: Authors.

Table 4. Institutional contributions to MTE research.

Rank	University	Number of articles and percentage of total	Country
1	Sun Yat-sen University	6 (12%)	China
2	University of Vaasa	5 (10%)	Finland
3	Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences	3 (6%)	Finland
4	Griffith University	3 (6%)	Australia
5	University of Tartu	3 (6%)	Estonia
6	Macau University of Science and Technology	2 (4%)	China
7	University of Sri Jayewardenepura	2 (4%)	Sri Lanka
8	University of Calgary	2 (4%)	Canada
9	University Putra Malaysia	2 (4%)	Malaysia
10	Other	22 (44%)	

Source: Authors.

Table 5. Research settings.

Research settings	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	Total
China	2(4%)	3(6%)	6(12%)	11(22%)
United States	1(2%)	2(4%)	3(6%)	6(12%)
Australia	0	3(6%)	3(6%)	6(12%)
Finland	0	5(10%)	1(2%)	6(12%)
Taiwan	1(2%)	2(4%)	2(4%)	5(10%)
United Kingdom	0	2(4%)	1(2%)	3(6%)
Malaysia	0	0	3(6%)	3(6%)
Indonesia	0	1(2%)	1(2%)	2(4%)
Canada	2(4%)	0	0	2(4%)
Italy	0	1(2%)	1(2%)	2(4%)
Total	6(12%)	19(38%)	21(42%)	46(92%)

Source: Authors.

Research methods and nature of study

In this segment, the methodological and analytical approaches adopted by the reviewed articles are discussed. The methods applied in MTE articles are divided into three categories: qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method analysis. The frequency of methods applied in articles is shown in Table 6. Over half of the papers were quantitative studies, with 28 articles (52%), whilst qualitative methods were used in 18 articles, accounting for 36% of the total. The remaining studies (6 articles, or 12%) used mixed methods.

As indicated in Table 7, questionnaires and surveys were the methods employed most frequently by scholars as a means of collecting data (52%).

In terms of qualitative analysis methods, grounded theory was applied most often by researchers, accounting for 9 articles. This was followed by other qualitative analysis methods included netnography, thematic and conceptual analysis, all of which were applied more than once in articles (details shown in Table 8).

According to Baloglu and Assante (1999), statistical and methodological sophistication was proposed as an index of a discipline's progress and credibility. The statistical techniques employed in the research on memorable tourism experiences from 2012 to 2020 are detailed in Table 9. As for quantitative analysis methods, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was the method adopted most often, accounting for 18 articles. Other frequently used methods for quantitative analysis were structural equation modelling (SEM) and the partial least squares method (PLS). Overall, most studies used

Table 6. Quantitative versus qualitative approach.

	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	Total
Quantitative	3 (5%)	8 (15%)	17(32%)	28 (52%)
Qualitative	1(2%)	8 (16%)	9 (18%)	18 (36%)
Mixed	2(4%)	2(4%)	2(4%)	6 (12%)
Total	6 (12%)	18 (36%)	28 (54%)	52 (100%)

Source: Authors.

Table 7. Methodological procedures.

	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	Total
Questionnaire	3 (6%)	7 (14%)	16(32%)	26 (52%)
Interview	1(1%)	9 (17%)	10 (19%)	19 (36%)
Mixed method	2(4%)	2 (4%)	2(4%)	6(12%)
Total	6(12%)	17(34%)	27(54%)	52(100%)

Source: Authors.

simple data analysis techniques; nonetheless, in some articles more than two statistical methods were used.

