

# Summer camping: An extraordinary, nostalgic, and interpersonal experience

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## Abstract

This study explored the influence of core-consumption experience on the nostalgia intensity, word-of-mouth activity and revisit intentions of Greek summer campers. An online survey was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire. The link for the online survey was posted on the Facebook fan pages of some of the most popular Greek campsites. Results suggested that core-consumption experience strongly affects nostalgia felt by campers, which in turn influences campers' word-of-mouth activity, praise, and revisit intentions. Based on the findings, marketers should carefully design and manage campers' experiences in order to enhance nostalgia, leading to an increase in campers' word-of-mouth recommendations and loyalty.

## Keywords

Camping experience, Greece, nostalgia intensity, revisit intentions, word of mouth

## Introduction

The essence of tourism is the experience it offers to tourists. During the post-purchase stage of the tourism consumption process, tourists live two basic consumption experiences: the core-consumption experience and the remembered or nostalgia consumption experience (Arnould et al., 2002; Caru and Cova, 2003). During the core service consumption, tourists may live extraordinary experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993) that elicit nostalgic feelings, spark word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, and increase revisit intentions (Pine and Gilmore, 1998, 1999). Hence, it can be argued that experience does not end with the core-consumption stage but continues as consumers rehash memories, reminisce about the consumption experience, and share their experiences with others (Arnould et al., 2002; Nicosia, 1966). Therefore, post-consumption-stage experiences often are characterized by *extreme nostalgic intensity* and *interpersonal communication* (i.e. WOM).

The purpose of this study is to determine whether tourists' core-consumption experiences

affect their post-consumption experiences (i.e. nostalgia and experience sharing). Specifically, this study tests the relationships between the core-consumption experience, nostalgia intensity, WOM activity, and revisit intentions of Greek summer campers.

## Literature review

### Core-consumption experience

Tourism researchers have realized the significance of the tourism experience and recently have begun to investigate the content of 'core-consumption experiences' in certain tourism settings. For example, Arnould and Price (1993) investigated the content of 'extraordinary experiences' of white-water river rafters. The study revealed that 'extraordinary experience'

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was comprised of three dimensions: harmony with nature, sense of *communitas*, and personal growth and renewal. Specifically, it was determined that participants felt close to nature and engaged in escapism during river rafting. Interaction with other rafters was another aspect of the experience that cultivated a sense of belonging. Many participants believed that river rafting was a stimulating and challenging experience that improved their skills and abilities. Ultimately, extraordinary experience was an important predictor of rafters' satisfaction.

Celsi et al. (1993) studied the 'high-risk consumption experiences' of skydivers. According to the findings of Celsi et al. (1993), skydiving could be characterized as a risky, escapist, absorbing, and flow experience. Skydivers created special bonds and shared a common language with other participants. Self-improvement and rejuvenation were also the important elements of their experience.

Dodson (1996) examined the 'peak experiences' of mountain bikers. The results of Dodson's (1996) study indicate that biking experiences enhance feelings of connectedness with nature and increase the interaction among bikers. Interestingly, a peak mountain experience affected a biker's extended self. Belk and Costa (1998) explored 'fantasy experiences' of modern mountain men in the rendezvous in the Rocky Mountains and discovered experience elements similar to the ones found by Arnould and Price (1993). Core elements of a 'fantasy experience' include: (a) worship of nature; (b) revitalization and transformation of the identity and self; (c) escape from the daily routine; and (d) a strong sense of bonding between the individuals that shared the experience.

Pomfret (2006) investigated the experiences of mountaineer adventure tourists and revealed that these experiences are comprised of four common elements: (a) emotional experience that produces feelings of enthusiasm, satisfaction, escapism, and catharsis; (b) social experience that mountaineers live through the creation of special groups and communities; (c) connection to the natural and wild environment; and (d) identity experience as mountaineers test their limits, find new meanings, change their perceptions toward danger and risk, get to know themselves, and develop and renew their personality and identity.

