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Memorable customer experiences and autobiographical memories: From service experience to word of mouth

Miguel A. Moliner-Tena *, Diego Monferrer-Tirado, Marta Estrada-Guillen, Lidia Vidal-Meliá

Universitat Jaume I, (Spain)

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to study the relationship between customer experience and word of mouth (WOM) through two mediating variables: customer satisfaction and memorable characteristics of service experience (MCSE). Memory theory is adopted as a theoretical background, with emphasis on the key role of episodic or autobiographical memory. Memorable customer experience (MCE) is defined from this perspective, thereby enabling the connection between human memory theory and service-dominant (S-D) logic. As for the impact of the internet on WOM, two types of WOM behaviours are examined: positive WOM (pWOM) and eWOM. A methodology was designed from a survey that used a questionnaire based on measurement scales validated by the literature. The sample is of 1476 tourists who visited seven Spanish tourism destinations. The results show service experience precedes customer satisfaction and MCSE. Both pWOM and eWOM are significantly influenced by customer satisfaction and MCSE. Various scenarios are put forward in which several combinations of customer satisfaction and MCSE give rise to different intensities and valence of pWOM and eWOM.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, memorable customer experience (MCE) has deserved the attention of services researchers (Kim et al., 2012, 2022; Flacandji and Krey, 2020; Stone et al., 2022; Prentice et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022; Roggeveen and Rosengren, 2022). Identifying aspects that result in a service experience being vividly memorised by the customer and subsequently relived is important for service businesses because it influences consumer behaviours such as WOM and repeat purchasing (Kim et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022).

Hosany et al. (2022) analyze more than half a hundred published research on MCE in tourism between 2012 and 2020, and conclude that research has been fragmented and dispersed. Different theoretical frameworks from the field of psychology (savoring, theory of planned behavior, script theory, place attachment, human experience) and sociology (interaction, ritual theory, affect control theory, stakeholder theroy) have been used, but there is no unifying theory to explain MCE (Hosany et al., 2022; Roggeveen and Rosengren, 2022; Prentice et al., 2022). Research on MCE has mainly focused on the design of measurement scales and the identification of characteristics that make an experience memorable (Kim et al., 2012; BustamanteRubio, 2017; Flacandji and Krey, 2020; Stone et al., 2022).

Klaus and Kuppelwieser (2021) identify four future research directions on customer experience: time, the role of emotions, methods and personal experience vicinity (Manthiou et al., 2020; Verhulst et al., 2020; Babin et al., 2020; Akire et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020; Lecoeuvre et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020; Rosenbaum et al., 2020). They conclude that customer experience dynamic nature is an important research challenge, which implies knowing the causes of customer experience memorability, because in the present time consumers seek to buy experiences that are memorable (Pekovic and Rolland, 2020).

Then, there is still no adequate conceptual framework to explain service experience dynamics and MCE. The dispersion of theories leads Hosany et al. (2022) and Stone et al. (2022) to propose the need to build a unifying theory of MCE, which they consider should be based on memory theory. A unifying theory must be able to explain the nature of MCE, its antecedents and consequences. There is a common opinion that more research is needed in the consequences of MCE (Williams et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022; Roggeveen and Rosengren, 2022). According to the meta-analysis carried out by Donthu et al. (2021) on eWOM, no research cluster has examined the relationship between customer experience and WOM behaviours. The relationship between service

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: amoliner@uji.es (M.A. Moliner-Tena), dmonferr@uji.es (D. Monferrer-Tirado), estrada@uji.es (M. Estrada-Guillen), lvidal@uji.es (L. Vidal-Meliá).

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experience and WOM has received little attention to date, given that the antecedents of WOM have continued to focus on relationship quality (Taheri et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022).

Then, it can be concluded that there is need to build a unifying theory of MCE based on memory theory, and there is also a research gap in the study of the consequences of MCE. The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between service experience and WOM, through two mediating variables: customer satisfaction and memorable characteristics of service experience (MCSE). More specifically, the questions that will be explored include a) establishing the antecedents of MCE, b) determining the relationship between service experience and WOM behaviours, c) studying the antecedents of positive WOM (pWOM) and eWOM and d) using the memory model as a theoretical background. To that end, we review the functioning of human memory from the field of psychology. We consider a causal model that relates service experience with WOM behaviours through two mediating variables: customer satisfaction and MCE.

2. Theoretical background: autobiographical memory

Episodic or autobiographical memory is a subsystem of Long Term Memory (LTM) where associations of an autobiographical event relating to time, space, emotions or other contextual circumstances are stored (Tulving, 2002; Herz and Brunk, 2017). Autobiographical memories gather information about where, when and what happened in an event (Asperholm et al., 2019). The content is subjective since it only refers to life episodes experienced first-hand by an individual within a context and at a specific time (Herz and Brunk, 2017).

The subjective experience of reliving an event is called memory phenomenology. Tulving (2002) considers that the re-experience of a past event enables individuals to transport themselves in time. Different models have proposed several dimensions of phenomenology, thereby generating some debate about their number (Sutin and Robins, 2007; Boyacioglu and Akfirat, 2015). They all include coherence, vividness, emotional intensity, accessibility, visual perspective and valence (Sutin et al., 2021). Some also include sharing (Sutin and Robins, 2007). The most recent memories tend to have a richer phenomenology (vividness), while emotional memories have a stronger phenomenology than neutral experiences (Sutin et al., 2021).

Intimacy and connection to others are created by sharing memories (Sutin et al., 2021), and vividness reflects the skill to recall a richness of details of a particular experience (Cooper et al., 2019). Not all autobiographical memories are stored with the same degree of vividness, coherence, accessibility or emotional intensity (Herz and Brunk, 2017). This proposal has recently been applied to services research. Kim et al. (2021) propose a version adapted to tourism in which they identify nine phenomenological dimensions of autobiographical memories: recollection, place details, accessibility, time details, vividness, sensory details, emotional intensity, valence and sharing.

A relevant aspect in memory theory is forgetting, which implies that the memorability of an experience weakens over time. Two explanations for this process are proposed (Jonides et al., 2008): a) decay theory proposes that as time passes, information in memory erodes and this leads to less availability for later retrieval, and b) interference theory considers that items compete in memory, and that the degree of interference depends on the similarity, number and strength of competitors. Babin et al. (2020) consider that emotional forgetfulness and age perceptions erode MCE.

One type of specific autobiographical memory are flashbulb memories. They are an extreme case of the memory of an event, which take the shape of extremely vivid, detailed and emotional memories (e.g., a wedding day, the death of a loved one, an exciting adventure or a car accident) (Heuer and Reisberg, 1990; Sutin and Robins, 2007). Hirst and Phelps (2016) consider that the formation of flashbulb memories follows the same mechanisms as any other episodic memory, although a series of factors influence their formation and retrieval: a) the characteristics of the event or circumstances in which the individual learns from the event (emotions felt, degree of surprise, consequences and significance of the event, and the distinctive nature of the event) and b) how the individual processes the event over time (the degree of rehearsal). Kopp et al. (2020) consider that flashbulb memories are a type of memory of shock-induced public or personal events that people share in their daily conversations.

