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## THE DIMENSIONS OF MEMORABLE MARINE TOURISM EXPERIENCES<sup>†</sup>

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### Abstract

In a post COVID-19 era the tourism industry has been forced to adapt to a changing business world evident in the paradigmatic shifts in tourist behavior. The industry has been forced to transform in order to recover from the devastation caused by the pandemic. A strategy which could prove useful for the rejuvenation and the sustainability of the tourism industry is the provision of memorable experiences. Understanding the dimensions that contribute to memorable experiences is vital for the success of tourism businesses. Therefore, the aim of the study was to investigate which dimensions contribute to a memorable marine tourism experience (MMTE) in South Africa. The exploratory research design and mixed method approach were applied in the study. A total of 444 usable questionnaires were analyzed by means of descriptive and inferential statistics. The results indicate that eight dimensions positively relate to MMTEs. Hedonism is the most important dimension to increase the likelihood of shark-diving experiences being remembered. Whereas, five dimensions in particular (refreshment, social-interaction, meaningfulness, knowledge and novelty) will increase the memorability of whale-watching experiences, while an increase in delight will enhance the memorability of the experience for all three activities (whale-watching, shark-diving and visits to marine protected areas (MPAs)). The results of the study are important for marine tourism businesses who want to stage memorable experiences, in order to meet the needs of their customers and to enhance the relevance and sustainability of their businesses.

**Keywords:** Memorable Tourism Experience, Marine Tourism, Delight, Shark-diving, Whale-Watching, Marine Protected Areas

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### 1. Introduction

As the world is recovering from COVID-19 and many businesses are trying to rebuild and stabilize themselves, it has become evident that businesses are operating in a changing world and will have to adapt to a new business environment. This new business environment is characterized by several new developments. The first development faced by businesses is a surge in technology and digitization (Sneader and Singhal, 2021). The second development relates to changes made to business supply chains. The third development faced by businesses is a new consumer who is displaying a change in behavior. Consumers are making significant changes to how they live, work, and shop (McCabe, 2021).

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The aforementioned developments are particularly evident in the tourism industry, which, during the COVID-19 pandemic, was one of the most vulnerable and most affected industries (South African Government, 2023). This industry has been forced to adapt to paradigmatic shifts in tourist behavior (Kock *et al.* 2020) and pushed toward transformation (Sigala, 2020) because of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Prior to the pandemic, the tourism industry was heralded as one of the world's largest industries, with a considerable growth rate which surpassed the growth of the global economy for nine consecutive years (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2022). The tourism industry was responsible for the employment of 333 million people (10.3% of all jobs) and a global GDP contribution of USD 9.6 trillion (10.3% of global distribution) (WTTC, 2022). During the pandemic, the tourism industry's contribution to global GDP dropped to USD 4.9 trillion (5.3% of global distribution) in 2020. In 2021, the contribution to global GDP increased slightly by USD 1 trillion (WTTC 2022). Despite the devastating effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry, the future prospect of the industry is positive. Projections indicate a decade of growth, with GDP forecasted to grow on average by 5.8% annually between 2022 and 2032. GDP is expected to return to 2019 levels by the end of 2023 (WTTC, 2022).

In response to the changes and developments in the business environment and in order to achieve the growth projections, the tourism industry has had to formulate strategies to rejuvenate the industry. Today, many tourists are seeking memorable experiences (Hosany *et al.* 2022). Memorable experiences are considered to be special experiences (Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014) and the memories associated with these experiences serve as the most useful and important source of information for individuals who are deciding whether or not to revisit a destination (Marschall, 2012). The provision of memorable experiences is also integral to successful tourism products (Chen *et al.* 2020) as they are a core determinant of loyalty behaviors (Zhang *et al.* 2018) and sustainability of a destination (Hosseini *et al.* 2021).

