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Zandivuta Kankhuni & Cecilia Ngwira

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Overland tourists' natural soundscape perceptions: influences on experience, satisfaction, and electronic word-of-mouth

Zandivuta Kankhuni [a] and Cecilia Ngwira [a,b]

[a]Department of Tourism, Mzuzu University, Luwinga, Malawi; [b]School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Kow Loon, Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

The natural soundscape is an under-researched topic of study in tourism literature. More so, research lacks empirical examination on the antecedents and outcomes of natural soundscape perceptions. Drawing on the extant literature, the present study investigates the interplay of tourist engagement, soundscape perceptions, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), satisfaction and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM). Using responses from 221 overland tourists in African destinations who posted their experiences on Instagram, the study employs partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modelling to test the relationships. The results reveal that engagement positively influenced natural soundscape perceptions, which, in turn, positively influenced memorable tourism experiences, satisfaction, and e-WOM. Also, MTEs predicted satisfaction and e-WOM. The results did not support the antecedent effects of engagement on memorable tourism experiences, nor of satisfaction on e-WOM. The paper discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and suggests areas for further research.

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Soundscapes; overland tourism; tourist engagement; tourism experiences; tourist satisfaction; electronic word-of-mouth

Introduction

The African continent is distinctly known for its natural tourist attractions such as landscapes, rivers, deserts, and wildlife which offer opportunities for multi-sensory tourist experiences. Curiously, most of the studies on tourist experiences in Africa have focused on the visual dimension (e.g. Moscardo, 2017; Mutanga et al., 2017; Skibins et al., 2016). The same seems to be the case in the wider tourism literature where the visual dimension has dominated over the sound, taste, smell, and touch dimensions of tourist experiences (Pan & Ryan, 2009; Rojek & Urry, 1997), partly as a result of the widely cited notion of the 'tourist gaze' (Urry, 1990). Tourist experiences are more than their visual dimension; hence, tourism destinations should embrace the use of a variety of sense appeals (Liu et al., 2018; Pan & Ryan, 2009; Quan & Wang, 2004).

According to Liu et al. (2018), a destination's soundscape is one of the core elements of tourists' experiences. This is because the soundscape could be an integral aspect of tourist attractions, or the main attraction itself (Briassoulis, 2002); for instance, music tourism (Gibson & Connell, 2005). Second, the soundscape could offer the backdrop on which tourists create the sense of a place (Liu et al., 2018). It has also been observed that soundscape has a significant influence on tourists' perceptions and destination evaluation (He et al., 2019). Consequently, Liu et al. (2018) called on scholars to equally investigate 'non-visual aspects of tourist experience' (Quan & Wang, 2004, p. 303). Despite the foregoing, there is limited literature on the relationship between soundscapes and other important constructs in the tourism literature, including satisfaction, memorable tourism experiences (MTEs), and post-consumption-related constructs such as revisit and recommendation intentions (He et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2018). Furthermore, the majority of studies on soundscapes have examined the impact of environmental/external factors on soundscape perceptions, thus overlooking the influence of personal factors on the phenomenon (Aletta & Xiao, 2018).

The current study, therefore, investigates the influence of tourist engagement on natural soundscape perceptions. Tourist engagement was chosen specifically because it has been shown to influence tourist experience-related constructs such as MTEs (Chen & Rahman, 2018) and satisfaction (Lin et al., 2019). Consequently, we examine the effect of tourist engagement on natural soundscape perceptions and MTEs, and the effect of natural soundscape perceptions on MTEs, tourist satisfaction and e-WOM."

CONTACT Zandivuta Kankhuni zandi.kankhuni@connect.polyu.hk Department of Tourism, Mzuzu University, Private Bag 201, Luwinga, Mzuzu 2, Malawi

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on the major constructs of the study. Then we discuss the theoretical rationale supporting the study's hypotheses. Thereafter, we present the methods that guided the study. We then present and discuss the results, highlighting key findings, and the study's theoretical and practical implications. In the end, we discuss the study's limitations and suggest areas for future research.

Literature review

Overland tourism

Slocum and Backman (2011) define overland tourism as a form of self-contained travel in the back of a bus or a truck. Holland and Leslie (2018) describe overland tours as long road trips using self-reliant vehicles usually for a maximum of 22 passengers, where the major goal is to travel long distances, often visiting remote destinations with under-developed infrastructure. Musa and Sarker (2019) characterise overland tourism as the exploration of natural environments where common activities include the exploration of new cultures or remote areas. Despite the emphasis on the use of big vehicles and organised tours in the first two definitions, overland tourism is also associated with almost all independent leisure long-distance road travel using motor vehicles (Pirie, 2013), motorcycles (Cater, 2017; Hall, 2013), or even bicycles (Gibbons & Pritchard-Jones, 2014). In Africa, overland tourism commenced after the First World War and by the 1930s, an increasing number of motorists were going on vacation road trips (Pirie, 2013). Today, overland tourism is integral to the tourism sectors of many African destinations (Gibbons & Pritchard-Jones, 2014; Mmopelwa et al., 2007; Novelli et al., 2006). However, despite the significance of overland travel to the tourism industry, the segment remains largely under-researched (Hardy & Gretzel, 2011; Sykes & Kelly, 2016; Frash Jr & Blose, 2019). Moreover, the limited studies on overland tourism are mostly descriptive and have focused on developed economies such as the United States of America and New Zealand (Qiu, Hsu, et al., 2018).

Soundscapes

The concept of soundscapes was first promulgated by Granö (1929, translated 1997) who pointed out the need to recognise the multi-sensory nature of landscape experiences. The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO, 12913-1, 2014) defines the soundscape as the 'acoustic environment as perceived or experienced and/or understood by a person or people, in context'. In the tourism context, Liu et al. (2018) define the soundscape as the acoustic environment experienced by visitors from the time they arrive in a destination to the time of their departure. Sound influences tourists' experience as it is integral to the whole visitation process (Duffy et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2018). According to Liu et al. (2018), soundscapes can be analysed from different perspectives such as source (artificial or natural), volume (quiet or loud), and pace (lively or calm).

