

## **ABSTRACT**

This research first develops a conceptual model to link relevant concepts in psychology and tourism research vis-à-vis each stage of the long term memory (LTM) system. It combines insights from mindfulness, positive affect, and quality of conscious experience to understand how tourists encode information; research in short-term memory and working memory as well as social identity to address the consolidation of information; and concepts of remembering, false memory, and storytelling to highlight information retrieval. Next, focus groups were conducted to examine how practitioners are helping tourists encode, consolidate, and retrieve their memories in the context of this model (Study 1). Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted to complement the practitioner's perspective by reflecting the tourist's voice that is relevant in each stage of the LTM system (Study 2). Overall, this research connects findings from the practitioner's view with the tourist's voice to present a framework of memory management and tourism experiences.

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of facilitating memorable experiences (MEs) for tourists is receiving attention in current tourism research and practice. For practitioners, learning how tourists create and recollect their memories is crucial as research has shown implications of positive remembered experiences on desires to repeat an experience, satisfaction, and positive word-of-mouth (Manthiou et al., 2016). For destination management organizations (DMOs), the delivery of MEs is important to destination competitiveness and sustainability (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Indeed, the provision of experiences is a fundamental characteristic of the tourism phenomenon and the role of practitioners is to help tourists construct their memories and stories (Tung & Ritchie, 2011).

Given the significance of the foregoing, many studies have sought to investigate tourist memories in different contexts in an effort to measure or identify elements that enable those experiences to be particularly memorable. For example, Cutler, Carmichael and Doherty (2014) explored the experience of hiking the Inca Trail in Peru along with the experience of the destination of Machu Picchu. Other recent contexts also include memorable outdoor and adventure experiences (Pomfret, 2012), rural experiences (Loureiro, 2014), and cultural experiences (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2014).

Despite important insights gained from past studies, more research attention could be given to understand the impact of the long term memory (LTM) system on the facilitation of MEs. This line of work requires further attention as tourist “memories” or “memorable” experiences are fundamentally based on an individual’s LTM which consists of a set of three stages: encoding, consolidation, and retrieval (Nadel, Hupbach, Gomez, & Newman-Smith, 2012). For practitioners seeking to facilitate MEs for tourists, their efforts should address all three stages of the LTM system (e.g., including encoding and consolidation) rather than just helping tourists “retrieve” their memories after an experience.

The present research seeks to address this research gap through three objectives. The first objective is to develop a conceptual model to link relevant concepts in psychology and tourism research vis-à-vis each stage of the long term memory (LTM) system. The second objective is to examine how practitioners are helping tourists encode, consolidate, and retrieve their memories in the context of this model by conducting focus groups with senior-level managers currently working in various sectors, including tourism services, destination management, and hospitality (Study 1). The third objective is to complement the practitioner’s perspective by reflecting on the tourist’s voice that are relevant in each stage of

the LTM system through the use of in-depth interviews (Study 2).

The present research contributes to the theoretical development of memorable tourism experiences in the literature by linking the three stages of the LTM system with relevant concepts in psychology and tourism research. This research also contributes by presenting a framework of memory management and tourism experiences, providing practitioners with a multi-stage conceptualization of potential strategies that may help tourists encode, consolidate, and retrieve their own memories across each of the three stages of the LTM system. This research recognizes that practitioners cannot directly “deliver” or “create” MEs for tourists since memory is subjective and based on personal factors (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Instead, “management” can only refer to efforts by destination managers to facilitate and enhance the likelihood for tourists to develop their own memories.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Long term memory**

Long term memory refers to the storage of information over a longer period of time in contrast to information that is retained temporarily in short term memory (Baddeley, 2012). LTM consists of semantic memory and episodic memory. Semantic memory is defined as the storage of factual and conceptually based material, representing general knowledge of the world (Piolino, Desgranges, Benali, & Eustache, 2002). For example, the Eiffel Tower is semantically associated with Paris.

Episodic memory is defined as the storage of personal experiences. A subset of episodic memory is autobiographical memory (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). While general episodic memories can have large proportions of referencing that involves others, autobiographical memory is primarily concerned with knowledge of the self in the past (Baumgartner, Sujan, & Bettman, 1992). Autobiographical memory refers to the recollection of experiences from one’s own life, allowing individuals to relive an experience from an earlier moment (Piolino et al., 2002). Overall, LTMs are a critical part of individuals’ self and social identities, guiding future behaviour by reminding them of their past actions and outcomes (Stern & Alberini, 2013).

### **The long term memory system**

The first objective of this study is to develop a conceptual model to link the three stages of the LTM system with relevant concepts in each stage that can impact tourist MEs.

The elements in this model are derived from a synthesis of various literatures, from psychology, marketing, and tourism. This model suggests LTM is temporal in nature, moving from encoding and consolidation to retrieval. However, tourist behaviors, experiences, and memories can change over time, and opposite moves are possible when autobiographical memories are remembered, reconstructed, and potentially distorted due to later experiences. Nevertheless, this model can serve as a framework to examine how practitioners can help tourists encode, consolidate, and retrieve their MEs.

### *Stage 1: Encode*

The first stage of the LTM system is encoding. Individuals do not acquire a “memory” per se; but rather, individuals acquire a collection of highly specific information and vivid moments during an experience that, in their collective, form the basis of an autobiographical memory (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). These specific moments are referred to as event-specific knowledge. Event-specific knowledge can include highly precise details such as the time and location of the experience as well as specificities acquired through the senses (e.g., olfactory and auditory cues).