During and post COVID-19, tourists also appear to be increasingly drawn to tourist experiences that are hosted outdoors in wide-open spaces (South Africa National Department of Tourism, 2021) and a preference for coastal and rural destinations has been identified (OECD, 2020). Marine tourism activities offer the type of experiences sought by tourists post COVID-19, as many of these experiences take place outdoors and in coastal areas some of which are remote. Furthermore, marine tourism is also a key sector with high economic growth potential (Dimitrovski *et al.* 2021) which is vital for the tourism industry at present. South Africa is situated in a prime location to host marine tourism activities as the country has an extensive coastline and is surrounded by three oceans (South African Government, 2022) rich in marine resources (Saayman, 2014). The country's marine tourism sector attracts visitors from around the world who are mainly drawn by the diversity of marine wildlife resources found in the oceans surrounding the country (Mabaleka *et al.* 2020).

From the preceding discussion it is evident that staging experiences which are desired by consumers is the best way for tourism businesses to remain relevant, succeed and remain sustainable. Furthermore, marine tourism has been identified as an important type of tourism which can aid the industry in recovery. Consequently, a logical next step would be to investigate the provision of memorable experiences in a marine tourism context. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the dimensions of memorable marine tourism experiences, or in short MMTEs.

Understanding the dimensions that lead to the formation of memorable experiences is vital to the competitiveness and ultimate success of tourism businesses (Stone *et al.* 2022). Numerous studies have been conducted on memorable experiences in different contexts. The most recent studies focus on memorable dining experiences (Ma *et al.* 2022), memorable experiences at natural attractions (Andrianto *et al.* 2022), memorable wellness tourism experiences (Sthapit *et al.* 2022), astrotourism (Rodrigues *et al.* 2023) and memorable quarantine hotel experiences (Chia and Xiong, 2023). There appears to be a dearth of research on the dimensions of MMTEs, particularly whale-watching experiences, shark-diving experiences, and visits to marine protected areas (MPAs). Current research on MMTEs focuses mostly on the effectiveness of marine tourism experiences in encouraging conservation behavior (Hofman *et al.* 2022), tourist motivation for participation in marine tourism experiences (Carvache-Franco *et al.*

2020), virtual reality tourism experience in a marine setting (Walters *et al.* 2022) and profile characteristics of marine tourists (Jonas *et al.* 2019).

Due to the absence of past research focusing on the dimensions of MMTEs with a particular focus on selected marine tourism experiences, and a call by researchers (Seyfi *et al.* 2020) for more critical contextualization of memorable tourism experience (MTE) dimensions, seven dimensions of memorable experiences (hedonism, novelty, social-interaction, rejuvenation (refreshment), meaningfulness, involvement and knowledge) were selected and the influence of these dimensions on memorable experiences in a marine tourism context was measured. Six dimensions (hedonism, novelty, rejuvenation (refreshment), meaningfulness, involvement and knowledge) were selected as they form part of Kim *et al.* (2012) memorable experience scale, which is one of the most commonly cited memorable experience scales and has been successfully validated and found reliable for assessing tourists' memorable experiences. Social interaction was selected as a dimension because it has been successfully applied in research into tourist activities, for example by Park and Santos (2017), Wei *et al.* (2019), Jonas *et al.* (2020) and Chen *et al.* (2020). All these dimensions were also selected as they were deemed relevant to marine tourism experiences. One more dimension, namely delight, was added to the list of seven dimensions. The current study regards delight as an emotion which is comprised of pleasure and arousal and therefore delight is viewed as a separate construct from satisfaction.

The emotional salience of an experience increases the likelihood of the experience being remembered (Kensinger, 2004). Furthermore, experiences which evoke emotions are more likely to be remembered than those which evoke no emotion (Kensinger, 2004). When individuals reminisce about experiences which they have had in the past, it is often only the delightful experiences that are remembered (Kalliatakis, 2017). This is due to the fact that delightful experiences have a strong memory trace (Berman, 2005). As a result of the foregoing discussion, delight will be included (in addition to the seven dimensions already identified) as a prospective dimension which contributes to a MMTE.

The results of this study can assist marine tourism businesses with staging memorable experiences. This will enable marine tourism businesses to meet the needs of their customers and remain relevant. Furthermore, the results can also assist marine tourism businesses to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Marine tourism in South Africa**

South Africa has the third largest coastline in Africa, extending nearly 3000 kilometres (National Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, 2022), making this a prime destination for marine tourism. There is no current data related to the economic contribution of marine tourism to the South African economy (Bob *et al.* 2018). However, the available data indicates substantial direct contributions to the economy amounting to R11.9 billion in 2015 and later in 2020 the contribution was expected to increase to R21.4 billion (Department of Tourism Republic of South Africa, 2017). By 2033 it was predicted that the direct contribution would increase to R177 billion (Xasa, 2017). Based on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic these predictions might be lower than previously expected.

