

Ecotourism experience: A systematic review and future research agenda

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Abstract

This study presents a systematic review of the last 25 years' literature and offers a comprehensive understanding of the ecotourism experience. The study uses a Theory-Context-Characteristics-Method (TCCM) framework, offering insights that ecotourism experience research has advanced beyond ecotourism sites and resources to a multi-stakeholder approach. As a result, we have developed a conceptual framework illustrating three consumption stages of ecotourism, that is, pre-visit, on-site and post-visit. The study concludes by identifying some neglected areas and suggesting some future research directions in ecotourism experience field. Lastly, several theoretical and practical implications are presented that could aid the ecotourism industry in overcoming ecotourists' inertia toward site visits.

KEYWORDS

conceptual framework, ecotourism, ecotourism experience, SLR, systematic literature review, TCCM

1 | INTRODUCTION

With the growing popularity of customer experience as an experiential marketing phenomenon, the focus of every business today has been on experience rather than benefits. The tourism industry, particularly ecotourism, is no exception as it places greater emphasis on customer experience (Adil et al., 2020; Juned & Adil, 2015). Understanding tourists' experience is essential since tourists gain experiences not only by consuming the services per se, but also with interactions, activities and events (Kandampully et al., 2018; Packer et al., 2018).

In the past, ecotourism scholars used different terminology to study experience, such as memorable experience (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017), or national park experience (Kang & Gretzel, 2012). However, to avoid any confusion and cover all forms of 'experiences', we use the umbrella term "ecotourism experience" throughout this paper. 'Ecotourism experience', comprises of two keywords (that is, 'ecotourism' and 'experience'). 'Ecotourism' has been defined as a "practice of travelling to relatively less exploited natural destinations to appreciate the natural settings, acquire knowledge about wildlife and enjoy local cultures in authentic settings while conserving the environments of the destinations" (Khanra et al., 2021, p. 1). In other

words, ecotourism is a subfield of tourism that is unique and features ethical connotations, concerns for the environment and its impact on them (Ansari et al., 2022; Fennell, 2001; Rafiq et al., 2022a, 2022b; Sadiq & Adil, 2021). On the other hand, 'ecotourism experience' as "a subjective phenomenon, which involves visitors' experience of interacting with the firms/nature at 'pre-visit', 'on-site visit' and 'post-visit' of ecotourism sites." This will help in understanding the complex nature of the tourist experience which changes with different phases of consumption (Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). In fact, ecotourism experiences vary depending on the destination and/or activities. For example, some of the most important aspects of the overall experience are viewing animals, while sharing these experiences with like-minded people (Curtin, 2005).

Since ecotourism places tourist experience at the centre of its marketing strategies, creating a positive tourist experience is essential to popularizing it (Deery et al., 2012; Mckercher, 2010; Sadiq & Adil, 2021). Previous scholars have studied "experience" in different areas of tourism and hospitality research, including hotels (Alnawas & Hemsley-Brown, 2019), whale watching (Xie et al., 2020), wildlife tourism experience (Mutanga et al., 2017) and ecotourism (Ayala, 1996; Huang & Liu, 2017) among others. However, Packer

et al. (2018) observed that due to its subjective nature, 'experience' is difficult and complex to define and measure.

Though empirical studies on 'ecotourism' and 'customer experience' have gradually increased over the last two decades, extant literature on 'ecotourism experience' seems to be largely fragmented and incoherent. For instance, Godovykh and Tasci (2020) considered 'customer experience' as a whole, looking at the overall tourism experience, which limits the scope of their findings. Similarly, Liu and Li (2020) and Khanra et al. (2021) examined ecotourism research trends through bibliometric analysis, but largely overlooked the experiences of ecotourists. Recently, in a bibliometric analysis of ecotourism literature, Hasana et al. (2022) examined only one sub-field of ecotourism, that is, protected area, therefore, existing reviews (bibliometric) do not provide a comprehensive and up-to-date synthesis of ecotourism experience research. Thus, it warrants a need to systematically review the ecotourism literature in order to provide a state-of-the-art synthesis.

Following Jebarajakirthy et al. (2021), this systematic literature review (SLR) aims to answer the following research questions: (a) what is the current state of knowledge about ecotourism experience in the literature?; (b) what theories, contexts and methods have been used in ecotourism research?; and (c) what are the prospects for ecotourism experience research in the future?

In order to address these research questions, we adopt the theories, context, characteristics and method (TCCM) approach suggested by Paul and Criado (2020) and Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019). Further, in line with scientific research design, we note that an SLR is expected to assist researchers by offering a synthesis of literature, while highlighting research gaps in the literature (Adil et al., 2022; Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021; Paul et al., 2021). Accordingly, we believe that our SLR on ecotourism experience would offer insightful theoretical and managerial implications. By synthesizing previously published scholarly articles on ecotourism experience, we identify the current status of extant literature and conceptualize a framework to have a deeper insight into the ecotourism experience at large. Through this SLR, we also propose research directions to future scholars wanting to explore the ecotourism experience domain. Practically, our SLR offers a better understanding of tourists' ecotourism experiences by categorizing them into three important stages: pre-visit, on-site and post-visit experiences.

The next section explains the methodology and systematic review process, followed by a section on the theories, contexts and methods applied to the ecotourism experience domain, and development of a conceptual framework. Section 4 discusses directions for future research and theoretical and managerial implications, while the last section concludes the review.

2 | METHODOLOGY

2.1 | Structure of the review

This study adopted the SLR approach, as it identified areas of uncertainty (Paul & Bhukya, 2021), where minimal studies have been

conducted, and where new studies are required (Paul & Criado, 2020). According to Paul and Criado (2020), SLR can be conducted through a 'structured review' (Ulker-Demirel & Ciftci, 2020), 'framework-based review' (Takey & Carvalho, 2016), 'bibliometric review' (Kim & So, 2022) and 'meta analytical review' (Maseeh et al., 2022). We chose to adopt a 'structured review' to meet our research objectives. We aim at developing in-depth insights into ecotourism experiences by identifying research trends, demonstrating research gaps, while offering meaningful future directions (Paul et al., 2021). We believe that this approach would enable us to identify the variables, theories, methods and context that are important in the ecotourism experience domain.

In addition, Paul et al. (2021) suggested structuring an SLR using one of the established frameworks: antecedents, decisions and outcomes (ADO) framework (Paul & Benito, 2018), theories, contexts and methods (TCM) framework (Paul et al., 2017), TCCM framework (Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019), and/or what, why, where, when, who and how (5W1H) framework (Lim, 2020). Of these, we adopted TCCM framework as it delivers "highest level of clarity" and "coverage (i.e., breadth and depth)" to literature reviews (Paul et al., 2021, p. 3). Further, according to Roy Bhattacharjee et al. (2022), Jebarajakirthy et al. (2021) and Adil et al. (2022), the TCCM framework clarifies the theoretical and empirical facets of a research domain in a comprehensive and coherent manner, thus addressing the limitations of traditional systematic reviews.

2.2 | Topic selection

Paul and Criado (2020) stated that in SLR, topic selection is an important step; so it is imperative to identify that the topic selected has not already been published in the form of an SLR. On the other hand, if it has already been published, the new SLR should provide some additional and novel insights into relevant literature (Paul & Criado, 2020). The need for current research is two-fold: *first*, we found that no SLR had been published on the topic of 'ecotourism experience'; *second*, lack of an SLR presents an ambiguity regarding the current state of the literature on the topic, hence this calls for an SLR to synthesize extant literature on ecotourism experience.

2.3 | Search strategy

Following topic selection, we looked to finalize the keywords for searching relevant literature on the selected topic. This process is explained below.

2.3.1 | Keyword selection

To identify the appropriate keywords, we followed Talwar et al.'s (2020) recommendations to search the keywords online. After a Google Scholar search for 'ecotourism' AND 'experience' we

screened the first 25 papers. Our content analysis produced most appropriate keywords: “Experience” AND “Ecotourism,” “Experiential” AND “Ecotourism,” and “Memorable Experience” AND “Ecotourism,” “Visitor Experience AND National Park,” “Experience AND National Park,” “Experience AND Nature-based Tourism” “Learning Experience AND Ecotourism,” “Experience AND Community Development” and “Experience AND Wildlife Tourism.”

2.3.2 | Database selection and article search

In line with Jebarajakirthy et al. (2021), Rebouças and Soares (2021) and Dogra et al. (2022), we used these keywords to select relevant articles from multiple online sources, for example, ‘ABI Inform/ProQuest, EBSCO Host, Springer, Emerald, JSTOR, Sage, ScienceDirect, Scopus,¹ Web of Science, Wiley Online Library, Taylor & Francis and Google Scholar’.²

2.4 | Journal selection and inclusion/exclusion criteria

Consistent with the studies of Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019), Srivastava et al. (2020) and Dogra et al. (2022), we set both the inclusion and exclusion criteria to further shortlist research papers that are relevant for this SLR. Our inclusion criteria included: (i) studies in which ‘experience’ has been studied as a variable or a concept in the context of ecotourism; (ii) These studies must be published before August 2022; (iii) Studies must be published in English; (iv) Studies must be limited to journal articles, that is, either B grade or above in Australian Business Dean Council (ABDC) Journal Quality list or in a journal with impact factor 1.0 or above in Journal Citation Reports (JCR) 2022 (Clarivate) and (v) peer-reviewed papers.

We retrieved a total of 714 research articles from online databases. Our next step was to remove duplicate research articles (N = 184), which had been downloaded more than once from the same or different databases. Next, we shortlisted the papers based on both inclusion and exclusion criteria shown in Figure 1. We removed 3 and 7 research articles from the database after we discovered that they were not published in journals or peer-reviewed journals. After reviewing the remaining 419 research articles, we found that they were not directly related to the ecotourism experience. Next, we found that 13 research papers were neither indexed by ABDC 2019 nor JCR 2022 (Clarivate). In the end, we identified 88 high-quality journal articles that have been synthesized in this study.

3 | RESULTS

The study characteristics of the 88 articles selected may be seen in Table 1, which includes authors' name, publication year, title of the paper, number of citations and journal of publication. We analysed these articles to find answers to the research questions, that is, what

is the current state of knowledge about ecotourism experience in the literature? and what theories, contexts and methods have been used in ecotourism research? Using the TCCM framework, we synthesized the literature in the ecotourism experience domain to answer the research questions listed above. The details of the synthesis are discussed in this section.

3.1 | What is the current state of knowledge about ecotourism experience in the literature?