Event-specific knowledge is formed when individuals are attentive and aware of their conscious experience. Here, the concept of mindfulness is instructive, providing insight into the conscious state that engages tourists during this process. Mindfulness is a state of consciousness in which individuals attend to ongoing events and experiences in a receptive and non-judgmental way (Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt & Lang, 2013). It describes “a state of mind that results from drawing novel distinctions, examining information from new perspectives, and being sensitive to context...[recognition] that there is not a single optimal perspective, but many possible perspectives on the same situation” (Langer, 1993; p. 44). Mindfulness gives individuals power over their behaviors especially in situations where they feel that they have an opportunity to learn, control and exert influence (Langer & Piper, 1988). For example, when eating a meal, a tourist can be attuned to the moment-to-moment taste experience of spices while also aware of the increasing feeling of fullness in his/her stomach.

Existing research findings suggest a link between mindfulness and positive emotional experiences. For example, Brown and Ryan (2003) found that mindfulness influenced positive emotional states and well-being, as well as less cognitive and emotional disturbance. Frewen et al., (2008) showed that higher levels of mindfulness were related to fewer negative thoughts. In the tourism literature, recent research also suggests mindfulness and positive

affect as critical dimensions in tourists' recollections of MEs (Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015). Positive emotional connections between individuals can enhance social relationships insofar as individuals are mindful of what is occurring at a certain moment (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). For example, when speaking with a travel companion, an individual can be highly attentive to both the spoken words and sensitively aware of the subtle emotional tones underlying the conversation.

Mindfulness can also be driven by an individual's pursuit for "quality" conscious experiences. What is considered as a "quality" conscious experience is subjective; it is contingent on one's independent and interdependent self-goals (McAdams, 2001). For example, individuals can facilitate their own well-being through self-endorsed or freely chosen activities in order to fulfill their self-goals of autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000). "Quality" – in a mindfulness perspective – draws on individuals' abilities to remain aware of a situation and what is actually happening to them. An individual who is mindful of his/her goals can direct attention to drive his/her thoughts, habits, and behaviors to pursue those experiences. In this state, quality conscious experiences are markedly vivid and clear (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

### *Stage 2: Consolidate*

The second stage, consolidation, reflects the transition process of the LTM system in which events in memory becomes more stable and resistant to disruptions (McGaugh, 2000). This is in contrast to short term memory (STM) in which information is typically held in mind for a relatively short period of time before they are forgotten (e.g., trying to remember an address temporarily before writing it down) (Stern & Alberini, 2013). The consolidation process in LTM involves a number of neuropsychological changes that occur over time before memories are considered "consolidated" (McGaugh, 2000).

The term "storage" (or store) is oftentimes used to denote this stage as it involves the relationship between STM and LTM. STM, or "working memory" (WM) describes the temporary storage of information and manipulation (i.e., the latter is still used interchangeably on occasion despite recent research to separate the two concepts as the term "working memory" evolved from the earlier concept of STM) (Baddeley, 2012). It refers to the capacity to store visual and spatial, as well as auditory and verbal material, which are recorded in one's temporary mental sketchpad and discarded unless rehearsed (Baddeley, 2012). For instance, a visual sketchpad can store the visual imagery of a stimulus such as the colour of a lake (Logie, 2011).

The relationship between STM and LTM is not unidirectional; that is, information consolidation is not merely a uniform two-step process moving from STM to LTM. Memory research highlights complex and multiple links between them; STM could be conceptualized as part of a dynamic system whereby sensory information both informs and is informed by LTM (Baddeley, 2012). In other words, existing LTM may influence the semantics and perceptions of immediate stimuli which are sketched in the working store. The activation of old memories combined with new stimuli could lead to (re)interpretations of new LTMs, which together, influences the behaviors and actions of an individual (Nadel et al., 2012).

Memories are an important part of life as they help create and maintain one's identity (Stern & Alberini, 2013). What individuals retain in LTM can depend on how they view their identity at a given moment (Gino & Desai, 2011). One's identity comprises of two levels: personal identity, related to a person's individual sense of self, and social identity, related to groups to which a person belongs or is affiliated (Tajfel, 1982). Each individual has an inventory of identities that include his/her self-identity and various social identities, and an individual can respond to a situation in ways that are consistent with his/her personal identity or social identity (Goldstein, Cialdini, & Griskevicius, 2008). For example, a tourist can be a mother, a wife, and a researcher. What is retained in the tourist's memory could depend on the aspect of her identity that was elicited during a situation and she could even engage in tourism experiences to explore, maintain, and disengage from particular aspects of her identity (Bond & Falk, 2012). This identity, termed working self, could impact one's STM and WM (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). The elicited working self, including the current goals of the self, coordinates the mental cognition capacities required in the storage of information (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). Following the example above, as a mother and wife, the individual could consolidate memories of fun experiences with her children if her self-goal at that moment was to enjoy time with her family. At another moment, her social identity as a researcher could be elicited and she could also consolidate details of the destination and tourism experience to inspire her future research.

