

Research Article

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Understanding Memorable Tourism Experience: Long-Term Memory System and Revisit Intention

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Abstract: This study seeks to understand the recall of memorable tourism experience (MTE) from long-term memory. It primarily seeks to comprehend the recollection of MTEs from tourists' or alumni tourists' long-term memory, and to closely link MTEs to human emotions and travel destinations. A mixed-method approach, including semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire survey, was adopted to collect data from alumni tourists with travel experiences during their studies in the United Kingdom. The findings of qualitative research highlighted three factors – *Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness, Activity and Event Engagement and Relationship and Friendship Development* – as major emotional stimuli. Meanwhile, empirical results from the survey suggested that *Relationship and Friendship Development* and *Recollection and Vividness of Experience* significantly influenced revisit intention to their MTE destinations.

Keywords: Memorable tourism experience; Attraction and atmospheric impressiveness; Activity and event engagement; Relationship and friendship development; Recollection and vividness of experience; Alumni tourists

1 Introduction

Offering experiences is a primary function of tourism, and the role of any destination practitioner is to construct positive memories for tourists (Tung & Ritchie, 2011a). The experience of tourism involves a complex system with various psychological elements that generate memories

(Cutler et al., 2014; Ritchie et al., 2011). In the tourism industry, memorable experiences have influential roles in tourists' decision-making processes and revisit intentions (Kim et al., 2010; Lehto et al., 2004). Tourism studies have been displaying a growing interest in the importance of Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE), and tourism practitioners have begun to engage in activities that facilitate memory creation and development (Tung et al., 2017). Existing studies on MTE encompass a wide range of research approaches, including case studies, conceptual papers, methodology research, and studies on behavioural models (Hosseini et al., 2023). Given that positive experiences lead to higher satisfaction, desire to repeat visits, and positive word-of-mouth (WOM) (Manthiou et al., 2016), destination-management organisations strive to deliver memorable experiences and increase the competitiveness of their destinations (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003).

Individuals can only transform selected parts of their tourism experiences into long-term memories, which have long-lasting effects on their image of a tourism destination (Kim et al., 2010). This study aims to explore the critical underlying factors of MTEs in long-term memory and investigate their influence on revisit intention. Moreover, this research seeks to comprehend the recollection of MTEs from long-term memory and understand the association between human emotions that emerged from those MTEs and the travel destinations that elicited them. This was to be achieved by answering the following two main research questions: "What is/are the key factor(s) of travel experiences that become most memorable in an individual's long-term memory?" and "How can MTE factors influence revisit intention?" This research expands MTE studies by employing a long-term memory system as its framework. It also fills a research gap regarding cognitive and affective emotions and their influence on the revisit intentions of alumni tourists, a less-focused-upon market in tourism studies.

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2 Literature Review

2.1 Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) and MTE Factors

A Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) is defined as “selectively constructed from tourism experiences based on the individual’s assessment of the experience” (Kim *et al.*, 2012, p.13). As of early 2020, 52 articles highly relevant to MTEs were identified, and half of them were related to either MTE scales or tourist behaviour and intention (Hosseini *et al.*, 2023). These studies have identified two main dimensions of MTEs: destination-related attributes and personal psychological factors (Wei *et al.*, 2019).

A study on tourism in Uganda revealed that tourists perceived the four preserved components of the tourism product — attractions, supplementary services, facilities, and lodging — as contributing to the development of their MTE (Tukamushaba, *et al.*, 2016). Tung and Ritchie (2011b) proposed identity formation, family milestones, relationship development, nostalgia re-enactment and freedom pursuits as the five typical characteristics of MTE. Moreover, destination facilities (Kim, 2014); the value for tourists’ money; the variety of activities (Crouch, 2011; Mahdzar *et al.*, 2015); and interactions with and hospitality of locals (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Mahdzar *et al.*, 2015) are all determinant factors of MTE. Other factors have also been categorized as influential, such as affective factors (Duman & Mattila, 2005); external, social and personal factors (Morgan & Xu, 2009); psychological factors (Kim, 2014); and escapism, recognition, interactivity, learning, unique involvement and peace of mind (Ali *et al.*, 2016). Through the application of a grounded theoretical methodology, Hosseini *et al.* (2022) constructed a conceptual framework pertaining to memorable dark tourism experiences in the war zones of Iran, including four primary factors — learning from dark experiences, spiritual experiences, involvement in activities and emotional experiences — that exert influence on the nature of dark tourism experiences (Hosseini *et al.*, 2022).

In developing the measurement scales of MTE amongst US college students, Kim (2010) identified involvement, local culture and refreshment as experiential factors that help them remember the benefits of their travel experiences. Inspired by this study, Kim *et al.* (2012) later established a seven-dimensional scale with 24 items, including hedonism, refreshment, local culture, meaningfulness, knowledge, involvement and novelty. Destination-related attributes and place attachment were proposed as additional variables for measuring MTEs (Kim, 2014), and

personality was later identified as an influential external factor (Kim & Jang, 2016).

The measurement scales mentioned above have their uniqueness, and some latter findings generated different results from Kim *et al.* (2012). Hence, new measurement scales on MTEs have also been developed and adjusted across cultures (Kim, 2013; Kim *et al.*, 2012). Recently, Kim and Chen (2019) developed a four-dimensional scale to test the relationship between autobiographical memory and its functions in the context of tourism. The scales included dimensions that best explicate the memorable travel experience: novelty, social interaction, destination enthusiasm, and learning. Kim and Chen (2021) used the scales developed in 2019 to prove that based on their beliefs, individuals would exhibit a greater level of destination excitement than those who share their memorable travel experiences. Nevertheless, few studies have examined cognitive and affective dimensions as they relate to destination-related attributes or behavioural characteristics.