To make the study manageable, three activities from the leisure category of marine tourism have been selected as the focus. The first activity is whale-watching. South Africa is known as one of the top destinations worldwide for whale-watching (International Whaling Commission, 2023). The second activity, shark-diving is a niche sector in marine tourism which enables tourists to view sharks in their natural habitat either from boats or underwater (Cater, 2008). This activity has grown in popularity and has become an appealing attraction which contributes to the South African economy (González-Mantilla *et al.* 2022). The third activity relates to visits to MPAs. MPAs are areas "of sea and/or coastline ... especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biodiversity and natural and cultural resources through being managed in a structured and legal manner" (World Wildlife Fund for Nature, 2014). South Africa is home to 42 MPAs (The South African Environmental Observation Network, 2023).

## **2.2. Memorable tourism experiences**

MTEs have become the ultimate experience sought by tourists (Bigne *et al.* 2020) and therefore an influx of tourists are seeking MTEs (Hosany *et al.* 2022). From a tourism business perspective, the importance of MTEs stems from the fact that tourists base most of their decisions on past experiences (Hosseini *et al.* 2012). Consequently, tourists' past experiences and memory are the most important determinants in their decision-making process (Kim *et al.* 2012). Furthermore, experiences and memories also influence tourists' behavioral intentions (Gohary *et al.* 2020). Providing tourists with a satisfactory experience is no longer enough to persuade repurchase or revisitation; instead, tourists should be given a memorable experience to ensure repurchase or revisitation (Melón *et al.* 2021). Eight dimensions were selected for the current study, each of these dimensions will be briefly discussed in the subsequent sections.

### **2.2.1. Hedonism**

Hedonism can be defined as the pleasure that a tourist derives from a tourist experience (Zhang *et al.* 2018). It is often associated with emotions such as excitement and surprise (Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2013). Tourists generally seek pleasurable experiences while participating in tourism activities and hedonism has been identified as one of the most significant components of travel and recreational practices (Wei *et al.* 2019). Hedonism acts as a powerful trigger influencing emotions and memories (Chandralal *et al.* 2015) and therefore has been identified as a fundamental part of memory (Coudounaris and Sthapit, 2017). Due to its influence on memory, hedonism is also considered a crucial part of MTEs. Chen *et al.* (2020) agree that hedonism is a crucial component which enriches the memorability of an experience.

### **2.2.2. Novelty**

In tourism, novelty refers to new or unique experiences (Mitas and Bastiaansen, 2018), which are perceived to be unfamiliar by tourists and unlike prior experiences (Blomstervik and Olsen, 2022). Novelty is a core part of tourism experiences as travel provides experiences which are different from daily life or routine (Lee and Crompton, 1992). Moreover, novelty can be considered an antecedent to enjoyable experiences (Mitas and Bastiaansen, 2018) and an influencer in the decision-making process (Petrick, 2002). According to Zhang *et al.* (2018), novelty is fundamental to understanding memorable consumption experiences and has been identified as a precursor to MTEs. Wei *et al.* (2019) also concur that novelty is an important dimension required for the delivery of memorable experiences.

### **2.2.3. Refreshment**

Refreshment denotes a sense of relaxation and renewal (Zhong *et al.* 2017) and is an essential component of tourism activities (Huang *et al.* 2022). Refreshment provides tourists with the feeling of escape from daily life (Hurombo *et al.* 2014); it focuses on the individual's state of mind (Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2018) and therefore individuals derive psychological benefits from refreshing experiences (Taheri *et al.* 2021). According to Park and Santos (2017), refreshment increases the memorability of a tourism experience. Yu *et al.* (2019) agree that refreshment significantly influences the memorability of an experience.