### *Stage 3: Retrieve*

The third stage in the LTM system, retrieval, consists of the act of remembering, which refers to an individual's recollection of past information that can be subjected to distortions and false information (Loftus, 2005). Autobiographical memories are fundamentally constructed and reconstruct based on future experiences, context, and information from outside sources (Loftus, 2005). Sources of information such as advertising

and stories from other tourists could also distort an individual's memory of his/her past experiences; for example, Braun, Ellis, and Loftus (2002) showed participants a Disney advertisement that contained false information about meeting Bugs Bunny at Disneyland. The majority of participants remembered meeting Bugs Bunny at Disneyland although this could never have happened as Bugs Bunny is a Warner Bros. copyrighted character. In a similar follow up study, Braun-Latour, Grinley and Loftus (2006) examined whether increased repetition of false information would also increase the number of false memories that were generated. The authors found that repeating false information may increase tourists' confidence in the reliability of that information if they did not notice it was false initially. More presentations of false information led to greater false memory creation than when information was presented only once. These studies demonstrate that the act of remembering is highly malleable as individuals could be induced to implant entirely new information although none of these post-events actually occurred.

The act of storytelling is one way individuals recollect and share past memories with each other. Individuals remember, recreate memories of their experiences, and then present these memories to others as stories. Specific cues from stories such as the location and individuals involved in the experience are the touch points of these narratives. These cues form the basis of a story, shaping memories and impressions of events over time (McGregor & Holmes, 1999). These cues also represent positive and negative critical encounters that are personally relevant (Pritchard & Havitz, 2006). Stories are packaged and shared with others in discrete units to suit a particular timeframe and circumstance (Pearce & Packer, 2013).

Storytelling acts to both consolidate and recover experiences from memory and has been used in tourism research to analyze stories and themes in an interpretative setting (Moscardo, 2010). For example, Noy (2004) asked participants to recall their backpacking experiences in order to investigate the effects of the experience on self-change. Cutler, Carmichael and Doherty (2014) explored the MEs of tourists hiking the Inca Trail in Peru along with the experience of the destination of Machu Picchu. Tourists discussed the experience of the physical self on the trail through post-trip recollections with special attention paid to pain and struggle. Storytelling at the retrieval stage stimulates reflections, highlighting the ways in which tourists pay attention, retain their views, and present their ideas.

The following sections describe the methodology and results for Study 1 followed by the methodology and results for Study 2. A general discussion of the findings for both studies is presented subsequently.

## STUDY 1: THE PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

### Methodology

The second objective of this research is to examine how practitioners are helping tourists encode, consolidate, and retrieve their own memories across each of the three stages of the LTM system. Focus groups were conducted in July, 2015 with 21 senior-level practitioners in tourism and hospitality to allow them to discuss the strategies they use to facilitate MEs for tourists. The participants have on average of over ten years of work experience and hold influential positions in their organizations. Their roles and experiences allowed them to share deeper insights into their organization's operational, marketing, and management strategies. Furthermore, to capture a broader perspective of ideas from different backgrounds, these participants are currently working in various sectors, including tourism services, destination management, and hospitality. For example, the participants included a general manager of an online travel agency, a director from a local government agency, general managers from international brand hotels, and a deputy secretary from a destination tourism board.

Participants were divided into three focus groups with one moderator in each group to oversee the process. The moderators were provided with briefing and training sessions before conducting the group discussions. Each moderator began with an introduction of the ground rules and a digital recorder was used to record each session. Each focus group lasted about 40 to 60 minutes and was conducted in three private meeting rooms in Shenzhen, China.

At the beginning of each focus group, the moderator introduced the concept of MEs and highlighted the importance of facilitating and managing positive memories for tourists. Participants were not briefed about the theoretical concepts of the LTM system prior to the focus groups in consideration of potential social desirability bias in the research process (Hollander, 2004). For example, by explaining the theoretical concepts to participants prior to the study, there is the risk that participants may research certain areas (e.g., strategies for facilitating mindfulness) in order to seem more knowledgeable about the concept (e.g., mindfulness) during the focus groups. Social desirability could be particularly relevant as participants are senior-level managers who represent their organizations in front of their peers and the researcher (Thompson & Phua, 2005).

Participants were provided with a general introduction to capture their interest at the start of the focus groups. They were informed:



“This work explores the idea of memorable tourism experiences. For tourists, memories of experiences could represent stories and positive word-of-mouth they share with family and friends. Recent research suggests an important role of industry practitioners is to facilitate an environment to enhance the likelihood for tourists to create their memories.”

After this introduction, focus groups were conducted based on a series of open-ended questions aimed at finding out if and how participants are facilitating MEs for tourists. These questions were informed by past research on MEs and adapted for the context of this study but were not distinguished on the basis of each of the three stages of the LTM system. For example, participants were not told positive affect is an important element during the encoding stage. Instead of asking participants to specifically share how they facilitate positive emotions such as happiness and excitement, participants were asked to share their strategies for facilitating emotions among tourists in general. This open-ended question encouraged insightful responses as participants also shared their strategies for managing “negative” emotions such as frustration and grief.

Moderators were given the flexibility to facilitate dialogue among participants. After a participant shared an account of his/her strategy, other participants oftentimes followed up with a brief exchange of questions about that story. This dialogue encouraged a thought-provoking environment and maintained discussion among participants in the focus group.

Since the interviews were conducted in Chinese, the transcripts were translated from Chinese to English, and backwards translated to safeguard the reliability of the translation process and to ensure the transcripts stayed close to the data. For certain phrases, for example, the authors decided to retain the literal translation from Chinese such as “stream of moving landscapes”, opting to emphasize the raw translation rather than risk transforming it in a way that may endanger its meaning. This process took several iterations.

The authors identified excerpts from a careful, thematic reading of the transcripts that were later connected to the three-stage LTM system. This approach sought quality from the data, rather than results which could be generalized to the broader population. Each word or phrase that indicated a single exemplar was recorded. A word or phrase was deemed to indicate a single exemplar if it contained similar reference; for example, in Chinese, the word to represent the idea of “unforgettable” could also be captured by the combination of two characters that literally mean “deep engrave.” The exemplars were further analyzed and

compared, according to whether they were qualitatively similar or dissimilar in character. For example, a practitioner's use of external stimuli was indicated by phrases that alluded to "background music" and "scents of flowers."