2.2 MTE and Revisit Intention

MTEs have been proven to be indirectly linked to satisfaction and loyalty, subsequently increasing tourists’ revisit intentions and positive WOM promotion (Kim, 2018). Dimensions of perceived MTE values, including emotional, social and economic effects on tourists’ behaviour, vary by demographic features; for example, economic value increases younger visitors’ recommendation intentions (Brochado *et al.*, 2022). Emotional assessments of experiences influence the future behaviour of tourists, and memories of tourist experiences from the distant past can still significantly impact revisit intentions (Barnes *et al.*, 2016).

Previous literature has argued that tourists’ experiences could generate unique cognitive and affective benefits and mediate between destinations and tourists, thereby influencing their revisit intention (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). Researchers have also recommended that scholars integrate memories into their study of tourism experiences, because memories from previous vacations particularly influence tourists’ behavioural intentions, including their inclination to repeat a visit (Kim *et al.*, 2012). Several studies demonstrated the effect of (pleasant) memories of tourism experiences on the choice processing of individuals and their potential for future transactions (Kim & Ritchie, 2014; Kim, 2014).

By merging tourist experiences with autobiographical-memory phenomenology, measurement scales

for tourism memory characteristics were developed in tourism memory research to highlight tourist memory and its related effects, such as word-of-mouth and revisit intention (Kim et al., 2021a). Barnes et al. (2016) examined the influence of the most recent, positive, unique and multisensory travel experiences on the revisit intentions of tourists in Denmark. Studies of tourists in Finland revealed that local culture, novelty, involvement, hedonism and knowledge could all significantly influence the behavioural intention of tourists (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). Studies of tourists in Malaysia also highlighted that the positive impact of destination-related attributes on positive MTEs could increase revisit intention (Mahdzar et al., 2015). A recent study on smart tourism reveals that the incorporation of interactive and personalised features in smart-tourism technologies enhances the overall tourism services provided, leading to the creation of meaningful and memorable experiences and influential factors on travellers' behavioural intentions (Shin et al., 2023). Thus it is vital to understand MTE and its relationship with revisit intention as a stimulating factor for travel interests, especially for alumni tourists, which are a less-focused-upon segment in the repeat visitor market.

2.3 Long-Term Memory System

Long-term memory refers to the information stored in one's mind for extended periods (Baddeley, 2012). Long-term memory has been considered the main knowledge base when studying tourist memories and memorable experiences in different situations to identify the elements that affect memorable experiences (Tung et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2019). Tourists retrieve their memories in the long-term memory system in three stages: encoding, consolidating and retrieving. During encoding, the system acquires vivid moments or scenes in one's mind related to an experience and follows such moments or scenes with a collection of precise information (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000). During consolidation, the system re-constructs such moments or scenes to make them stable and resistant (McGaugh, 2000). Finally, retrieval involves the act of remembering, which may introduce false or distorted information (Loftus, 2005).

This three-stage model in the long-term memory system was applied to understanding tourists' travel stories from the practitioners' perspective and build a framework for memory management of tourism experiences (Tung et al., 2017). The present study adopted the three-stage long-term memory framework to guide the examination of the specific MTEs of the alumni tourists,

and to identify stimuli that can build the strength of memorability.

3 Methodology

University students represent a crucial market that is well-suited to examining long-term travel memories in alumni travellers. Students may play multiple roles as temporary residents, VFR hosts, guests and/or domestic travellers whilst staying in another country. They also frequently travel during their study period and tend to revisit their study places for leisure or business after some years. Compared with general leisure tourists, these alumni tourists tend to have more memories of their travel experiences whilst studying at their universities, and their memories last longer (Gabe et al., 2006). This implies the significance of the alumni market might have long-term memory processing from the recall of MTEs. The research sample in the present study was composed of Chinese alumni tourists from UK universities.

The present study adopted a mixed-method approach. As illustrated in Figure 1, the qualitative study aimed to discover MTEs within long-term memories and reveal the critical underlying themes that make travel experiences memorable (Step 1). Using the interview data, three main MTE components were identified and a survey was designed to test the relationship between those components and revisit intention (Step 2). Results of the regression model revealed the influential factors on revisit intention. This provided valuable insights that could help destination-marketing organisations in the UK and other places with a large number of alumni tourists to enhance the memorability of their travel experiences.

Twenty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted first, including two pilot tests. Purposive and snowball sampling were both adopted, and interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. Two Chinese researchers who graduated from UK universities used their networks to reach out to suitable interviewees. The transcripts were then translated into English by the two researchers who are competent in both languages. Thematic analysis was performed to analyse the data through a process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The survey was designed in Mandarin Chinese and distributed through an online platform. Four were adapted from the scale developed by Kim (2014), one of the most widely adopted measurement scales in MTE studies. Another 11 items were adapted from Chandralal and Valenzuela (2013; 2015), who ran a study with a mixed-method approach to dis-