Autobiographical memory emphasizes the importance of the extraordinary characteristics of an event, such that, according to Williams et al. (2020), one can differentiate between memorable experience and frictionless experience on the basis of their impact on autobiographical memory. It is important to distinguish between episodic memory and the characteristics of an event that trigger their formation and retrieval: flashbulb is an episodic memory, while the emotivity, surprise, significativeness and distinctiveness of the event are characteristics that influence their level of memorability. That is, MCE is the stored memory, with a certain degree of vividness, coherence, accessibility or emotional intensity, but the characteristics of the service experience that have provoked memorability are attributes of the service experience, such as emotions, surprise, significance, and distinctiveness. In this study we refer to the second aspect as memorable characteristics of service experience (MCSE).

3. Antecedents and consequences of MCE

Pine and Gilmore (1998) defined MCE as "encounters that have undergone a level of customization that renders them memorable to the point where customers are willing to pay a premium and repurchase". This definition is based on the performance of MCE. Later Kim et al. (2012) defined a positive MCE as "a customer experience positively remembered and recalled after an event has occurred". This definition emphasizes the importance of the memory evoked and its valence. More recently Sharma et al. (2022) defined memorable tourist experience as a "significant event that is accumulated in the memory of the tourist and can be evoked later". The latter definition establishes a very direct connection between MCE and the autobiographical memory.

According to the theoretical background, MCE can be defined as a trace of the autobiographical memory, generated by a past experience, retrieved in a new cognitive process, with a specific level of accessibility, emotional intensity, coherence, vividness, visual perspective, valence and sharing.

The services marketing literature has proposed several elements of MCSE: emotion, hedonism, novelty, involvement, knowledge, surprise, engagement and/or social connections. The tourist sector has conducted most of the research on identifying MCSE (Kim et al., 2012; Stone et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2012) identify seven dimensions of MCSE: hedonism, meaningfulness, local culture, involvement, refreshment, novelty and knowledge. BustamanteRubio (2017) believe that if the interaction between a client and the physical retail environment is to be memorable, it must trigger personal importance, novelty, surprise, learning and/or engagement. Cooper et al. (2019) believe that particularly emotional experiences are often vividly memorised and that affective salience (intensity of an emotional experience) is a key factor in the vivid impression of an autobiographical memory. Flacandji and Krey (2020) created the Shopping Experience Memory Scale, in which they identify four dimensions: attraction, structure, affect and social. Within the field of food experiences, Stone et al. (2022) identify six dimensions: emotional connections, sensory connections, social and interpersonal connections, focus and attention, novelty and experimental connections, and reflective connections. Roggeveen and Rosengren (2022) propose a human experience concept, which seeks a connection with the ambitions, beliefs, values or feelings of each person, giving rise to different levels of customer engagement, from emotional connections to shared identity.

Memory theory allows to explain the antecedents of MCE identified by the literature since it considers that their formation is related to the

characteristics of the service experience or circumstances in which the customer learns from the service experience: emotions felt, degree of surprise, consequences and significance of the service experience, and the distinctive nature of the service experience.

3.1. Service experience, satisfaction and MCSE

BeckerJaakkola (2020) claim that customer experience is the non-declarative and spontaneous response to an offer throughout the customer journey. Klaus and Maklan (2012) believe that the basis of service experience is service quality: service experience incorporates affects to service quality. The co-creation perspective is a key aspect because the interactions between the customer and a product/firm are what provoke the personal reaction of an individual.

In accordance with memory theory, both declarative and non-declarative memory intervene in a service experience. Unconscious procedural aspects occur in co-creation on the customer journey (for which customers' physical and cognitive skills are needed), which condition customers' assessment of the service experience (Squire and Zola, 1996). This aspect becomes particularly important in service ecosystems where the service is co-created by different organisations, which calls for a bigger effort in time and energy, and a greater use of customer skills (BustamanteRubio, 2017). Moreover, some aspects of service experience (cognitive evaluation and perception process) stored in autobiographical memories are retrieved by short-term memory for reasoning, comprehending and solving problems (Herz and Brunk, 2017; Asperholm et al., 2019).

According to Kim et al. (2012), an MCE is selectively constructed during the service experience from individual assessments made by the client on the consumer journey. That implies that not all experiences have memorable characteristics (Herz and Brunk, 2017). Williams et al. (2020) differentiate between memorable experience and frictionless experience, stating that both have a significant influence on customer loyalty. Emotions associated with the service experience are crucial to generate MCE such that positive emotions lead to positive consumer outcomes (Manthiou et al., 2020). MCSE captures the degree of exceptionality of a service experience from the perspective of its memorability (Hirst and Phelps, 2016). Therefore, based on some aspects of service experience, moments that make an experience memorable are generated throughout the consumer journey.

H1. Customer service experience directly influences MCSE.

Service experience triggers some cognitive processes in short-term memory, such as customer satisfaction, which, according to the confirmation/disconfirmation theory, is the comparison between the perception of service experience and the expectations (Sharma et al., 2022). The consequences of service quality and service experience are the same (Klaus and Maklan, 2012). Service experience is therefore an antecedent of customer satisfaction (Prentice et al., 2022).

According to memory theory, expectations are generated through the processing of information items stored in the autobiographical memory, known in psychology as an episodic simulation: vividly imagining a future experience (Bettman, 1979). In general, literatur considers customer satisfaction to be an evaluative outcome of the service experience. Cao et al. (2020) find that autobiographical memory and simulations was significantly positively related to satisfaction and well-being. Therefore, service experience is a driver of customer satisfaction (Maklan and Klaus, 2011; Klaus and Maklan, 2012; Martin et al., 2015; BeckerJaakkola, 2020; Williams et al., 2020; Prentice et al., 2022; Sharma et al., 2022).

H2. Customer service experience directly influences customer satisfaction.

3.2. MCE and WOM behaviours

WOM is defined as informal communications such as recommendations and evaluations of goods and services (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Consumers often use WOM to share their experiences, explain their preferences and seek opinions (Sweeney et al., 2020; Taheri et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2021). According to Keiningham et al. (2018), WOM is a social process motivated by a sense of social obligation, a desire to help others (altruism) and/or a feeling of pleasure at recounting one's own experiences to others.

WOM is an umbrella term that encompasses several behaviours, such as positive/negative WOM, advocacy, eWOM, referrals or opinion leaders (Keiningham et al., 2018; Sweeney et al., 2020; Taheri et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2021). This study focuses on pWOM and eWOM. We consider the comments and recommendations of positive valence made by a consumer in an offline setting as pWOM (Sweeney et al., 2020; Taheri et al., 2021), whereas eWOM involves comments, photos and multimedia content uploaded by a consumer in an online setting (social media, web, blog), whose valence can be positive, negative or neutral (Talwar et al., 2021).