To safeguard reliability in data analysis and interpretation, the authors interpreted the exemplars individually before meeting and comparing similarities and differences. The authors presented their exemplars, revisited the context within the original transcript, and resolved discrepancies through discussion before connecting them to a stage of the LTM system.

## Results

Participants discussed many strategies for facilitating MEs for tourists. These strategies are categorized into dimensions across each stage of the LTM memory system. For example, at the encoding stage, participants focused on facilitating mindfulness for tourists through three dimensions: using external cues, emphasizing the immediate moment (the "now"), and delivering collectible experiences. At the consolidation and retrieval stages, the key dimensions extracted were "tangibilizing the intangible" and "distributing memories", respectively.

Management practices at the encoding stage often involved enhancing tourists' attention to their immediate experiences. At this stage, three dimensions were identified from the focus groups: *external cues*, *facilitating the "present"* and *collectible experiences*. External cues refer to practitioners' use of external stimuli at their destination to sustain tourists' awareness of their surrounding environment and experiences. For example, as one participant described: "some tourists do not like [smoke] from smoking, or may like scents from certain flowers. [Our] hotel will do some preparation, to allow him/her to have a beautiful memory."

Another participant followed up with suggestions that environmental stimuli can extend beyond olfactory cues to include "auditory cues from background music" and "gustatory perceptions from food and aromas." This participant suggested: "visually, [we want] visitors to see us as clean and orderly, our staff as a *stream of moving landscape* (note italics: direct translation from Chinese)." This insight aligns with Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience-design principle as staff members (or actors on stage) are harmonized with the environment. It also supports the participant's strategy of leveraging "uniforms, soft décor [to] give visitors a pleasurable cultural experience."

Participants also highlighted the importance of "facilitating the present" and

emphasized “the current moment.” After a participant indicated that this is referred to as “*emotional resonance*” (note italics: direct translation from Chinese), other participants provided cases of how they were able to facilitate timely and positive affect such as happiness and excitement for visitors by planning and celebrating key events such as birthdays and anniversaries. However, participants also indicated that successfully managing potentially negative emotions such as frustration and grief could bring even more vivid and positive emotional experiences for visitors. One participant shared:

“An American couple is our repeat customer but unfortunately his wife passed away due to cancer. Afterwards, when our hotel received his new reservation, our entire team, including public relations, front office and other related departments, made preparations. We knew our guest would be heartbroken when he returns to our place because it would bring back a lot of memories. Our staff wanted to minimize his sadness and they made a video using past photos of them with our staff so that when he arrives, they can show it to him and welcome him home. Many people cried when they saw the video. We understand that seeing the environment (i.e., hotel) may bring back feelings of sadness, but if you go in this direction, you can also turn it into a very positive thing.”

The third dimension, “collectible experiences”, refers to management efforts to appeal and provide high-value or quality experiences. Participants suggested ways to help tourists participate in experiences that are “collectible”, which could be defined as “the process of actively and selectively acquiring experiences as a part of a set of non-identical experiences” (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011; p. 937). For example, one participant described: “when the tourist visits the historical site, there is an appropriately placed handmade-ceramics workshop beside [the site]. The tourist can create an item, and then create a personal seal. For example, the seal can indicate from which teacher’s craft class, or which year it was made. The finished item, representing the kinds of achievements, can be taken away.” This excerpt illustrates a succinct case for capturing novelty and rarity as well as bringing vividness to foreign and exotic experiences. A personally-customized stamp can help seal a moment of authenticity, as well as the presence of “being there” at the cultural and craftsmanship experience at the historical site in China.

The next stage, consolidation, involves the interface between STM and LTM, moving the perceptions of immediate stimuli from the memory sketchpad in the working store to

potential LTM, as well as combining old memories with new stimuli to elicit the (re)interpretations of new LTMs. Holding information in STM does not guarantee transfer to LTM (Gino & Desai, 2011), and tourists oftentimes seek objects to help them solidify their experiences. In this regard, practitioners often discussed the use of photographs, videos, and souvenirs to help tourists consolidate their moments and learned information.

Many participants provided details highlighting the importance of linking the first (i.e., encoding) with the second stage (i.e., consolidation) of the LTM system. For example, one participant described the use of a “certificate-of-achievement” as the object to capture memories of a sporting experience: “when [our tourists] go to South Korea, they will participate in Taekwondo. The [Taekwondo] instructor will teach [them], and after practice, [the instructor] will issue a certificate to them.” Although tourists in this experience may not have demonstrated supreme technical skills, the certificate nevertheless provides “credibility” to the activity. This aligns with the previous example at the cultural site where practitioners facilitated opportunities for tourists to tangibilize their memories vis-à-vis their personal seals from the crafting workshop.

More interestingly, one participant suggested that “surprises” could also be tangibilized. As this participant described:

“Tourists go to the winery to experience bottling and labeling to experience more value and a sense of participation. After [tourists’] participation, we (management) come out to put a pre-printed label with the tourists’ name in the logo that indicates when the wine was bottled and sealed. With this imprint, [we] increase the tourists’ deep memory [of the activity], increase his memories of the trip, and can also promote sales of tourism products.”

This is a concise example of a well-executed process suggesting that practitioners are not only tactically planning and executing surprises for tourists, but they are also enabling the use of objects to capture this “unexpected moment” to facilitate consolidation.

