

## Determinants of Behavioural Intention Towards Travel Applications in an Emerging African Economy: A Perspective on the Hospitality Industry

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### Abstract

This study is aimed at uncovering the determinants of behavioural intention towards travel applications in an emerging economy of South Africa. A descriptive and quantitative design was employed, and primary data (n=420) was gathered from participants using an online questionnaire. Structural equation modelling was applied to examine the theoretical connection between the dimensions of experiencescape, memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention. The results prove that the dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics), memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention are positively and significantly related. Therefore, the promotion of experiencescape, memorability, and satisfaction is an important area of concern among hospitality providers in developing a consistent and enduring service experience that can stimulate behavioural intention towards travel applications.

**Keywords:** experiencescape, memorability, satisfaction, behavioural intention, and travel applications

### Introduction

In an experiential economy, customer tastes and preferences for services have shifted significantly towards the need for a more intuitive and memorable experience when travelling for leisure worldwide (Jensen & Prebensen, 2015). This trend is seen in an emerging African economy, South Africa, coupled with increased demands for a seamless and pleasurable service experience in the hospitality industry (MarketLine, 2020a). The hospitality industry is one of the key contributors to the economic development of the country as it provides 9.2% of employment opportunities, accounts to 3% of gross domestic product and generates total revenues of more than R130 billion (Statistics South Africa, 2021). A recent report conducted by Marketline (2020b) established that due to improvements in internet technologies and the need to provide a frictionless service has forced the majority of hospitality providers to introduce the use of travel applications (such as Airbnb, Booking.com, Trivago, etc.) in an effort to address the service requirements of customers. For this reason, travel applications assist in improving service delivery to customers as they are easily accessible, user-friendly, and convenient for use as they provide a customer with a higher degree of control for making reservations for accommodation of their choice at anytime and anywhere (Schaarschmidt & Höber, 2017). Although travel applications have assisted the hospitality industry to address the service demands of customers, there is a rising concern among customers for an enduring and memorable experience (Marketline, 2020a). This notion is validated by Rodríguez-Torrico, Prodanova, San-Martín and Jimenez (2019) and Schaarschmidt and Höber (2017) who posit that customers are constantly looking for a travel application that can help them find their dream accommodation which provides them with an out of home experience and an escape from reality. A possible way in which hospitality providers can address this is through the

implementation of experiencescape in order to fulfill customers' expectations (Hallmann, Zehrer & Rietz, 2021; Sthapit & Jiménez-Barreto, 2018).

Mody, Suess and Lehto (2017) postulate that experiencescape involves a set of activities that creates a satisfactory and delightful experience from using a travel application. In this way, experiencescape exists as a solution to enhance the service delivery as it allows the user to have a greater degree of control over their service experience, which fosters their interaction, and satisfaction levels (Tresidder & Deakin, 2019). Experiencescape is a rising area of interest within the academic environment and research has mostly focused on uncovering its determinants and drivers in the travel and tourism industry worldwide (Adeola & Evans, 2019; Hallmann et al., 2021; Mody et al., 2017). As a result, empirical studies (Rodriguez et al., 2019; Schaarschmidt & Höber, 2017; Tresidder & Deakin, 2019) on the shift towards the use of digital bookings and the improvement of service experience agree that it is critical to consider the extent of the relationship between the dimensions of experiencescape (namely: entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics), memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention towards travel applications. In this regard, no current research exists from an African emerging economy of South Africa that examined the association between the determinants that affect the behavioural intention towards travel applications. A focus on Africa, particularly South Africa, provides a unique setting for providing deeper insights on the theoretical connection between the effect of the dimensions of experiencescape on memorability and satisfaction, which in turn, leads to improved levels of behavioural intention. To address this research gap, the study aims to investigate the determinants of behavioural intention towards travel applications in the hospitality industry of South Africa.

This current study responds to calls in the literature (Adeola & Evans, 2019; Hallmann et al., 2021; Mody et al., 2017) to evaluate service experience from the perspective of experiencescape in order to sustain the longevity of the hospitality industry. This is done by enriching the extant research on the determinants and outcomes of behavioural intention from a developing economy perspective. In addition, the study also provides guidelines to hospitality providers on the role and use of experiencescape in an effort to stimulate memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention towards travel applications. Therefore, it is important for hospitality providers to gain an understanding of how the cultivation of the dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) can influence the levels of memorability, which ultimately leads to improved satisfaction and enhanced behavioural intention towards the use of travel applications.