3.1.1 | Publication timeline

The first analysis in this SLR is by year of publication which gives an outline of the momentum of research in specific fields. For instance, the first paper on ecotourism experience was published in 1996, which is then considered as the starting year for this SLR. The selected studies were published between 1996 and 2022, a span of over 25 years of research. Figure 2 illustrates the publications of the selected paper by year.

Figure 2 shows that the momentum of research in the area of ecotourism experience has increased significantly over the last decade (2010–2020).

3.1.2 | Journals of publication

Next, we examined the performance of various journals categorized in the area of hospitality and tourism/education/conservation by JCR 2022 (Clarivate) or ABDC 2019. We identified 30 journals through the review process. Table 2 shows that the Journal of Ecotourism is a major contributor in publishing the highest number of papers (22) on the subject of ecotourism experience followed by the “Tourism Management” (10). Several other pertinent studies came from journals focusing on hospitality and tourism, such as, “Current Issues in Tourism”, “Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management”, “Journal of Travel Research”, “Annals of Tourism Research”, “Tourism Management Perspectives.” Some articles that were relevant to our study were selected from diverse disciplines, such as, “Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism”, “Human Dimensions of Wildlife”, “Biodiversity and Conservation”, “Environmental Education Research”, “Journal of Transport Geography”, “Marine Policy” etc.

3.1.3 | Authorship

Table 3 acknowledges the top 10 authors based on citation counts. The citation structure analysis shows that Ballantyne and Packer have been the most productive authors in the field of ecotourism experience. Notably, Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a) article has been the most influential, with 642 citations in total, followed by Ballantyne et al. (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011b) article (591 citations). These articles were on top in terms of average citations per year

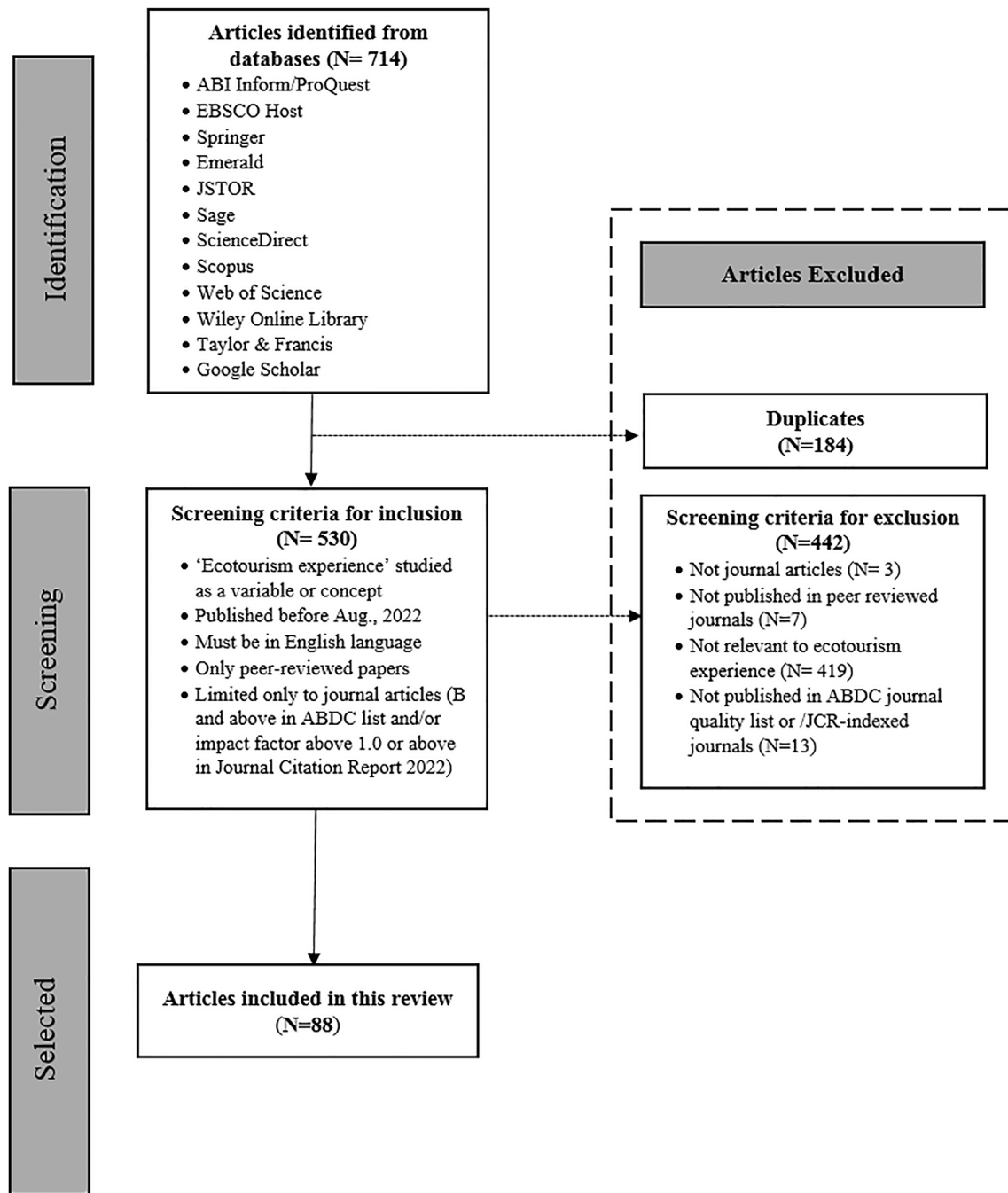


FIGURE 1 Inclusion–exclusion criteria and procedure for article selection.

(i.e., 58.36 and 53.72), followed by Ballantyne et al. (2009) article with 36.07 citations each year on average.

3.1.4 | Variables/constructs of interest

The second objective of this SLR was to propose a conceptual framework to identify the before-visit, during visit and after-visit experiences in ecotourism. Table 4 shows the synthesis of variables/constructs. We also noted from extant literature, that

motivation, destination image and environmental orientation are some of the main dimensions of pre-visit experience. Similarly, on-site experience has been heavily researched in terms of experiencescape (i.e., activities, park settings) and internal responses (i.e., authenticity, disorientation, consumption experience, engagement). In terms of post-visit experience, memories, aesthetic judgement, place attachment, environmental learning/awareness, connection to nature and satisfaction are some of the most studied components. These variables of different stages of experience are discussed below.

TABLE 1 Articles included in the review

No.	Author (year)	Title	Citations ^a	Journal
1	Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a)	Visitors' memories of wildlife tourism: Implications for the design of powerful interpretive experiences	642	Tourism Management
2	Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011b)	Visitors' learning for environmental sustainability: Testing short- and long-term impacts of wildlife tourism experiences using structural equation modelling	591	Tourism Management
3	Lee and Moscardo (2005)	Understanding the Impact of Ecotourism Resort Experiences on Tourists' Environmental Attitudes and Behavioural Intentions	491	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
4	Ballantyne et al. (2009)	Tourists' support for conservation messages and sustainable management practices in wildlife tourism experiences	469	Tourism Management
5	Lu and Stepchenkova (2012)	Ecotourism experiences reported online: Classification of satisfaction attributes	342	Tourism Management
6	Chan and Baum (2007)	Ecotourists' perception of ecotourism experience in Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah, Malaysia	316	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
7	Sharpley (2006)	Ecotourism: A Consumption Perspective	293	Journal of Ecotourism
8	Ballantyne and Packer (2011)	Using tourism free-choice learning experiences to promote environmentally sustainable behaviour: the role of post-visit 'action resources'	266	Environmental Education Research
9	Kang and Gretzel (2012)	Effects of podcast tours on tourist experiences in a national park	248	Tourism Management
10	Curtin (2005)	Nature, Wild Animals and Tourism: An Experiential View	215	Journal of Ecotourism
11	Connell and Page (2008)	Exploring the spatial patterns of car-based tourist travel in Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park, Scotland	185	Tourism Management
12	Wang et al. (2012)	Tourist experience and wetland parks: A case of Zhejiang, China	159	Annals of Tourism Research
13	Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017)	Antecedents of memorable tourism experience related to behavioural intentions	159	Psychology & Marketing
14	Cong et al. (2014)	Analysis of wildlife tourism experiences with endangered species: An exploratory study of encounters with giant pandas in Chengdu, China	157	Tourism Management
15	Chin et al. (2000)	Ecotourism in Bako national park, Borneo: Visitors' perspectives on environmental impacts and their management	155	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
16	Brody and Tomkiewicz (2002)	Park visitors' understandings, values and beliefs related to their experience at Midway Geyser Basin, Yellowstone National Park, USA	149	International Journal of Science Education
17	Kim and Thapa (2018)	Perceived value and flow experience: Application in a nature-based tourism context	148	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management
18	Walker and Moscardo (2014)	Encouraging sustainability beyond the tourist experience: ecotourism, interpretation and values	145	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
19	Curtin (2010a)	Managing the wildlife tourism experience: The importance of tour leaders	139	International Journal of Tourism Research
20	Packer et al. (2014)	Chinese and Australian tourists' attitudes to nature, animals and environmental issues: Implications for the design of nature-based tourism experiences	133	Tourism Management

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

No.	Author (year)	Title	Citations ^a	Journal
21	Vespestad and Lindberg (2011)	Understanding nature-based tourist experiences: an ontological analysis	125	Current Issues in Tourism
22	Weiler and Walker (2014)	Enhancing the visitor experience: Reconceptualising the tour guide's communicative role	122	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management
23	Higham and Carr (2002)	Ecotourism Visitor Experiences in Aotearoa/ New Zealand: Challenging the Environmental Values of Visitors in Pursuit of Pro environmental Behaviour	120	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
24	Tangeland and Aas (2011)	Household composition and the importance of experience attributes of nature based tourism activity products: A Norwegian case study of outdoor recreationists	116	Tourism Management
25	Mutanga et al. (2017)	Travel motivation and tourist satisfaction with wildlife tourism experiences in Gonarezhou and Matusadona National Parks, Zimbabwe	113	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
26	Powell et al. (2009)	Interactional Theory and the Sustainable Nature-Based Tourism Experience	101	Society and Natural Resources
27	Zwirn et al. (2005)	Angling ecotourism: Issues, guidelines and experience from Kamchatka	96	Journal of Ecotourism
28	Yachin (2018)	The 'customer journey': Learning from customers in tourism experience encounters	96	Tourism Management Perspectives
29	Curtin (2010b)	What makes for memorable wildlife encounters? Revelations from 'serious' wildlife tourists	91	Journal of Ecotourism
30	Raadik et al. (2010)	Understanding Recreational Experience Preferences: Application at Fulu fjället National Park, Sweden	88	Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism
31	Wolf et al. (2015)	Outcome-focused national park experience management: Transforming participants, promoting social wellbeing and fostering place attachment	78	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
32	Coghlan (2012)	Linking natural resource management to tourist satisfaction: A study of Australia's Great Barrier Reef	72	Journal of Sustainable Tourism
33	Huang and Liu (2017)	Moderating and mediating roles of environmental concern and ecotourism experience for revisit intention	71	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management
34	Moyle et al. (2017)	Assessing preferences of potential visitors for nature-based experiences in protected areas	66	Tourism Management
35	Apps et al. (2018)	Turning wildlife experiences into conservation action: Can white shark cage dive tourism influence conservation behaviour?	66	Marine Policy
36	Daigle and Zimmerman (2004)	The Convergence of Transportation, Information Technology and Visitor Experience at Acadia National Park	65	Journal of Travel Research
37	Montag et al. (2005)	The Wolf Viewing Experience in the Lamar Valley of Yellowstone National Park	64	Human Dimensions of Wildlife
38	Mau (2008)	Managing for Conservation and Recreation: The Ningaloo whale shark experience	61	Journal of Ecotourism
39	Ayala (1996)	Resort ecotourism: A master plan for experience management	55	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly
40	Harlow and Pomfret (2007)	Evolving environmental tourism experiences in Zambia	54	Journal of Ecotourism