Schouten et al. (2007) introduced the term 'transcendent consumer experiences' for describing the experiences of the Camp Jeep event participants. Transcendent experiences are a combination of peak and flow experiences that

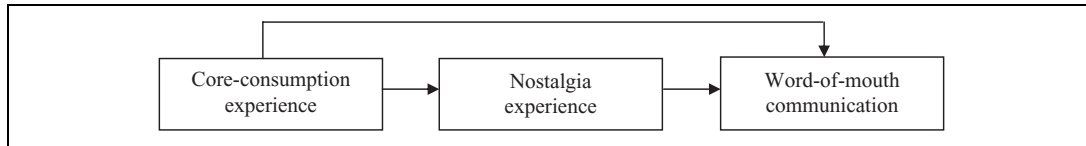
stimulate high levels of satisfaction, intense emotional reactions, a sense of novelty and escapism, self-awareness, and personal renewal. Moreover, these experiences were capable of producing strong relationships among the Camp Jeep event participants.

Oh et al. (2007) investigated the consumption experience of lodging based on the work of Pine and Gilmore (1999). They treated the tourist experience as a construct consisting of four dimensions (i.e. education, esthetics, entertainment, and escapism). Additionally, it was determined that the esthetic experience affected tourists' satisfaction, excitement, and memories. Hosany and Witham (2010) and Huang and Hsu (2010) measured the experience of cruisers. The first study extended the work of Oh et al. (2007) and found that the esthetic and entertainment aspect of the experience influenced the WOM intentions of cruisers. In the latter study, cruise experience was comprised of six dimensions: learning and knowledge, anxiety reduction, self-discovery, family interaction, physical renewal, and social interaction with other travelers. However, it is important to note that only the learning and relaxation dimension of the experience influenced visitors' satisfaction.

Ismail and Melewar (2010) investigated the experience of visitors of the Sharm El Sheikh Resorts. The visitors' experiences elicited feelings of fun and hedonism. Moreover, visitors gained knowledge, interacted with other tourists, improved their self-esteem, and admired the physical surroundings. The study of Ismail and Melewar (2010) also revealed that the tourist experience has a significant impact on loyalty. Wu and Liang (2010) treated the experience of white-water rafters as a flow experience in which rafters lose track of time because of their immersion in the activity. This flow experience affected participants' positive emotions and satisfaction.

It is evident that during the core-consumption of the tourism product, tourists may live peak and flow experiences (Schouten et al., 2007) that can activate their emotions and senses (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Joy and Sherry, 2003; Schmitt, 1999), leading to a personal transformation (Belk and Costa, 1998). Moreover, the core-consumption experience clearly impacts the post-consumption responses of tourists (i.e. memory and WOM communication).

According to Arnould et al. (2002), the core-consumption experience is followed by two post-consumption aspects: nostalgia experience and experience sharing. Moreover, Moscardo



**Figure 1.** The link between core- and post-consumption experiences.

(2010) indicated that core-consumption experience, nostalgia, and WOM communication are interrelated because tourists form nostalgic memories after the core-vacation experience. These nostalgic experiences serve as discussion topics among tourists and their friends and relatives. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the core- and post-consumption experiences of tourists.

### *Nostalgia experience*

Remembered experience is evident in the demand for memorabilia (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) since consumers connect their experience with objects. This nostalgia relates past events or experiences with individuals (Holak and Havlena, 1992). Consumption experiences are regarded as ‘once-in-a-lifetime events’ (Kim et al., 2010; Otto and Ritchie, 1996) with strong emotional content. Thus, they are capable of producing strong nostalgic memories (Baumgartner et al., 1992). Since nostalgia is an outcome of a personal experience, it is proposed that consumption experiences carry nostalgic meanings.

A distinction should be made between nostalgic experiences and the act of sharing experiences. A nostalgic experience is ‘a positively toned evocation of a lived past’ (Davis, 1979: 18) and one’s internal longing for a past event (Holbrook, 1993). Hence, nostalgia is an internally oriented experience. In other words, the center of a nostalgic experience is the consumer (Wildschut et al., 2006). While a nostalgic experience is a state of mind, WOM communication is an aspect of consumer behavior directed toward others.