The following sections of this study provide an orientation of this research by uncovering a discussion on the theoretical background of the study, research hypotheses, research methodology, research results, managerial implications, and areas for future research.

## **Literature review**

### ***An overview of the hospitality industry of South Africa***

In the new millennium, the hospitality industry arises as an important contributor to the emerging economy of South Africa. For this reason, South Africa accounts for 0.2% of the global hospitality industry (Marketline, 2020b). A recent report by Statistics South Africa (2021) established that the hospitality industry is one of the largest industries within the service sector and has assisted the sector to account for 71.7% of the GDP and generate \$4 billion revenues to the economy of South Africa. This indicates that the service sector is spearheaded by the hospitality industry, and it is thus predicted that the hospitality industry will grow the revenues of the service sector to \$4.4 billion in 2023 (Statistics South Africa, 2021). It is noteworthy that the hospitality industry is made up of hotels, motels, and other hospitality providers that aim to provide accommodation services to customers. Furthermore, the

hospitality industry is dominated by large players (such as Tsogo Sun Holdings, Marriot, City Lodge Hotels, and InterContinental Hotels Group) who compete intensively among themselves and with numerous small independent players (Marketline, 2020a). However, these key players are facing an increased threat from digital booking service providers (i.e. Airbnb, Booking.com, HomeAway, etc.), who have revolutionised the hospitality industry by providing a secure and convenient method of making reservations for accommodation (Marketline, 2020a). This competitive industry has been hard hit by the global corona virus pandemic as the number of tourists decreased by 71% from 15.8 million to less than 5 million in 2020, leading to a decline in revenues and employment, as well as increased business closures (Statistics South Africa, 2021). To this end, the low switching costs and barriers to entry implies that any party with the resources can enter the market and be added to the pool of competitors, thereby affecting the level of profitability and growth of the existing players in the hospitality industry (Marketline, 2020b). In order to ensure survival of the main players in the hospitality industry, requires the provision of digital booking services that caters to the growing need for a unique and memorable experience that can offer superior value to customers and fulfil their service expectations (Hallmann et al., 2021;Tresidder & Deakin, 2019).

### ***A perspective on the theory grounding the study***

This study is founded on the theory of stimulus organism response (SOR) to explain the theoretical connection between constructs in the proposed conceptual framework (see Figure 1). The SOR theory was proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and is widely regarded as an influential theory for examining the behavioural and emotional responses of consumers. The theory predicts that stimuli influence consumer attitudes and emotional states (organism), resulting in the consumer's behaviour as response (Mody et al., 2017). Mostafa and Kasamani (2021) eludes that the theory is made of three interrelated factors: stimuli, organism, and response. Stimuli refers to an external factor (i.e. marketing and environmental factors) that affects an internal state of an individual, while organism relates to internal processes and structures that intervenes between a stimuli and the resulting behavioural responses (Mody et al., 2017). In contrast, response represents the affective and cognitive state of an individual (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021). Furthermore, the SOR theory provides a holistic process for creating a seamless experience in order to address the accommodation needs of customers (Islam & Rahman, 2017). This occurs through uncovering the cues (e.g. entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) that stimulate the service experience and using these cues to create favourable memories about the hospitality provider in the minds of consumers, leading to enhanced satisfaction, and improved behavioural intention towards travel applications (Mody et al., 2017). This implies that the SOR theory can have a direct impact on how consumer respond favourably or unfavourably towards using the services of travel applications (Yuan, Tian, Huang, Fan & Wei, 2019). Therefore, SOR theory provides knowledge into understanding how stimuli can shape the behavioural response of consumers towards travel applications (Islam & Rahman, 2017; Mody et al., 2017).