Regarding the relationship between MCE and WOM behaviours, several studies point to a significant relationship considering that MCE is a critical element for predicting WOM intentions. The essence of WOM is to recount experiences to others, which is why the link between MCE and WOM is inseparable (Keiningham et al., 2018). In this sense, it is important to highlight that one of the phenomenological dimensions is sharing, which implies that there is a social dimension implicit in the autobiographical memory that can be activated in WOM behaviours (Sutin and Robins, 2007; Kim et al., 2021; Sutin et al., 2021). The sharing dimension enables greater social integration and a lower likelihood of the individual feeling alone (Sutin et al., 2021). Moreover, flashbulb memories show that high MCSE involves high values of vividness and emotional intensity dimensions of autobiographical memories (Sutin and Robins, 2007; Hirst and Phelps, 2016).

As for the type of WOM behaviours, in the study by Keiningham et al. (2018), the greatest impact on any pWOM stems from affective commitment and positive emotions, which implies that MSCE influences pWOM. Sweeney et al. (2020), however, claim that memorable brand experience bears no significant relation to advocacy or pWOM. In accordance with the theoretical framework, this study considers that when consumers find themselves in a situation of WOM behaviours, MSCE will activate the sharing dimension and will influence pWOM and eWOM.

H3. MSCE influences pWOM.

H4. MSCE influences eWOM.

Finally, it is logical to think that positive customer satisfaction will increase the likelihood of consumers generating pWOM: if satisfaction is positive, WOM behaviours will be positive (Baker et al., 2016; Kim, 2018; Sweeney et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022). Anderson (1998) established the existence of this relationship and determined that it follows an asymmetric U-shaped model, in such a way that highly dissatisfied customers engage in more WOM than highly satisfied customers. More recently several studies have compared the existence of a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and WOM (Duarte et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2021; Sharma et al., 2022).

However, not until recent years has study begun on the relationship

between customer satisfaction and the various WOM behaviours. According to Keiningham et al. (2018), customer satisfaction is associated with increased pWOM with strong ties, whereas it is linked to a decrease in the rest of pWOM. Sweeney et al. (2020) establish that customer satisfaction has a significant and positive relationship with pWOM but not with advocacy.

The memory model offers a complementary explanation to the relationship between both variables. Customer satisfaction is a comparison between service experience and service expectations. Service expectations are episodic simulations, which, according to Gaesser and Schacter (2013), generate an intention to help others arise. This leads to a connection between episodic simulation and WOM behaviours through the sharing dimension of autobiographical memories. Moreover, it should be remembered that both the trace of autobiographical memory and WOM have a dimension of valence (Sutin and Robins, 2007; Kim et al., 2021; Keiningham et al., 2018), which implies that the valence of customer satisfaction will contribute to pWOM, while customer dissatisfaction will contribute to negative WOM. Therefore, in accordance with the theoretical framework, customer satisfaction is considered an influence on pWOM and eWOM.

H5. Customer satisfaction has a direct influence on pWOM.

H6. Customer satisfaction has a direct influence on eWOM.

The study hypotheses have now been outlined and Fig. 1 shows the model to be analysed (see Fig. 3) (see Table 1).

4. Methodology

An electronic version of the questionnaire was designed. The research has a favourable report from the university's Deontological Commission (case number CD/109/2021), which considers that it meets the required ethical standards. The questionnaire was distributed on social media (Instagram and Facebook) in November 2020–March 2021 and received 1476 valid responses. Respondents visited seven different tourism destinations in Spain: 436 (29.5%), urban (Barcelona, Valencia), 400 (27.2%) sun and sand (Peñíscola, Benidorm) and 640 (43.4%) rural (Morella, La Rioja and Asturias). Participation was determined by those who have recently stayed at any of these destinations. The main characteristics of the sample were taken from an analysis of the data and used for the tourist profile (Table 2).

The scales used match their theoretical definitions (Table 3). In this study, we adapted them to tourism. Service experience, MSCE and satisfaction items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree). pWOM and eWOM scales items were scored on a 5-point scale (1 = never; 5 = always).

On this measurement model, a refinement process is developed that pursues the fulfillment of the following objectives: (1) eliminate bad indicators to refine the measurement scales as much as possible and evaluate their dimensionality (strong and weak convergence conditions, and monitoring of model fit indices); (2) carry out the appropriate reliability tests (internal consistence and variance extracted); (3) complete the analysis with certain tests that allow evaluating the validity of the scales (convergent and discriminant validity).

As starting point a CFA is performed using EQS 6under the maximum likelihood approach (Table 4). Then less relevant indicators of the latent variables are eliminated (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991; Hair et al., 2010). In order to meet the strong convergence condition, we remove indicators with individual standardised coefficients (λ) lower than 0.6 and an average standardised factor loading of less than 0.7. In order to meet the weak convergence condition we analyze the significance of the factor regression coefficients between indicators and their latent variables. We use the Student t-value and imposed the maximum condition ($t > 2.58$; $P = 0.01$). As a result, four indicators are eliminated: EXP1.3, EXP3.3, EXP4. and MEM.3. Finally, we monitor the evolution of the main model fit measurements ensuring their progressive improvement as each indicator is eliminated (Hair et al., 2010): absolute (GFI>0.90; RMSR<0.08; RMSEA<0.08), incremental (IFI>0.90; CFI>0.90; NFI>0.90; NNFI>0.90), and parsimony fit measures ($X^2/gl < 3$).

Several verification tests are conducted in order to identify whether the refinement tests have negatively affected scale reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). For internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$) and construct composite reliability (CR > 0.7) are implemented. Compliance with this criterion allows us to confirm that the indicators of each scale are measuring the same constructions and, in this way, are highly correlated. Regarding analysis of variance extracted (AVE>0.5) its compliance implies that the variance captured by each factor is greater than that due to measurement error.

Finally, the validity of the scales is evaluated. First, a re-examinination of the CFA is done in order to test convergent validity,

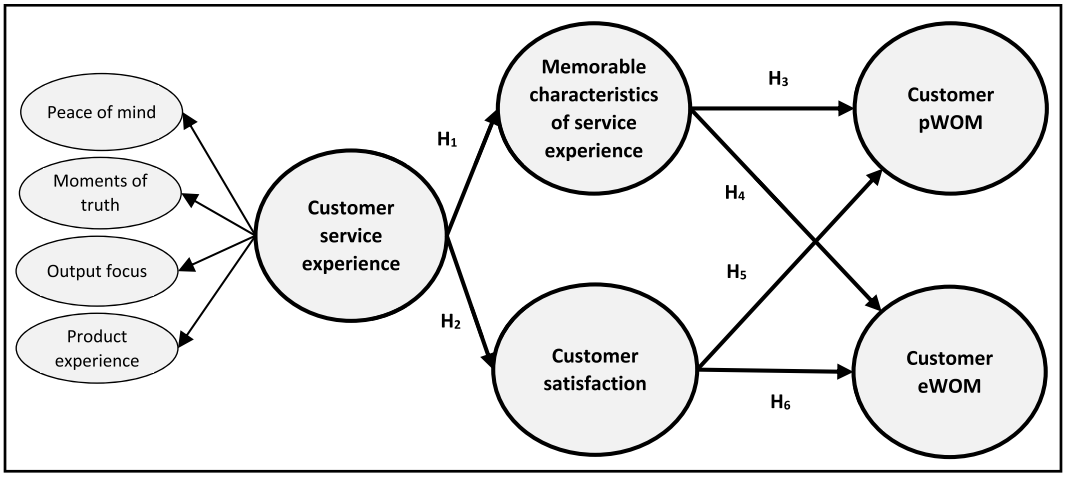

Fig. 1. Model of effects.