### **2.2.4. Meaningfulness**

Meaningful experiences lead to personal growth, development, and change (Coudounaris and Sthapit, 2017). These experiences enable tourists to learn more about themselves and society, as well as maintaining good relationships with others (Yu *et al.* 2019). Meaningful experiences are formed through active participation or engagement in different activities (Lončarić *et al.* 2021). Tourism experiences that are perceived as meaningful tend to be more memorable (Gao *et al.* 2012). Sthapit and Coudounaris (2018) concur that when tourists have a meaningful experience or an experience where they learn something new about themselves while vacationing it is most likely to result in a memorable experience.

### **2.2.5. Involvement**

Involvement in an experience is defined as the degree of interaction, participation, and engagement that tourists experience while participating in tourism activities (Zatori *et al.* 2018). Tourists' involvement commences during the planning phase of the tourism experience, while visualizing their engagement in activities. The tourists' involvement continues to the on-site phase, where tourists actively participate in tourism activities (Zatori *et al.* 2018). Involvement in various activities leads to MTEs (Coudanaris and Sthapit, 2017). Similarly, Zatori *et al.* (2018) found that involvement increases the memorability of travel experiences and enhances the value for tourists.

### **2.2.6. Knowledge**

Knowledge is the educational dimension of a tourist experience (Kim and Ritchie, 2013). In the tourism context, knowledge refers to learning new things, as well as the development of new skills and insights which individuals can acquire by participating in tourism experiences (Kim, 2014). The desire to acquire knowledge is also one of the socio-psychological motivations which predispose tourists to travel (Kim, 2014). In the marine tourism sector, knowledge has also been cited as a motivator for tourist participation in marine tourism activities (Geldenhuys, Van der Merwe and Saayman, 2019). Furthermore, knowledge has also been identified as a fundamental factor contributing to MTEs (Tung and Ritchie, 2011).

### **2.2.7. Social interaction**

Social interaction refers to face-to-face encounters where individuals are physically present and engage with one another for a duration of time (Little, 2016). Tourism is a social phenomenon (Huang and Hsu, 2010) and therefore often occurs with or alongside other people, which implies that tourists have constant encounters/interactions with fellow tourists and these encounters/interactions can have an influence on the individual's experience (Rihova *et al.* 2018). Social-interaction aids in fulfilling tourists' social-psychological needs, relating to the need for experiencing positive feelings and emotions (Choo and Petrick, 2014) and adds to the value of an experience (Campos *et al.* 2016). According to Sthapit and Jimenez-Barreto (2018), social-interaction also contributes positively to the memorability of a tourism experience. Chen *et al.* (2020) agrees that social-interaction aids in shaping MTEs.

### **2.2.8. Customer delight**

Customer delight is an emotion characterized by joy, exhilaration, thrill or exuberance (Oliver *et al.* 1997). It is related to the concept of customer satisfaction, but also separate and distinct from this concept (Baluyot and Pampolina, 2021). In the tourism industry customer, delight is viewed as a strategic imperative (Jiang, 2019) as it has an influence on behavioral intention (Jiang, 2019) and can deliver significant outcomes such as customer retention (Torres *et al.* 2014), business profitability (Torres *et al.* 2014), customer loyalty (Kim, 2011) and memorable customer experiences (Ma *et al.* 2013).

## **3. Methodology**

The exploratory research design was adopted for the study. This design was selected as it provided the researcher with additional insights into the problem and aided with the identification of relevant variables for the study (McDaniel and Gates, 2020). The mixed method approach was followed as a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study. The type of mixed approach applied was an exploratory sequential mixed method design. This design is characterized by a qualitative and a quantitative phase (Cresswell and Cresswell, 2018). The qualitative component of the study consisted of interviews with experts in the field of marine tourism to explore how they describe memorable experiences. In the subsequent quantitative phase, the information was analyzed, and the findings were used to create a survey instrument which was administered to a sample of the population under study.

### 3.1. Sample

The sample for the study included individuals aged 19 years and older, who had participated in at least one of the selected marine tourism experiences (whale-watching, shark-diving or visits to MPAs) in South Africa. A complete sample frame of tourists who participated in the designated marine tourism activities in South Africa could not be found; however, according to South Africa Tourism (2017) more than 5 million tourism related trips (inbound and outbound) were taken between July 2017 and September 2017 in South Africa. It was assumed that the number of tourists participating the selected marine tourism activities exceeded 5000 and therefore the sample desired sample size was a minimum of 400 responses which was determined based on the recommendation by Gay *et al.* (2012). Ultimately 444 usable questionnaires were received.