### ***Experiencescape (stimulus)***

Chen, Suntikul and King (2020) describe experiencescape as physical and mental spaces that connect consumers together and provide an individualised service experience while generating mutual value for an accommodation service provider. For the purpose of this study, experiencescape is considered as an intuitive experience that a customer undergoes after making a successful accommodation booking via their travel application. Experiencescape is an important element that assists hospitality providers to provide enjoyable and appropriate experiences to customers (Chen, Wang & Morrison, 2021). However, Chen et al. (2020) and

Mody et al. (2017) claim that little research has been conducted on the factors that constitute experiencescape and it remains unclear on how to effectively measure experiencescape. For this reason, experiencescape is a new and multi-dimensional construct consisting of multiple factors and thus, no agreement in the literature has been reached regarding its underlying factors (Chen et al., 2021). Chen et al. (2020) and Moody et al. (2017) proposed a solution to this theoretical debate by suggesting that experiencescape is best described by entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics. These three selected dimensions form the physical, cultural, and social aspects of the service experience, as corroborated in the empirical studies of Chen et al. (2021) and Tresidder and Deakin (2019). Therefore, the current study will adopt these three factors to examine their influence on memorability and behavioural intention towards travel applications in South Africa.

### ***Entertainment***

Entertainment is one of the core dimensions of experiencescape and relates to a passive involvement within an individual regarding an experiential service provided by a travel application (Moody et al., 2017). This suggests that entertainment relates to the extent to which an experience is fun and joyful to a customer, thereby promoting a favourable emotional response towards a service provider (Hallmann et al., 2021). In line with the principles of the study, entertainment is measured as the degree to which a hospitality provider provides both a functional value and raises customers' pleasure when using a travel application. As a result, entertainment requires a direct absorption of the service of a travel application, which evokes a customer's attention and readiness to use their services (Tresidder & Deakin, 2019).

### ***Escapism***

This concept is founded on the notion that escapism requires an active participation and immersion into the service rendered by a travel application (Moody et al., 2017). This indicates that escapism focuses on the extent to which customers involve and immerse themselves in experiential activities that adds value and strengthen their ties to a service provider (Chen et al., 2021). For the purpose of this study, escapism is measured as the degree to which customers escapes reality and become passive observers during the accommodation experience provided by a travel application. Therefore, hospitality providers can entrench this dimension into their activities to provide a more personalised and unique service that stimulates customers' feelings of getting away and being at a place that is worthy of their time (Hallmann et al, 2021).

### ***Aesthetics***

Aesthetics relates to customers' evaluation and perception of the experiential environment on the basis of their service requirements (Hallmann et al., 2021). This requires passive participation and immersion into the experiential service delivered by a digital application (Moody et al., 2017). For this reason, customers must become part of the entire service experience in order to experience the service offering of the hospitality provider. In line with the context of the study, aesthetics is measured as the degree to which customers receive a pleasant and sensual experience via their travel application. To this end, aesthetics focuses on the extent to which a customer gets indulged in the service experience offered by a travel application (Chen et al., 2021).

### ***Memorability (organism)***

Sthapit, Chiappa, Coudounaris and Björk (2019) describe memorability as the extent to which customers receive and recall positive experiences after utilizing their travel application. This signifies the ability of customers to easily remember their service experience, which creates

favourable impressions and higher satisfaction rates towards a hospitality provider (Kim & Jang, 2016). In line with the purpose of this study, memorability is measured as the degree to which hospitality providers deliver a consistent and pleasurable experience to customers via a travel application. Higher levels of memorability translate into increased probability of recommendations and spreads goodwill about a hospitality provider, leading to improved competitive advantage (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2021). Therefore, memorability is the most significant internal source of information which consumers use to decide whether or not to use a travel application (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017).

### ***Satisfaction (organism)***

Kim, Huh, Song and Lee (2021) posit that satisfaction reflects a post-experience evaluation based on prior expectations regarding a service delivered by an hospitality provider. In line with the purpose of this study, satisfaction relates to the extent to which consumers' experiences and expectations by a travel application. This suggests that a consumer becomes satisfied when they experience positive and memorable feelings after using their travel application of choice (Sthapit et al., 2019). With this in mind, satisfaction is an important element in improving the business performance of hospitality providers as it generates repeat purchases, creates favourable word of mouth recommendations, and strengthens ties with consumers (Coves-Martínez, Sabiote-Ortiz & Frías-Jamilena, 2021). As a result, satisfaction is considered as a good signal that predicts consumers' intention to use travel applications (Kamboj & Joshi, 2020).