Participants also emphasized the importance of memory retrieval (i.e., Stage 3) to encourage tourists to relive their experiences and distribute their memories with others. One participant noted: “If visitors have a good experience...perhaps even after ten years, the visitor would still remember some details. Maybe he will tell his story to everyone he meets.” Participants again highlighted the role of “objects” to tangibilize an experience and provide tourists with a sense of the past during memory retrieval (Belk, 2013). Objects can facilitate

tourists' recollections of their broader experiences, and stimulate the retrieval of specific details such as encounters and activities during the trip by acting as autobiographical memory cues. An object represents a ticket into a tourist's autobiography; it elicits the re-embodiment of one's social identity at that time. For example, the results illustrate the impact of the "certificate" and "personal seal" for eliciting a tourist's social identity as a "student" in Taekwondo and handcrafting class from South Korea and China, respectively. Objects can also enable the social function of autobiographical memories by making conversations more truthful and believable when tourists share their stories with others (Bluck, 2003).

Tourists are using new sets of digital objects to distribute memories of their tourism experiences with family and friends. Digital objects may include updates or posts on social media, tags, blogs, calendar notes, digital photographs and videos, and many others. Many participants indicated they are actively involved in facilitating memory distribution through different digital channels. For example, this participant acknowledged: "Now, following the development of Facebook and Twitter in foreign countries, Sina Weibo and WeChat are the new media types in China. The best example is from this restaurant, where the manager posts the selfies that customers take during the dining experience, and then add comments or likes." Other participants suggested the importance of using incentives to entice visitors to share their experiences: "when guests check-out of the hotel, through our points-redemption program, we encourage them to write their memories of their stay."

Finally, participants also indicated the importance of building communities for visitors to relive and share past experiences with each other. One participant explained: "we manage a specialized circle for fans. These fans previously stayed at our hotel. Our manager would regularly organize events and invite them so that memory of the hotel becomes part of their lives." Other participants indicated that they have similar strategies so visitors can "participate together", create "friendships", and "pass this feeling to others." In this way, practitioners are facilitating a sense of community by allowing participants – through dialogue and activities – to be involved in the retrieval, re-enactment, (re)interpretation and co-construction of each other's autobiographical memory (Belk, 2013).

## **STUDY 2: THE TOURIST'S VOICE**

Since memory is highly personal to individuals, practitioners cannot directly "create" MEs for tourists. In this regard, Study 2 was conducted distinctively as a follow up to Study 1 with the objective to complement the practitioner's perspective by identifying aspects of the

tourist experience that are particularly memorable, and reflect the tourist's voice that are relevant in each stage of the LTM system.

## **Methodology**

The methodological approach adopted in Study 2 largely paralleled Study 1, and 12 in-depth interviews were conducted in May, 2016 to capture tourists' voices. Participants were recruited via convenience sampling but screened to ensure they had past travel experiences to Shenzhen, China, to parallel this characteristic of the focus group participants in Study 2. While focus groups were chosen in Study 1 to encourage dialogue amongst practitioners, in-depth interviews were preferred in Study 2 as tourists' memories are highly personal, and could even be potentially confidential, in nature.

At the start of the interview, the interviewer introduced the concept of MEs but did not brief interviewees about the theoretical concepts that are relevant in each stage of the LTM system. This was done to minimize the chance of response bias as tourists' recollections could be distorted to fit these definitions.

Interviewees were asked what aspects made their destination experience stand out, and what was kept in their memory. They were also asked to describe how they felt their travel memories were related to their self and social identities at the time. Furthermore, they were asked to comment if they felt the destination helped them encode, consolidate, and retrieve their travel memories. In parallel to the data analysis approach adopted in Study 1, the authors identified tourists' excerpts from a careful, thematic reading of their transcripts to reflect the tourist's voice on aspects that are relevant in each stage of the LTM system.

## **Results**

Interviewees shared many examples from their experiences and these aspects were categorized into each stage of the LTM system. For example, interviewees focused on the importance of attention during their destination experience, reflecting the role of mindfulness at the encoding stage. One interviewee described in her gustatory recollection: "when I travel to Shenzhen, it is about all the different types of food, different smells, different choices." Another interviewee commented on his capacity to observe the immediate environment. He described: "I am an observer. I watch people and things. See how different they are. Just like standing in the middle of London, it will be very different from Glasgow, Shanghai or Shenzhen. It, to me, just enlarges my observations." Insightfully, this interviewee was well-aware of the interaction between his personal self (i.e., as an "observer") as well as his self-

goal at the moment (i.e., to enlarge his views). This example lend supports to the notion of “quality” – interpreted within a mindfulness perspective – as it reflects an individual’s ability to be aware of his/her surroundings to fulfill personal goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This interviewee was mindful of the need to stay open-minded, driving his sight and thoughts towards watching and capturing different types of destination experiences.

Interviewees also highlighted the link between mindfulness and positive affect. One interviewee commented on her experience at a place she described as an “immigrant-based destination.” She noticed individuals “came from many different areas of the country and spoke in many different dialects with different accents.” Once she heard “individuals (with an accent) from her hometown area (of the country)”, she felt very “warm” as “the feeling represented the uniqueness of the destination.” In contrast to positive affect, another interviewee described a negative emotion from his onsite experience. He recalled: “In the middle (border) between Hong Kong and Shenzhen, there is a street called Chung Ying Street. When I first arrived (in Shenzhen), I rushed to a place called Shatoujiao where Chung Ying Street is located. When we arrived at around 5pm in the afternoon, that place was closed. I felt regretful.” Despite the negative affect that was encoded from that moment, he evaluated his experience as positive overall as he explained he went to a “very popular and symbolic place” and later reflected on the “differences between Hong Kong and Shenzhen.”