### 3.2. The data collection instrument

The data for the study was collected by means of an online survey as well as a self-administered paper-based questionnaire. No instrument could be found that measured memorable experiences in a marine tourism context and which specifically included delight as a dimension of memorable experiences. At the outset 75 items were selected from questionnaires of previous research on memorable experiences and customer delight, in different contexts. The items sourced from existing literature were adopted and adapted from Finn (2005), Mossberg (2007), Kim (2009), Bigné *et al.* (2005), Bowden and Dagger (2011), and Triantafyllidou and Petala (2016). Additional items were developed based on the literature review.

The 75 selected items were reviewed by six subject experts with a marketing management and experience marketing background and a statistician at a South African university. The reviewers retained 63 items which they deemed to be relevant to MMTEs. The items which were retained were then evaluated by a psychology and tourism expert to verify the content validity from a tourism and psychology perspective. After the evaluation 56 items remained. Thereafter, the questionnaire was sent for review to three tourism experts working in industry, which resulted in minor changes to the wording of certain items. After attending to the minor changes, three individuals who had participated in at least one of the three selected marine tourism activities were asked to review the questionnaire to determine the ease of understanding, no further changes were requested. The final questionnaire contained 43 items. Twenty conveniently selected respondents were selected to participate in a pilot study, to ascertain the adequacy of the research instrument. The pilot study resulted in the adjustment to the wording of two items.

### 3.3. Data collection analysis

The study utilized two types of web-based approaches to collect the primary data. Firstly, the survey was posted on Google Forms and the link to the survey was distributed via social-media and e-mailed to prospective respondents, who were asked to complete the questionnaire. Secondly, a research firm (online panel company) invited respondents on their database to participate in a web-based survey. In addition to the web-based methods, self-administered questionnaires were also distributed in order to reach respondents who might not have been reached with the web-based survey. Respondents were asked two screening questions which were related to the marine tourism activity in which they participated (visits to marine protected areas, whale-watching or shark-diving) and a question regarding whether the experience was positively memorable or not. The screening questions were used to ensure that those respondents who were surveyed met the pre-determined criteria of the target population. The study employed purposive sampling as specific characteristics (i.e. age of respondent, participation in one of the selected marine tourism activities in South Africa and experience was positively memorable) required by the sample were identified. The research firm (online panel company) was then allowed to invite respondents based on the predetermined characteristics. The data was collected from August to September 2017. A total of 11 764 respondents were invited of which 83 usable responses were received. To locate more respondents, convenience and snowball sampling were employed. These methods assisted the researcher to gather a further 361 responses. The statistical package STATISTICA was used for data analysis.

#### 4. Results

##### 4.1. Sample demographics

The sample was made up of 444 respondents. The respondents' age variation was 65.3% were young adults (19-40 years old), 29% were mature adults (41-59 years old) and 5.7% were senior citizens (60+ years old). Approximately half (51.8%) of respondents were female. Most of the respondents (77.2%) had some type of tertiary qualification (certificate, diploma, degree or post-graduate degree). Most of the respondents (80%) were South African and 80.9% of respondents resided in Africa during the data collection period. A cross-tabulation of the respondents showed that nearly half (46.7%) of the respondents had visited MPAs, and 27.9% participated in whale-watching experiences, while slightly fewer (25.4%) of respondents had participated in shark-diving experiences.

##### 4.2. Dimensions of MMTEs

Based on the literature review the MMTE was expected to consist of eight factors. The content and face validity of the items representing each dimension of memorable experience within a marine tourism context was strengthened through the opinions of various subject and industry experts, as previously indicated. In addition, the reliability of each of the proposed dimensions was tested by calculating the Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each dimension (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Internal consistency for the scale items**

Dimensions	Cronbach Alpha's
Hedonism	0.85
Involvement	0.86
Knowledge	0.81
Meaningfulness	0.89
Novelty	0.84
Refreshment	0.87
Social-Interaction	0.86
Delight	0.94
<b>Memorable experience</b>	<b>0.94</b>