TABLE 1 (Continued)

No.	Author (year)	Title	Citations ^a	Journal
41	Lemelin and Smale (2006)	Effect of environmental context on the experience of polar bear viewers in Churchill, Manitoba	53	Journal of Ecotourism
42	Thapa and Lee (2017)	Visitor experience in Kafue National Park, Zambia	53	Journal of Ecotourism
43	Fossgard and Fredman (2019)	Dimensions in the nature-based tourism experiencescape: An explorative analysis	53	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
44	Prakash et al. (2019)	Reasons for visitor dissatisfaction with wildlife tourism experiences at highly visited national parks in Sri Lanka	51	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
45	Higham and Carr (2003)	Sustainable wildlife tourism in New Zealand: An analysis of visitor experiences	49	Human Dimensions of Wildlife
46	Cobbinah et al. (2015)	Ecotourism implementation in the Kakum Conservation Area, Ghana: Administrative framework and local community experiences	48	Journal of Ecotourism
47	Mace et al. (2013)	Effects of overflights on the national park experience	41	Journal of Environmental Psychology
48	Lawson et al. (2011)	Modelling the effects of shuttle service on transportation system performance and quality of visitor experience in Rocky Mountain National Park	41	Transportation Research Record
49	Brochado and Brochado (2019)	What makes a glamping experience great?	41	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology
50	Ruhanen (2019)	The prominence of eco in ecotourism experiences: An analysis of post purchase online reviews	40	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management
51	Moyle and Croy (2009)	Media in the pre-visit stage of the tourist experience: Port Campbell National Park	39	Tourism Analysis
52	McIntosh and Wright (2017)	Emotional processing as an important part of the wildlife viewing experience	38	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
53	Newsome et al. (2019)	Visitor satisfaction with a key wildlife tourism destination within the context of a damaged landscape	38	Current Issues in Tourism
54	Dangi and Gribb (2018)	Sustainable ecotourism management and visitor experiences: managing conflicting perspectives in Rocky Mountain National Park, USA	37	Journal of Ecotourism
55	Folmer et al. (2013)	The role of wildlife in emotional attachment to a nature-based tourism destination	35	Journal of Ecotourism
56	Taff et al. (2013)	Dimensions of alternative transportation experience in Yosemite and Rocky Mountain National Parks	34	Journal of Transport Geography
57	Webb (2002)	Investigating the Structure of Visitor Experiences in the Little Sandy Desert, Western Australia	33	Journal of Ecotourism
58	Bertella (2016)	Experiencing nature in animal-based tourism	32	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
59	Li et al. (2021a)	Experiences, post-trip destination image, satisfaction and loyalty: A study in an ecotourism context	32	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management
60	Jorgenson et al. (2019)	Measuring Visitor Experiences: Creating and Testing the Tourism Autobiographical Memory Scale	30	Journal of Travel Research

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

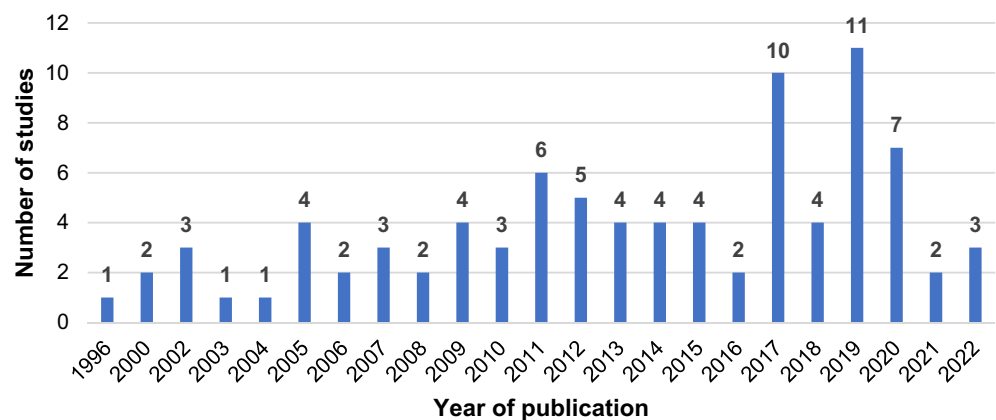
No.	Author (year)	Title	Citations ^a	Journal
61	Pabel et al. (2017)	Tourists' preferences with Indigenous tourism experiences in the Wet Tropics of Queensland, Australia	29	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management
62	Newsome (2013)	An ecotourist's recent experience in Sri Lanka	28	Journal of Ecotourism
63	Zhang and Xu (2020)	Understanding aesthetic experiences in nature-based tourism: The important role of tourists' literary associations	25	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management
64	Cooper (2000)	Backpackers to Fraser island: Why is ecotourism a neglected aspect of their experience?	24	Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism
65	Brochado (2019)	Nature-based experiences in tree houses: guests' online reviews	24	Tourism Review
66	Lyngdoh et al. (2017)	Tigers, tourists and wildlife: visitor demographics and experience in three Indian Tiger Reserves	22	Biodiversity and Conservation
67	Tiberghien et al. (2020)	Authenticity and disorientation in the tourism experience	22	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
68	Weiler et al. (2019)	Demarketing an iconic national park experience: Receptiveness of past, current and potential visitors to selected strategies	21	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
69	Massingham et al. (2019)	Pathways between contrasting ecotourism experiences and conservation engagement	21	Biodiversity and Conservation
70	Mayer and Wallace (2007)	Appropriate Levels of Restoration and Development at Copán Archaeological Park: Setting Attributes Affecting the Visitor Experience	17	Journal of Ecotourism
71	Lück and Porter (2019)	Experiences on swim-with-dolphins tours: an importance-performance analysis of dolphin tour participants in Kaikoura, New Zealand	16	Journal of Ecotourism
72	Rathnayake (2016)	Willingness to pay for a novel visitor experience: ecotourism planning at Kaudulla National Park in Sri Lanka	14	Tourism & Planning Development
73	Botha et al. (2016)	Expectations versus experience – the Kruger National Park's interpretation services from a regional approach	14	Journal of Ecotourism
74	Maguire et al. (2020)	Empathy and experience: understanding tourists' swim with whale encounters	13	Human Dimensions of Wildlife
75	Tarver et al. (2019)	Sustainable safari practices: Proximity to wildlife, educational intervention and the quality of experience	13	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism-Research Planning and Management
76	Goggin et al. (2017)	Connecting with Country in Mungo National Park, Australia: a case study to measure the emotional dimension of experience and place attachment	12	Local environment: The international Journal of Justice and Sustainability
77	Nolan and Rotherham (2012)	Volunteer perceptions of an ecotourism experience: a case study of ecotourism to the coral reefs of Southern Negros in the Philippines	10	Journal of Ecotourism
78	Skibins and Sharp (2017)	Evaluation of the Brown Bear Viewing Experience at Katmai National Park and Preserve: Implications for Management	9	Human Dimensions of Wildlife
79	Stoll et al. (2009)	Sturgeon viewing as nature tourism: to what extent do participants value their viewing experiences and the resources upon which they depend?	7	Journal of Ecotourism

TABLE 1 (Continued)

No.	Author (year)	Title	Citations ^a	Journal
80	Li et al. (2021c)	Experiences and value perceptions of an ecotourism trip – an empirical study of outbound Chinese tourists	6	Tourism Recreation Research
81	Miller et al. (2021)	Pavement treatment type influences visitor experiences related to vehicular road sound in Death Valley National Park	5	Journal of Ecotourism
82	Upchurch (2015)	Zion National Park, Utah Enhancing Visitor Experience Through Improved Transportation	4	Transportation Research Record
83	Li et al. (2021b)	Connecting tourism experience and environmental learning	3	Current Issues in Tourism
84	Scholtz and van der Merwe (2020)	We Can Deal with the Extra Feet, but Not the Extra Speed: the Importance of Providing a Memorable Experience in a Crowded National Park	1	Tourism Planning & Development
85	Usui (2021)	Feral animals as a tourism attraction: characterizing tourists' experiences with rabbits on Okunoshima Island in Hiroshima, Japan	1	Current Issues in Tourism
86	Clark and Nyaupane (2022)	Understanding Millennials' nature-based tourism experience through their perceptions of technology use and travel constraints	1	Journal of Ecotourism
87	Tabaeian et al. (2022)	Host-tourist interaction, revisit intention and memorable tourism experience through relationship quality and perceived service quality in ecotourism	1	Journal of Ecotourism
88	Sivakami et al. (2022)	Impact management and experience design for sustainable development of ecotourism destinations: the case of Eravikulam National Park, India	0	Journal of Ecotourism

^aBased on Google Scholar (8 November 2022).

FIGURE 2 Year-wise publications.



Pre-visit experience

When tourists enter an ecotourism site, they bring a wide range of experiences which shape their perceptions of future experiences.