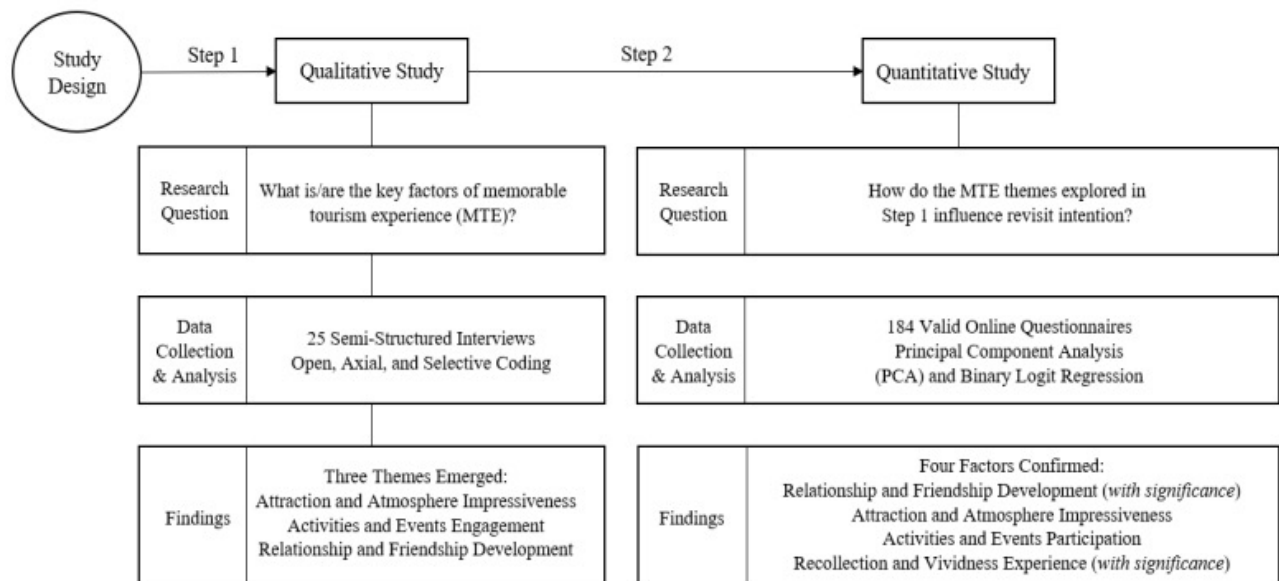


Figure 1: Research Methodology

cover leisure travellers' antecedents and behavioural outcomes. Revisit intention was asked to perform the binary logistic regression as a polar question. Two researchers fluent in both English and Chinese used the back-translation process (Brislin, 1980). A total of 210 questionnaires were collected, of which 184 were deemed valid. IBM SPSS 26.0 was used to execute the quantitative study. Binary logistic regression was conducted to test the relationship between revisit intention and MTE factors generated from the qualitative phase and the literature mentioned above.

4 Findings and Discussions: Qualitative Study

Two-thirds of the respondents of the qualitative study were females aged between 20 and 35 years, representing an appropriate mix of generations Y and Z. The respondents had stayed in the UK for an average of 2.6 years between 2012 and 2020. All of them graduated from the UK anywhere from 6 months to 6 years prior to the time of the interview, with an average of 2.3 years. Most interviewees studied in metropolitan areas in the UK, mainly in the southern part of England. England and Scotland were the most frequently mentioned travel destinations, while Wales and Northern Ireland were mentioned the least. Appendix 1 lists the complete demographic information of the 23 interviewees of this study.

The long-term memory system's coding process manipulated referred to in this study is the coding process

suggested by Nadel *et al.* (2012) and Tung *et al.* (2017). The memory retrieval procedure is shown in Figure 2. Following the guidelines proposed by Tung *et al.* (2017), the participants were first asked to share the most memorable scenes and relevant details, such as what features of their destination experience stood out, and relate a collection of particular scenes.

In the first stage of encoding, the participants did not acquire a "memory"; instead, they gathered a variety of detailed and vivid moments of their MTEs, which together constituted the foundation of autobiographical memories (Conway & Pleydell-Pearce, 2000).

Next, in the consolidation stage, researchers facilitated the participants' re-construction of their MTEs and encouraged them to express their emotions when their memories had become more stable (McGaugh, 2000). Lastly, the participants were directed to perform storytelling. Storytelling is one method for people to remember and exchange old experiences with one another while recalling, recreating, and then telling others about their past experiences in narrative form (Tung *et al.*, 2017).

Three MTE themes were generated from the travel stories shared by the interviewees. They emerged from the interviewees' connection between their emotions and the travel destination. Furthermore, MTE themes were established from these unique and exclusive stories, with which the interviewees would create a symbiotic identity (George & George, 2004). The three major themes from the interviewees' travel stories, with their related categories and their codes (keywords) as identified by the researchers, are shown in Appendix 2. Interpretations of each theme