### ***Behavioural intention (response)***

According to Zhang, Liu and Bai (2021) behavioural intention is the likelihood of an individual to exhibit behaviours that produce intention. For the purpose of this study, behavioural intention relates to extent to which a customer will re-use the travel application in the future. Behavioural intention is considered as a true predictor of retention and defection towards a travel application on the basis of feelings and attitudes (Yi, Jackson, Park & Probst, 2016). This implies that if customers experience negative feelings and attitude towards a travel application, a defection will take place and customers will not use the travel application (Zhang et al., 2021). In the same vein, customers who hold favourable impressions and attitude towards a travel application will be motivated to use it again in future and spread positive reviews about it, thereby creating a basis for retention (Mody et al., 2017). As a result, behavioural intention reflects the behavioural responses of customers on the basis of their knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes towards travel applications (Stavrianea & Kamenidou, 2021).

## **Development of the conceptual framework**

### ***The influence of the dimensions of experiencescape on memorability***

Previous research conducted by Hallmann et al. (2021) speculate that the dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) are critical to the development of favourable memories towards the use of travel applications. An empirical study of Chen et al. (2020) proposes that spontaneous and uncontrolled thoughts generated by aesthetics, entertainment, and escapism are connected to the creation of memories and concepts in consumers' minds. This argument is validated by Chen (2021) and Mody et al. (2017) who found out that entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics do have a positive significant impact on the level of memorability. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered:

*H<sub>1</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between entertainment and memorability*

*H<sub>2</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between escapism and memorability*

*H<sub>3</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between aesthetics and memorability*

#### ***The influence of the memorability on satisfaction***

The creation of a memorable experience has a direct effect on satisfaction towards travel applications (Sthapit et al., 2019). This is because consumers can easily recall a positive experience from their memories which stimulates their satisfaction and ultimately their intention to visit a destination (Sthapit et al., 2019). The empirical studies of Sie, Pegg and Phelan (2021) and Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2021) who speculate that memorability has a significant influence on satisfaction. This notion is validated by Kim and Jang (2016) who echoes that memorability is a strong predictor of satisfaction. In line with these empirical findings, it is therefore proposed that:

*H<sub>4</sub>: There is a positive significant relationship between memorability and satisfaction*

#### ***The influence of the memorability on behavioural intention***

Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Hall and Hatamifar (2021) emphasise that the relationship between memorability and behavioural intentions has been strongly entrenched in the hospitality and tourism literature. A traveler's memories of previous experiences influence their decision to return to a destination and continue using their travel application (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). Sthapit et al. (2019) and Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2021) found that people who engaged in a memorable exercise are more inclined to return to a destination and a result will be motivated to re-use their travel application and spread positive reviews about it amongst their peers and family members. On the basis of these findings, it is therefore proposed that:

*H<sub>5</sub>: There is positive significant relationship between memorability and behavioural intention*

#### ***The influence of the satisfaction on behavioural intention***

Satisfaction is recognised as a crucial factor that influences the behavioural response of consumers towards travel applications (Kamboj & Joshi, 2020). If a travel application exceeds the experiences and expectations of consumers, this generates positive sentiments towards a hospitality provider and strengthens consumers' intention to use their preferred travel application (Hsiao, Lin, Wang, Lee & Zhang, 2019). Ali, Terrah, Wu and Ali (2021) postulate that satisfaction has positive impact on the level of behavioural intention towards travel applications. Kamboj and Joshi (2020) concur that satisfaction is a necessary factor for stimulating the behavioural intention towards travel applications. Therefore, it is proposed that:

*H<sub>6</sub>: There is positive significant relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intention*

The proposed conceptual framework is depicted in Figure 1 below. This conceptual framework is grounded on the SOR theory and seeks to uncover the interrelationship between the dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics), memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention towards travel applications.