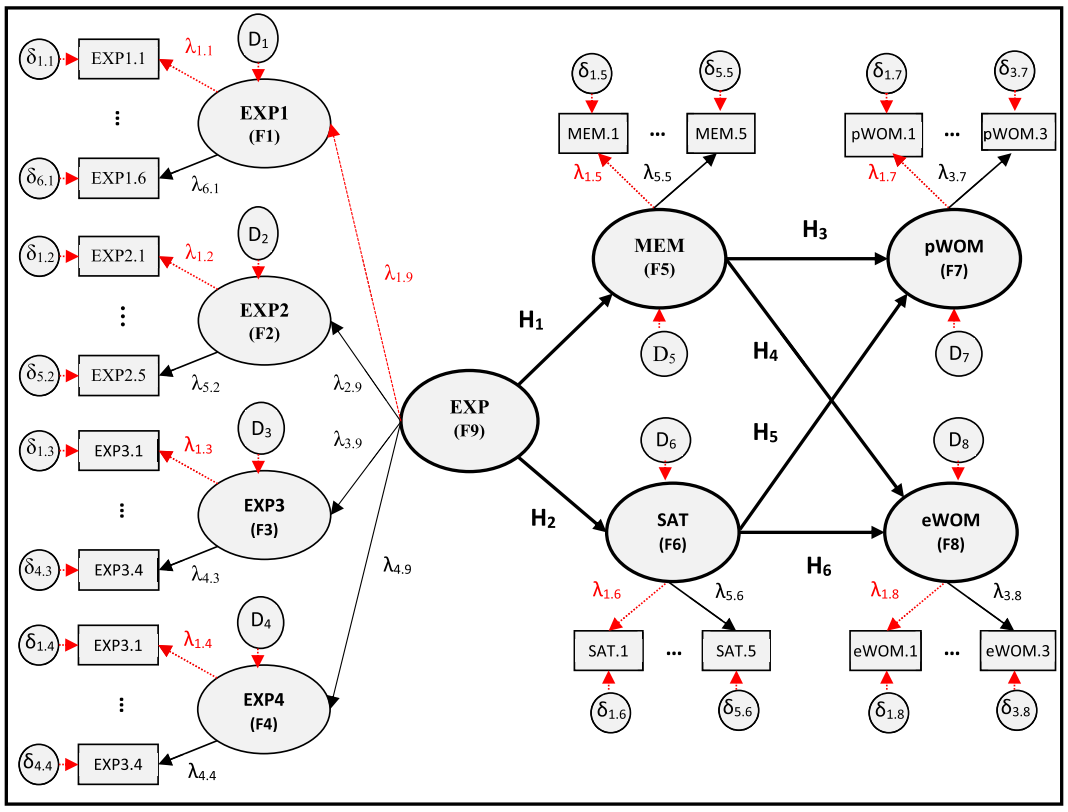

Fig. 2. Structural equation model diagram
Note: Observed variables are represented by a square. Latent variables are represented by a circle. The model identification criteria appear in red (regression coefficients set to 1). λ = factorial loadings. δ, D = error terms of the dependent variables. Solid black highlights the structural part directly associated with the hypotheses proposed in the model of effects (H_1 to H_6).

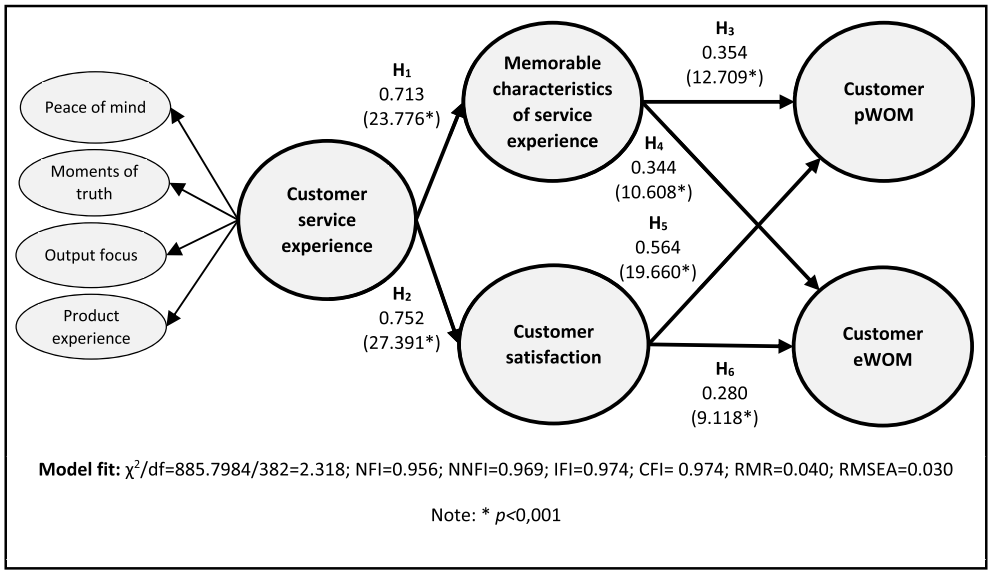

Fig. 3. Representation of the model.

Table 1
Dimensions of phenomenology.

Dimensions	Description
Vividness	The visual clarity and intensity of the retrieved memory
Coherence	The extent to which the memory retrieved involves a logical story in a specific time and place
Accessibility	The ease of retrieval of the memory
Emotional intensity	The intensity of the emotions experienced
Visual perspective	The perspective from which the individual views the memory in his/her head
Sharing	The extent to which the memory is shared with other people
Valence	The degree of positiveness or negativeness

Source: Sutin and Robins (2007).

referring to the degree to which measures designed to measure the same concept are related. The high estimated value and significance of the correlations between scale dimensions are confirmed. Second, Table 5 shows the values of AVE and confident interval tests performed in order to evaluate the discriminant validity. This will allow us to check whether the concept that is determined by each scale is sufficiently different from the other concepts with which it is related. For the first test, the discriminant validity is ratified because the square root of the AVE between each pair of factors is higher than the estimated correlation between those factors (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The confidence interval test involves verifying the non-appearance of the value of 1 within the confidence interval calculated for each pair of latent factors while considering the covariance of ± two standard errors around the estimated value obtained in the final confirmatory factor analysis (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Overall, the results confirm the discriminant validity.