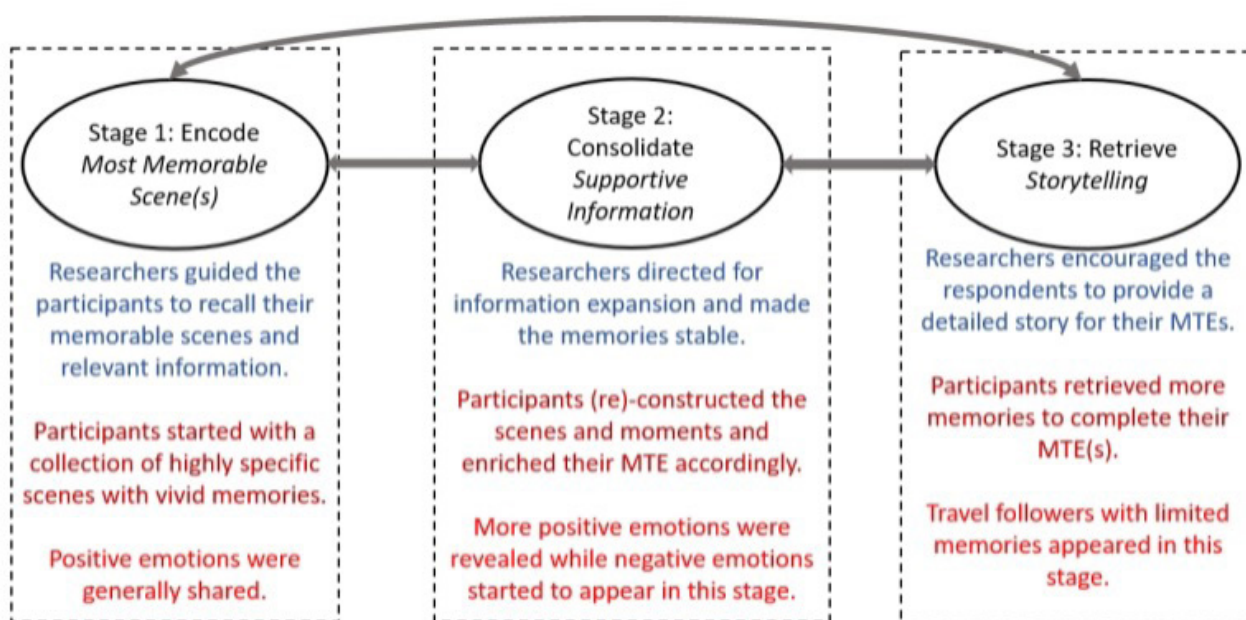


Figure 2: Retrieval of MTEs by the Long-Term Memory System (Modified from Tung et al., 2017)

are provided in the following sections. Each interviewee is denoted by ‘R’ with a corresponding number, and direct quotations are presented in italics.

4.1 Theme I: Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness

The first theme, Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness, conceptualises destinations as physical places with different features, ranging from cities and towns to foreign locations and local sites. Some interviewees shared their most memorable moments and emotions from their experiences of a certain unique and exclusive atmosphere. In line with the findings of Xu et al. (2009), the interviewees sought out famous attractions with traditional British features; meanwhile, some small cities attracted interviewees through social media postings. Some interviewees chose the attraction for particular reasons. For example, R2 and R6 booked a hotel in Lake District, a location they had studied and analysed for their course assignment. They wanted to experience the place and complete their coursework.

A few famous cities were cited as destinations for memorable travels. R3 presents a typical example of attachment to attractions. Specifically, R3 visited Cotswold on a solo trip after seeing and studying the city’s distinctively British architecture (e.g., stone houses) and local history. Although she spent five hours commuting to this typical

British town, she felt that the experience was “*worthwhile and meaningful*” in the first stage, and described the town as an ideal place to learn about British nature, culture, and history. Some interviewees compared their visited attractions with their study places, which strengthened their attachment to these attractions. For instance, R23 compared London with Edinburgh, her study place:

“London is a big and diverse city that involves modern and old-fashioned feelings simultaneously, while Edinburgh is more ancient and ‘traditional.’” – R23

Most interviewees shared memorable moments linked to the impressiveness of the scenery, such as the ancient and traditional architecture in Edinburgh. Emotions were generated and connected by a love for the specific features of a destination. The moments involved in the MTEs shared by the interviewees generated unforgettable and exclusive feelings. According to Iwashita (2003), the physical features of a destination, such as its natural resources, cannot be easily changed in the perceptions of tourists; the scenes listed above undoubtedly cannot be replaced by other destinations, given that the specific features of the UK contributed significantly to those memories.

4.2 Theme II: Activity and Event Engagement

Since university alumni tend to stay much longer in a destination than typical leisure tourists, they have more

chances to participate in local events and activities. Most interviewees shared that they preferred to deeply immerse themselves in the local culture of their destinations during their travel in UK. For example, R1 spent much time searching for reservations for an afternoon tea in the British Museum to accommodate her mother's visit. She commented that her time in London was “*unusual, untraditional*” as she planned many surprises for her mother. Some emotions were shared related to the distinctiveness of experiencing of those traditional activities and events. R16 visited the British Museum every time he travelled to London to explore the valuable collections he had seen on television. Meanwhile, R11 narrated her experience at the Hot Air Balloon Festival as follows:

“This was my first time to attend a foreign festival, which was exotic.” – R11

The interviewees wanted to explore the local culture of their destinations and have unique experiences, especially from festivals and other special events. A study on nature tourism has proven that specially-arranged activities to connect with nature could increase the memorability of the trips (Soares & Nunes, 2020). R12 attended Christmas services in a cathedral and participated in London's New Year fireworks festival with his friends. He described the festival as “*beautiful*,” “*grand*” and “*shocking*” and included the phrase “*Life is great, live it*” in his WeChat post. Several items to measure the level of engagement were created based on respondents' comments (e.g., The event or activity was exclusive to the destination). Meanwhile, during the second stage of consolidation and reconstruction, R15 talked about his experiences of watching a football match with his friend:

“I am not a football fan, but the high level of competition between the teams made me engage in the game together with the other fans.” – R15

Both the *Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness* the *Activity and Event Engagement* themes have unforgettable meanings for the respondents. However, the latter theme was mainly generated by recalling the memorable scenes of activities and events that are not necessarily exclusive to the UK environment or location. Destinations can indeed contribute to visitors' memories, and some respondents expressed more emotions about their engagement in activities and events, without focusing on specific locations.