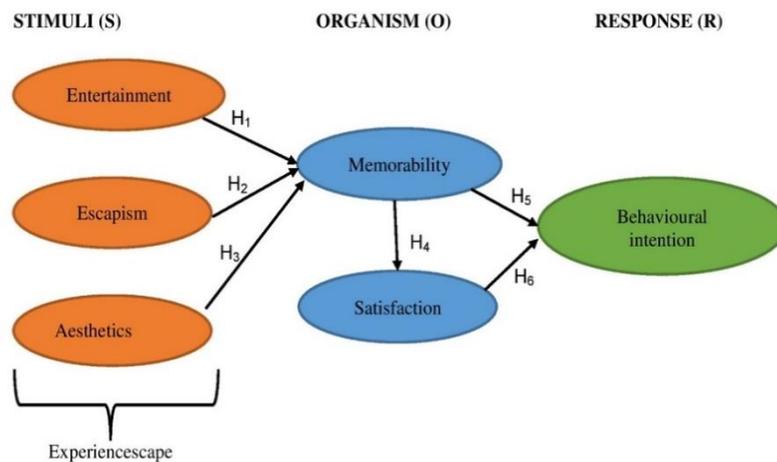


Figure 1: Conceptual framework

### Research methodology

This current study made use of a quantitative and descriptive design. The target population included customers that have used their travel applications to make their reservations for accommodation in South Africa in the past twelve months. In this regard, Gauteng Province was selected as the primary location for this research, as it is the economic hub of South Africa, and the use of travel applications is predominant in this region (Statistics South Africa, 2021). Conversely a convenience sampling procedure was utilised for inviting participants who are both accessible and willing to participate in the study. This sampling method is deemed suitable for this study as it enables the collection of a large number of responses within a short period of time and at lower costs, which enhances the adequacy of the sample (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2016).

Online questionnaires were utilised to collect data for the empirical phase of the study. A data collection company was employed to gather the data required for the study. Furthermore, the online questionnaire commenced with a preamble, explaining the purpose, and ensuring anonymity of participants, followed by a screening question, demographic information of participants and statements related to the dimensions of experiencescape, memorability, and behavioural intention. The constructs for the study were measured using a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The measurement scales for the different constructs were adapted from the empirical studies of Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017), Mody et al. (2017), and Yi et al. (2016).

The data were collected over a seven-week period. Out of the total of 450 questionnaires that were distributed, only 420 usable and complete questionnaires were retrieved for further data analysis, hence representing a response rate of 93%. Therefore, the realised sample falls within the minimum sample range as recommended by Hair et al. (2016).

Once the data collection was finalised, SPSS version 27 was used to capture, edit, clean, and analyse the data. The data analysis process included descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values to measure reliability of the measuring instrument, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for validating the research data, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the interrelationships between the constructs. The proposed conceptual framework for the study was tested using structural equation modelling (SEM), with the aid of AMOS (version 27).

## Results

### *Demographic profile of participants*

There was a higher female participation (54%) than male participation (46%). In addition, 41.1% of the participants fell in the age group of 18-24 years old, which was the highest number of participants across all the age groups. The second highest number of responses came from those aged 25-29 years old, with a total contribution of 21.8%; this resulted in 63.2% of responses coming from participants under the age of 30 years old. Many of the participants that took part in the study were predominantly black (51.1%), followed by those who were white (37.0%), coloured (8.5%) and Indian (3.0%) respectively. Lastly, the results revealed that the average education level for the participants is a bachelor's degree (36.5%), with the second highest qualification being a tertiary level diploma (22.5%).

### *Reliability and validity of the measurement model*

The results pertaining to the measurement model are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurement model results summary