Discussion

This study has provided a literature review of journal articles published between 2012 and 2020 on MTE. The growing interest of academics in this topic is demonstrated by the increase in the number of publications. The analysis showed that since 2017, the number of articles has increased sharply, reaching 5 in 2017 and 20 in 2019. Of the 52 studies in this review, seventy percent ($N = 37$) were published between 2017 and 2020. This suggests that MTE research is at a nascent stage of development. This situation could be described by Price's law, which divides the growth period of scientific fields into four periods: in the first period, a new field gains the attention of a small body of researchers; then, the number of people interested in the field increases and new aspects of the subject are explored; in the third period, the growth of scientific research enters a strengthening phase; and finally, the field matures and interest in the subject matter slowly declines. Nevertheless, as the analysis indicated, the majority of recent studies have either tested the original MTE scale developed by Kim et al. (2012) in other contexts or new items of MTE have been developed. This reflects the difficulty in generalizability with regard to Kim et al.'s (2012) MTE scale in other contexts. Yet, a comprehensive scale pertaining to MTE aligned with different contexts is lacking in the literature. This reflects the observation of several researchers that MTE is very subjective in nature and not all experiences are necessarily memorable (e.g. Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018; Sthapit & Björk, 2019; Seyfi et al., 2020). These

Table 8. Qualitative analysis methods

	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020	Total
Thematic analysis	0	2	0	2
netnography	0	2	2	4
Conceptual	0	1	1	2
Ethnography	0	0	1	1
Grounded theory	0	3	6	9
Memory-work	0	1	0	1
Total	0	9	9	18

Source: Authors.

Table 9. Quantitative methods

Statistical techniques	2012–2014	2015–2017	2018–2020
Chi-square tests	3	2	0
T-test	1	1	0
Factor analysis	2	4	3
Variance factors (VIFs)	0	3	0
SEM	0	3	6
Correlation	0	1	1
Comparative	1	0	0
ANOVA	1	0	0
CFA	2	5	11
Regression	0	1	1

Source: Authors.

results reinforce the need to look for tourism experiences from a broader perspective.

As the findings highlight, in early MTE studies, only seven factors (e.g. hedonism, novelty, knowledge, meaningfulness, involvement, local culture, and refreshment) were identified as leading to strong memorability. Later, other dimensions were also explored. Nonetheless, the seven dimensions suggested by Kim et al. (2012) are not representative across a variety of destination-specific tourist experiences. Other dimensions such as the attributes of a destination that affect the formation of MTEs is relatively absent from the current conceptualisation of MTEs. This is important given the fact that tourists' post-trip views of the destination are dependent on on-site encounters and determine MTEs (Kim, 2014). Furthermore, as the results of this study identified, the majority of the studies were conducted within the context of consumer behaviour and behavioural intentions. For instance, the psychological well-being of tourists and experience co-creation have rarely been investigated as strong predictors of the memorability of an experience. These need to be tested in a wider context.

The majority of these studies have followed a quantitative approach, whilst qualitative studies have not been used extensively in the MTE research. This is surprising given the multifaceted and complex nature of the tourist experience and the lack of agreement among researchers on the MTE scale. A broader qualitative or mixed methods approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods is critical to gaining a deep understanding of MTE. Furthermore, findings show a substantial number of conceptual papers in the early stages of research development on MTEs. While in later stages, the majority of studies have only tested the frameworks in other contexts or attempted to add new dimensions to the MTE framework. Nonetheless, new scale development and further academic inquiries to enrich the understanding of MTE by applying the constructs in a 'real-world' tourism context are required (Sthapit & Coudounaris, 2018). The latter is significant

given that tourism experiences vary depending on the type of destination, tourism activities, tourists' prior experience and cultural backgrounds and the MTE scale components may vary as well. Any attempts to develop an MTE scale in future research should extend the extant components by adding other experiential factors to enhance our understanding of MTE. Such efforts would aid in the theoretical development of the MTE concept which is needed for it to mature into a solid theoretical structure.

The analysis also shows that in terms of the geographic locations where MTE studies were conducted, China, the United States, Australia and Finland are the top four regions. Nonetheless, regions where tourism is a major source of income (e.g. Mediterranean countries) have not been the focus of MTE-related research. This is surprising given that the Mediterranean countries are amongst the most visited destinations and understanding the factors which lead to the memorability of experience in mass tourism destinations may extend the current conceptualisation of MTE by identifying new factors.