The present study focuses on natural soundscapes which are a vital element of destination soundscapes and connote the collection of sounds ascending from nature (e.g. bird songs, sounds of raindrops hitting the ground, echoes of a thundering waterfall, etc.) (Jiang et al., 2018). Natural soundscapes can extend to tourists' feelings of calm and tranquility so much that the peace and tranquility offered by natural soundscapes are considered as the main attraction in some destinations such as deserts and national parks (Hu et al., 2020; Watts & Pheasant, 2015). In fact, soundscape is so integral to the whole visiting experience that tourists can hardly avoid listening to the sounds in a particular destination (Aili et al., 2013) which influence not only the tourists' experiences and satisfaction, but also their views on crowding, and attitudes towards the management of the destination (Li et al., 2018).

A number of studies have explored the influence of external/environmental factors on natural soundscape perceptions, such as noises/sounds from aircraft in national parks (Watts & Pheasant, 2015), crowdedness and sources, volume, temporal duration and spatial distribution (Han et al., 2017), the composition of sound sources in urban contexts (Hong & Jeon, 2015), audio-visual interactions (Jeon & Jo, 2020), and environmental tranquility (Filipan et al., 2016). Liu et al. (2018) catalogue the extant literature on soundscapes and tourist experiences into three streams: noise pollution and its impact on tourists; significance of a quiet natural soundscape; and multisensory experience and sound interpretation. Qiu, Zhang, Zhang, et al. (2018) identified studies on the influence of background music, traffic noise, and tranquility on tourist satisfaction. Aili et al. (2013) identified as one of four soundscape research directions studies of tourist behaviour focusing on tourists' sense of place, sound preferences, and soundscape satisfaction.

Despite these efforts, scholars and practitioners alike agree that there is limited research on the influence of personal factors on soundscape perception (Aletta & Xiao, 2018; Liu et al., 2019). Jennings and Cain (2013) state that people's evaluation of soundscape in a place

will be influenced by their direct engagement with the place. Jiang et al. (2020) recommend further studies on the relationship between leisure participation and soundscape perception. Furthermore, He et al. (2019) called for studies on the influence of soundscape perceptions on outcomes apart from tourism experiences, and the impact of soundscape evaluation on tourists' behavioural intentions.

Tourist engagement

Engagement has been conceptualised variably according to different contexts and fields of study including education, sociology, psychology, marketing, and tourism (Loureiro & Sarmento, 2019). In general marketing literature, engagement is conceptualised as customers' active participation in interacting with service providers and brands (Hollebeek, 2011). Customer engagement as a topic has gained prominence in consumer/tourist behaviour research since it is integral to the nuanced concept of co-creation (Lin et al., 2019; Romero, 2017). Furthermore, recent studies have established antecedent effects of customer engagement on customer trust (Rather et al., 2019), MTEs (Chen & Rahman, 2018), and consumer loyalty (So et al., 2016).

Patterson et al. (2006) were the first to introduce the concept of engagement in tourism and marketing context, examining the concept as a second-order construct encompassing four dimensions: *absorption*, *dedication*; *vigour*; and *interaction*. Subsequently, tourism scholars have explored the concept from tourist experience and tourism brand perspectives (Lin et al., 2019). The tourism brand perspective connotes tourists' engagement with tourism firms such as airlines and tour operators. Drawing on the brand perspective, So et al. (2014) developed and validated a tourist engagement scale with five dimensions: *enthusiasm, absorption, attention, identification, and interaction*. On the other hand, the tourist experience perspective reflects tourists' engagement with travel destinations, such as tourists' involvement in on-site activities and experiences. Drawing on the second perspective, Taheri et al. (2014) proposed and validated an eight-indicator scale using a sample of museum visitors. Since the focus of the present study is the interaction of tourists with sites and attractions in destinations, we investigate tourist engagement using the tourist experience lens.

According to Hollebeek (2011), engagement is a multidimensional concept whose components include cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. Based on the works of Taheri et al. (2014) and So et al. (2016), Lin et al. (2019) describe tourist engagement as tourists' affective and cognitive attitude towards their involvement in particular activities organised by related operators at tourism destinations. In So et al.'s (2016) scale, absorption comprises both affective and cognitive aspects which reflect the intensity of tourists' concentration and immersion while at the destination. Since the focus of the present study is tourists' evaluation of on-site experiences, we adopt the absorption dimension from So et al.'s (2014) scale to measure tourist engagement.

Memorable tourism experiences

Pine and Gilmore (1998) observed that the world's economy had drastically evolved from product-based to service-based, and then, to experience-based. Consequently, many service providers have embraced the delivery of pleasant experiences to their customers (Andersson, 2007; Voss et al., 2008), with a particular focus on experiential services. This has made MTEs valuable for destination positioning purposes (Tan, 2017). Whereas on-site experiences are short-lived, MTEs enable tourists to relive and continually reflect upon their experiences (Kim, 2018). Moreover, scholars have established that MTEs influence travel destination-choice decisions via memories (Mantonakis et al., 2008; Masiero & Qiu, 2018). Resultantly, studies on MTEs have gained prominence in tourism research.

Andersson (2007) contends that tourist experiences 'can only take place in the mind of the tourist. No one but the tourist can have control over the experiences and, in most cases, not even the tourist is fully able to have such control' (p. 46). In line with the foregoing, Kim et al. (2012) conceptualised MTEs as tourism experiences positively remembered post-consumption. Several studies have highlighted the importance of and the need for the delivery of MTEs (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Kim, 2018; Zhong et al., 2017). Tung and Ritchie (2011) identified four dimensions of MTEs, namely *affect*, *expectations*, *consequentiality*, and *recollection*. Kim et al. (2012) followed with a multidimensional scale of MTEs constituting *involvement*, *meaningfulness*, *local culture*, *novelty*, and *knowledge* dimensions. More dimensions such as *surprise* and *adverse feelings* were added to the scales in later studies (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2015; Sthapit, 2013). According to Kim (2018), the scale by Kim et al. (2012) is the first and widely cited in the literature and has been applied to and validated in various contexts. Consequently, the present study adopts Kim et al.'s (2012) scale to examine the antecedents and outcomes of MTEs. In the present study, the fact that most African destination heritage and natural environments are relatively foreign to a lot of overland tourists could mean that travelling in Africa could trigger heightened MTEs in international tourists.