These examples point to two noteworthy aspects: first, they support existing research on the relationship between mindfulness and affect as inter-related aspects during the encoding stage of the LTM system (Bosangit, Hibbert, & McCabe, 2015). Second, the act of remembering during retrieval could enable an individual to experience another emotion that is different from the emotion encoded during the immediate, onsite experience (e.g., the encoded emotion was negative but the interviewee’s post-trip evaluation of the recalled memory was positive). Taken together, this suggests the concept of affect could impact multiple stages differently, including encoding and retrieval, as emotions are also aroused during recollection.

The next stage of the LTM system is consolidation, and interviewees described the influence of social identity during this phase. One interviewee explained: “I will feel it when I check-in at a hotel. I will look at the people around me. ‘Professional’ (people) will use more civilized language and my image is very much a part of it. The image is very proper and I feel professional too.” This example suggests that social identity needs to be understood from tourists’ point-of-view to reflect their personal narratives, culture, and even the lifestyle image they aspire to (Io, 2015).

The consolidation of encoded information into LTM also requires an understanding of tourists' prior travel experiences, life histories, and even stage of the lifecycle as these factors, among others, could influence their identity and their LTMs (Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004; Marschall, 2015). One interviewee explained: "My actions depend on where I'm staying, which in turn influences the style I portray. For example, if I stay at a 'budget' (accommodation), I will dress more casually. If (the accommodation) is 'upscale', I cannot wear slippers. The environment creates the person." This exemplar lends support to the notion that identity-related motivations, including identity development, maintenance, and engagement, can influence tourists' experiences (Bond & Falk, 2012). In other words, tourists' identities and their motivations could explain the benefits they derive from experiences, and tourists could engage in experiences to explore, maintain, and disengage from particular aspects of their identities.

At the retrieval stage, the stories shared by interviewees stimulated reflections and highlighted the ways in which they paid attention, retained their views, and presented their ideas. The act of storytelling helps individuals consolidate and recover experiences from memory (Moscardo, 2010). One interviewee described: "I have been to Shenzhen 30 years ago. Now it is very well-developed, very crowded. It is a metropolis now. 30 years ago, the only places that foreigners can buy things was in the Friendship Store. Now you can go anywhere. The only thing I think should keep an eye on is personal safety, not just for visitors, but also for local people, and try to prevent many people from begging."

The recollection of narratives is oftentimes aided by the use of non-digital objects such as "souvenirs" and digital objects such as "photographs"; for example, interviewees described photo-taking during the onsite experience to capture immediate moments and reflected on the stories that were "contained" in the photos and souvenirs in the post-travel phase. However, not all tourists will opt to engage in the act of photography to "consolidate" experiential moments and then use photographs to later "retrieve" these memories. As one interviewee argued: "I never travel with cameras and take photographs. If I remember something, it is simply because it is in my memory, the place, the persons and the events. People take a lot of photograph simply because their memories are not good."

## **DISCUSSION**

This research first developed a conceptual model to link relevant concepts in psychology and tourism research vis-à-vis each stage of the LTM system. Next, focus groups



were conducted in Study 1 to examine how practitioners are helping tourists encode, consolidate, and retrieve their memories. Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted in Study 2 to complement the practitioner's perspective to reflect the tourist's voice that are relevant in each stage of the LTM system. Taken together, there are several key findings in the present research: the importance of facilitating mindfulness and positive emotions as well as the desire to create "collectible experiences" and distribute experiences for tourists.

The findings from the tourist's perspective highlighted the relevance of the concept of mindfulness in the encoding stage. Tourists voiced the importance of attentiveness to the environment, capturing experiences through their senses such as sight and smell. Research in mindfulness suggests that external stimuli can help engage tourist during their experiences and they can come in many forms, including objects such as signs and displays to enhance perceptions of sensory cues (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000). For example, in addition to sight and scents, Kim and Jang (2014) emphasized the importance of using auditory cues during visitors' onsite experiences.

From the practitioner's perspective, the findings indicate managers are emphasizing the importance of facilitating affective experiences for tourists. This could involve managing tourists' positive as well as potentially negative emotions such as sadness and grief. Research has shown that positive affect can widen the scope of attention and increase happiness as well as psychological growth (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Although it is oftentimes beyond management's control to anticipate negative emotions from the tourist's perspective such as feelings of regret, practitioners discussed the need to help tourists focus on what is happening in the present – not what had happened in past or will happen in the future – through openness and undivided attention, sustaining tourists' consciousness for current events and experiences.

The findings also indicate that practitioners are seeking to provide high-value experiences for tourists. These experiences could be conveyed as "collectible experiences" as tourists are increasingly selecting experiences that allow them to build their "experiential CV" (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). For example, some tourists may systematically travel to destination such as different countries, states, or cities, or visit famous golf courses or hotels, thereby accumulating diverse experiences to complete a "set" while others may choose to stay at freezing ice hotels or eat at restaurants serving peculiar foods. These experiences allow them to "check off" items on an "experiential check list" and build their "experiential CV" (Keinan & Kivetz, 2011). However, tourists' desires to accumulate specific aspects of their experiential CV could depend on their social identity, enabling them to (dis)engage in

certain experiences in order to explore and/or maintain particular aspects of their identity (Bond & Falk, 2012).