Additionally, three different tests are used to rule out common method data collection bias (CMB). First, multicollinearity is checked by testing the variance inflation factor (VIF) among latent variables in our proposed overall model (Kock, 2015). Values are between 1.428 and 5.563, considerably lower than the maximum value of 10. Second, Harman's (1976) test is used. Following MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012) a factorial analysis is carried out using principal component analysis, in which the unrotated factor solution is examined. As expected, the results show several factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, which explain 76.230% of the variance among the 31 items, and the first factor does not accumulate most of the variance (37.072%). Third, the marker variable technique is applied (Williams et al., 2010). As it is theoretically unrelated to the theoretical model, unfairness perception 3-item scale is chosen as a marker variable (Nguyen et al., 2014). No significant cases are found in the comparison between models (Table 6).

It implies (Williams et al., 2010): (1) there is no evidence of shared CMB between the latent marker variable and the indicators of the substantive variables (Method-C does not fit significantly better than the baseline model); (2) CMB is the same for all indicators (Method-U does not fit significantly better than Method-C); (3) CMB's presence does not skew the relationships among the substantive variables (Method-R is not significantly different from Method-U). In sum, the three tests used to evaluate CMB indicate the possible absence of this bias in collecting the data.

Table 2
Respondents description.

Gender	**Women** 63.7%					**Men** 36.3%
Age (Mean: 37 sessions)	**18–29**	**30–39**	**40–49**	**50–59**	**60–69**	**70 or more**
	36.3%	22.0%	20.5%	13.1%	6.7%	8.1%
Occupation	**Employee**	**Student**	**Retired**	**Homemaker**		**Unemployed**
	64.1%	19.5%	6.1%	4.1%		6.2%
Studies	**University**	**High School**		**Secondary**		**Primary**
	55.6%	34.2%		7.3%		2.9%

5. Analysis and findings

Table 6 shows the covariance matrix.

Structural equation models is used to test the hyphoteses. Fig. 2 displays the step diagram.

Next, EQS 6.2 multivariate software package is used to test the hypotheses. The results (Table 7) show tourist service experience at the destination emerging as a relevant determining factor of MCSE (H_1: $\lambda = 0.713$, $t = 23.776$*) and tourist satisfaction (H_2: $\lambda = 0.752$, $t = 27.391$*). These two factors would act as mediating variables to generate a positive effect on tourists' WOM about the destination, both from a traditional approach associated with WOM (pWOM) and from a digital perspective (eWOM). In the case of pWOM, the greatest weight would be determined by the tourist's satisfaction (H_5: $\lambda = 0.564$, $t = 19.660$*), with the tourist's MCSE having a lower weight if compared in relative terms (H_3: $\lambda = 0.354$, $t = 12.709$*). In the case of eWOM, however, the influence of these mediating variables would be reversed. The greatest weight would then be determined by the tourist's MCSE (H_4: $\lambda = 0.344$, $t = 10.608$*), whereas tourist satisfaction would have a lower weight if compared in relative terms (H_6: $\lambda = 0.280$, $t = 9.118$*).

Moreover, when we consider the total effects, tourist service experience on the destination influences on both types of WOM (pWOM and eWOM) through the mediating role of tourist MCSE and tourist satisfaction is reinforced (Table 8). In summary, the main total effect of tourist service experience is on pWOM ($\lambda = 0.676$, $t = 25.764$*) when compared to eWOM ($\lambda = 0.456$, $t = 19.226$*). This circumstance would be mainly explained by the antecedent effect of satisfaction, which is especially high on classic pWOM ($\lambda = 0.564$, $t = 19.660$*) and relatively lower in the case of eWOM ($\lambda = 0.280$, $t = 9.118$*). However, the consideration of a new mediating effect, based on the construction of MSCE in the mind of the tourist, would have a balanced effect on both WOMs (pWOM: $\lambda = 0.354$, $t = 12.709$* and eWOM: $\lambda = 0.344$, $t = 10.608$*), and would be especially important when the global effect on the digital aspect was considered. In sum, the interrelationship between these constructs in a three-level approach (antecedent: tourist service experience; mediation: tourist MSCE and tourist satisfaction; consequence: pWOM and eWOM) will favour the development of these tourists' feelings of positive recommendation from different media of the destinations they visited.

Table 3
Scales of measurment

Variables	References	Items
Service experience	Klaus and Maklan (2012)	***19***
Peace of mind		6
Moments of truth		5
Output focus		4
Product experience		4
Memorable characteristics of service experience	Kim et al. (2012)	**5**
Customer satisfaction	Estrada et al. (2020)	***5***
Customer positive WOM	Keiningham et al. (2018), Maklan and Klaus (2011), Klaus and Maklan (2012)	***3***
Customer eWOM	Keiningham et al. (2018), Maklan and Klaus (2011), Klaus and Maklan (2012)	***3***

Table 4
Validity and reliability analysis.