4.3 Theme III: Relationship and Friendship Development

Relationship and Friendship Development refers to the companionship of fellow travellers and interactions with locals and other tourists. Travel companions may include friends, parents, or significant others. Most of the interviewees mentioned parents as their travel companions and described their travel experiences as filled with happiness. R4 showed a strong attachment to his relationship with his girlfriend. When asked about his MTE, he immediately mentioned his travel experience with his girlfriend, who was also involved in most of his shared romantic memories:

“We were waiting for the train in Lake District. It was freezing, and we ordered Chococino. We drank it together and used it to warm our hands as well.” – R4

Another kind of relationship was established between the interviewees and local residents. R7 revealed a noticeable change in his accommodation preference. After such an experience, he started to choose Airbnb for his future travels. During his conversations with his Airbnb hosts, he felt warmth and a connection to the destination's local culture and lifestyle. He shared:

“I feel that human interactions are reduced because people spend more time on their phones than talking to one another in person.” – R7

Various outcomes in relationship and friendship development were observed between the interviewees and their travel partners. For instance, R4 and R8 married their travel companions, whereas R11 broke up with her travel partner after their trip. Unlike the previous two themes, *Relationship and Friendship Development* involves MTE with a human-centric component. Therefore, the items to measure the level of development in the quantitative study were related to the process of friendship development with travel companions or other people on a trip. This theme was developed based on memorable scenes related to interpersonal relationships, as opposed to locations or activities.

When asked about their intention to revisit the UK, most interviewees indicated wanting to revisit their MTE destinations and study places, but six interviewees mentioned “*not so much*.” R10 and R12 gave similar answers for different reasons: “*Cities in the UK looked similar*” and “*I studied there for only one year. I did not have anybody special to visit*.” Meanwhile, R4 simply answered “*No*” when asked if he plans to revisit the UK as a tourist. Only

a few interviewees have shared bad experiences in their travel, such as bad companionship (R11) and theft (R5). These incidents did have a strong impact on their revisit intention. The results confirmed how negative incidents in an MTE could influence revisit intention (Kim, 2022; Kim et al., 2021b).

5 Findings and Discussions: Quantitative Study

Upon completing the qualitative study, a survey was developed to examine the effects of the three themes on alumni tourists' revisit intentions for the UK and their MTE destinations. A total of 184 valid responses from participants of different demographic characteristics were collected. The longest length of study in the UK among all participants was 8 years, and the average length of study was approximately 2 years. Participants are mostly between 26 and 30 years old, and nearly 90% were employed full-time. Most participants had left the UK for about 5 years by the time of interview; with the longest one being 18 years. Moreover, 33 of the participants experienced the COVID-19 pandemic before they graduated. The longest travel time for an MTE was 60 days, but some participants even referred to one-day excursions as their most memorable trip experiences. The average length of an MTE was around seven days. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the 184 valid responses.

The data analysis included the Principal Component Analysis method to purify the scale measurement and reduce dimensionality. Seven items were dropped by adopting a factor loading of 0.5. The Cronbach's alpha values of these four retained factors ranged from 0.848 to 0.905, which exceeds the threshold of 0.60 recommended in exploratory studies (Hair et al., 2010). The total variance explained was satisfactory based on the 60% rule of thumb (Hair et al., 2010). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) result of 0.896 and the significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < 0.001$) also supported the use of principal component analysis (PCA). The final results yielded four main factors, as shown in Table 2.

The first two factors, as shown in Table 2, comprised seven and six items, respectively, that were associated with Theme III and Theme I of the qualitative studies. Factors 3 and 4 in Table 4 each incorporated five items that highlighted the events and activities experienced by the participants during their memorable trips, which were associated with Theme II of the qualitative studies. To match the contents of the quantitative results, Factor 3

was relabelled as *Activity and Event Participation*, whereas Factor 4 was relabelled as *Recollection and Vividness of Experience*, reflecting the unforgettability, uniqueness and authenticity of the memories recalled by the participants.

Table 3 presents the results of the binary logit regression model for the participants' revisit intention for their MTE destinations. Among the 151 participants, 82% indicated an intention to revisit their MTE destinations. The model was significant ($\chi^2_{MTE} = 18.531$, $p < 0.05$) with an R-square value of 0.163. The binary logit model estimate took the statistical and practical significance into account to examine predictors for the revisit intentions of university alumni in mainland China.

According to the regression model, only *Relationship and Friendship Development* and *Recollection and Vividness of Experience* significantly influenced the intentions of Chinese alumni tourists to revisit MTE destinations, at 0.1 and 0.05 levels, respectively. Moreover, the frequency of respondent travel during the study program in the UK negatively correlated with revisit intention. Interestingly, the length of MTE trips had a strong positive influence on the revisit intentions of Chinese alumni tourists to MTE destinations. Gender, age and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic showed no significant impact on revisit intention.

Among the four factors, a new factor, *Recollection and Vividness of Experience*, is consistent with previous literature, where activities and events associated with affective thoughts and emotions are more likely to be memorised (Kim, 2010). When recalling a travel experience, people tend to cite specific moments or scenes in a specific destination with their companions (Pan et al., 2016). For example, the interview respondents in this study initially shared memorable scenes from their travel stories, followed by the most meaningful and special events and activities they experienced, such as having afternoon tea and watching the New Year's fireworks. These unique experiences deep in their minds were conducive to recalling MTE memories in their daily lives (Wei et al., 2019). Some respondents purposely shared photos on social media to relive these meaningful experiences and retain them as special memories.