(a) Motivation: 'Motivation' drives an individual from a state of inertia to the consumption stage (Sharpley, 2006). In the context of ecotourism, motivation of ecotourists has been recorded in terms of motivation for learning, along with motivation for participating and

visiting (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011b; Cooper, 2000; Lück & Porter, 2019; Newsome et al., 2019; Pabel et al., 2017; Stoll et al., 2009; Weiler et al., 2019). Here, it may be worthwhile to refer to Mutanga et al. (2017) study, who distinguished the reasons for visiting as push or pull factors. While push factors relate to the tourists' need and wants, the pull factors on the other hand are associated with destination attributes that in effect, attract the tourists.

TABLE 2 Journals included in this review

No.	Journal	No. of article	Articles	JCR impact factor	ABDC
1	Journal of Ecotourism	22	Sharpley (2006); Curtin (2005); Zwirn et al. (2005); Curtin (2010b); Mau (2008); Lemelin and Smale (2006); Harlow and Pomfret (2007); Thapa and Lee (2017); Webb (2002); Folmer et al. (2013); Cobbinah et al. (2015); Newsome (2013); Dangi and Gribb (2018); Mayer and Wallace (2007); Botha et al. (2016); Lück and Porter (2019); Nolan and Rotherham (2012); Stoll et al. (2009); Miller et al. (2021); Clark and Nyaupane (2022); Tabaeian et al. (2022); Sivakami et al. (2022)	NA	B
2	Tourism Management	10	Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a); Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011b); Ballantyne et al. (2009); Lu and Stepchenkova (2012); Kang and Gretzel (2012); Connell and Page (2008); Cong et al. (2014); Packer et al. (2014); Tangeland and Aas (2011); Moyle et al. (2017)	12.879	A*
3	Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism	8	Mutanga et al. (2017); Prakash et al. (2019); McIntosh and Wright (2017); Fossgard and Fredman (2019); Bertella (2016); Weiler et al. (2019); Tiberghien et al. (2020); Tarver et al. (2019)	3.462	NA
4	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	7	Lee and Moscardo (2005); Chan and Baum (2007); Chin et al. (2000); Walker and Moscardo (2014); Coghlan (2012); Wolf et al. (2015); Higham and Carr (2002)	9.470	A*
5	Human Dimensions of Wildlife	4	Montag et al. (2005); Higham and Carr (2003); Skibins and Sharp (2017); Maguire et al. (2020)	1.756	NA
6	Current Issues in Tourism	4	Vespestad and Lindberg (2011); Newsome et al. (2019); Li et al. (2021b); Usui (2021)	7.578	A
7	Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	3	Kim and Thapa (2018); Li et al. (2021a); Zhang and Xu (2020)	7.158	A
8	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	3	Weiler and Walker (2014); Ruhanen (2019); Pabel et al. (2017)	7.629	A
9	Journal of Travel Research	2	Daigle and Zimmerman (2004); Jorgenson et al. (2019)	8.933	A*
10	Transportation Research Record	2	Lawson et al. (2011); Upchurch (2015)	2.019	B
11	Tourism Planning & Development	2	Scholtz and van der Merwe (2020); Rathnayake (2016)	NA	B
12	Biodiversity and Conservation	2	Massingham et al. (2019); Lyngdoh et al. (2017)	4.296	NA
13	Annals of Tourism Research	1	Wang et al. (2012)	12.853	A*
14	Tourism Management Perspectives	1	Yachin (2018)	7.608	A
15	Tourism Recreation Research	1	Li et al. (2021c)	NA	A
16	Cornell Hospitality Quarterly	1	Ayala (1996)	3.578	A
17	Environmental Education Research	1	Ballantyne and Packer (2011)	3.725	A
18	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1	Huang and Liu (2017)	9.321	A
19	Journal of Transport Geography	1	Taff et al. (2013)	5.899	A
20	Marine Policy	1	Apps et al. (2018)	4.315	A
21	Psychology & Marketing	1	Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017)	5.507	A
22	International Journal of Tourism Research	1	Curtin (2010a)	4.737	A
23	Tourism Review	1	Brochado (2019)	7.689	B

TABLE 2 (Continued)

No.	Journal	No. of article	Articles	JCR impact factor	ABDC
24	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Technology	1	Brochado and Brochado (2019)	7.629	B
25	Local environment: The international Journal of Justice and Sustainability	1	Goggin et al. (2017)	3.590	NA
26	Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism	1	Raadik et al. (2010)	4.694	A
27	Society and Natural Resources	1	Powell et al. (2009)	3.024	NA
28	International Journal of Science Education	1	Brody and Tomkiewicz (2002)	2.518	NA
29	Journal of Environmental Psychology	1	Mace et al. (2013)	7.649	NA
30	Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism	1	Cooper (2000)	NA	B

Abbreviations: ABDC, Australian Business Deans Council 2019; JCR, Journal Citation Reports 2022 (Clarivate).

TABLE 3 Ten most cited studies

Rank	Source	Journal	Citations ^a	Average citations ^b
1	Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a)	Tourism Management	642	58.36
2	Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011b)	Tourism Management	591	53.72
3	Lee and Moscardo (2005)	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	491	28.88
4	Ballantyne et al. (2009)	Tourism Management	469	36.07
5	Lu and Stepchenkova (2012)	Tourism Management	342	34.20
6	Chan and Baum (2007)	Journal of Sustainable Tourism	316	21.06
7	Sharpley (2006)	Journal of Ecotourism	293	18.31
8	Ballantyne and Packer (2011)	Environmental Education Research	266	24.18
9	Kang and Gretzel (2012)	Tourism Management	248	24.80
10	Curtin (2005)	Journal of Ecotourism	215	12.64

^aBased on Google Scholar (8 November 2022).

^bTotal number of citations divided by number of years after article publication.

Common 'push-factors' include knowledge-seeking, recreation, spending time with family or friends, getting closer to nature and escaping from everyday stress. The common pull factors on the other hand include an abundance of wildlife, scenic beauty, cost, freedom and flexibility.

(b) Destination image: Destination image is one of the key components of pro-environmental behaviour, and has a significant influence on ecotourism experience, and tourists' future intentions of a revisit (Huang & Liu, 2017). An image in the tourists' minds, prior to a visit is primarily based upon secondary sources, like word-of-mouth or other marketing communications (Moyle & Croy, 2009). Extant literature showed that when tourists do visit a destination, they have live experiences and gain additional insights into the destination, due to which their 'earlier' perception may or may not be modified and/or become more stable (Li et al., 2021a).

(c) Environmental orientation: Environmental orientation refers to interest in nature or environment, along with value and beliefs, based on the knowledge of wildlife conservation and environmental practices such as talking to others about environmental issues (advocacy) (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011b). Literature showed that ecotourists plan a visit to a destination either because of significant

prior experience, or a strong interest in the natural environment (Harlow & Pomfret, 2007). Further, when they do visit a destination, they bring with them a wide range of prior experience, interests, knowledge, values and beliefs (Ballantyne et al., 2009; Ballantyne & Packer, 2011; Brody & Tomkiewicz, 2002; Pabel et al., 2017). Pabel et al. (2017) stated that the level of interest and awareness in ecotourism could result in a different level of motivation for experience. For instance, wildlife tourists could have a higher degree of awareness and interest in environmental issues than the general public (Ballantyne et al., 2009). Earlier, Lee and Moscardo (2005) had stated that if ecotourists are aware of an ecotourism site or environmental management, they tend to get higher satisfaction from their experience, and thereby become open to newer ideas (Brody & Tomkiewicz, 2002).

On-site experience

On-site experience includes all the experiences ecotourists have within the destination's premises during their visit. The components of on-site experience used in past studies may be divided into two categories: that is, experiencescape and internal response which are elaborated below.

TABLE 4 Variables/constructs of interest

Studies	Pre-visit experience			On-site experience						Post-visit experience					
	MO	IM	EO	AC	PS	AU	DI	CE	EN	ME	AJ	PA	EL	CN	SA
Newsome (2013)					✓	✓									
Cong et al. (2014)					✓										
Tiberghien et al. (2020)						✓	✓								
Packer et al. (2014)															✓
Li et al. (2021b)								✓					✓		
Goggin et al. (2017)								✓							
Weiler et al. (2019)	✓														
Fossgard and Fredman (2019)				✓	✓										
Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017)										✓					
Mayer and Wallace (2007)					✓										
Lu & Stepchenkova (2012)					✓										✓
Chan and Baum (2007)								✓							
Higham and Carr (2002)			✓					✓							
Lemelin and Smale (2006)				✓	✓										✓
Mace et al. (2013)					✓										
Kang and Gretzel (2012)					✓								✓	✓	
McIntosh and Wright (2017)								✓		✓					
Maguire et al. (2020)									✓					✓	
Walker and Moscardo (2014)				✓											
Harlow and Pomfret (2007)	✓		✓												
Li et al. (2021c)								✓							
Lück and Porter (2019)	✓												✓		
Li et al. (2021a)		✓						✓							✓
Bertella (2016)				✓	✓										
Connell and Page (2008)				✓	✓										
Tangeland and Aas (2011)													✓		
Powell et al. (2009)													✓		
Webb (2002)											✓				
Coghlan (2012)															✓
Mau (2008)				✓	✓										
Curtin (2010a)													✓		
Jorgenson et al. (2019)										✓					
Moyle and Croy (2009)															✓
Huang and Liu (2017)	✓	✓	✓					✓							
Brochado (2019)				✓	✓						✓				
Curtin (2005)						✓		✓							
Wolf et al. (2015)													✓		
Brody and Tomkiewicz (2002)			✓										✓		
Massingham et al. (2019)				✓	✓			✓	✓				✓	✓	
Miller et al. (2021)					✓										
Kim and Thapa (2018)								✓							✓
Stoll et al. (2009)	✓														
Dangi and Gribb (2018)				✓	✓			✓							
Higham and Carr (2003)					✓										
Ruhanen (2019)				✓	✓								✓		

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Studies	Pre-visit experience			On-site experience						Post-visit experience					
	MO	IM	EO	AC	PS	AU	DI	CE	EN	ME	AJ	PA	EL	CN	SA
Folmer et al. (2013)				✓								✓			
Lyngdoh et al. (2017)					✓										✓
Wang et al. (2012)					✓			✓							
Ballantyne et al. (2009)			✓						✓			✓			
Pabel et al. (2017)	✓		✓					✓							
Mutanga et al. (2017)	✓			✓											✓
Apps et al. (2018)									✓						
Zhang and Xu (2020)					✓			✓			✓				
Vespestad and Lindberg (2011)								✓							
Raadik et al. (2010)	✓														
Lee and Moscardo (2005)			✓										✓		
Ballantyne and Packer (2011)			✓										✓		
Thapa and Lee (2017)					✓										✓
Newsome et al. (2019)	✓							✓							✓
Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011b)	✓		✓						✓				✓		
Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a)								✓							
Scholtz and van der Merwe (2020)								✓							
Brochado and Brochado (2019)				✓	✓										
Curtin (2010a)				✓	✓			✓							
Rathnayake (2016)					✓										✓
Usui (2021)	✓														
Tabaeian et al. (2022)										✓					
Clark and Nyaupane (2022)				✓											
Sivakami et al. (2022)					✓										
Total	11	2	9	15	25	3	1	20	5	4	3	2	13	4	11

Abbreviations: AC, activities; AJ, aesthetic judgement; AU, authenticity; CE, consumption experience; CN, connection to nature; DI, disorientation; EL, environmental learning; EN, engagement; EO, environmental orientation; IM, image; ME, memories; MO, motivation; PA, place attachment; PS, park settings; SA, satisfaction.