Conclusions

Over the last decade, memorable tourism experience has attracted remarkable attention amongst tourism scholars and practitioners. Hence, tourism literature acknowledges MTE's significance in tourism industry studies. This paper has set out to establish an understanding of how the current academic literature has approached the MTE phenomenon. In the current study, a systematic review was performed to study the MTE, analysing the different methods and approaches used to assess the impact of MTEs and the results obtained. This survey undertook a systematic review of the pertinent literature on MTE, identifying a total of 52 papers on MTE from the SCOPUS and WOS databases. Articles covered the time period from 2012 to 2020 and a wide range of geographical locations, with China being the most common research setting selected by academics. The findings also show that MTEs significantly influence tourists' behaviours, such as the future intention to revisit a destination, participate in the same activities, destination image and word-of-mouth publicity. Furthermore, the MTE scales developed in these studies could be used as a conceptual framework for future studies.

In this review of the literature, co-occurrence analysis of keywords revealed that memorable tourism, memorability, experience, and behavioural intention were essential concepts. Furthermore, fundamental concepts for destination image and tourism marketing seem to

be peripheral. As depicted by the colours of each keyword, earlier studies tended to focus more on tourism experience, whilst later studies shifted their focus towards satisfaction, marketing and service innovation. A customer-centered perspective could be the focus of future MTE research. In the tourism industry, issues related to the destination are key and many articles focused on topics involving destination management, ranging from destination image to customer behaviour. Destination managers can employ MTE research as a managerial tool to appraise their business efficiency and put into place appropriate practices and strategies to improve positive behavioural intentions. Tourism plans must be evaluated in full to determine whether they satisfy each of the MTE components identified. Traveller surveys containing these MTE components and specifically asking about past tourism experiences at specific destinations and businesses could help destination managers to understand how each of these seven dimensions of MTEs has been performing in the tourism business and industry.

Limitations and directions for future research

Notwithstanding the contributions made and the systematic approach adopted in this analysis, the results of this study must still be considered in the light of certain constraints which also provide opportunities for further investigation. Firstly, the range of this review was confined to full-length research papers on the SCOPUS and WOS databases. Also, some aspects of the literature were not covered (e.g. authors), and this review did not include conference articles. However, since MTEs are still a nascent field of study, there are many subjects yet to be added to the body of knowledge such as context-focused MTEs within dark tourism or ecotourism setting. To put it another way, future studies should broaden MTE research by covering additional aspects of analysis and using top academic conference proceedings. This form of analysis, together with the recent study results, would help tourism companies plan and improve tourism programmes. Furthermore, increased attempts should focus on building theoretical scales, since tourism is an interdisciplinary field, interesting findings can also be made in relation to other disciplines.

Acknowledgments

The research in this paper was funded by the project 'Overtourism in Spanish coastal destinations. Tourism degrowth strategies an approach from the social dimension' (RTI2018-094844-B-C33) financed by Spanish Ministry of Science,

Innovation and Universities (National Plan for R+D+i) the Spanish State Research Agency and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Conceptualization, *Syedasaad Hosseini*, Almeida-García, Fernando and Cortés-Macías, Rafael; methodology, *Syedasaad Hosseini*; validation, *Syedasaad Hosseini*, Almeida-García, Fernando and Cortés-Macías, Rafael; formal analysis, *Syedasaad Hosseini*; investigation, Almeida-García, Fernando and Cortés-Macías, Rafael; writing—original draft preparation, *Syedasaad Hosseini*; writing—review and editing, *Syedasaad Hosseini*, Almeida-García, Fernando and Cortés-Macías, Rafael; supervision, Almeida-García Fernando and Cortés-Macías, Rafael. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

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

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