The findings of this present study also align with the results of Kim and Chen's study (2021), which found that recalling memorable travels in episodic memories elicits higher emotional reactions, as well as visual images associated with destination excitement (Kim & Chen, 2021). Tourists recalled experiential elements, such as enjoyment and excitement, when perceiving MTEs (Kim et al., 2012). Their positive emotions associated with such

Table 1: Participant Profile (n=184)

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	%
Age		
18-20	1	0.5
21-25	38	20.7
26-30	88	47.8
31-35	46	25.0
36-40	5	2.7
41-45	6	3.3
Gender		
Female	125	67.9
Male	59	32.1
Marital Status		
Single	117	63.6
Married without child(ren)	28	15.2
Married with child(ren)	35	19.0
Divorced	4	2.2
Occupational Status		
Full-time employment	164	89.1
Study	10	5.4
Unemployed	10	5.4
Travel Frequency During Study Time		
Once a week	8	4.3
Once every 2 to 3 weeks	30	16.3
Once a month	40	21.7
Once every 2 to 3 months	61	33.2
Once every 4 to 6 months	29	15.8
Once every 6 to 12 months	11	6.0
Once a year or more than a Year	5	2.7
Length of the MTE trip (n = 176 with 8 missing values)		
Weekend trips (3 days or less)	66	37.5
Short trips (4–7 days inclusive)	83	47.2
Vacations (8–15 days inclusive)	20	11.4
Longer period leave (more than 15 days)	7	4.0
Travel companion of MTE trip(s)		
Solo	16	8.7
With partners	17	9.2
With family members	9	4.9
With friends	83	45.1
With schoolmates	59	32.1

experiences are described as critical components of MTEs (Tung & Ritche, 2011a). Although a few respondents mentioned unpleasant incidents, such as being victimised by theft or having problems with Airbnb hosts, they still demonstrated strong intentions to revisit. Given that per-

ceiving travel memories as either positive or negative has not yet been examined in any empirical study, the influences of negative memories on revisit intention will be challenging to confirm.

Table 2: Factor Development by Principal Component Analysis (n=184)

MTE Factors	Factor Loadings			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Relationship and Friendship Development				
<i>I enjoyed the trip very much because I was with a wonderful group of travellers. ^c</i>	0.873			
<i>The trip enhanced my existing bonds with my travel companions. ^c</i>	0.851			
<i>I highly enjoyed the comradeship amongst my travel companions during the trip. ^c</i>	0.814			
<i>It was an unforgettable trip for my travel companions and I. ^a</i>	0.801			
<i>I met friendly people during the trip. ^a</i>	0.770			
<i>I always mention this trip with my travel companions until now. ^a</i>	0.665			
<i>I made friends with my travel companions or other people in this trip. ^a</i>	0.634			
Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness				
<i>I learned a lot about the UK from what I saw on this trip. ^a</i>		0.776		
<i>I saw awe-inspiring landscapes. ^b</i>		0.772		
<i>The destination(s) had typical British features. ^a</i>		0.756		
<i>The destination(s) had unique characteristics, which I could not find in other places. ^a</i>		0.700		
<i>I visited the places where I wanted to go. ^c</i>		0.619		
<i>The destination(s) was safe and clean. ^a</i>		0.618		
Activity and Event Participation				
<i>I attended interesting and special events in the destination(s). ^b</i>			0.802	
<i>I closely experienced actual local cultures from the activities. ^c</i>			0.777	
<i>I attended activities that I cannot usually participate in in my mundane life. ^b</i>			0.762	
<i>I could immerse myself in local festivals and other cultural ceremonies. ^c</i>			0.722	
<i>I engage in activities that I wanted to do. ^c</i>			0.615	
Recollection and Vividness of Experience				
<i>I still remembered the scenario of that event or activity I went to. ^a</i>				0.820
<i>The event or activity I attended provided me various emotions and memories. ^a</i>				0.735
<i>The event or activity was meaningful to me. ^a</i>				0.719
<i>The event I attended was an unforgettable experience. ^a</i>				0.686
<i>The event or activity was exclusive to the destination(s). ^a</i>				0.672
Eigenvalue	9.192	3.133	1.965	1.109
% variance explained	20.263	16.486	15.295	14.909
Cronbach's alpha	0.905	0.848	0.879	0.882

Notes: MTE Factors are measured on a seven-point scale, with 1 denoting “strongly disagree” and 7 denoting “strongly agree”; KMO=0.940; Chi-square for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity = 2920.832 ($p < 0.001$); total variance explained: 66.953%.

^a Derived from the Step 1 qualitative study

^b Adapted from Kim (2014)

^c Adapted from Chandralal and Valenzuela (2015)

Table 3: Revisit Intention to MTE Destinations (Binary Logit Model)

Independent variables	Revisit intention to MTE destinations (n = 151)	VIF
Constant	1.105**	
MTE factors (odds ratio)		
<i>Relationship and Friendship Development</i>	0.77* (1.464)	1.158
<i>Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness</i>	-0.017 ^{ns} (0.983)	1.027
<i>Activity and Event Participation</i>	0.094 ^{ns} (1.099)	1.021
<i>Recollection and Vividness of Experience</i>	0.442** (1.556)	1.060
Demographic and travel characteristics (odds ratio)		
Male	0.339 ^{ns} (1.404)	1.072
Length of MTE trip	0.160** (1.173)	1.023
Frequent travellers (once a week during the study time)	-1.444* (0.236)	1.047
Experienced COVID-19 pandemic when studying in the UK	0.626 ^{ns} (0.535)	1.188
26 to 30 years old	-0.551 ^{ns} (0.576)	1.199
-2 log likelihood (full model)	148.366	
Nagelkerke's pseudo-R-square	0.163	
Chi-square	18.531**	

Notes: Dependent variable – Revisit intention to MTE destinations; **p < 0.05; *p < 0.10; ^{ns}p > 0.10

The results of this empirical study also indicate that *Relationship and Friendship Development* is a strong predictor of revisit intention. Previous studies have established Social Interaction as an influential factor in revisit intention, but the items related to local social interaction in this study did not affect the PCA results. Further examination of this attribute revealed that *Relationship and Friendship Development* can be defined as a suitable intimate connection between the experience of the destination and the respondents. Previous studies have found that interactions with travel companions and locals also positively influence the MTE recollections of tourists (Wei et al., 2019). Tourists' mutual understanding and trust can be enhanced through social interactions with their travel companions (Morgan & Xu, 2009). The majority of the interviewees recalled memorable moments with their travel companions or local residents. They mentioned that their feelings about interpersonal relationships were stronger than their memories. Satisfaction with the travel experience was identified as an indicator of tourists'

revisit intention, and social interactions with companions were found to positively affect the overall satisfaction of tourists with their travel experience (Choo & Petrick, 2014). Interviewees often talked about their memorable trips with their travel companions after their journeys, and sharing these memories could enhance their relationships or friendships. As a result, unforgettable experiences can further cultivate relationships and friendships (Wei et al., 2019).