Tourist satisfaction

Given the time and economic resources invested and the risk of travelling in foreign, and at times dangerous, places, the stakes for a rewarding trip should be high, making the examination of satisfaction even more important. From a consumer behaviour perspective, researchers describe satisfaction as customers' fulfilment reaction (Kim, 2018). Tourist satisfaction is conceptualised as the outcome of the tourist' experience in a destination assessed against their pre-visit expectations (Agyeiwaah et al., 2016; Pizam et al., 1978). Several models are applied to assess tourist satisfaction, including 'Perceived overall Performance', 'Importance-Performance', and 'Equity', and the commonly applied 'Expectancy-Disconfirmation' model (Agyeiwaah et al., 2016). The expectancy-disconfirmation model proffers that expectations formed at the pre-visit stage will determine post-visit satisfaction, and that satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) is a product of the discrepancy between perceived performance and expectations. Based on this understanding, Chon (1989) defines satisfaction as a function of the goodness of fit between the tourist's pre-visit expectations and the perceived destination performance.

However, the disconfirmation model has been criticised; first, because it might be less meaningful to destinations than to physical products that can be evaluated before purchase (Kim, 2018). Second, there is no conclusive evidence to the effect that tourists only use predictive expectations in their post-visit assessments or whether they apply other benchmarks which they bring into the visitation experience (for instance, desired/ideal level), or other benchmarks that could emerge after the experience (e.g. what other tourists experienced) (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2001). Given the criticism, some scholars have proposed a global measure of tourist satisfaction. Tse and Wilton (1988) contend that overall satisfaction performs better than the disconfirmation model in predicting post-purchase behaviours. In support, Olsen (2007) states that a cumulative measure of satisfaction is a better predictor of post-purchase behaviours and economic performance. Several tourism researchers have adopted a global approach to measuring satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2018). Accordingly, the present study assesses satisfaction using the overall satisfaction approach.

Electronic word-of-mouth

Soundscape perceptions directly or indirectly influence tourists' behavioural intentions and retention (Qiu, Zhang, Zhang, et al., 2018). A quick review of soundscape perception studies, however, shows that most of the studies on soundscapes in tourism have focused on return and traditional word-of-mouth intentions as outcome variables (Jiang et al., 2018; Lv et al., 2020; Min et al., 2020). This is despite the importance of electronic word-of-mouth in modern leisure travel, more so among overland travellers. The word-of-mouth concept has received intense scholarly attention owing to its potential to minimise perceived risk and augment trust in purchases (Arndt, 1967). Meanwhile, the proliferation of digital media has increased the production, dissemination, and uptake of e-WOM (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020), which is assumed to offer unbiased product and service evaluations (Hu et al., 2011). Litvin et al. (2008) define e-WOM as 'all informal communications directed at consumers through internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers' (p. 459). Unlike WOM, e-WOM is easily accessible, quickly spread and confidential, has a wider reach, is less ephemeral, and can be disseminated via rich multimedia elements such as images, audio, ratings, and stories (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). The proliferation of e-WOM raises some pertinent questions, one of which is whether the relationships between some variables (such as satisfaction and MTEs) and WOM, established by prior studies, are similarly valid for e-WOM (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). Tsao and Hsieh (2012), for example, found no statistically significant relationship between satisfaction and e-WOM intentions.

Besides the inconsistencies, there is another gap in literature. Cantallops and Salvi (2014) carried out a review of the e-WOM literature and catalogued it into two streams of research: predictors of e-WOM and consequences of e-WOM. However, the extant literature on e-WOM is heavily skewed towards the consequences of e-WOM (Fine et al., 2017; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Yang, 2017; Yen & Tang, 2019). The literature on the predictors of e-WOM in tourism has focused on the experience factor (e.g. service quality) and knowledge sharing motivations (Yang, 2017). Nevertheless, specific destination experiences such as soundscape evaluations have rarely been examined as predictors of e-WOM. To take advantage of recent developments in electronic marketing, marketers are keen to understand what motivates customers to share their experiences online (Tsao & Hsieh, 2012). More so, many overland travellers like to share their travel experiences online during and after their trips (Sun et al., 2015; Wu & Pearce, 2016). Specifically, the current study heeds the call by He et al. (2019) on the need for scholars to examine the impact of soundscape on tourists' behavioural intentions. Consequently, we examine the influence of natural soundscape perceptions, MTEs, and satisfaction on e-WOM among overland tourists.

Formulation of hypotheses

The impact of tourist engagement

Cain et al. (2008) propose that it is the contextual issues experienced by the individual that determine the evaluation of a given soundscape. The contextual issues include who the individual is, why and how they are listening, the time of listening, and the place in which they are. Based on the preceding, Craig et al. (2017) assert that soundscape perception is determined by the activity that the individual is involved in at the material time. Similarly, Herranz-Pascual et al. (2010) contend that our evaluations of soundscapes is guided by activity needs, activity types, and the social interactions that we undertake in an environment. Empirically, Bild et al. (2018) found that the intensity of social interaction of urban park users' activities influenced their soundscape evaluations. In a similar vein, Rather (2020) established a positive influence of engagement on tourist experiences, the dimensions of which included soundscape evaluation. For MTEs, Tung and Ritchie (2011) note that a deeper immersion in the local culture and the local people's ways in destination shapes a visitor's memorable experience. According to Taheri et al. (2014), intense engagement with a destination's attractions can enhance a tourist's overall experience. For overland travellers, who often visit backroad sites and engage more with destinations' rurality, it is expected that more engagement will result in enhanced natural soundscape perceptions and memorable tourism experiences. Given the preceding theoretical rationale, the following hypotheses are postulated:

> Hypothesis 1: Tourist engagement will positively and significantly influence natural soundscape perceptions.

> Hypothesis 2: Tourist engagement will positively and significantly influence MTEs.

The impact of natural soundscapes

In the media and communication field, research has shown that sound plays a significant role in shaping personal and collective memory (Van Dijck, 2006). In the tourism context, Agapito et al. (2017) established that diversified sensory experiences have a long-term influence on tourist memory. Using a sample of Chinese tourists, Huang and Gross (2010) found that past visitors to Australia held multi-sensory image features in their memory, which included auditory aspects like the sound of sea waves and birds' singing. On the contrary, Wood and Kinnunen (2020), in a qualitative study of festival attendees in the United Kingdom, found that the music listened to at a festival is entwined through the extension of experience but does not form a key element of the memorable experiences. On the whole, not many studies have empirically investigated the role of natural soundscapes in the formation of MTEs. Hence, the following hypothesis is postulated:

> Hypothesis 3: Natural soundscape perceptions will positively influence MTEs.