Experiencescape. Experiencescape is considered as a complex extension of servicescape that comprises elements of tourists' activities, and their interaction with the environment (Bertella, 2016; Campos et al., 2018; Fossgard & Fredman, 2019). The environmental stimuli from various ecotourism activities and environmental settings can significantly influence the ecotourists' experience (Lemelin & Smale, 2006). Our SLR reveals that components of experiencescape have been among the most researched topics in the recent past (as shown in Table 4).

(a) Activities: Most of the ecotourists' activities identified in literature included hiking, tours, cruising (Dangi & Gribb, 2018; Ruhanen, 2019), camping (Brochado & Brochado, 2019), bicycling, horse-riding, fishing, skiing, swimming, photography (Bertella, 2016; Dangi & Gribb, 2018), walking, eating (Brochado, 2019; Massingham et al., 2019), feeding, holding (Massingham et al., 2019; Mau, 2008) or getting close to animals (Lemelin & Smale, 2006; Mau, 2008). Connell and Page (2008) explored ecotourists' activities in terms of reasons for stopping during a park visit for instance, and noted that most

people stopped to buy food or drink, followed by taking a short walk (Bertella, 2016).

(b) Park settings: Park settings consist of physical, temporal (time and duration) and spatial (movement and coverage) (Higham & Carr, 2003) dimensions. The physical context is important, because it facilitates the ecotourists' experience by determining the resources for ecotourism activities (Fossgard & Fredman, 2019). On the other hand, components like service quality, staff, facilities and integrated management could all significantly contribute in shaping the tourists' experience (Wang et al., 2012). In the context of ecotourism, soundscape is also considered an important element of tourists' experience (Kang & Gretzel, 2012). Social scientists believe that the natural world provides a therapeutic effect on people by escaping the stressful noise of urban environments, and noises like that of aircraft, which tend to put a negative impact on the quality of park experience (Mace et al., 2013). Other researchers have argued that both the temporal and spatial pattern of ecotourists could possibly play a vital role in developing information policy (Connell & Page, 2008). Literature

has shown that overcrowding for instance, has mostly been seen at mid-day (Lawson et al., 2011); shifting visitors at this point to avoid overcrowding at key sites, has possibly been the most challenging task for park managers (Connell & Page, 2008; Lawson et al., 2011).

Internal response. Experience resulting from stimuli generated at an ecotourism site reflects an 'internal response'. Our SLR shows that key perceptual responses of ecotourists include authenticity, disorientation, consumption experience and engagement. These dimensions are discussed below.

(a) *Authenticity:* Providing authenticity to tourists is considered as one of the best practices of ecotourism (Newsome, 2013). When tourists confront cultural difference, unique and exotic encounters during their trip, they perceive the experience as 'authentic' (Tiberghien et al., 2020). However, a few researchers argued that urbanization and post-modernity has in effect, created a romantic notion of wildlife and nature, where tourists expect exciting, adventurous, life-enhancing and authentic experiences, but in reality, authentic experiences are rarely found (Curtin, 2005; Newsome, 2013). In essence, ecotourists perceive the experience as authentic only when they get a first-hand experience of wildlife in their natural habitat, rather than in an artificially controlled human environment (Montag et al., 2005).

(b) *Disorientation:* Disorientation in ecotourism refers to the tourists' first confrontation with an unfamiliar setting (Tiberghien et al., 2020). Extant literature appears to lack studies that have explored and discussed the subject of disorientation. Nevertheless, Tiberghien et al.'s (2020) study states that disorientation plays an important role in influencing emotions, understanding and interaction with the environment, while making the experience unique and authentic.

(c) *Consumption experience:* Our SLR also shows that many previous researchers have studied the ecotourism experience in general terms, without focusing on any specific component (Chan & Baum, 2007; Curtin, 2005; Daigle & Zimmerman, 2004; Higham & Carr, 2002; Huang & Liu, 2017; Newsome et al., 2019; Pabel et al., 2017; Ruhanen, 2019). For instance, a few researchers have explored the ecotourism experience in terms of sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, relational experience (Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2011a; Brochado & Brochado, 2019; Goggin et al., 2017; Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b; Wang et al., 2012), while some others have studied the ecotourism experience in terms of the level of involvement and activity, such as educational, escapist, aesthetic and entertainment experiences (Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b; Li et al., 2021c; Vespestad & Lindberg, 2011; Webb, 2002). Some other studies have specifically explored only those experience aspects which make it memorable, for instance, proximity to wildlife, first time sightings etc. (Curtin, 2010b; Scholtz & van der Merwe, 2020). Kim and Thapa (2018) interestingly focused on what they termed the 'flow experience'. They noted that high flow experience could be achieved by working on the quality of ecotourism site contents and activities, along with service and ecological systems.

(d) *Engagement:* The level of engagement of ecotourists has been researched under two broad categories that include emotional

engagement and conservation or environmental engagement (Apps et al., 2018; Ballantyne et al., 2009; Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011b; Maguire et al., 2020; Massingham et al., 2019). Literature showed that most ecotourists do tend to be engaged in low-involvement environmental activities (Ballantyne et al., 2009). It may also be noted that different types of ecotourism experiences could actually generate different types of conservation engagement, which in turn could foster stronger engagement in terms of conservation issues for instance (Massingham et al., 2019). Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011b) studied environmental engagement in terms of experiential and reflective engagement and noted that reflective engagement is a prominent predictor of environmental learning, while emotional engagement is associated with knowledge gain and better perception of tour quality (Apps et al., 2018).

Post-visit experience

Post-visit experience refers to all experiences that ecotourists retain after they leave the ecotourism site. Next time, these experiences could form part of the pre-visit experience. Extant literature (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017; Zhang & Xu, 2020) also suggested that memories, aesthetic judgement, place attachment, emotional learning/awareness, connection to nature and satisfaction are some of the salient post-visit experience dimensions. These dimensions are discussed below.

(a) *Memories:* While on-site experiences are momentary, they could generate feelings or provide experience that is stored in human memory for a long time (Coudounaris & Sthapit, 2017). As experience is multidimensional and multifaceted, a variety of memory typology has been used in past studies (Jorgenson et al., 2019). Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017) for instance, measured post-visit experience components like hedonism, refreshment, novelty-seeking behaviour, local culture, involvement, meaningfulness, knowledge and adverse feelings. Notably, tourism autobiographical memory scale (TAMS) has been useful in measuring the Ecotourism experience holistically (Jorgenson et al., 2019).

(b) *Aesthetic judgement:* Tourists' aesthetic judgements determine the value they attribute to the environment based on their perception of natural beauty (Zhang & Xu, 2020). Several studies have used different terms for exploring the dimension of aesthetic judgement, like 'nature of the landscape' (Webb, 2002) or 'the wildlife theme' (Brochado, 2019). Wildness, colour, vibrancy and romantic evenings also emerged as key aesthetic qualities, as judged by ecotourists in the past (Brochado, 2019; Webb, 2002).

(c) *Place attachment:* Place attachment in ecotourism refers to the emotional or affective bond that tourists feel with an ecotourism site or communities of the site after the visit (Folmer et al., 2013; Wolf et al., 2015). Place attachment may therefore be the result of meaningful experience, and it is important for community development (Wolf et al., 2015). Intense experience, or more experience due to longer stays, and guided wildlife excursions create stronger emotional attachment with the destination, which could further lead to destination loyalty and support for nature protection (Folmer et al., 2013).

(d) Environmental learning/awareness: We have already noted that ecotourism experiences are recognized as an important tool for increasing knowledge on environmental issues, while developing a positive attitude toward environmental protection (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011b; Li et al., 2021b). Extant literature suggests that ecotourists are interested in learning about threats to wildlife, vis-à-vis their contribution to protect the environment (Lück & Porter, 2019). Importantly, both cognitive and affective experiences are strongly associated with learning outcomes (Ballantyne, Packer, & Sutherland, 2011b). Thus, ecotourists in their reviews of experience, frequently mentioned 'environmental learning' as one of the main eco-aspects of the experience per se (Ruhanen, 2019).

(e) Connection to nature: Connection to nature refers to the emotional connection tourists feel to the natural world (Maguire et al., 2020; Massingham et al., 2019). Experiences that could induce a sense of immersion in nature include 'soft' ecotourism experiences, which in turn allow them to engage in nature in a safe environment, and develop concerns for animals for instance (Packer et al., 2014). For example, feeding non-captive birds could generate a sense of privilege and emotional affinity due to non-captive birds willingly approaching the tourists (Massingham et al., 2019).

(f) Satisfaction: Tourist satisfaction is based on prior experience (Kim & Thapa, 2018), and may be associated with wildlife interaction, price (Mutanga et al., 2017; Newsome et al., 2019; Thapa & Lee, 2017), privacy, solitude, natural attractions (Moyle & Croy, 2009), destination image, emotional connection and experience quality (Newsome et al., 2019). Improving tourists' experience with wildlife interaction may thereby be crucial to provide a satisfactory ecotourism experience (Mutanga et al., 2017). It is thereby important to note that satisfied ecotourists are more likely to revisit a destination (Lyngdoh et al., 2017) and show environmentally responsible behaviour (Kim & Thapa, 2018).