The findings also suggest practitioners are helping tourists “distribute” their memories through the use of digital and non-digital objects. They are facilitating online communities for visitors to relive past experiences and are looking for new opportunities to help tourists distribute their memories to others. For example, practitioners are helping tourists look up friends they met on a trip and are sharing photos with other tourists from an event they attended together. These new friends may post images of other tourists and “tag” them in it. In this way, the use of digital objects for consolidation not only benefits the tourist, but also to others who have been “tagged” on social media. Indeed, the social function of autobiographical memory can foster empathy and help us bond with others (Bluck, 2003). Individuals can remember past emotions that they experienced with other people during significant events in their lives (Belk, 2013).

Overall, facilitating MEs requires a multiphase perspective as the tourist experience begins with the images and expectations that are formed before the trip, the on-site experience as well as post-travel recollection (Aho, 2001). These memories may also influence the anticipation and expectations of future tourism experience (Lehto, O’Leary, & Morrison, 2004). For example, Park and Santos (2016) explored the central elements comprising MEs, adopting a sequential data collection process along three main successive travel stages: pre-, during, and post-travel. Their findings indicate tourists vividly recalled collecting and negotiating information for travel planning as well as interactions with others during the pre- and on-site experiences, respectively. In post-travel recollection, tourists highlighted the unexpected personal experiences that differed from others’ experiences.

### **Theoretical implications**

This research contributes to the tourism literature by linking the three stages of the LTM system with relevant concepts in psychology and tourism research. Furthermore, this research contributes by connecting findings from the practitioner’s perspective with the tourist’s voice in the context of the LTM system to present a framework of memory management and tourism experiences as shown in Figure 1.

--- Insert Figure 1 here ---

At Stage 1, this model combines insights from mindfulness, positive affect, and quality of conscious experience to understand how tourists encode information. It considers an individual's pursuit for "quality" conscious experiences as one's goals could drive his/her thoughts, habits, and behaviors during tourism experiences. The research also recognizes affect could impact multiple stages, including encoding and retrieval as emotions are aroused during recollection (Tung & Ritchie, 2011). The model specifically placed positive affect in Stage 1 following these considerations; first, to further emphasize the relationship between mindfulness and emotional experiences (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The concept of mindfulness informs the conscious state that engages tourists, and this link reinforces the importance of attention towards personal emotional states during encoding (Frewen et al., 2008).

Second, the recollection of emotions during retrieval is oftentimes a recall of affective experiences that are encoded in Stage 1. For example, Park and Santos (2016) reported that the emotions reported by tourists in the recollection stage (i.e., post-travel phase) largely represented encoded affective experiences. These remembered emotions were encoded during dynamic activities as well as the onsite process of moving about and its associated bodily experiences.

Third, this research recognizes that emotions may be mixed in the retrieval stage (e.g., as per Study 2, during tourists' act of remembering, they could recollect a trip as positive despite feelings of regret that were encoded during the onsite experience). In fact, this is could be particularly salient in the remembering of false memories (Frenda, Knowles, Saletan, & Loftus, 2013). The salience of emotions aroused in false memories during recollection could be different as they could be based on fabricated events that do not represent autobiographical experiences that were encoded (Loftus & Bernstein, 2005). In these cases, it would be especially worthwhile to emphasize the influence of affective responses on the retrieval of false memories.

At Stage 2, this research contributes to the literature by considering research in STM and WM as well as social identity to address how tourists consolidate information. At Stage 3, this research considers the concepts of remembering, false memory, and storytelling to highlight the retrieval process. The findings from the practitioner's perspective suggest they are focusing on "tangibilizing the intangible" and "distributing memories" to help tourists consolidate and retrieve their memories; however, as described in Study 2, practitioners need to be mindful of their strategies as not all tourists, for example, engage in the act of photography to "consolidate" their moments or "retrieve" their memories from photographs.

It is important to note that intangible cues in the consolidation stage could be relevant

for the retrieval stage as well. As tourists voiced in Study 2, photographs and souvenirs could function as external cues of the tourism experience when they are later remembered (i.e., at Stage 3: Retrieval). Objects, both digital and non-digital, could also play a dynamic role among the three stages, from Stage 3: Retrieval, back to Stage 1: Encoding and Stage 2: Consolidation. For example, Wang, Park, and Fesenmaier (2012) examined stories provided by travelers related to their use of smartphones (and associated applications) during their touristic experiences. Their results revealed that smartphones changed tourists' behavior and emotional states, enabling tourists to more effectively share experiences and "store" memories (p. 371). Their study suggests mobile technology mediates the touristic experience as it allows for timely retrieval of memories as the experience progresses without waiting for the post-travel phase. In essence, tourists may retrieve their memories day-to-day (or even hour-by-hour) as their tourism experience unfolds. The act of remembering (i.e., Stage 3) could re-influence their perceptions and attention (i.e., Stage 1), and subsequently, the consolidation of new information (i.e., Stage 2) in LTM.

From a theoretical perspective, the memory management framework in Figure 1 addresses the nature of changes that occur when encoding, consolidation, and retrieval "moves" from one stage to the next. Opposite moves are possible when one recollects and reconstructs his/her travel memories, which are subjected to distortions due to later experiences, context, and outside information. It would be optimal to demonstrate this dynamism in the model, illustrating the linkages between each of the key concepts and managerial implications in response to each of the three stages. Towards this end, the model attempts to take into account the interaction between stages by positioning Stage 2 as an interface between Stage 1 and Stage 3, while recognizing that Stage 3 could re-influence Stage 1, as described above. Nevertheless, the static nature of the labels is a limitation of this model.