According to Jiang et al. (2018), natural soundscape image positively influences tourist satisfaction. Similarly, Liu et al. (2018) established a statistically significant relationship between soundscape perception and tourist satisfaction. The study further found that soundscape satisfaction influences tourist satisfaction. Qiu, Zhang, Zhang, et al. (2018), in a comparative study of the influence of soundscapes and visual landscapes on overall tourism experience, found that soundscape influenced overall satisfaction and that the latter was influenced by the consistency of listening. Furthermore, Edensor (2000) submit that the changing 'symphony' of diverse pitches, volumes, and intonation made by different sounds could trigger multisensory feelings to tourists and thus enhance their destination experiences. Thus, the following hypothesis is formulated:

> Hypothesis 4: Natural soundscape perceptions will positively influence tourist satisfaction.

Qiu, Zhang, and Zheng (2018) established that positive soundscape emotions enhanced the influence of tourists' connectedness to nature on pro-environmental behaviours, signifying that soundscape perceptions influence post-consumption behaviours in tourists. In a different but related context, destination atmospheric cues (of which the soundscape is a component) have been found to positively predict tourists' attitudes and behaviours (Grappi & Montanari, 2011). However, a limited number of studies have explored atmospheric cues as a driver of WOM (Conti et al., 2020; Loureiro & Ribeiro, 2014). Recently, Loureiro et al. (2020) found no evidence of the impact of destination atmospheric cues on WOM in a city destination context. However, the study conceptualised destination atmospheric cues without the inclusion of the soundscape dimension. In a restaurant context, Almohaimmeed (2020) established a positive and significant relationship between brand sensory experiences and electronic WOM. The sensory experience construct encompasses the five human senses. In the offline context, Abubakar and Mavondo (2014) established a negative and significant impact of noise and a positive and significant impact of ambience (background sound) on positive WOM at tourist attraction sites. In a study of online reviews posted by tourists, Lv et al. (2020) established that all the five types of

sensory impressions (visual, aural, olfactory, gustatory, and haptic) influence destination loyalty. Similarly, Min et al. (2020) found that tourists' behavioural intentions including positive WOM are influenced by emotions initiated by music perceptions in a destination. Given the context of overland travellers who have a higher predisposition towards sharing their experiences online, the current study examines the influence of soundscapes on electronic word of mouth. Indeed, Wu (2015) stated that self-drive tourists tend to be high users of emerging technologies, often using social media and accessing the Internet throughout their trips. Such independent travellers usually publish blogs that offer insights on how to cope in new destinations (Wu & Pearce, 2016). Given the foregoing, the following hypothesis is postulated:

Hypothesis 5: Natural soundscape perceptions will positively influence e-WOM generation.

The impact of MTEs

Otto and Ritchie (1996) contend that MTEs can account for a significant portion of satisfaction besides service quality. Zhong et al. (2017) noted that MTEs are a strong predictor of tourist satisfaction. Kim and Brown (2012) observed that specific experiences such as learning, relaxation, and discovery significantly influenced overall satisfaction among self-drive tourists. In their study, Agyeiwaah et al. (2019) employed Pine and Gilmore's (1998) conceptualisation of experiences and concluded that the more experiences cooking-class tourists encountered, the more satisfied the tourists were. In a sea-based adventure context, Triantafillidou and Petala (2016) found that experiential factors of socialisation, escapism, and hedonism were positive predictors of tourists' satisfaction. Recently, Tapar et al. (2017) noted that experiential factors of peace of mind, moments-of-truth, and outcome focus influenced the satisfaction of trekking and rafting participants. Based on this theoretical rationale, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 6: MTEs will positively influence tourist satisfaction.

Triantafillidou and Petala (2016) observed a positive and statistically significant relationship between socialisation and hedonic realms of MTEs and e-WOM and a negative and statistically significant relationship with the flow components of MTEs. Using a sample of self-drive tourists in Australia, Kim and Brown (2012) observed that two experiential dimensions of 'discovery' and 'being close to nature' were significant antecedents of recommendation intentions. Zhong et al. (2017) found that MTEs significantly predicted tourists' willingness to tell stories about their travel experiences both online and offline. In a study of summer campers, Triantafillidou and Siomkos (2014) noted that the intensity of experience determined the campers' willingness to spread word-of-mouth about their experiences. Moreover, Chandralal et al. (2015) noted that tourists use online platforms such as travel blogs to share authentic and accurate accounts of their experiences. To empirically ascertain whether the observed relationships are also valid in the online context, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 7: MTEs will positively influence e-WOM generation.

The impact of satisfaction on e-WOM

Studies have identified several motivations for consumers' intentions to share e-WOM, including 'satisfaction/dissatisfaction', 'sociability and emotional support', and 'social responsibility' (Munar & Jacobsen, 2014; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). Pourfakhimi et al. (2020) observe that the importance of e-WOM rests partly in the notion that e-WOM is an indicator of overall product performance. Even though some studies have established the positive influence of tourist satisfaction on e-WOM (e.g. Liang et al., 2013), some have failed to empirically confirm the relationship (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018; Swanson & Hsu, 2009; Tsao & Hsieh, 2012; Yang, 2017). More importantly, Dolnicar et al. (2015) expressed reservations on the relationship between satisfaction and word-of-mouth. Furthermore, in studying the influence of satisfaction on recommendation intentions, researchers have generally failed or ignored to distinguish WOM and e-WOM, whose dynamics could be subtle but significant (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). Based on this theoretical rationale, the following hypothesis is postulated (Figure 1):

Hypothesis 8: Tourist satisfaction will positively influence electronic word-of-mouth generation.