3.1.5 | Conceptualization of an integrated framework

Based on our SLR, we developed a conceptual framework showing the three stages of experience in the context of ecotourism: the pre-visit experience, on-site experience and post-visit experience (see Figure 3). Pre-visit experience consists of the components which ecotourists bring with them before entering the ecotourism sites. These behavioural or perceptual experiences are based on prior experience or some secondary source of information. The motivation for visiting ecotourism sites (learning, pull and push) include destination image and environmental orientation (interest, knowledge and advocacy), which in turn represent the components of pre-visit experience. Further, on-site experiences represent experiences that tourists get while consuming the ecotourism experience, comprising two broad categories. One relates to all the stimuli providers at the ecotourism site, that is, components of experiencescape, while the other relates to internal responses generated by those stimuli. Important components of experiencescape encompass a wide range of ecotourism activities (i.e., wildlife appreciation, wildlife encounters, attending shows) and features or settings of the ecotourism sites (i.e., service quality, aesthetic quality, capacity, pavement type, temporal and spatial aspects and soundscape). Internal responses on the other hand, consist of authenticity, disorientation, consumption experiences (i.e., sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, relational, educational, entertainment, escapism, aesthetic, flow and memorable) and engagement with nature. Post-visit experiences consist of components that are experienced immediately or after some time of the actual consumption of the experience per se. These include memories, aesthetic judgement, place attachment, environmental learning/awareness, connection to nature and satisfaction. Importantly, the framework shows that all three phases of total experience are highly interrelated.

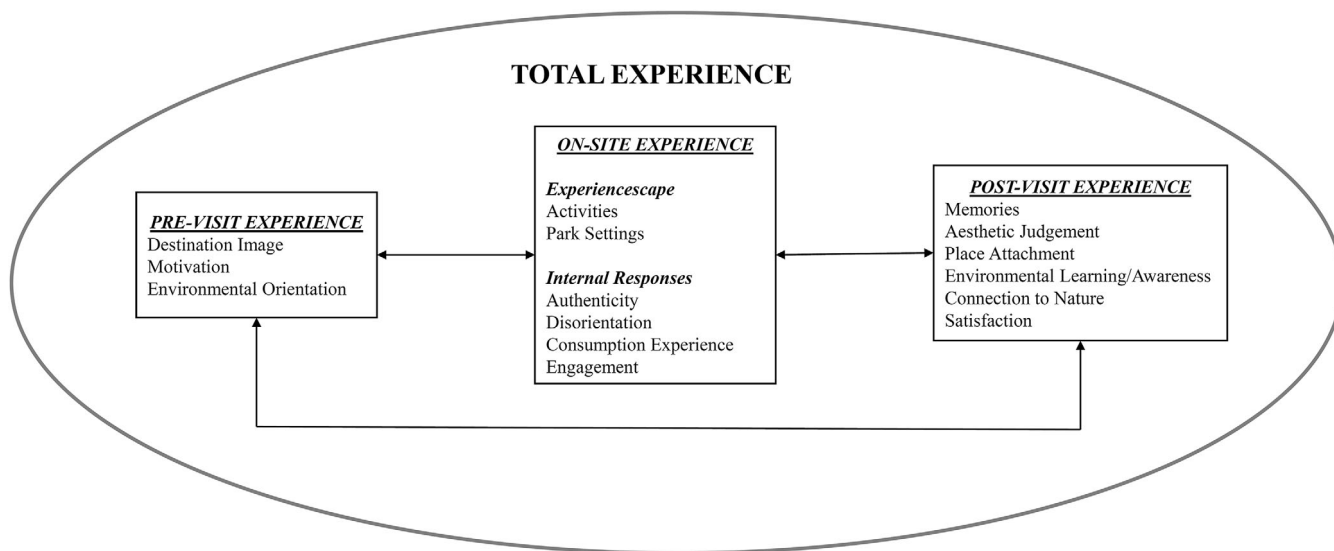


FIGURE 3 Conceptual framework.

3.1.6 | Domain in ecotourism experience

Since 1996, researchers have explored a variety of ecotourism sites in order to study tourists' experience. Different settings of physical, social, organizational or natural environment set different experiences for the tourists. The interaction of tourists with other elements of the experiencescape influences the memorability and impression of an on-site experience (Campos et al., 2018). In fact, most of the researchers studied ecotourists' experience in natural areas that are relatively undisturbed, like national parks, islands, etc., but as Table 5 shows, some studies have also explored ecotourists' experience of some man-made structure in natural settings have also been explored, for example, resorts, zoos, etc.

Natural areas

Protected areas are sites guarded by indigenous communities to conserve iconic landscapes or seascapes. These provide habitat to endangered wildlife, and livelihood to local communities (Watson et al., 2014). The total number of protected areas recorded in the May 2021 release of the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) is 265,908, covering 245 countries and territories (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2021). These protected areas include

national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, conservation reserves, community reserves or marine protected areas. Extant literature also showed that protected areas/national parks (land and marine) have been the dominant study location with more than half of the studies (50) examining ecotourism experiences.

Interestingly, a few researchers have studied ecotourists' experience of visiting world heritage sites like barrier reefs (Coghlan, 2012), islands (Cooper, 2000), pinnacles (Li et al., 2021b; Li et al., 2021c) and volcanic peaks (Moyle et al., 2017). These are sites of outstanding universal value and are important across countries and generations. Our literature review shows that all the world heritage sites studied (5) for exploring ecotourists' experience, were in Australia.

Further, in order to escape urban pressures and over-commercialization, there has been a growing desire among tourists to experience a unique natural environment (Cooper, 2000). Islands or rural areas give a lot of scope for ecotourists to indulge in cultural realms and unfamiliar encounters (Tiberghien et al., 2020).

Moreover, ecotourists' experience of rural areas like Kazakhstan (Tiberghien et al., 2020) and islands like Jeju (Kim & Thapa, 2018) and Moreton (Packer et al., 2014) have gained significant attention of a few researchers in the past. Some other common places of ecotourists' experience include mountains, river sides, or more than one

TABLE 5 Domains in ecotourism experience research

Domain	Sub-domain	Studies	
Natural areas	Protected areas/ national parks	Land	Li et al. (2021a); Goggin et al. (2017); Weiler et al. (2019); Fossgard and Fredman (2019); Taff et al. (2013); Cobbinah et al. (2015); Newsome (2013); Chin et al. (2000); Lemelin and Smale (2006); Mace et al. (2013); Kang and Gretzel (2012); McIntosh and Wright (2017); Skibins and Sharp (2017); Botha et al. (2016); Connell and Page (2008); Powell et al. (2009); Jorgenson et al. (2019); Moyle and Croy (2009); Lawson et al. (2011); Wolf et al. (2015); Brody and Tomkiewicz (2002); Massingham et al. (2019); Miller et al. (2021); Prakash et al. (2019); Dangi and Gribb (2018); Tarver et al. (2019); Yachin (2018); Mayer and Wallace (2007); Montag et al. (2005); Lyngdoh et al. (2017); Ballantyne et al. (2009); Mutanga et al. (2017); Raadik et al. (2010); Ballantyne and Packer (2011); Thapa and Lee (2017); Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a); Scholtz and van der Merwe (2020); Curtin (2010b); Rathnayake (2016); Upchurch (2015); Usui (2021); Sivakami et al. (2022)
		Marine	Maguire et al. (2020); Weiler and Walker (2014); Lück and Porter (2019); Mau (2008); Zwirn et al. (2005); Stoll et al. (2009); Apps et al. (2018); Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011b)
	World heritage sites	Cooper (2000); Li et al. (2021c); Li et al. (2021b); Coghlan (2012); Moyle et al. (2017)	
	Rural areas/Island	Packer et al. (2014); Higham and Carr (2002); Kim and Thapa (2018); Tiberghien et al. (2020); Daigle and Zimmerman (2004)	
	Nature	Zhang and Xu (2020); Chan and Baum (2007); Walker and Moscardo (2014); Bertella (2016); Tangeland and Aas (2011); Webb (2002); Curtin (2010a); Brochado (2019); Wang et al. (2012); Pabel et al. (2017); Vespestad and Lindberg (2011); Nolan and Rotherham (2012); Brochado and Brochado (2019); Harlow and Pomfret (2007); Huang and Liu (2017); Folmer et al. (2013); Higham and Carr (2003); Ruhanen (2019); Clark and Nyaupane (2022)	
Man-made structures in natural settings	Eco lodges/resorts	Ayala (1996); Lu and Stepchenkova (2012); Lee and Moscardo (2005); Newsome et al. (2019); Tabaeian et al. (2022)	
	Research centre/Zoo	Cong et al. (2014); Coudounaris and Shapit (2017)	

ecotourism site. These have been categorized under the sub-domain of nature, as shown in Table 5.

Man-made structures in natural settings

Among other ecotourism sites, where the ecotourists' experiences were recorded by researchers in the past, some were man-made structures, albeit under natural settings, like zoos, resorts, etc. The ecotourists' experience of these man-made structures could have been different from those sites that are purely natural or relatively untouched by human beings. This distinction is due to the difference in experiencescape, which effectively changes with the physical elements of the site (Fossgard & Fredman, 2019). Table 5 summarizes some of these studies.

3.2 | What theories, contexts and methods have been used in ecotourism research?

3.2.1 | Theoretical perspectives

Theories help researchers to address the research questions, and thus, through theories, one could significantly advance extant literature (Lim et al., 2021). In line with the TCCM framework proposed by Paul and Rosado-Serrano (2019), our SLR reveals meaningful insights into the theories that have been used in understanding 'experience' in the ecotourism domain (Table 6). We note 26 theories that have been extensively used to understand and appreciate 'experience' in the ecotourism domain. For instance, Table 6 highlights the theory of experiential marketing, which has been used in three studies, followed by the theory of experience economy (in two studies) and the theory of planned behaviour (in two studies) to understand experience in ecotourism. The other 23 theories have been used only once to study ecotourism experience. Of these, most researchers have focused on the theory of experience economy (Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b, 2021c) and theory of experiential marketing (Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b, 2021c), especially in recent times. The theory of experience economy for instance, explains the tourists' 'experience' based on entertainment, learning, escapist and aesthetics. Therefore, scholars (Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b, 2021c) suggested firms should focus on these aspects of experience to increase visitors' footfall. The theory of experiential marketing argues that consumers are rational and emotional (Schmitt, 1999). Therefore, researchers (Li et al., 2021a; Li et al., 2021b, 2021c) have suggested that firms should generate positive experiences among visitors; they should focus on improving sensory, emotional, thinking, acting and relating aspects.