Items	Factor loads	t-value
SERVICE EXPERIENCE (CR = 0.96;AVE = 0.86)		
Peace of mind (α = 0.867;CR = 0.87;AVE = 0.57)	0.935	27.700*
EXP1.1:During the planning, booking and the stay itself, everyone showed they knew what they were doing.	0.685	Fixed
EXP1.2:During planning, booking and the stay itself, the procedures were easy to carry out.	0.687	24.414*
EXP1.3:Everything has been so easy at this destination that I wouldn't mind going back.	Deleted	
EXP1.4:During the planning, booking and the stay itself, everyone cared about me.	0.798	27.967*
EXP1.5:During the planning, booking and the stay itself, I felt that everything flowed easily.	0.844	29.402*
EXP1.6:All the advice I received while planning and booking, and during the stay was objective and independent.	0.748	26.386*
Moments of truth (α = 0.875;CR = 0.88;AVE = 0.59)	***0.998***	***35.598****
EXP2.1:Everyone at this destination was flexible in their dealings with me and cared about my needs.	0.788	Fixed
EXP2.2:During the planning, booking and the stay itself, they kept me constantly informed.	0.791	33.755*
EXP2.3:While booking and during the stay, I was sure that my money was well spent.	0.799	34.229*
EXP2.4:There were good people at this destination: they listened to me, they were polite and they made me feel comfortable.	0.740	31.003*
EXP2.5:When something went wrong during the booking and the stay, they solved it properly.	0.711	29.514*
Output focus (α = 0.830;CR = 0.84;AVE = 0.63)	***0.994***	***38.288****
EXP3.1:During the booking and the stay, they made things very easy for me. I will consider them again in future.	0.831	Fixed
EXP3.2:The processes associated with the booking and the stay turned out to be as smooth as I had expected.	0.792	36.150*
EXP3.3:I felt more confident about this destination than other destinations I had visited previously.	Deleted	
EXP3.4:The people at this destination were empathetic and understood my concerns.	0.762	34.196*
Product experience (α = 0.869;CR = 0.87;AVE = 0.69)	***0.766***	***27.289****
EXP4.1:The offer available at this destination was wide-ranging and varied (leisure, gastronomy, accommodation, culture, etc.).	0.820	Fixed
EXP4.2:It was important for me to receive information about the different options offered by the destination.	0.828	34.965*
EXP4.3:It was important for me to compare the different options to make the best decisions.	Deleted	
EXP4.4:I felt that I could count on someone to help me if needed.	0.839	35.474*
MEMORABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICE EXPERIENCE (α = 0.823;CR = 0.84;AVE = 0.57)		
MEM.1:I really enjoyed that tourism experience.	0.782	34.825*
MEM.2:I felt revitalised through that tourism experience.	0.809	36.552*
MEM.3:I learned something about myself from that tourism experience.	Deleted	
MEM.4:I had a chance to closely experience the local culture of that destination area.	0.701	29.380*
MEM.5:I experienced something new (e.g., food, activity, etc.) during this tourism experience.	0.731	31.642*
SATISFACTION (α = 0.903;CR = 0.91;AVE = 0.66)		
SAT.1:My expectations of this destination were met.	0.830	38.638*
SAT.2:I was satisfied with the services (accommodation, food, attractions) of this destination.	0.805	36.830*
SAT.3:The price corresponded to the quality offered.	0.732	32.136*
SAT.4:My feelings about this destination were very positive.	0.847	39.882*
SAT.5:Overall, I was satisfied with this trip.	0.840	39.322*
pWOM (α = 0.860; CR = 0.87; AVE = 0.69)		
After the visit, how often did you perform behaviours such as … ? pWOM.1: … say positive things about this destination to other people.	0.837	38.323*
pWOM.2: … recommend this destination to someone who seeks your advice.	0.874	41.000*
pWOM.3: encourage friends and relatives to visit this destination.	0.780	34.542*
eWOM (α = 0.932;CR = 0.93;AVE = 0.83)		
How often did you perform behaviours such as … ? eWOM.1: After the visit, upload photos and videos of this destination to social media (Facebook, Instagram).	0.904	44.326*
eWOM.2:After the visit, upload reviews and comments to online channels (Booking, Tripadvisor).	0.867	41.397*
eWOM.3:During the visit, send positive comments, photos and videos of this destination to your family and friends via messaging applications (WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger).	0.953	48.523*
Fit of the model: χ^2/df = 682.613/382 = 1.787; NFI = 0.966; NNFI = 0.981; IFI = 0.985; CFI = 0.985; RMR = 0.029; RMSEA = 0.023		

Note: AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability . IR = individual reliability.
*p < 0.001.

Table 5
Discriminant validity.

		1	2	3	4	5
1.	**Service experience**	0.93				
2.	**Memorable characteristics of service experience**	0.67* [0.63; 0.71]	0.77			
3.	**Satisfaction**	0.72* [0.69; 0.75]	0.93* [0.92; 0.95]	0.82		
4.	**pWOM**	0.60* [0.56; 0.64]	0.76* [0.74; 0.79]	0.80* [0.79; 0.83]	0.83	
5.	**eWOM**	0.40* [0.36; 0.45]	0.55* [0.51; 0.60]	0.53* [0.49; 0.57]	0.65* [0.61; 0.68]	0.91

Note: Below the diagonal: correlation estimated between the factors. Diagonal: square root of AVE.
*p < 0.05.

Table 6
Model fit indices and model comparisons for CFA models with marker variable.

Model	χ^2 (df)	CFI	RMSEA
1.CFA with marker variable	2629.532 (499)	0.904	0.057
2. Baseline	2671.944 (512)	0.924	0.057
3. Method-C (constrained)	2673.078 (511)	0.924	0.057
4. Method-D (unconstrained)	2633.473 (481)	0.924	0.058
5. Method-R (restricted =	2619.101 (502)	0.924	0.057
Chi-square model comparison tests	**$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)**	**Chi-square critical value: 0.05**	
1. Baseline vs Method-C	1.134 (1)	3.841	
2. Methd-C vs Method-U	39.605 (30)	43.773	
3. Method-U vs Method-R	14.372 (21)	32.671	

Note: *p < 0.05.

6. Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this research is to explore the relationship between service experience and WOM, through two mediating variables: customer satisfaction and memorable characteristics of service experience (MCSE).

6.1. Theoretical contributions

In accordance with the postulates of memory theory, service experience is closely linked to episodic/autobiographical memory (Kim et al., 2022; Stone et al., 2022). In the pre-purchasing phase of the consumer journey, consumer gathers information and generates expectations that are stored in the episodic memory of the LTM in a kind of

Table 7
Covariance matrix for the variables (N = 1476).