Materials and methods

The study targeted overland tourists using motor vehicles or motorcycles across Africa. Data were collected through Instagram, which is one of the most popular social media platforms in the world (Smart Insights, 2020), with 1 billion users as of May 2020 (Instagram, 2020). We used hashtags including #OverlandingAfrica, #Africanroadtrip, #CapetoCairo, and #OverlandAfrica to identify users who had used the hashtags in their posts. These hashtags were chosen

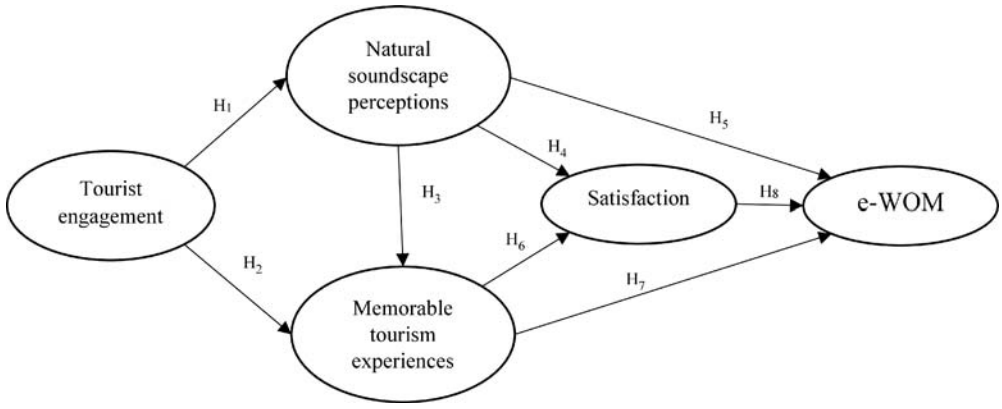

Figure 1. Conceptual model of the study.

after observing typical hashtags posted on Instagram by overland tourists in various destinations across Africa. Then, the profile of each identified user was checked to see whether they had posted several photos and/or videos about their overland trip in Africa. Thereafter, an invitation was sent to them via direct messaging, with an explanation about the research and a link to the questionnaire created on the Qualtrics platform. A screening question asked the respondents whether they had been on an overland trip across at least three African countries continuously in the last two years. This was also explained in the invitation. Only those who answered in the affirmative to the screening question were allowed to complete the survey. This was done to ensure that respondents had a deep engagement and wider experiences on their trip. First, the questionnaire was sent to 10 PhD students enrolled in a hotel and tourism management programme to evaluate its face validity, after which corrections were made regarding the phrasing of some of the questions.

Data were collected between November 2019 and January 2020. Except for the section on demographics and trip-related characteristics, the online survey was designed to allow participants to submit their questionnaire only after filling out all the sections. A total of 600 accounts were contacted and, in the end, 221 usable surveys with responses for all the items under the latent variables in the model were obtained. The conceptual model was tested using partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modelling. The PLS technique is suitable for prediction-oriented studies and exploratory analysis (Serra-Cantallops et al., 2018). Descriptive and reliability analyses were undertaken using SPSS version 25 while structural equation modelling was conducted using SmartPLS version 3 (Ringle et al., 2015). We determined the sample size according to the ratio of sample-size to indicators which Bentler and Chou (1987) suggested should be between 5:1 and 10:1. Initially, the model had 21 indicators; hence, a sample size between 105 and 210 should be adequate. Thus, 221 responses met the sample size requirement.

The questionnaire included questions about tourist engagement, natural soundscapes perceptions, MTEs, satisfaction, e-WOM, and demographics such as gender, marital status, age, highest education attained, and nationality and trip-related information such as means of transport used, trip arrangement, and destination familiarity. All the scales were borrowed from literature and have been validated widely in previous studies. Tourist engagement was assessed using 6 items adopted from So et al.'s (2014) scale. Natural soundscapes perceptions were assessed using 4 items borrowed from Jiang et al. (2018). Memorable tourism experiences were assessed with 5 items borrowed from Kim (2018). Satisfaction was measured using a single item adapted from Jensen et al. (2017). Electronic word-of-mouth was measured using 5 items borrowed from Serra-Cantallops et al. (2018). A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used in the study. The items are listed in Table 2.

Regarding ethical considerations, the first section of the online survey provided a consent box. The consent part informed the participants of the researchers' identities, the purpose of the study, inclusion criteria, and the time expected to complete the survey. The first section also assured the survey participants that the data collected would be used for research purposes only. Furthermore, the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information which they provided. Only after the participants had given informed consent were they granted access to the rest of the online questionnaire. No names or personal details that could point to the specific identities of the respondents were requested in the survey. The data used in the analysis were de-identified and aggregated. The foregoing measures endeavoured to meet the

most pertinent ethical considerations to be considered when recruiting survey participants via social media, i.e. '(i) respect for the privacy and other interests of social media users and (ii) investigator transparency' (Gelinas et al., 2017, p. 5).

Results

Demographics

The demographic and trip-related information of the respondents is summarised in Table 1. About 58% of the respondents were male. Regarding age, the majority of the respondents were below 30 years old (29.5%) and in the age range of 30–35 years (33.2%) while those above the age of 56 made up only 7.4% of the sample. A higher proportion of the respondents possessed bachelor's degrees (50.2%), followed by those with postgraduate education (30.1%). The respondents came from over 30 countries across the world. South Africans dominated the sample (15%), followed by Germans (11.8%) and Americans (9.5%). Other than South Africa, the vast majority of the respondents were from outside the African continent as the rest of the African continent (apart from South Africa) contributed only 1.8% to the sample. The majority (69%) travelled by car, with the rest using motorcycles. Most of the respondents (47.9%) travelled in the company of a spouse or a partner, followed by those who travelled alone (21%). Slightly over half of the respondents (51.6%) had been on an overland trip in Africa before.

Before assessing the measurement model, we examined the data for common method bias (CMB).

Table 1. Demographic and trip-related characteristics of respondents ($n = 221$).

Variable	*N*	%	Variable	*N*	%
Gender			*Travel party*		
Male	127	58	Alone	46	21
Female	92	42	Partner/spouse	105	47.9
Age			Friends	39	17.8
Less than 30	64	29.5	Family	22	10
30–35	72	33.2	Others	7	3.2
36–45	46	21.2	*Type of transport*		
46–55	19	8.8	Motor vehicle	149	69
56 and above	16	7.4	Motor cycle	67	31
Nationality			*Trip arrangement*		
German	26	11.8	Independent	195	89
American	21	9.5	Package tour	5	2.3
British	19	8.6	Independent + package	19	8.7
Dutch	14	6.3	*Education*		
South African	33	15	High/secondary school	17	7.8
Rest of Africa	4	1.8	College diploma	20	9.1
Rest of the world	104	47.1	Bachelor's degree	110	50.2
Destination familiarity			Postgraduate degree	66	30.1
First-time	106	48.4	Other	6	2.7
Repeat	113	51.6			

Note: The sum of some variables is not 221 because the respondents did not indicate.