As shown in Table 1, the Cronbach Alpha's ranged from 0.81 to 0.94, indicating that the scale was internally reliable. The scale intended to measure memorable experience was also considered reliable with Cronbach's Alpha of 0.94. A summary of the descriptive results of the study is illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics for dimensions of a memorable marine tourism experience**

Dimensions	Mean	S.D.	Min	Quartile 1	Median	Quartile 3	Max
Hedonism	5.80	1.09	2.20	5.20	6.00	6.80	7.00
Refreshment	5.27	1.34	1.00	4.50	5.50	6.25	7.00
Social-Interaction	4.08	1.54	1.00	3.00	4.00	5.25	7.00
Meaningfulness	4.74	1.58	1.00	3.50	4.75	6.00	7.00
Knowledge	4.30	1.45	1.00	3.25	4.25	5.50	7.00
Novelty	4.57	1.55	1.00	3.25	4.75	5.75	7.00
Involvement	5.48	1.28	1.00	4.75	5.75	6.50	7.00
Delight	5.46	1.23	1.67	4.89	5.56	6.44	7.00
<b>Memorable Experience</b>	<b>5.00</b>	<b>1.59</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>4.00</b>	<b>5.20</b>	<b>6.20</b>	<b>7.00</b>

As shown in Table 2, standard deviations of the mean scores ranged from 1.09 to 1.59. The median values for six of the dimensions were slightly above the mean scores, which suggests that the data was negatively skewed. Two dimensions, namely social-interaction and knowledge indicated median values that were below the mean scores implying that the data was not symmetrical but positively skewed (Spatz, 2011). All the dimensions attracted mean scores above 4.00, indicating that the respondents had a fairly positive perception of the marine tourism experience in which they had participated. Hedonism attracted the highest mean score ( $M=5.80$ ,  $SD=1.09$ ) on the 7-point scale, while social-interaction attracted the lowest score ( $M=4.08$ ,  $SD=1.54$ ). This implies that respondents were most positive about hedonism and least positive

about social interaction during a marine tourism experience. Involvement was the second-place dimension, followed by delight. The mean scores ranged from 5.46 to 5.48. The standard deviations of the means scores ranged from 1.23 to 1.28. Pearson's product moment correlation coefficients were calculated to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The results are reported in Table 3.

**Table 3. Correlations between variables**

<b>All Activities Combined</b>									
<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Hedonism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Refreshment	0.630	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Social-Interaction	0.340	0.400	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Meaningfulness	0.439	0.435	0.581	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Knowledge	0.402	0.397	0.655	0.766	-	-	-	-	-
6. Novelty	0.420	0.214	0.421	0.547	0.615	-	-	-	-
7. Involvement	0.709	0.563	0.454	0.596	0.565	0.555	-	-	-
8. Delight	0.713	0.629	0.441	0.548	0.515	0.472	0.749	-	-
9. Memorable Experience	0.569	0.449	0.488	0.746	0.668	0.593	0.675	0.645	-
<b>Shark-Diving</b>									
<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Hedonism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Refreshment	0.602	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Social-Interaction	0.432	0.581	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Meaningfulness	0.499	0.618	0.555	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Knowledge	0.485	0.611	0.636	0.662	-	-	-	-	-
6. Novelty	0.534	0.273	0.334	0.393	0.455	-	-	-	-
7. Involvement	0.829	0.655	0.467	0.628	0.519	0.565	-	-	-
8. Delight	0.760	0.694	0.520	0.655	0.567	0.545	0.845	-	-
9. Memorable Experience	0.723	0.617	0.494	0.632	0.560	0.590	0.794	0.796	-
<b>Whale-Watching</b>									
<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Hedonism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Refreshment	0.751	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Social-Interaction	0.370	0.497	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Meaningfulness	0.474	0.576	0.684	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Knowledge	0.435	0.538	0.752	0.834	-	-	-	-	-
6. Novelty	0.494	0.482	0.503	0.673	0.739	-	-	-	-
7. Involvement	0.689	0.669	0.610	0.731	0.710	0.746	-	-	-
8. Delight	0.715	0.671	0.455	0.599	0.578	0.651	0.777	-	-
9. Memorable Experience	0.643	0.681	0.602	0.804	0.709	0.650	0.775	0.727	-
<b>Marine Protected Areas</b>									
<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>
1. Hedonism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Refreshment	0.670	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Social-Interaction	0.260	0.244	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Meaningfulness	0.357	0.266	0.529	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Knowledge	0.310	0.251	0.613	0.766	-	-	-	-	-
6. Novelty	0.269	0.172	0.433	0.525	0.587	-	-	-	-
7. Involvement	0.657	0.554	0.364	0.462	0.465	0.353	-	-	-
8. Delight	0.672	0.633	0.393	0.426	0.422	0.277	0.645	-	-
9. Memorable Experience	0.444	0.402	0.437	0.772	0.675	0.500	0.565	0.539	-