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
1	**EXP1.1**	0.652																														
2	**EXP1.2**	0.373	0.556																													
3	**EXP1.4**	0.402	0.334	0.834																												
4	**EXP1.5**	0.354	0.363	0.492	0.629																											
5	**EXP1.6**	0.347	0.312	0.502	0.433	0.787																										
6	**EXP2.1**	0.355	0.321	0.517	0.440	0.510	0.769																									
7	**EXP2.2**	0.385	0.355	0.537	0.476	0.506	0.542	0.866																								
8	**EXP2.3**	0.342	0.312	0.430	0.415	0.405	0.433	0.511	0.704																							
9	**EXP2.4**	0.320	0.270	0.391	0.371	0.371	0.408	0.415	0.437	0.694																						
10	**EXP2.5**	0.343	0.312	0.450	0.399	0.455	0.476	0.493	0.443	0.397	0.879																					
11	**EXP3.1**	0.343	0.111	0.472	0.435	0.404	0.454	0.491	0.481	0.435	0.472	0.695																				
12	**EXP3.2**	0.342	0.344	0.422	0.406	0.387	0.422	0.466	0.418	0.361	0.416	0.455	0.629																			
13	**EXP3.4**	0.303	0.272	0.454	0.395	0.400	0.464	0.460	0.431	0.486	0.436	0.458	0.391	0.763																		
14	**EXP4.1**	0.249	0.234	0.370	0.333	0.321	0.354	0.348	0.331	0.351	0.328	0.356	0.312	0.391	0.795																	
15	**EXP4.2**	0.258	0.223	0.380	0.354	0.340	0.363	0.368	0.356	0.344	0.351	0.354	0.320	0.413	0.600	0.847																
16	**EXP4.4**	0.319	0.270	0.490	0.425	0.421	0.494	0.478	0.444	0.420	0.448	0.464	0.398	0.518	0.558	0.587	0.893															
17	**MEM.1**	0.188	0.198	0.253	0.252	0.243	0.249	0.257	0.274	0.249	0.259	0.275	0.241	0.255	0.241	0.233	0.247	0.497														
18	**MEM.2**	0.184	0.213	0.270	0.262	0.259	0.270	0.278	0.304	0.268	0.274	0.279	0.256	0.290	0.232	0.234	0.263	0.383	0.613													
19	**MEM.4**	0.203	0.180	0.321	0.281	0.312	0.320	0.342	0.303	0.283	0.328	0.290	0.276	0.348	0.344	0.352	0.370	0.317	0.404	1.027												
20	**MEM.5**	0.205	0.176	0.289	0.261	0.269	0.260	0.274	0.292	0.277	0.266	0.298	0.261	0.310	0.286	0.310	0.309	0.313	0.386	0.574	0.812											
21	**SAT1**	0.212	0.230	0.287	0.296	0.281	0.298	0.326	0.313	0.274	0.303	0.302	0.288	0.309	0.286	0.276	0.301	0.349	0.408	0.430	0.433	0.621										
22	**SAT2**	0.230	0.205	0.301	0.299	0.282	0.303	0.305	0.338	0.312	0.319	0.351	0.296	0.333	0.281	0.302	0.340	0.333	0.338	0.371	0.395	0.405	0.564									
23	**SAT3**	0.236	0.224	0.345	0.307	0.340	0.356	0.345	0.376	0.298	0.370	0.349	0.310	0.356	0.269	0.295	0.338	0.338	0.367	0.420	0.376	0.414	0.402	0.750								
24	**SAT4**	0.219	0.221	0.271	0.292	0.282	0.290	0.307	0.322	0.280	0.296	0.293	0.294	0.305	0.248	0.260	0.292	0.342	0.399	0.393	0.382	0.419	0.384	0.404	0.589							
25	**SAT5**	0.201	0.205	0.265	0.261	0.248	0.250	0.284	0.302	0.293	0.244	0.289	0.247	0.295	0.247	0.245	0.268	0.319	0.358	0.334	0.353	0.376	0.342	0.361	0.408	0.489						
26	**pWOM.1**	0.196	0.182	0.284	0.255	0.260	0.277	0.291	0.279	0.262	0.270	0.283	0.273	0.296	0.235	0.244	0.273	0.277	0.318	0.407	0.342	0.345	0.329	0.322	0.367	0.322	0.619					
27	**pWOM.2**	0.189	0.190	0.258	0.248	0.273	0.282	0.280	0.279	0.268	0.297	0.278	0.263	0.279	0.234	0.226	0.248	0.298	0.361	0.401	0.344	0.378	0.324	0.366	0.381	0.344	0.466	0.643				
28	**pWOM.3**	0.213	0.204	0.336	0.286	0.310	0.299	0.320	0.329	0.315	0.278	0.320	0.269	0.360	0.294	0.311	0.332	0.323	0.380	0.482	0.410	0.395	0.367	0.366	0.382	0.379	0.496	0.539	0.968			
29	**eWOM.1**	0.163	0.178	0.241	0.227	0.260	0.252	0.249	0.246	0.221	0.259	0.234	0.221	0.256	0.246	0.240	0.250	0.270	0.307	0.423	0.349	0.316	0.289	0.322	0.331	0.291	0.409	0.441	0.531	1.012		
30	**eWOM.2**	0.158	0.172	0.255	0.215	0.272	0.260	0.262	0.231	0.226	0.256	0.224	0.231	0.265	0.245	0.248	0.274	0.239	0.300	0.433	0.332	0.313	0.270	0.308	0.308	0.280	0.358	0.391	0.501	0.766	0.978	
31	**eWOM.3**	0.162	0.174	0.245	0.217	0.257	0.243	0.248	0.242	0.227	0.256	0.239	0.228	0.259	0.229	0.222	0.241	0.259	0.297	0.404	0.325	0.318	0.278	0.308	0.312	0.280	0.363	0.379	0.477	0.823	0.780	0.899

Table 8
Summary of the structural model analysis.

Hyp.	Path	Parameter	*t*-value	Result
H_1	Service experience → MCSE	0.713	23.776*	Supported
H_2	Service experience → Satisfaction	0.752	27.391*	Supported
H_3	MCSE → pWOM	0.354	12.709*	Supported
H_4	MCSE → eWOM	0.344	10.608*	Supported
H_5	Satisfaction → pWOM	0.564	19.660*	Supported
H_6	Satisfaction → eWOM	0.280	9.118*	Supported
Model fit: $\chi^2/df = 885.7984/382 = 2.318$; NFI = 0.956; NNFI = 0.969; IFI = 0.974; CFI = 0.974; RMR = 0.040; RMSEA = 0.030				

Note: * = p < 0.001.

Table 9
Total and indirect effects.

Path	Total effects		Indirect effects	
	Parameter	t-value	Parameter	t-value
Service experience→Satisfaction	0.752	27.391*		
Service experience→MCSE	0.713	23.776*		
Service experience→pWOM	0.676	25.764*	0.676	25.764*
Service experience→eWOM	0.456	19.226*	0.456	19.226*
Satisfaction→pWOM	0.564	19.660*		
Satisfaction→eWOM	0.280	9.118*		
MCSE→pWOM	0.354	12.709*		
MCSE→eWOM	0.344	10.608*		

Note: *$p < 0.001$.

Table 10
Memorable characteristics, satisfaction and WOM.

	High Satisfaction (++)	Satisfaction (+)	Dissatisfaction (−)
High MCSE	high pWOM(++) high eWOM(++)	high pWOM(+) high eWOM(+)	No pWOM high eWOM(−)
Medium MCSE	medium pWOM(++)	medium pWOM (+)	No pWOM
	medium eWOM(++)	medium eWOM (+)	medium eWOM (−)
Low MCSE	low pWOM(++) low eWOM(++)	low pWOM(+) low eWOM(+)	No pWOM low eWOM(−)

memory known as episodic simulation (Gaesser and Schacter, 2013). During the service experience, episodic memory enables a comparison between perception with episodic simulation and with other autobiographical memories (Tulving, 2002).

A trace is generated in the episodic memory, which is a unique record with different phenomenological dimensions: accessibility, vividness, visual perspective, coherence, valence, sharing and emotional intensity (Sutin and Robins, 2007; Sutin et al., 2021). When a WOM setting occurs, the retrieval process evokes traces of autobiographical memory, with vividness, emotional intensity, sharing and valence exerting the most influence on pWOM and eWOM (Heuer and Reisberg, 1990; Sutin and Robins, 2007). Episodic memory is therefore the mechanism of the human mind that enables cognitive processes and behaviours to have consequences for future cognitive processes and behaviours.

The results of the study show that all the hypotheses are met: customer satisfaction and MCSE are mediating variables of the relationship between service experience and WOM behaviours. These results are consistent with the findings of Prentice et al. (2022) where memorable experience and satisfaction are mediating variables between service quality and customer loyalty. As pointed out by Keiningham et al. (2018) and Sweeney et al. (2020), the different WOM behaviours must be studied separately. The relationship between MCSE, satisfaction and WOM behaviours is summarised in Table 9 and Fig. 4. Three levels of customer satisfaction (high satisfaction, satisfaction and dissatisfaction) and three levels of MCSE (high, medium and low) are considered (see Table 10).