### **Managerial implications**

There are several additional managerial considerations worth noting. First, practitioners could risk decontextualizing the overall experience for tourists if tourists focus too much on the bits and pieces during an event or activity. For example, it could be counterproductive for practitioners to recommend too many areas at a destination for tourists to take selfies or help tourists capture every moment, or as many moments as possible. Human memory is script-based, and individuals retrieve and share their memories with each other as stories. Stories have a beginning, plot, and end that are interconnected. As much as

possible, practitioners should aim to deliver an experience that flows with a sense of continuity over time, rather than a quantity of discrete incidences.

The use of a “certificate-of-achievement” as the object is only one instance of a management strategy reported in the consolidation stage. In this example, the tourism practitioner sought to help tourists consolidate their experience into LTMs (i.e., in that case, eliciting tourists’ temporary identity of a Taekwondo student). However, as reported in Study 2, trying to influence social identity to enhance the consolidation of these moments is not as simple as editing certificates as not all tangible items make sense in strengthening the social self for every tourist.

The findings suggest that practitioners are facilitating “digital memories” for tourists; however, managers should adopt this approach cautiously and be aware of the potential risks from overly emphasizing the distribution of “digital memories” during a touristic experience (i.e., Stage 3). For example, by encouraging too much social media sharing and updates or digital reminders at a destination, tourists could become less attentive of their immediate experiences. Instead, they could pay more attention to the likes and comments from their posts, or contemplate the types of responses that their future memories may generate. This could possibly lead to an absence of mindfulness during the current experience.

This research suggests that objects can aid in consolidation (i.e., Stage 2) as well as facilitate retrieval (i.e., Stage 3). While this study focuses on the managerial implications of objects from practitioners-to-tourists, objects can also be transferred from tourists-to-tourists, or tourists-to-others in the form of gift-giving. Postcards represent a traditional form of non-digital gifts that are intended to convey thoughtfulness to a recipient when the gift-giver is traveling. Today, digital gift-giving in the form of photos or e-card equivalents could also help tourists distribute – almost in real-time – their memories to anyone anywhere in the world.

Autobiographical memories are malleable; they are fundamentally (re)interpreted and (re)constructed based on future experiences, information, and context (Braun-LaTour, Grinley, & Loftus, 2006). While the findings suggest that practitioners are striving to help tourists develop personal stories during their experiences, they must also remember that tourists’ memories could be distorted after a trip. Memory distortions can happen through the increasing number of blogs and social media platforms that allow tourists to share their stories with others (Braun-Latour et al., 2006). Furthermore, tourists’ memories of past experiences could also be distorted by false information from outside sources; thus, practitioners have to be prepared to address potentially harmful information to protect their

operations and brand.

## CONCLUSION

The present research sought to go beyond theoretical concepts to reveal, in greater depth, the managerial implications of a framework of memory management and tourism experiences. At the first stage of the LTM system, encoding, this research combined insights from the concepts of mindfulness and positive affect to represent the conscious state that engages tourists when they are attentive of their present moment. In the second stage, consolidation, this research considered research in short term memory (STM) and working memory (WM) as well as social identity to address how tourists consolidate information. In the third stage, retrieval, this research considered the concepts of remembering, storytelling, and memory distortions to highlight the retrieval process.

Focus groups were conducted to examine how practitioners are helping tourists encode, consolidate, and retrieve their memories in the context of this model. This research highlighted the importance of facilitating mindfulness, immediate moments (the “now”), and collectible experiences for tourists at the encoding stage. At the consolidation and retrieval stages, this research discussed the managerial implications of focusing on “tangibilizing the intangible” and “distributing memories” for tourists, respectively. Finally, in-depth interviews were also conducted to complement the practitioner’s perspective by reflecting the tourist’s voice that is relevant in each stage of the LTM system.

While this framework is instructive, it is limited as tourist behaviors, experiences, and memories can change over time, potentially reconstructing and/or distorting past memories. However, the timing of this study is cross-sectional, assessing tourist perspectives and managerial practices at one point in time. Another limitation is that focus groups were conducted with no prior information given to the participants; hence, participants may have forgotten potentially important strategies they adopted. The depth and clarity of their responses may have increased if they were given an opportunity to reflect on their strategies prior to the focus groups, and to potentially provide the researchers with examples of their strategies (e.g. the social media channels and content they facilitate to help tourists distribute their memories) as opposed to giving immediate feedback.

Based on the model in this research, future studies could consider how the conceptual elements in the stages ought to be measured as well as the salience of these elements towards the overall memorability of an experience. For example, affect could be particularly salient

during encoding at the onsite experience but different when tourists recollect their emotions after-the-fact. Furthermore, the intensity of recalled emotions could still be very strong over many years as in the case of flashbulb memories (Tinti, Schmidt, Testa, & Levine, 2014).

For scholars interested in cross-cultural studies, future research could explore tourist memories and management practices from different cultural perspectives. For example, experiencing the local culture is an important aspect of MEs for many people (Kim, Ritchie, & McCormick, 2012). Future research could identify ways in which practitioners can stimulate a higher level of openness to different cultures among tourists.

Overall, the framework of memory management presented in this research is likely to undergo further refinement as future research continues with a broader sample of practitioners and tourists across different cultures and destinations. Nevertheless, this research contributes to the field by taking a step in that direction, linking memory research with tourism management practices to uncover the potential of memory management and tourism experiences.

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