According to Harman's single factor test, if a single factor explains the majority of the variance (50%) in the data, it could indicate an issue with CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The exploratory factor analysis identified four factors with Eigenvalues larger than 1. The largest variance explained by a factor was 28.247%. Also, Kock (2015) asserts that if factor-level variance inflation factor (VIF) values from a full collinearity test do not exceed 3.3, the model can be deemed to have no substantial CMB issues. The VIF values for all the factors were less than 3.3. Thus, CMB was not an issue as per the two approaches.

Measurement model evaluation

The psychometric properties of the five constructs were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). The five constructs demonstrated an acceptable level of internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha > 0.6). To satisfy the cut-off thresholds for AVE and CR, two items under tourist engagement, one item under MTEs, and two items under e-WOM were deleted. The remaining items all had standardised factor loadings of at least 0.7, except for two items under MTEs whose factor loadings were 0.55 and 0.62 (Table 2). According to Rasoolimanesh et al. (2017), loadings of 0.6 should be dropped if they negatively affect the psychometric properties of the construct they belong to. Given that CR for MTEs was above 0.7 and that deleting either of the items led to a decrease in AVE, the two items were retained. All the AVEs, except for the one for MTEs, were above 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Malhotra and Dash (2011) argue that AVE is usually too strict and convergent reliability may be established based on CR alone. All the CR values met the minimum threshold of 0.7. Thus, convergent validity was established. The model was also assessed for multicollinearity. Value inflation factor (VIF) values of less than 5 for the items under each construct in the model indicate that the model has no substantial issues with multicollinearity (Montgomery et al., 2001).

Discriminant validity was established based on two criteria: Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion and the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. In the former, the square root of the AVE for each construct should be higher than the correlation of the construct with other constructs. The HTMT criterion, considered more conservative than the Fornell and Larcker's criterion, suggests that HTMT values should be less than 0.85 for discriminant validity to be established. Both criteria of discriminant validity were satisfied (Table 3).

Table 2. Results of the measurement model assessment.

Constructs and measurement items	Mean	SD	Loadings	VIF	AVE (CR)
Engagement (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82)					0.65 (0.88)
Time flew when I was interacting with the tourism sites	3.57	0.97	0.84	2.02	
When I was interacting with the tourism sites, I got carried away	3.29	0.98	0.75	1.74	
In my interaction with the tourism sites, I was immersed	3.60	0.94	0.78	1.71	
When interacting with the tourism sites intensely, I felt happy	4.00	0.95	0.84	2.03	
Soundscape perceptions (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89)					0.76 (0.93)
The natural sounds of Africa are in harmony with the landscapes in scenic areas	4.37	0.80	0.88	2.52	
The natural sounds of Africa improve the leisurely atmosphere	4.33	0.86	0.90	2.91	
The natural sounds of Africa highlight the natural charm of scenic spots	4.39	0.80	0.93	3.62	
African scenic areas are more interesting because of the natural sounds	4.17	0.89	0.77	1.84	
Memorable tourism experiences (Cronbach's alpha = 0.66)					0.48 (0.78)
I really enjoyed this overlanding experience	4.86	0.46	0.81	1.35	
I revitalised through this overlanding experience	4.48	0.82	0.76	1.30	
I learned something about myself from this overlanding experience	4.39	0.82	0.55	1.21	
I experienced something new (e.g. food, activity, etc.) during this overlanding experience	4.71	0.60	0.62	1.26	
Tourist satisfaction					1.00 (1.00)
Overall, I was satisfied with my decision to go overlanding in Africa	4.50	0.91	1.00	1.00	
Electronic word-of-mouth (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75)					0.67 (0.86)
I am excited to comment on social networks that I have gone on this trip	4.24	0.88	0.73	1.34	
I have written positive comments about this trip on social networks	4.68	0.60	0.87	1.76	
I have uploaded photos and/or videos about this trip on social networks	4.80	0.51	0.85	1.63	

SD: Standard deviation. VIF: Variance inflation factor. AVE: Average variance extracted. CR: Composite reliability.

Structural model evaluation

Subsequently, we assessed the structural model. We applied the non-parametric bias-corrected (BCa) bootstrapping approach with 4,999 subsamples. Henseler et al. (2016) recommend the use of 4,999 subsamples as the number is sufficiently close to infinity for usual situations, controllable to computation time, and enables unanimous determination of bootstrap confidence intervals. SmartPLS guidelines (https://www.smartpls.com/) suggest that an SRMR value of less than 0.10 implies a good fit. Thus, the model's SRMR value of 0.087 signifies an adequate fit. All R^2 values were above the minimum 0.10 value (Falk & Miller, 1992) (Natural soundscape perceptions: 0.144; MTEs: 0.178; Satisfaction: 0.153; Electronic word-of-mouth: 0.282). Furthermore, the values for the Stone-Geisser Q^2 measure (Natural soundscape perceptions: 0.105; MTEs: 0.049; Satisfaction: 0.121; Electronic word-of-mouth: 0.105) were all above 0, thereby demonstrating the model's predictive relevance (Hair Jr et al., 2016).

The results show that tourist engagement has a strong and positive effect on natural soundscape perceptions ($\beta = 0.39$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, H1 was confirmed (refer to Table 4). However, tourist engagement does not seem to influence on MTEs (H2). The structural paths from natural soundscape perceptions to MTEs ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$), satisfaction ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$), and e-WOM ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$) were all statistically significant. Thus, H3, H4, and H5 were confirmed. Furthermore, MTEs positively and significantly influenced satisfaction ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$) and e-WOM ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$); thus, H6 and H7 were supported. However, no statistically significant relationship could be established between satisfaction and e-WOM (H8). Due to the insignificance of the structural path from tourist engagement to MTEs, we tested for the mediating effect of natural soundscape perceptions on the relationship between engagement and MTEs. The bootstrapped results (4,999) revealed that the indirect path was statistically significant ($\beta = 14$, $p < 0.01$). Since the direct relationship between engagement and MTEs was not statistically significant, the indirect path indicated full mediation. (Figure 2).