When service experience has caused high MCSE, the result is high pWOM and high eWOM settings. In general, in situations in which the possibility of WOM may be activated and service experience generates high MCSE, autobiographical memory will have high levels of vividness, emotional intensity and sharing dimensions, and accordingly a strong likelihood of being retrieved by short term memory. Customers will actively compare the service experience through on and offline channels. When service experience has led to customer dissatisfaction and therefore negative valence of autobiographical memory, no pWOM is generated, although eWOM is, albeit in a negative sense. In situations of exceptionally high MCSE, a flashbulb memory (very high vividness, emotional intensity, sharing and valence) will be generated.

When service experience provokes medium MCSE, medium pWOM and medium eWOM scenarios are generated. In general, in situations in which the possibility of WOM may be activated and service experience generates medium levels of MCSE, at the moment of retrieval, the autobiographical memory will not be in the initial positions of the evoked set of memories retrieved from the episodic memory. The reason will be that the phenomenological dimensions of vividness, emotional intensity and sharing will have medium values and will not occupy preferential places in the order of retrieval. The customer will not initially refer to the autobiographical memory in on and offline channels, although it could be evoked following the WOM process. When service experience has caused customer dissatisfaction and therefore a negative valence in the autobiographical memory, pWOM is not generated. However, if eWOM is generated, it will be in the negative sense.

Finally, when service experience has caused low levels of MCSE, low pWOM and eWOM settings are generated. In general, in situations in which the possibility of WOM is activated and the service experience generates low levels of MCSE, the autobiographical memory will not be retrieved from the episodic memory. This is due to low or non-existent levels of vividness, emotional intensity, sharing and valence phenomenological dimensions of the episodic memory. The likelihood of the customer referring to the service experience through on and offline

Fig. 4. eWOM and pWOM scenarios.

channels is very low or non-existent.

This study makes four contributions to the literature. First of all, it incorporates human memory theory into service theory, thereby responding to a call for further research in this field (Stone et al., 2022; Hosany et al., 2022). This perspective means that a past service experience can be projected onto the future, identifying the mechanisms of the human mind that influence future behaviours. Discovering the mechanisms that intervene in the memory system leads to a better understanding of the dynamics of service experience and to the inclusion of a time perspective to its study (Manthiou et al., 2020; Babin et al., 2020; Akire et al., 2020; Verhulst et al., 2020). The retrieval of autobiographical memories is an important aspect of the co-creation of service experiences as exemplified by its influence on the activation of WOM behaviours.

Secondly, the identification of the phenomenological dimensions of autobiographical memory (Sutin and Robins, 2007; Klaus and Kuppelwieser, 2021). In this sense, vividness, emotional intensity, sharing and valence are essential characteristics that define MCE, since they determine their memorability and the activation of WOM behaviours (Cooper, Kensinger and Ritchey, 2019). This model also helps identify the antecedents of MCE and the sources of their influence: MCSE and customer satisfaction. This contribution sheds light on the question of whether or not customer satisfaction is enough to explain post-purchasing behaviours such as loyalty or WOM: MCSE has a similar level of impact on WOM behaviours as customer satisfaction.

Thirdly, the relationship between WOM, customer satisfaction and service experience has barely been studied (Donthu et al., 2021). This work takes a new approach to this study: it establishes a path between service experience and WOM behaviours through two mediating variables. Service experience on the consumer journey establishes moments that lend memorability to an experience (MCSE) and that generate satisfaction/dissatisfaction in the customer. While customer satisfaction appears to have a closer association with valence and sharing dimensions of episodic memory, MCSE appears to be more associated with vividness, emotional intensity and sharing. This can help explain why customer satisfaction has more influence on positive WOM, whereas MCSE has more influence on WOM: pWOM is only generated in settings where customer satisfaction is positive and MCSE has medium to high intensity.

Fourthly, it has been established that not all WOM behaviours can be treated in the same way (Keiningham et al., 2018; Stone et al., 2022). In this study, we conclude that it is important to differentiate between the different types of WOM behaviours because the impact of service experience is different. In our case, pWOM is only generated in settings where customer satisfaction is positive and MCSE has a medium to high intensity. The intensity of pWOM and eWOM depends on MCSE, while the valence is associated with customer satisfaction (episodic memory valence).

6.2. Practical recommendations

WOM is of great concern to tourist destinations, especially following the emergence of instant messaging apps, social media and online platforms. The commentaries, recommendations and multimedia content that tourists make during and after their visit have a great impact on the decisions of other tourists. Therefore, an in-depth examination of their antecedents is a very important aspect.

Tourism destinations must be aware that customers' memory systems constantly evoke autobiographical memories when STM needs to perform a cognitive assessment. In a tourism experience, STM constantly evokes episodic simulation (expectations formed at the pre-visit stage) and other episodic memories (associated with other prior experiences at other destinations or linked to other autobiographical events). The tourism destination must ensure that the customer journey generates customer satisfaction, since it will be associated with the valence and sharing of memories linked to the experience. In accordance with the measurement scale used, it is essential that all the services of the service ecosystem generate positive feelings, meet visitor expectations and generate positive satisfaction. In this sense, the results of this study show that the three most important dimensions of service experience are moments of truth, output focus and peace of mind. It therefore seems appropriate to identify the critical points of contact of the consumer journey and to pay attention to the associated management procedures.

Furthermore, the tourism destination must attempt to make the experience as memorable as possible because it will lead to it being evoked in WOM situations both during and after the visit. The memorability of an experience is associated with the vividness and emotional intensity with which it is recalled when it is evoked. Although further research on this subject is necessary, this study indicates that in the case of tourism destinations, experiences must generate revitalisation, enjoyment and novelty in the tourist, through events that are significant, unique and distinctive. Flashbulb memories reveal that the emotional impact of an event, due to its outcomes, significativeness, novelty and surprise, leaves a deep imprint on the human mind, giving it a preferential place in the evoked set of memories.

Generally speaking, MCSE and customer satisfaction are necessary for pWOM and eWOM. If a tourist visit has been highly satisfactory but has not generated MCSE, the associated episodic memory will not be evoked in a WOM situation. Likewise, if an event at the destination has caused MCSE but customer dissatisfaction, it will generate eWOM but not pWOM.

6.3. Limitations and future research

The main limitation of the study lies in the sample. Despite its considerable size, it focuses on one country, a specific sector and a period of time when the whole world was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Undoubtedly these aspects will require completion in future so that the conclusions can be generalised.

The study can inspire future lines of research. Theoretical background and memory theory provide a very solid base for the relationships considered. An in-depth examination could be made of the direct links between customer satisfaction, service experience, MCSE and the phenomenological dimensions of autobiographical memories. Recently, measurement scales of these dimensions have been validated (Klaus and Kuppelwieser, 2021) and could be used to contrast some of the implicit associations raised in this study, in particular with vividness, emotional intensity, sharing and valence.

It would also be interesting to consider the relationship between the phenomenological dimensions of autobiographical memories and WOM behaviours, to analyze whether, for example, sharing and valence have a direct relationship with the intensity and meaning of WOM.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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