Construct, item	Factor loadings	Composite reliability	AVE	Shared variance	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )
<b>Entertainment (EN)</b>					
The accommodation experience I received after using my travel app was fun	0.833	0.880	0.711	0.172	0.879
The accommodation experience I had after using my travel app was entertaining	0.789				
I really enjoyed this accommodation experience that I received after using my travel app	0.904				
<b>Escapism (ES)</b>					
Staying at the accommodation that I selected on my travel app made me feel like I was in a different world	0.904	0.863	0.947	0.172	0.855
Staying at the accommodation that I selected on my travel app made me feel like I was living in a different time or place	0.943				
I completely escaped from reality during the accommodation experience that I received after using my travel app	0.930				
<b>Aesthetics (ET)</b>					
It was pleasant just being at this accommodation that I selected on my travel app	0.835	0.756	0.846	0.172	0.751
The setting of the accommodation that I selected on my travel app provided pleasure to my senses	0.805				
The setting of the accommodation that I selected on my travel app really	0.773				
<b>Memorability (ME)</b>					
I have wonderful memories about the accommodation experience that I received through my travel app	0.893	0.725	0.841	0.172	0.724
I remember many positive things about the accommodation experience that I received through my travel app	0.875				
I like going back and re-experiencing the trip in my mind following my selection of the accommodation on my travel app	0.609				
<b>Satisfaction (SA)</b>					
I am satisfied with my travel app	0.909	0.848	0.944	0.172	0.847
I am pleased with my travel app	0.943				
I am contented with my travel app	0.910				
I am delighted with my travel app	0.900				
<b>Behavioural intention (BI)</b>					
I say positive things about my travel app to other people	0.861	0.743	0.897	0.172	0.740
I would recommend the travel app to other people/friends and relatives	0.888				
I intend to continue using my travel app	0.837				
<b>Model fitness</b>					
<b>Normed chi-square (<math>\chi^2/df</math>)</b>	3.968				
<b>TLI</b>	0.932				
<b>CFI</b>	0.945				
<b>RMSEA</b>	0.085				



A CFA procedure via SEM was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the online questionnaire. All constructs in the study were reliable, as Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability values were greater than the acceptable limit of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2016). In terms of face validity, the study made use of scale items from previous studies that were proven to be reliable and valid. Moreover, a pilot study was conducted to verify the measurement instrument prior to actual data collection. Discriminant validity was confirmed as all the average variance extracted (AVE) were higher than the corresponding shared variances. The factor loadings and AVE values were seen to be all above the recommended level of 0.50, which implied convergent validity. As a result, the measurement model achieved an acceptable level of fitness (Chi-square/degrees of freedom ( $\chi^2/df=3.968$ ), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI=0.932), Comparative fit index (CFI=0.945) and Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA=0.085) and provided further support for the convergent validity of the measurement instrument.

### *Assessment of the structural model*

Once the measurement model was considered reliable and valid, a structural model was then developed to evaluate the significance of the hypothesised relationships using maximum likelihood parameters via SEM. These parameters compose of standardised regression weights ( $\beta$ ) and the p-values of the different paths. The results from this analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 3 indicate positive standardised regression weights of the hypothesised relationships between the dimensions of experiencescape, memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention, ranging from 0.098 to 0.541. In addition, all standardised regression weights were found to be statistically significant at a 5% ( $p<0.05$ ) level, confirming that the hypothesised relationships ( $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ ,  $H_3$ ,  $H_4$ ,  $H_5$ , and  $H_6$ ) could be accepted. Firstly, a positive and significant relationship between entertainment and memorability ( $\beta=0.260$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) was confirmed. This is in line with  $H_1$  and the prediction is supported. Secondly, the results established that escapism had a positive influence on memorability. Thus,  $H_2$  is supported ( $\beta=0.259$ ,  $p=0.023$ ). Thirdly, aesthetics had a positive effect on memorability, thus  $H_3$  was retained ( $\beta=0.437$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Fourthly, memorability exerted a positive impact on satisfaction and as a result,  $H_4$  was accepted ( $\beta=1.068$ ,  $p=0.007$ ). Fifthly, memorability had a direct positive effect on behavioural intention and this implied that  $H_5$  was accepted ( $\beta=0.744$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). Lastly, satisfaction had a positive impact on behavioural intention hence  $H_6$  was retained ( $\beta=0.196$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). To this end, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics contributed 78% to the variation in memorability, while memorability predicted 62% of the variation in behavioural intention. Similarly, memorability contributed to 88% of the variation in satisfaction, while satisfaction predicted 76% of the variation in behavioural intention. Finally, as shown in Table 2, the structural model had satisfactory model fitness ( $\chi^2/df=3.766$ ), TLI=0.936, CFI=0.950) and RMSEA=0.082).