Several travel characteristics can significantly affect revisit intention to MTE destinations. The length of MTEs demonstrates a positive effect, whereas the frequency of travel while studying abroad demonstrates a negative impact. The positive effect of the length of MTEs on revisit intention is in line with the results of previous studies (Gabe et al., 2006). This suggests that destinations should focus on developing more attractions for tourists who stay longer, providing more opportunities for the development of memorable scenes, as this can stimulate repeat visits.

Revisit intention may be reduced, however, when the frequency of MTE trips was greater, which may indicate that Chinese alumni tourists' travel interests in the UK have already been satisfied. Experienced travellers tend to be motivated by experiencing different cultures and nature-related attributes (Pearce & Lee, 2005). Therefore, revisiting familiar places may not be a priority for those who frequently travelled during their study time.

In contrast with the above-mentioned factors, *Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness* did not demonstrate a relationship with revisit intention. One possible reason is that attachment to other countries may reduce respondents' intentions to revisit the UK. Based on the qualitative finding, several interviewees shared highly memorable travel experiences in different European countries, as many are popular alternative travel destinations for many Chinese students studying in the UK. Such preferences can affect interviewees' revisit intentions because some are novelty seekers who do not intend to revisit the UK but prefer to explore new places (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013; Bigne et al., 2020). For example, R10, who had no firm revisit intention, professed a stronger attachment to France than the UK.

Similarly, *Activity and Event Participation* factors did not significantly affect revisit intentions. Many activities and events mentioned, such as Christmas markets, were not organised exclusively in the UK. It is arguable that some respondents tended to express more emotions in the engagement process, not focusing on the specific location. For example, R15 was addicted to watching local football matches in the Premier League and built solid relationships with friends he met during trips. He did not demonstrate any strong revisit intention, but mentioned: "Travelling with the right people is the most important no matter where you go."

6 Implications and Limitations

This study offers a few contributions. The study systematically integrates an understanding of the long-term memory process to recall and explore MTE factors. It contributes to the literature on MTE and revisit intention by applying a mixed-method approach. The predominant methodologies that had been employed in prior MTE research were mostly quantitative, with limited utilization of qualitative studies. A few qualitative studies on MTE factors (Tung & Ritchie, 2011a; Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013) utilised in-depth interviews, but most studies relied

on questionnaires for measurement scale development or testing the effects of travel-related factors.

The surprising aspect of this quantitative-dominating phenomenon lies in the multifaceted and intricate nature of the tourist experience, coupled with the absence of consensus among researchers regarding the scale used to measure MTE (Hosseini et al., 2023). Accounting for the emotional states experienced during leisure travel is a relatively subjective process, yet it is essential to understanding the essence of MTEs. Theoretically, Khoo-Lattimore et al. (2019) suggested a mixed-method approach as a strategy for providing outcomes that would not be attainable with a single-method strategy. Some other researchers have extolled mixed approaches as a vital strategy for enhancing the validity of the acquired data and providing greater support for the outcomes (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

As the precedent for applying MTE concepts to the alumni tourists was still limited, this research first employed a qualitative approach to explore the MTE factors, followed by a quantitative approach to test the MTEs' impact on revisit intention; in-depth interviews were conducted first, with respondents enlisted as storytellers to describe their MTEs in detail. Some respondents were able to refresh their memories and provide strong emotions. Hence, the experiences collected from the interviews provide essential information about exploring the relationship between MTE factors and revisit intention.

The proposed use of a long-term memory processing framework offers new insights for MTE researchers to determine the components that make a specific travel experience stand out from other long-term memories. By confirming the findings of previous studies on MTEs, this research fills a research gap about what MTE elicits cognitively and affectively, and the effect of these factors on the revisit intention of China-based alumni tourists. Previous studies have used students as their survey participants to test the scale of MTEs (Kim, 2010; Kim et al., 2012) or to compare cultural factors of MTEs (Kim, 2013). However, this study is the first to examine both MTEs and the revisit intention of alumni tourists, and future studies may analyse other travel information search behaviour demonstrated by this group.

This study also explores the presence of negative emotions in MTEs. At the second stage of the long-term memory system (presented in Figure 2), the respondents started to bring in more memories and expressed negative feelings associated with some moments. Individuals can retrieve positive emotions related to events much more quickly than negative ones, confirming the existence of "fading affect bias" in this study (Kim & Youn, 2017). Pre-

vious studies have applied this term to examine service failure and recovery, and we have found it to be suitable for explaining MTEs. In addition, while many MTE studies have emphasised positive emotions, this study reveals that even a positive MTE may contain specific incidents linked to negative emotions, especially when multiple destinations were visited in a single journey. Many respondents shared negative moments or emotions when they re-constructed their MTEs, while still intending to revisit the associated destinations. Therefore, future studies should examine how multiple destinations being involved in a single trip influences MTE factors, and how this, in turn, affects the revisit intentions of tourists.