Table 3 shows that all correlations were positive and statistically significant ( $r \geq .093$ ) (Gravetter and Wallnau, 2013). Table 4 demonstrates where the strongest positive relationships between the activity and memorable experience were identified. According to the results in Table 4, the strongest relationship exists between hedonism and memorability in the case of shark-diving experiences. With regards to whale-watching the strongest relationship exists between refreshment, social-interaction, meaningfulness, knowledge, novelty and memorable experience. When considering all the activities combined, delight has the strongest relationship with

memorability. These findings imply that an increase in the independent variables mentioned above will result in an increase in the memorability of each of the identified experiences.

**Table 4. Correlations between variables – strong positive relationships**

	All Activities Combined	Shark-Diving	Marine Protected Areas	Whale-Watching
Hedonism	-	0.723	-	-
Refreshment	-	-	-	0.681
Social Interaction	-	-	-	0.602
Meaningfulness	-	-	-	0.804
Knowledge	-	-	-	0.709
Novelty	-	-	-	0.650
Delight	0.796	-	-	-

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the dimensions which contribute to MMTEs in South Africa. Eight dimensions which influence the memorability of a marine tourism experience were proposed. The results confirm that these dimensions positively relate to MMTEs.

### 5.1. Hedonism

In relation to hedonism, the findings of the study suggest that respondents were more positive about the hedonism of the experience than the other dimensions, demonstrating that marine tourism experiences are considered to be hedonistic, and that hedonism is a dimension which contributes to the memorability of a marine tourism experience. Hedonism was found to have a strong positive relationship with MMTEs (for all activities combined, shark-diving, and whale-watching). These relationships are supported by Chen *et al.* (2020) who indicated that hedonism is a crucial component of memorable experiences. Hedonism is associated with pleasure, excitement, and surprise.

### 5.2. Novelty

Novelty was found to have a strong positive correlation with MMTEs (for all activities combined and for the three activities individually). The significant influence of novelty on MMTEs in the current study supports the research findings by Wei *et al.* (2019) who attest that novelty is a dimension which contributes to memorable experiences.

### 5.3. Refreshment

Refreshment contributes to the creation of memorable shark-diving and whale-watching experiences. Higher levels of refreshment in whale-watching experiences, in particular, lead to higher levels of memorability. A strong positive correlation was found between refreshment and MMTEs (for shark-diving and whale-watching) and a moderate positive correlation was reported between refreshment and MMTEs (for visits to MPAs). This is in line with the findings of Yu *et al.* (2019) who found that refreshment influences the memorability of an experience.

### 5.4. Meaningfulness

Meaningfulness was found to have a strong positive correlation with MMTEs (for all activities combined and each individual activity). This influence of meaningfulness on MMTEs found in the current study supports the findings of Sthapit and Coudounaris (2018) who indicated that meaningful experiences result in a more memorable experience.

### **5.5. Involvement**

Involvement plays an important role in making experiences memorable. This relates to all the selected experiences but more so to shark-diving experiences. Involvement was found to have a strong positive correlation with MMTEs (for all activities combined and each individual activity). This is aligned with the findings by Zatori *et al.* (2018) who found that involvement leads to improved memorability of a tourism experience.

### **5.6. Knowledge**

Knowledge was identified as a dimension which contributes to the memorability of the selected marine tourism experiences, particularly whale-watching experiences. This contribution is evident in the strong positive correlation that was found between knowledge and MMTEs (for all activities combined and each individual activity). This corroborates the findings of Tung and Ritchie (2011) who found that knowledge is a vital contributor to memorable experiences.