Table 3: Hypothesis testing and goodness-of-fit results for the structural model

Hypotheses	Direct path estimates ( $\beta$ )	Probability value ( $p$ )	Hypothesis result ( $p<0.05$ )	Variance explained ( $R^2$ )
$H_1$ Entertainment $\longrightarrow$ Memorability	0.260	0.000	Supported	0.780
$H_2$ Escapism $\longrightarrow$ Memorability	0.259	0.023	Supported	
$H_3$ Aesthetics $\longrightarrow$ Memorability	0.437	0.000	Supported	
$H_4$ Memorability $\longrightarrow$ Satisfaction	1.068	0.000	Supported	0.620
$H_5$ Memorability $\longrightarrow$ Behavioural intention	0.744	0.000	Supported	0.880
$H_6$ Satisfaction $\longrightarrow$ Behavioural intention	0.196	0.000	Supported	0.760
<b>Model fit statistics</b>				
$\chi^2/df$	3.766			



TLI	0.936
CFI	0.950
RMSEA	0.082

## Discussion

The results established that the three dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) have a direct impact on memorability ( $H_1$ ,  $H_2$ , and  $H_3$ ). This implies that entertainment ( $\beta=0.260$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), escapism ( $\beta=0.259$ ,  $p=0.023$ ), and aesthetics ( $\beta=0.437$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). These findings are congruent to the previous studies of Hallmann et al. (2021) and Mody et al. (2017) who contend that entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics are the driving forces behind the generation of favourable memories in the minds of customers towards the use of travel applications. An improvement in the level of entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics will lead to increased memorability among customers. Therefore, the selected three dimensions of experiencescape are important in creating a seamless and personalised experiences that can foster the development of pleasant memories towards travel applications. The results show that a positive and significant relationship between memorability and satisfaction ( $H_4$ ). This suggests that memorability ( $\beta=1.068$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) has a direct impact on satisfaction. This finding is consistent to the previous studies of Kim and Jang (2016) and Sie et al. (2021) who discovered that the creation of favourable memories in the minds of consumers leads of increased levels of satisfaction towards travel applications. As a result, memorability is an influential factor that generates positive feelings and memories which evokes customer satisfaction.

The results indicate a positive and significant relationship between memorability and behavioural intention ( $H_5$ ). This shows that memorability ( $\beta=0.744$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) significantly influence behavioural intention. This finding is congruent with the empirical work of Stavrianea and Kamenidou (2021) and Sthapit et al. (2019) who found that memorability generates favourable impressions about a travel application which leads to sustained behavioural intention. This evidence suggest that memorability acts a catalyst for instilling positive feelings towards an experiential service, thus strengthening the behavioural intention towards travel applications.

The results prove that there is a positive and significant relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intention ( $H_6$ ). This suggest that satisfaction ( $\beta=0.196$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) is directly linked to behavioural intention. This finding is consistent with the previous work of Ali et al. (2021) and Hsiao et al. (2019) who postulate that the promotion of a satisfactory experience creates favourable impressions among consumers and in turn, strengths their behavioural intention towards using travel applications. Therefore, satisfaction creates a foundation for fostering behavioural intention through a consistent delivery of a service experience that exceeds customers' expectations.

## Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the study offers two useful contributions. Firstly, the findings of the study extend the SOR theory by offering insights and understanding on the how the implementation of the three dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) can contribute to improved memorability towards travel applications. In addition to this, the study makes an important contribution by applying and enhancing the predictive power of the SOR theory through validating its applicability within an experience context. The results align with the SOR theory by clarifying how the promotion of entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics (stimuli) can foster favourable memories (organism) in the minds of consumers. Therefore, future studies should explore the use of these three dimensions of experiencescape

by developing useful measurement scales for predicting their influence on memorability towards travel applications.

Secondly, the study provides an improved understanding of the influential role of memorability and satisfaction on behavioural intention within the hospitality industry of an emerging African economy. The study offers a quality framework that examines the effect of memorability and satisfaction on behavioural intention. This conceptual framework assists in enriching the service literature by providing useful measurement constructs that can be utilised by academic researchers to investigate the interrelationship between memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention. For this reason, insights from this association between memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention towards travel applications has important implications for marketing theory. This implication is directed towards gaining knowledge on the role and use of memorability as grounded within the SOR theory to sustain satisfaction and in turn, improve behavioural intention towards travel applications. Consequently, the cultivation of memorability can assist in generating favourable perceptions and feelings towards a hospitality provider, thus leading to increased levels of satisfaction and behavioural intention.

### **Managerial implications**

The current study offers useful guidelines that hospitality providers can use to assist them in offering a unique and memorable experiencescape to customers when making reservations for accommodation using travel applications. The provision of these guidelines will also assist in understanding the linkage between the dimensions of experiencescape, memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention.