The quantitative study provides new evidence to support the impact of *Relationship and Friendship Development* and *Recollection and Vividness of Experience* on the revisit intentions of Chinese alumni tourists. Tung and Ritchie (2011a) suggested that future studies should investigate the relationship between revisit intention and MTEs, but only a few studies had proven that MTEs directly influenced revisit intention through positive emotions (Mahdzar *et al.*, 2015), satisfaction (Barnes *et al.*, 2016; Kim, 2018) or country and destination image (Kim, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2018). The findings from this study suggest new directions for future studies to explore and evaluate other behavioural intentions, such as the effect of MTEs on the choice of accommodation and transport. Although the primary purpose of this study was not to validate MTE scales, new measurement scales were also developed that adapted existing MTE scales to the alumni-tourist market. For future studies, it is suggested that new data sets adopt Confirmatory Factor Analysis/Confirmatory Composite Analysis and further check validity for the effects of MTE dimensions on revisit intention.

This study also has some limitations because of its small number of interviewees and survey respondents. The China-based alumni were recruited from universities in the UK and are not representative enough for the findings of this study to be generalised to the entire population of international students. The gender and age of the interviewees may also limit the generalisability of these findings.

7 Conclusion

This study extended the research on MTEs by exploring the effect of the attachment to MTE destinations on the revisit intention of China-based alumni tourists from UK

universities. Analysing groups with homogeneous characteristics can reveal the needs of these groups and establish relationships amongst them by providing products that appeal to those specific groups. This is useful, for example, for destination managers who wish to promote enticing destination images (Wu & Jimura, 2019). Using the MTEs shared by interviewees who graduated from UK universities, this research discovered the critical factors that exist in these memories and revealed elements influencing subjects' intentions of revisiting the UK.

Three themes were identified from the qualitative study: *Attraction and Atmospheric Impressiveness*, *Activity and Event Engagement*, and *Relationship and Friendship Development*. The quantitative study showed that *Relationship and Friendship Development* and *Recollection and Vividness of Experience* significantly influence the revisit intention of Chinese alumni tourists to MTE destinations. By focusing on alumni tourists, this study provides insights that will contribute to future MTE studies that use the long-term memory system as their framework.

Finally, travel destinations other than the UK can refer to MTE factors to develop appropriate marketing strategies and create travel products that may increase the revisit intention of alumni tourists. As a symbolic memory, souvenirs could evoke an imagined return to memorable moments and locations (Boulhosa & Casais, 2019). For example, creating tailor-made souvenirs, such as photos, for tourists to keep as proof and memory of their trips is recommended.

In addition, destination managers should be involved in the development of alumni tourism as a new market. More events and activities can be invested with exclusive features and promoted to alumni tourists worldwide. Given that the alumni were students while creating their MTEs, destinations can impress tourists with several meaningful and exciting events and enhance their relationships to make their trips more memorable and meaningful. Destination managers can promote specific attractions of their destinations to remind these alumni tourists of their travel experiences and stimulate their revisit intentions after their return to their own home countries. Destination managers can cooperate with universities in launching special tours that promote the revisit intention of alumni tourists to their study places and other destinations within the same country. Alumni tourists show great loyalty to their study places; therefore, their study places' destinations should organise various activities and events with local communities to highlight their hospitality and motivate return visits.

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Appendix 1: Demographic Information of Interviewees

Characteristic	Frequency
Gender	
Male	8
Female	15
Age	
20-25	9
26-30	11
31-35	3
Occupation	
Full-Time Work	17
Others	6
Current Marital Status	
Single	16
Married	6
Unrevealed	1
Level of Program attended (Cumulative)	
High School and Foundation	3
Undergraduate	9
Postgraduate	23
Average Year of Study in the UK	2.6
Average Year after leaving the UK	2.3

Appendix 2: Themes emerged from travel stories

Theme I: Attraction and Atmosphere Impressiveness	• Destinations: Lake District, London, Penzance, Highlands, Cotswolds, Edinburgh, Glasgow, York, Cornwall, Weymouth, Grassholm, Bristol, Swansea, etc. • Features: forest, lake, stone city, architecture, beach, museum, castle, cathedral, exhibition, animal farm, festival, fireworks, sea, sky, etc. • Memorable Scenes: Rainy day in the Highlands, Ancient and traditional architecture in Edinburgh, Llama farm near Sheffield, Interior design of York Cathedral, Stone houses in Cotswolds, etc. • Emotions: fresh, clean, rural, unique, historical, distinctive, novel, sunny, traditional, typical, quiet, isolated, beautiful, blue, rainy, modern, aged, windy, lively, indulged, exotic, decent, touristy, niche, diverse, similar, disappointed, etc.
Theme II: Activities and Events Engagement	• Christmas market • Christmas service in the cathedral • Football match • Balloon festival • New Year fireworks • Sunset with white houses • British afternoon tea (British Museum and library-themed cafe) • British food (black pudding, Yorkshire pudding, etc.) • Cycling by the beach in Swansea • Lodging inside the Lake District • Countless collections in the British Museum • Emotions: meaningful, free, romantic, lazy, surprised, amazed, unforgettable, easy life, slow, expensive, cheap, tasteless, boring, interesting, self-beneficial, exclusive, special, rare, extraordinary, vivid, long-lasting, grand, rocked, thrilled, etc.
Theme III: Relationship and Friendship Development	• Communication with the local people • Travel with unfamiliar people • Cooking at Airbnb with travel partners • Happy moments with friends • Walking long distances with luggage and girlfriend • Family traveling together • Dinner with Airbnb host • Lifestyles of local people • Emotions: happy, connected, friendly, tired, stress relief, relaxed, full rest, away from normal life, relieved, warm, comfortable, valuable, familiar, closer, etc.