3.2.2 | Context

Context has been defined as "the circumstances in which research is carried out" (Jebarajakirthy et al., 2021, p. 1276). Thus, in line with SLRs previously published (see: Adil et al., 2022; Lim et al., 2021),

TABLE 6 Theories used in ecotourism experience research

Theory	Articles	References
Theory of experiential marketing	3	Li et al. (2021c); Wang et al. (2012); Li et al. (2021a)
Theory of experience economy	2	Li et al. (2021c); Li et al. (2021a)
Theory of planned behaviour	2	Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017); Lee and Moscardo (2005)
Tourism system model	1	Mutanga et al. (2017)
Theory of flow experience	1	Kim and Thapa (2018)
Appraisal theory	1	Kim and Thapa (2018)
Driver's outcome focus management model	1	Wolf et al. (2015)
Experiential learning cycle	1	Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a)
Interactional theory	1	Powell et al. (2009)
Marketing mix	1	Weiler et al. (2019)
Meta theory	1	Vespestad and Lindberg (2011)
Model of input, output and outcome measure	1	Coghlan (2012)
Model of responsible environment behaviour	1	Lee and Moscardo (2005)
Primary-process emotional systems of Panksepp	1	Goggin et al. (2017)
Service experience by Otto and Ritchie	1	Chan and Baum (2007)
Social presence theory	1	Kang and Gretzel (2012)
Spatial transformation model	1	Nolan and Rotherham (2012)
Stake holder theory	1	Dangi and Gribb (2018)
Collaboration theory	1	Dangi and Gribb (2018)
Stimuli-organism-response theory	1	Zhang and Xu (2020)
Dispositional empathy with nature (DEN) model	1	Maguire et al. (2020)
Tourism autobiographical memory scale (TAMS)	1	Jorgenson et al. (2019)
Traffic microsimulation model	1	Lawson et al. (2011)
Hotel attributes by Cadotte and Turgeon	1	Lu and Stepchenkova (2012)
Visitor impact (VIM) planning framework	1	Chin et al. (2000)
Social exchange theory	1	Tabaeian et al. (2022)

we conducted content analysis, using the data of 'sample, the platform used for the data collection and the countries' to study the context perspectives of the studies considered in this SLR (see Table 7). We analysed the sampling unit in terms of 'one day

TABLE 7 Context

Context	Count	Percentage
Sample		
One day visitors	18	20.45
More than one day visitors	35	39.77
No Information given ^b	35	39.77
Platform		
Online	13	14.77
Offline	68	77.27
Online + Offline	3	3.40
No Information given ^b	4	4.54
Countries based on Biodiversity Index ^a		
High (More than 0.500)		
0.853	Australia	25 27.47
0.839	China	3 3.40
0.820	Costa Rica	1 1.13
0.809	Malaysia	3 3.40
0.786	Philippines	1 1.13
0.732	India	2 2.27
0.714	South Africa	2 2.27
0.677	United States of America	18 20.45
0.674	Tanzania	1 1.13
0.656	Sri Lanka	3 3.40
0.653	Honduras	1 1.13
0.638	Japan	1 1.13
0.586	Zimbabwe	1 1.13
0.537	Zambia	2 2.27
0.520	New Zealand	3 3.40
0.511	Portugal	1 1.13
Low (<0.500)		
0.486	Spain	1 1.13
0.471	Iran	1 1.13
0.447	Russia	1 1.13
0.435	Kazakhstan	1 1.13
0.423	South Korea	1 1.13
0.412	Netherland	1 1.13
0.320	United Kingdom	4 4.54
0.304	Sweden	2 2.27
0.299	Canada	2 2.27
0.297	Norway	4 4.54
0.290	Finland	1 1.13
NA		
NA	Taiwan	1 1.13

Abbreviation: NA, not applicable.

^aBiodiversity information by country is based on report of Convention on Biological Diversity.

^bSome studies have not disclosed country from where the data collection was done.

visitors' and 'more than one day visitors'. Our SLR reflects that most of the empirical studies (i.e., ~40%) considered respondents who have had a stay of more than 1 day at an ecotourism site, while over 20% of studies considered respondents who have visited an ecotourism site for 1 day only. This highlights scholars' preference for diverse samples for ecotourism experience research. However, approximately 40% of empirical studies have not disclosed their respondents' demographic details either in terms of stay or visit duration. Further, we analysed the selected studies on the basis of the platform used to collect the data, that is, online or offline. Table 7 highlights that most of the empirical studies (~78%) have used an offline platform to collect data, while only 14.77% of the studies used the online mode to collect data. Notably, only 3.40% of empirical studies have used both the platforms to collect data. This highlights the scholars' preference to collect data by personally visiting ecotourism sites in order to ensure reliability and authenticity of the responses. Lastly, we analysed the selected studies based on countries (i.e., the data collection site). Table 7 shows that scholars conducted their research on ecotourism experience primarily across 28 countries. It is interesting to note that Australia alone accounts for approximately 28% of the research in the selected domain. USA is the second most surveyed country, accounting for about 21% of the studies, followed by UK ($N = 4$) and Norway ($N = 4$). We also analysed data based on the countries' national biodiversity index (NBI) (Global Biodiversity Outlook 1, 2011). Table 7 highlights that scholars preferred to conduct their research in high NBI nations (75.11% of empirical studies).

3.2.3 | Methodological perspectives

In SLR, the research approach is considered as an important factor in deciding the research methods of empirical and descriptive research. Table 8 reflects the results of research approach adopted by scholars to study the ecotourism experience phenomenon. Our SLR suggests that scholars in the past have used six research approaches to study ecotourism experience, that is, 'quantitative method, qualitative method, experiment, mixed method, literature review and conceptual'. In fact, more than half of the empirical studies have used the quantitative method (i.e., survey) to collect data, followed by qualitative based studies (slightly below 32%). Table 8 indicates that researchers have adopted the mixed method approach in about 8% of selected studies, while 3.41% of empirical studies were based on conceptual framework. Interestingly, only one study used a literature review approach to study ecotourism experience, which explains the ontology of the ecotourism experience phenomenon.

4 | DISCUSSION

Based on the results above, this section deals with some future research directions (RQ3) and implications.

TABLE 8 Research methods used in ecotourism experience research

Research methods	No. of studies	Sample type	
		Tourists	Others
Quantitative (Survey)	46	Apps et al. (2018); Ballantyne, Packer, and Falk (2011a); Ballantyne, Packer, and Sutherland (2011b); Ballantyne and Packer (2011); Ballantyne et al. (2009); Botha et al. (2016); Chin et al. (2000); Coghlan (2012); Connell and Page (2008); Cooper (2000); Dangi and Gribb (2018); Folmer et al. (2013); Huang and Liu (2017); Jorgenson et al. (2019); Kim and Thapa (2018); Lee and Moscardo (2005); Lemelin and Smale (2006); Li et al. (2021b); Li et al. (2021c); Li et al. (2021a); Lück and Porter (2019); Lyngdoh et al. (2017); Maguire et al. (2020); Massingham et al. (2019); Miller et al. (2021); Moyle and Croy (2009); Mutanga et al. (2017); Newsome et al. (2019); Nolan and Rotherham (2012); Pabel et al. (2017); Packer et al. (2014); Powell et al. (2009); Raadik et al. (2010); Rathnayake (2016); Scholtz and van der Merwe (2020); Skibins and Sharp (2017); Stoll et al. (2009); Taff et al. (2013); Tangeland and Aas (2011); Tarver et al. (2019); Upchurch (2015); Wang et al. (2012); Zhang and Xu (2020); Sivakami et al. (2022); Tabaeian et al. (2022)	Weiler and Walker (2014)
Qualitative	28	Ayala (1996); Bertella (2016); Brochado (2019); Brochado and Brochado (2019); Chan and Baum (2007); Cong et al. (2014); Coudounaris and Sthapit (2017); Curtin (2010a); Curtin (2010b); Fossgard and Fredman (2019); Daigle and Zimmerman (2004); Harlow and Pomfret (2007); Goggin et al. (2017); Higham and Carr (2003); Higham and Carr (2002); Lu and Stepchenkova (2012); McIntosh and Wright (2017); Newsome (2013); Ruhanen (2019); Tiberghien et al. (2020); Walker and Moscardo (2014); Webb (2002); Brody and Tomkiewicz (2002); Thapa and Lee (2017); Yachin (2018); Zwirn et al. (2005); Usui (2021)	Cobbinah et al. (2015)
Experiment	3	Kang and Gretzel (2012); Lawson et al. (2011); Mace et al. (2013)	
Mixed (quantitative & qualitative)	7	Mayer and Wallace (2007); Moyle et al. (2017); Montag et al. (2005); Prakash et al. (2019); Weiler et al. (2019); Wolf et al. (2015); Clark and Nyaupane (2022)	
Literature review	1	Vespestad and Lindberg (2011)	
Conceptual	3	Curtin (2005); Mau (2008); Sharpley (2006)	

4.1 | What are the prospects for ecotourism experience research in the future?

As regards the third objective, we propose a few research directions in the field of ecotourism experience. We followed the guidelines of Paul and Criado (2020) to synthesize literature on ecotourism experience, then using, Paul and Rosado-Serrano's (2019) TCCM approach, we identified some future directions for research based on the synthesis. This framework helped in identifying the gaps in literature on four bases that include theory development, context, characteristics and methodology (Adil et al., 2022; Paul & Rosado-Serrano, 2019). Table 9 shows potential questions and areas of research to advance the ecotourism experience domain. Based on the TCCM framework, details of future research directions are set out below.

4.1.1 | Theory

This SLR indicated that the theory of experiential marketing, the theory of planned behaviour, and the theory of experience economy have often been used as a theoretical framework to study 'experience' in the ecotourism domain. However, several other theories

may be used to understand the phenomena of 'experience'. One is the social learning theory, which states that individuals learn from their own experience, and also by observing others within the given environment (Bandura, 1985). Here, the term 'social' indicates the venue where the learning takes place (Bandura, 1985). However, some scholars have argued that visitors occasionally also have a negative experience of their journey (Hwang et al., 2021; Kim & So, 2022), which in turn could act as a barrier because negative experiences lead to negative word of mouth (Barari et al., 2020). Accordingly, the firm or organization responsible for an ecotourism site may incur financial loss due to the negative experience, as the number of prospective visitors may learn the negative experience of their peers. Therefore, one may assume that the social learning theory can indeed be used to examine both the role of positive and/or negative experience on the visitors' future behaviour and organizational performance.