Firstly, hospitality providers can enhance the influence of the dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics) on memorability by offering an enjoyable, pleasant, and a totally different experience to captivate the minds of customers. This can be addressed by the inclusion of the interesting activities (e.g. visiting historical sites, shopping malls, restaurants, hiking, etc.) that are central to the selected place of accommodation within the travel application. In addition to this, travel applications should send daily alerts to customers about the hidden gems (e.g. iconic tourist attractions such museums, wildlife parks, cultural villages, etc.) in the area that they have booked for accommodation. The travel application should also suggest certain types of accommodation (such as treehouses, boathouses, etc.), which will allow visitors to experience a new way of life and feel like they are on an adventure. Moreover, the travel application should tailor their service offering around the desired experience and activities that will capture customers' attention when making reservations for accommodation. As a result, the proposed guidelines will assist accommodation providers to differentiate and create pleasurable experiences that can stimulate favourable memories towards travel applications.

Secondly, hospitality providers can cultivate memorability in an effort to enhance satisfaction and behavioural intention by adding a new feature on the travel application that allows users to create a digital photo album of their trip and accommodation experience. The digital photo album would be offered for free and will be used as a way to enrich a customer's booking experience. This will evoke customers' feelings and attitudes to relive their experience and thereby encourage them to re-use their travel application in the future. For this reason, customers would be excited to showcase their positive experiences and memories with their friends and families through sharing the digital photo album on blogs and social media, which contributes to sustained satisfaction and in turn, improved behavioural intention towards the travel application. Therefore, the digital photo album will serve as a reminder and

recall for customers to consider the use of their travel application when making their next booking for accommodation on the basis of their positive memories and experiences.

Lastly, accommodation providers can stimulate the level of satisfaction on behavioural intention by creating a more personalised experience for consumers when making bookings for accommodation via their travel application. This can be achieved by enabling consumers to have more flexibility in designing travel packages that appeal to their individual needs. A new section could be created within the travel application that says ‘create my own travel package’ which will strike the attention of consumers and increase their engagement with the services provided by the travel application. These travel packages could include all the required information related to their destination of choice such as areas of interest, available transport services, and entertainment services. Throughout the design of their own travel packages, the travel application should constantly update consumers on the availability of venues and changes in Covid-19 regulations, prices, and weather, all of which can influence their overall service experience. Notably, a consumer should have a smooth experience in navigating across the different sections within the travel application while finalising their own travel package. Consequently, the creation of travel packages that align to customers’ requirements will stimulate their behavioural intention to use a travel application in future, as their service needs were satisfactorily met.

### **Conclusion, limitations, and areas for future research**

The purpose of this study was to examine the determinants and outcomes of experiencescape in an emerging African economy. This was addressed by uncovering the interrelationship between the dimensions of experiencescape (entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics), memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention. The results show that the three selected dimensions of experiencescape have a positive effect on memorability. Additionally, the study discovered that memorability is directly related to satisfaction and behavioural intention, while satisfaction has a significant influence on behavioural intention. Thus, all six hypotheses (H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>3</sub>, H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>5</sub>, and H<sub>6</sub>) for the study were accepted, implying that the cultivation of the dimensions of experiencescape can lead to enhanced levels of memorability and in turn, promote satisfaction and behavioural intention towards the use of travel applications. Furthermore, the impact of this study was to provide useful guidelines that can assist hospitality providers to understand the association between the dimensions of experiencescape, memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention. The implementation of the provided guidelines can illuminate insights for understanding the perceptions and responses of consumers towards the dimensions of experiencescape, memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention, leading to improved service experience and increased competitive advantage within the hospitality industry of South Africa.

This study is not without its limitations. The results of this study were based on the perceptions of consumers within the Gauteng Province and cannot be generalised to other industries in or beyond South Africa. The proposed framework is thus limited to uncovering the linkage between the dimensions of experiencescape, memorability, satisfaction, and behavioural intention. Future research should extend this conceptual framework by adding other relevant factors that can explain the drivers and outcomes of experiencescape. The study could be tested in other emerging economies or other industries in South Africa to achieve a better generalisation from the results.

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