Conclusion and implications

The study investigated the antecedent effect of engagement on natural soundscape perceptions and the latter's effect on MTEs, satisfaction, and e-WOM using a sample of overland tourists across Africa. It contributes to the literature on the multisensory nature of tourist experiences, focusing on natural soundscapes, and e-WOM in overland travel. The results confirm six of the 8 hypotheses examined, presenting important theoretical and practical implications. The results reveal that the more engaged overland travellers are with the destinations they visit, the better their evaluation of the destinations' natural soundscapes will be. It has been observed in previous studies that activities that emphasise listening to the sounds of nature, besides appreciating the visual-scape,

Table 3. Discriminant validity: Fornell and Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios.

Constructs	Engagement	Natural soundscape perceptions	Memorable tourism experiences	Tourist satisfaction	Electronic word-of-mouth
Engagement	**0.804**				
Natural soundscape perceptions	0.380 [0.434]	**0.871**			
Memorable tourism experiences	0.243 [0.310]	0.411 [0.455]	**0.69**		
Tourist satisfaction	0.182 [0.194]	0.313 [0.331]	0.343 [0.393]	**1.000**	
Electronic word-of-mouth	0.253 [0.317]	0.394 [0.475]	0.486 [0.650]	0.225 [0.253]	**0.817**

Note: The bolded values on the diagonal are the square roots of the respective constructs' AVE. In parentheses are HTMT ratios.

Table 4. Results of hypothesis testing.

Structural path	β	*t*-value	*p*-value	Inference
Tourist engagement → Natural soundscape perceptions	0.39	6.27	0.000	Supported
Tourist engagement → MTEs	0.10	1.58	0.115	Not supported
Natural soundscape perceptions → MTEs	0.38	5.21	0.000	Supported
Natural soundscape perceptions → Tourist satisfaction	0.21	2.74	0.006	Supported
MTEs → Tourist satisfaction	0.26	3.49	0.000	Supported
Natural soundscape perceptions → e-WOM	0.24	3.18	0.001	Supported
MTE → e-WOM	0.35	2.63	0.008	Supported
Tourist satisfaction → e-WOM	0.02	0.34	0.734	Not supported

can help tourists create the sense of a place (Liu et al., 2018) and enhance their overall perceptions of a destination (He et al., 2019). However, the study did not find a significant relationship between tourist engagement and MTEs, thereby contradicting some previous studies (Taheri et al., 2014; Tung & Ritchie, 2011). Nevertheless, mediation analysis revealed that engagement indirectly influences MTEs through soundscapes. The theoretical implication is that tourist engagement will contribute to the enhanced evaluation of MTEs only when tourists engage with the natural soundscape aspects of the destination. The results are in line with the findings of Chen and Rahman (2018) who found that visitor engagement only influenced MTEs through cultural contact.

The results further reveal that a better evaluation of natural soundscapes will enhance the formation of positive MTEs. Diversified sensory experiences have a long-term influence on tourist memory (Agapito et al., 2017). Specifically, auditory elements are integral to the formation of embodied tourist experiences (Jiang et al., 2018) among overland travellers (Wilson et al., 2019). The finding empirically confirms the relationship between destination image and MTEs by specifically incorporating the soundscape dimension into the relationship. The findings also show that natural soundscape perceptions are vital in enhancing satisfaction, confirming the results of recent studies on the relationship (Jiang et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018). For overland travel, considered one of the alternatives to mass travel, participants could be more interested in the natural environment as more than an object of their visual appreciation. However, the results seem to contradict the findings of Liu et al. (2018) who failed to establish the relationship between soundscape quality and satisfaction, likely due to Chinese tourists' specific interest in sightseeing. Perhaps this could signify differences in the appeal of natural soundscapes to distinct tourist segments.

Natural soundscape perceptions also play a positive role in electronic word-of-mouth generation. Previous

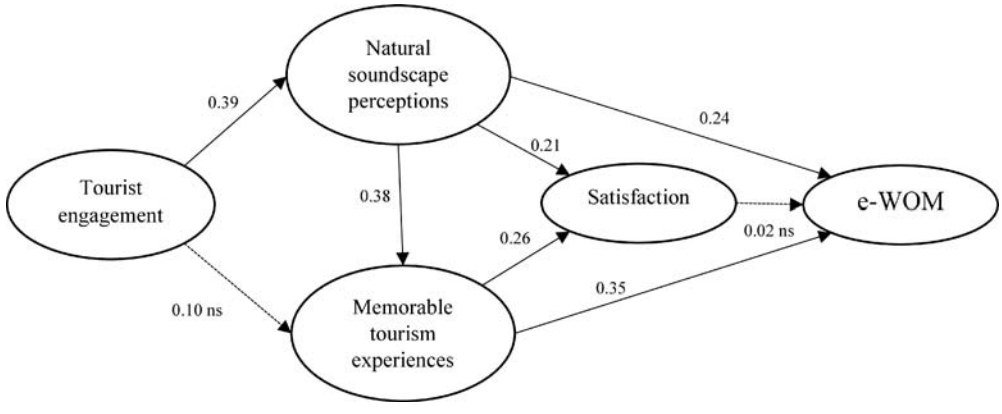

Figure 2. The structural model with results of hypotheses (ns: not significant).

studies mostly focused on the influence of destination soundscapes on traditional word-of-mouth (Han et al., 2017; Min et al., 2020). The present study extends the relationship to online platforms that are highly used by overland tourists (Wu, 2015). Indeed, in their study of motorcycle tourists, Frash Jr et al. (2018, p. 434) express that "social media has replaced bars and taverns as the social stage that drives the 'brotherhood' of motorcyclists". Since the majority of studies on e-WOM in the tourism literature have investigated the influence of the construct on tourist behaviour (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Yang, 2017), the present study contributes to the understanding of its antecedents. Overland tourists often share their travel experiences online, owing to their evaluations of the natural environment (Sun et al., 2015), and this seems to be particularly true for natural soundscapes evaluations as well.