This SLR also suggests that the semiotic theory, which states that signs are conveyors of messages about an event (Sebeok, 2001), be applied to the study of 'experience' in the ecotourism domain, because natural settings or destinations do have different signs that tend to convey different messages (Ballantyne, Packer, & Falk, 2011a). Semiotics has been defined as "the study of signs. It is

TABLE 9 Potential questions and areas of research to advance ecotourism experience literature

Topics	Major themes/ gaps identified	Future research questions
<i>Theory</i>		
Theory Development	Theoretical bases have been rarely used	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the different theories that could explain the ecotourists' behaviour? • Which established theories in the field of tourism could be applied and empirically tested in the area of ecotourism? • How consumer-based theories could be linked with environmental theories to demonstrate the total experience of ecotourists? • How does the government policy influence the ecotourists and indigenous groups who are dependent on the ecotourism?
<i>Context</i>		
Geographical Diversification	Biodiverse countries of third world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does ecotourism influence the learning process of ecotourists from developing countries? • Does ecotourists in developing countries differ from those of developed countries in terms of motivation, education, attitude, memories, satisfaction, etc?
Contemporary approach	Use of latest technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which contemporary methods can be used to assess the effectiveness of "customer experience" over time? • In what ways can virtual reality enhance ecotourists' experiences?
<i>Characteristics</i>		
	Inclusiveness of dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways does the socio-psychological factors shape ecotourists' behaviour? • What could influence ecotourists' overall experience if they travelled a long distance or faced transportation issues during their visit? • With each stage of experience, how do various dimensions differ in their significance? • What role can post-visit experience like peace of mind, mindfulness, novelty and spirituality play in determining the pre-visit experience in future?
	Major stimuli generators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the best ways to generate stimuli generators at the ecotourism sites to enhance ecotourists' overall experience?
<i>Methods</i>		
	Mixed-method research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could a mixed method approach contribute to strengthening ecotourism literature by identifying new dimensions of ecotourists behaviour?
	Data through various mode	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do online data collection methods capture experiential factors that influence ecotourist behaviour after a visit?

not purely a method of textual analysis, but involves both the theory and analysis of signs, codes and signifying practices" (Chandler, 2007, p. 259). Researchers have indicated that ecotourism sites have signs that may be 'words, images, gestures, colours, sounds and objects, or even smell' that generate different stimuli (Cong et al., 2014). Interpretation of these messages correctly results in good or positive experiences, which in turn results in positive behaviour (Ackerman et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2017). Therefore, one may choose to use the semiotic theory too, to study visitors' experience of interpretation of signs at ecotourism sites, which could go on to affect their future behaviour.

4.1.2 | Context

Studies on ecotourism experience have been conducted in 28 countries. Almost 50% of these studies have been conducted in Australia and USA alone. This reflects that the sample distribution has certainly not been even; thus, generalizing the findings has always been restricted. Further, with regard to ecotourism, culture does have a role to play in moulding the beliefs and knowledge of ecotourists (Amante-

Helweg, 1996). Future studies therefore, could collect data from both developing and developed countries, and explore this aspect. Moreover, it may be noted that ecotourism sites that are biologically rich and diverse are more likely to appeal to a larger number of ecotourists. Thus, researchers could use data from other bio-diverse countries like India, Costa Rica, Malaysia, South Africa and Tanzania for future studies. Additionally, modern techniques, like social media analytics may also be applied to ascertain the long-term impact of ecotourism experience.

4.1.3 | Characteristics

Our literature review showed that most ecotourism studies thus far have measured the on-site experience. However, both pre- and post-visit experience may equally contribute to a holistic understanding of experience. Furthermore, most frequently studied dimensions of ecotourism experience included motivation, site settings and/or cognitive judgements about activity and learning. The following section discusses some other characteristic-specific directions for future studies in the area of ecotourism experience.

Pre-visit experience

A considerable body of ecotourism experience research has focused on measures like motivation, environmental orientation and destination image, as perceived by visitors. However, there could be other pre-visit experience dimensions that are perceived as important by tourists while evaluating the overall experience. For instance, the distance they travel to reach an ecotourism site to reach an ecotourism site could possibly influence their pre-visit experience. Additionally, the visitor experience of transportation could also become a vital determinant of the on-site experience and post-visit experience. In fact, from the transportation perspective, there could be negative experiences of ecotourists; for instance, the waiting time to pass through an entrance, unclear roadway signage and parking not easily available (Upchurch, 2015). Thus, we propose that future studies could look to measure these dimensions, and empirically test their significance in the ecotourism experience.

On-site experience

On-site experience can also be affected by visitors' presence (Upchurch, 2015). Physical elements of an ecotourism site (such as, architecture, landscape, layout, usable space, cleanliness, etc.) are external to tourists and influence tourists' experiences to a certain extent (Campos et al., 2018). So, there could be numerous experience influencers depending on the ecotourism sites. In several qualitative studies, it was found that tourists fill their reviews with themes like host, nature, food, ingredients (Brochado & Brochado, 2019; Ruhanen, 2019). Furthermore, guide characteristics (Powell et al., 2009) or tour leader behaviour could impact tourists' knowledge or learning experience (Mau, 2008). Similarly, feeding behaviour and breeding sites, if managed properly, could create a high level of satisfaction too (Mau, 2008). Additionally, interactions with others include another important dimension of on-site experience, and could have an emotional impact on ecotourists (Campos et al., 2018). Hence, further studies need to explore such experiencescape dimensions that could create different stimuli.

Post-experience

The current synthesis of ecotourism literature showed that environmental learning is the most frequently studied dimension of post-visit experience. However, peace of mind (Otto & Ritchie, 1996), mindfulness and novelty (Kim et al., 2012) and spirituality (Webb, 2002) could also be important dimensions of post-visit experience. Yet, these dimensions have rarely been studied. Therefore, future studies could focus on examining such dimensions for better evaluation of the total experience. Furthermore, we recommend that future researchers focus specifically on both short-term and long-term memories of experience, as memories tend to deteriorate with time.

4.1.4 | Methods

As shown in Table 8, most of the selected studies have used quantitative methods for examining ecotourism experience. However, most

were based on descriptive statistics. We recommend that more studies should use inferential statistics, so that researchers in the future could perform meta-analysis of prior empirical studies to aggregate current knowledge. Earlier studies on ecotourism experience seem to have focused on various dimensions of experience per se, but have failed to capture the totality of experience, while using components of every experience stage. Nevertheless, as qualitative research is exploratory in nature, it is considered suitable for drawing knowledge about any subject or process (Hoepfl, 1997; Patton, 1990; van't Riet et al., 2001). A qualitative approach in research would thereby possibly help in exploring novel factors of 'experience' at different stages, from different ecotourism activities and ecotourism sites, coupled with varying levels of involvement of ecotourists.

Similarly, a mixed method approach may also be considered an effective approach for an in-depth understanding of an emerging phenomenon in a field (McKim, 2017). However, this did not attract much attention in this field of ecotourism experience. For instance, by using a mixed method, researchers could explore various dimensions of experience that differ with settings of ecotourism sites, or ecotourists through a qualitative study. In fact, this could be followed by empirical testing of those very dimensions in a quantitative study. Additionally, longitudinal studies may also be conducted to capture the dimensions of post-visit experience, which in turn, could possibly alter with time.

4.2 | Implications

This literature review has various academic implications. First, we systematically reviewed and synthesized literature on ecotourism experience to examine the development of research in this area over time. We put forth a year-wise progression of ecotourism experience research, and recognized some highly cited publications. We noted that the subjects and themes that have been employed in ecotourism experience research have evolved over time, and have transitioned from just 'resource management' to 'involvement and participation of multi-stake holders.

Based on our review and analysis of extant literature, we proposed an integrated conceptual framework. It may be noted that extant literature showed that existing scales have in effect, failed to measure the totality of experience in this sector. In our SLR, we categorized all the key components of ecotourism experience into pre-visit, on-site, and post-visit phases of consumption, believing that this would help in capturing the components of 'experience' that are difficult to apprehend during various phases. Accordingly, we provide a synthesis of the widely used variables in ecotourism experience research.

Finally, we identified some overlooked areas of ecotourism experience research based on our SLR, and proposed several future research directions. The surge in urbanization has undoubtedly increased the demand for ecotourism experience, but consumerism has also increased at the same time, and has resulted in the evolution of contemporary experience dimensions expected by tourists.

Importantly, the ecotourists' perception of the ecotourism experience before 2000 was very different from that of today. For instance, climate change and deterioration of ecotourism sites have become prime reasons for examining the trends and patterns of the ecotourism experience. Thus, to understand tourists' behaviour and attitudes toward sustainability, it is crucial to examine some of the emerging trends in ecotourism experience research. By examining some of the future directions suggested, we believe significant value could be added to the existing body of knowledge.

Practically, this SLR provides several implications for tourism and hospitality managers. For instance, the carbon footprint caused by tourists' mobility, and protection of local residents' interests have become a major concern for tourist managers. Capturing and understanding the experience perception of ecotourists would surely help in tailoring strategies for ecotourism sites. Further, some of the key dimensions of the ecotourism experience could be integrated at different consumption stages, that is, 'pre-visit, on-site and post-visit', which in turn, may help destination managers consider appropriate strategies for destinations that have possibly been facing the problem of reductions in visitors, particularly off-season.

Finally, the trend analysis shows that ecotourism has not remained limited to leisure experience only. It has incorporated many contemporary dimensions of experience that are the result of new thinking and practices, and thus it presents a challenge for destination managers. Therefore, understanding the ecotourists' perception of ecotourism becomes crucial for staging experiences that could support sustainability as well as the attractiveness of ecotourism sites for tourists.

5 | CONCLUSION

An examination of previous literature on ecotourism experience showed that there was no existing review on this subject. Accordingly, by synthesizing literature, using the SLR method, and following the TCCM framework for suggesting future research directions, we attempted to answer three research questions. In the process, we reviewed 85 articles using the SLR method, wherein all were Scopus/ADBC or JCR indexed. In the context of our first research question, we found that ecotourism experience research was started in 1996, and has witnessed substantial growth with a paradigm shift in this area. Earlier, the research focus was more on resource management of ecotourism sites, but gradually shifted to the participation and involvement of various stakeholders. According to the subject area, the Journal of Ecotourism emerged as the most contributing journal, followed by Tourism Management and Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism. Further, on the basis of the synthesis, we developed a conceptual framework that showed the different dimensions of experience according to their consumption stage, that is, before, during, or post-consumption. Importantly, these three phases of experience are highly interrelated, and form the totality of the experience. In terms of our second research question, we found that very few theories have actually been applied in this area. In terms of our third research

question, we noted that there have been crucial gaps in ecotourism experience research; based on those gaps, we proposed several future research directions, which we believe could add significant value to the existing body of knowledge in this field.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data can be made available on request.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ de Oliveira et al. (2018) suggested that Scopus database may miss some of the relevant research papers.
- ² Gehanno et al. (2013) suggested to include Google Scholar in the list of online databases to minimize the possibility for missing relevant research papers that might not be available on the selected databases.

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