### **5.7. Social interaction**

Social interaction was found to contribute to the creation of MMTEs. A strong positive correlation was found between social-interaction and MMTEs (for whale-watching experiences) and a moderate positive relationship was reported between social-interaction and MMTEs (for all the activities combined, shark-diving and visits to MPAs). This is aligned with the findings of Chen *et al.* (2020) who confirm that social interaction positively influences the memorability of an experience.

### **5.8. Customer delight**

An analysis of the results indicates that customer delight is an important dimension contributing to MMTEs (for all three activities combined). This is aligned with the findings of Ma *et al.* (2013) who attest that customer delight leads to a memorable experience. The significant positive relationship demonstrated between customer delight and MMTEs provides further support for the inclusion of delight as a dimension of MTEs.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

In conclusion, the eight proposed dimensions were all identified as contributors to the memorability of marine tourism experiences. With regards to the individual experiences, hedonism appears to be the most important dimension for increasing the memorability of shark-diving experiences. While increases in refreshment, social-interaction, meaningfulness, knowledge, and novelty will result in increased memorability of whale-watching experiences. In the case of all the activities combined, it seems as if delight will result in an increase in the memorability of the experiences.

In view of the preceding conclusion the following recommendations are proposed. In relation to hedonism, it is recommended that where possible, marine tourism experiences include exciting and surprising elements to enhance the pleasure experienced by the participant. For example, if tourists are on a whale-watching tour, although the primary purpose is to view whales, operators should do their utmost to point out different animals which might be sighted while on tour. Another example is to include surprising elements in the tour such as offering participants a discount voucher for follow-up tours. In terms of novelty, marine tourism operators have to find a way to make their experiences unique or different (novel). A recommendation is to provide participants with an option to customize their experience. This would be suitable in instances where private tours are booked. Another recommendation would be to provide tourists who are less adventurous a simulator activity, which will enable tourists to experience a realistic sensation of, for example, shark-diving. In line with refreshment, marine tourism businesses have to provide experiences that are relaxing and offer their customers an escape from daily life. It is

recommended that businesses pay personal attention to each customer, do their utmost to avoid overcrowding on a tour and provide customers with a comfortable experience and excellent quality service. In view of meaningfulness, marine tourism operators should offer their customers authentic experiences. For example, tourists can be provided with an opportunity to engage with the local community so that they can experience local life and culture. This can be done by serving a meal (if it is part of the whale-watching or shark-diving tour package) at the home of a local member of the community. Related to involvement, it is recommended that where guided tours are offered, the content of the tour should be carefully planned to make provision for interaction/involvement from participants. In the case of MPAs, a more flexible tour format should be provided, which gives tourists an option to do part of the tour as self-discovery and the other part of the tour as guided. In line with knowledge, it is recommended that marine tourism operators offer more enriching, informative and educational experiences. This could be accomplished by ensuring that tour guides are well trained and have extensive knowledge which they share with tourists. To enhance the interaction among tourists, marine tourism businesses are advised to set aside some time before the tour, for participants to get acquainted and to provide participants with name tags as this will make it easier for individuals to approach one another. Furthermore, a comfortable and inviting space should be allocated where tourists can socialize either before or after a tour. Regarding delight, marine tourism operators are recommended to stage emotionally engaging experiences. For example, operators can find out beforehand what customer preferences and expectations of a marine tourism tour are. Once on tour, the operators should try to incorporate at least one preference or exceed at least one expectation of each of the tourists on their tour.

## 7. Limitations and recommendations for future research

The following limitations of the study should be noted. Firstly, the study focused on participation in marine tourism experiences in South Africa, future studies could conduct a comparative study where experiences hosted in South Africa are compared with those hosted in other parts of the world. A second limitation relates to the unequal distribution of the sample. More South African respondents than foreign nationals participated in the study. Future research should strive to recruit a more equal number South African and Foreign nationals. A final limitation is the type of marine tourism activities selected. Future studies can examine activities which form part of other marine tourism categories such as boating, cruising or sports.

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