Previous studies have established the positive influence of MTEs on satisfaction (Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Kim & Brown, 2012; Zhong et al., 2017) and e-WOM generation (Zhong et al., 2017). Thus, MTEs enhanced tourists' satisfaction and tourists' e-WOM sharing efforts. Compared to soundscape perceptions which also positively influenced satisfaction, MTEs had a stronger effect on satisfaction. As mentioned earlier, overland travel requires significant resource investments hence the stakes in terms of satisfaction should be higher. Thus, the fact that the travel experience itself is even a stronger predictor of satisfaction is an important finding. Indeed, Kim and Brown (2012) mentioned that the examination of the impacts of travel experiences on overall satisfaction and post-consumption behaviour is more important than service quality where destinations need to enhance visitors' holistic travel experiences.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature on MTEs and e-WOM by demonstrating that MTEs are a strong predictor of e-WOM sharing efforts. Even though studies have demonstrated the positive influence of MTEs on recommendation behaviours, the relationship has not been widely tested in the online context. Despite the commonly held notion that tourist satisfaction will trigger favourable post-consumption behaviours, the current study did not confirm the satisfaction – e-WOM relationship. Compared to soundscape perceptions, MTEs were the stronger predictor of e-WOM. This is consistent with the findings of previous scholars who demonstrated that satisfaction is an inadequate predictor of post-consumption behaviour (Swanson & Hsu, 2009; Yang, 2017). More importantly, the result validates Serra-Cantallops et al.'s (2018) observation that, even though the examined relationship has been widely confirmed in the offline context (see Qiu, Hsu, et al., 2018), there are subtle but significant differences that could limit its applicability to the online context.

The study's results also present several managerial implications. First, findings provide valuable insights to destination managers and businesses such as tour operators and national parks who serve overland tourists to design activities that can enhance the tourists' interest and immersion in nature so that, in the end, they can form positive evaluations of the natural soundscapes. Given that tourist engagement only influenced MTEs through natural soundscape perceptions, it is imperative upon overland tourism service providers to direct the attention of the tourists on the natural features of the destinations to enhance the formation of memorable tourism experiences.

Second, given that natural soundscapes positively influence MTEs, satisfaction and e-WOM, destinations and businesses need to focus on the improvement of the natural soundscape environment. For instance, controlling the number of safari vehicles in wildlife reserves at any point in time or the level of motorised activities in nature-based attractions could help improve the natural soundscape experience of visitors. Additionally, destinations can incorporate natural soundscape attributes in their marketing communications. For instance, instead of only emphasising visual experiences such as wildlife sightings in marketing communications, destination managers and businesses can also include the calming sounds of nature in African destinations that tourists from highly-urbanised countries may find appealing. Destination managers should also consider extending the time tourists are exposed to natural soundscapes by, for instance, providing bush camping services. By sleeping under the stars and in close proximity to wildlife, tourists could appreciate more natural sounds, ultimately enhancing their MTEs, satisfaction and eWOM.

Third, the study has demonstrated the important roles played by MTEs and soundscape perceptions in influencing tourists' tendency to share their travel experiences online. Also, the non-significance of the structural path from satisfaction to e-WOM adds credence to the calls by scholars that there is a need to explore other drivers of post-consumption behaviours beyond the satisfaction construct. The practical implication is that destination managers and business operators keen on harnessing the potential of e-WOM among the overland travel segment should provide opportunities for the tourists to interact with and appreciate natural landscapes beyond the 'tourist gaze'. For instance, designing experiential products with a particular focus on sounds of nature such as nature walks, bird watching, and walking/night safaris

could enhance tourists' engagement with natural soundscapes and, in turn, heighten the memorability of the tourist experiences, ultimately contributing to e-WOM. Furthermore, destination planners and managers should explore more avenues that could help satisfied tourists to positively recommend the destination through eWOM. This, for example, could be through memory collection through professional audio-video recordings that could be shared with tourists at the end of their tours.

Furthermore, given that overland travellers post their experiences on social media platforms such as Instagram, service providers and DMOs must be actively present on such platforms to address any negative experience evaluation due to, for example, dissatisfaction. Since online reviews could influence potential tourists in their decision-making, positive e-WOM is desirable for a sustainable overland tourism segment. The significance of this finding rests in the notion that overland tourists are in constant contact with nature and, oftentimes, the digital environment. Favourable evaluations of natural soundscapes and travel experiences will then likely ensure constant dissemination of positive electronic word-of-mouth. Indeed, online reviews may appeal to the potential tourist by showing the uniqueness of a destination (Roy, et al., 2020).

Ultimately, overland travel is a growing market segment especially in emerging and rural destinations (Sykes & Kelly, 2016). This offers an opportunity for DMOs and businesses to design marketing campaigns and requisite tourism products so they can benefit from the segment.

Limitations and future research

The present study has limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, the study only considers the experiences of overland travellers on the African continent. Future studies could investigate overland tourism in other emerging destinations like South America and Southeast Asia. Second, only overland travellers who shared their experiences on Instagram with captions in the English language were contacted. Overland tourism in Africa (shared in the English language) cannot represent the various experiences of all overland tourists. Thus, the results might not be generalisable to overland travellers who share their experiences in other languages or travelled in other destinations of the world. The third limitation relates to the fact that the data was collected via Instagram. There could be overland travellers who use other social media platforms. Therefore, in the future researchers could collect data by working with overland tourism service providers such as tourist camps and car hire companies. Fourth, the study only examines the experiences of the overland travellers in Africa but does not identify their motivations for travel, which is an under-researched topic that could offer important insights. Fifth, the respondents were from different cultural backgrounds which could influence their perception of soundscapes. Future studies could conduct multi-group analysis to determine whether that is the case. Lastly, the study examined only engagement as a predictor of soundscape perceptions. Thus, scholars are encouraged to investigate other possible antecedents such as motivation, closeness to nature, and destination fascination. Scholars can also investigate the influence of other dimensions of tourist experiences including *smellscapes* and *tastescapes* on MTEs, satisfaction, e-WOM, etc.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Zandivuta Kankhuni is a lecturer in the Department of Tourism at Mzuzu University, Malawi. He recently finished his PhD in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests include destination marketing, destination brand equity, and tourist behaviour.

Cecilia Ngwira is a PhD candidate in the School of Hotel and Tourism Management at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She has special research interests in cultural heritage tourism, destination brand experiences, and tourism development. Cecilia is a lecturer in the Department of Tourism at Mzuzu University, Malawi.

ORCID

Zandivuta Kankhuni http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4458-7037
Cecilia Ngwira http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1792-3445

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