### *Sharing experiences: Word of mouth*

According to Richins (1984 cited in Sundaram et al., 1998), WOM is a ‘form of interpersonal communication among consumers concerning their personal experiences with a firm or a product’ or a service. WOM communication can be regarded as an outcome of a consumption experience (Anderson, 1998). In their proposed and validated measurement model regarding ‘tourism

experience,’ Otto and Ritchie (1996) incorporated the element of interpersonal communication that occurs during the post-consumption stage (*experiences are shared later*). While observing tourists in the Isle of Wight during the August Bank Holiday, McIntyre (2007) discovered that the post-consumption tourist experience is related to the memories of tourists and their need to share their experience with friends and significant others. Bronner and de Hoog (2010) also suggest that vacationers find joy in sharing their holiday experiences with others by posting their reviews electronically. Hence, it can be argued that WOM communication is an important predictor of the post-consumption experience in the context of tourism.

### *The experiential and nostalgic nature of camping*

An under-researched area of the tourism and consumption behavior literature is that of camping activity (Park et al., 2010). Research on camping has focused on the investigation of campers’ involvement (McIntyre and Pigram, 1992), motivations (Kyle et al., 2006), desired experience (Virden and Knopf, 1989; Winter, 2005), satisfaction (Bultena and Klessig, 1969; Graefe et al., 1998; LaPage and Bevins, 1981), quality (O’Neill et al., 2010), and loyalty (Hardy et al., 2005). Nonetheless, the notion of consumption experience in the context of camping has been minimally addressed by tourism researchers. As van Heerde (2010) indicates, the camping experience is an ignored subject of research that requires further investigation. Moreover, there is a need for designing and managing camping experiences (Janiskee, 1990).

Camping is a form of experiential tourism (Smith, 2006). Belk and Costa (1998) suggested that the essentials of fantasy and extraordinary consumption experience can be found in the setting of camping tourism. Camping experiences share common features with extraordinary experiences such as connection with nature, social interaction, and feelings of escapism and self-renewal (Garst et al., 2010).

Connection with nature is amongst the basic motivations that drive tourists to campgrounds (Kyle et al., 2006; Valentine, 1992). Virden and Knopf (1989) found that the most desired aspect of a camping activity was contact with nature. Furthermore, Hendee and Campbell (1969: 14) characterized camping as a social experience. For example, Wisconsin campers like to interact with other campers when they visit privately owned campsites (Henderson and Cooper, 1983). Similarly, visitors of New Zealand campgrounds felt a sense of community with other campers during their camping experience (Collins and Kearns, 2010).

Conelly (1987) observed that another critical factor for a satisfactory camping experience is the revitalization and self-renewal of campers during holidays. Camping as a form of 'soft' adventure tourism (Hudson, 2003) is associated with activities that produce feelings of enthusiasm, pleasure, and escapism (Beedie and Hudson, 2003; Rojek and Urry, 1997). While camping, tourists yearn to escape from their daily routines and to develop skills (Virden and Knopf, 1989). Furthermore, learning new things is also a major motivation for going camping (Kyle et al., 2006; Mohd et al., 2005). It is apparent from the preceding discussion that the basic dimensions of the extraordinary core-consumption experience can be easily found in a camping experience.

Arguably, camping has symbolic meanings for campers as well. The study of Garst et al. (2010) in the context of forest camping revealed that campers view campsites as special places associated with strong nostalgic memories. Walsh and Lipinski (2008) found that campers exhibit high levels of commitment to a campsite due to their desire to relive their past camping experiences. Thus, it can be concluded that camping is an appropriate field not only for researching extraordinary core-consumption experiences, but also for investigating the nostalgic value of a camping experience.

### **Conceptual framework**

Oh et al. (2007) tested the relationship of the four dimensions of lodging experience (i.e. education, esthetics, entertainment, and escapism) with memory. Results of the study suggested that long-lasting positive memories are positively related to the experience, with esthetics contributing most to the relationship. Similarly, Hosany and Witham (2010) examined the impact

of the cruise experience on memory and the intention to recommend. The findings indicate that experience is linked on memory and WOM communication. Memory is affected mainly by experience elements such as education and esthetics, while satisfaction and intention to recommend are related to the entertainment and esthetic dimensions. When vacationers have positive experiences on their trips, they tend to talk about their experiences to others and produce favorable WOM communication (Bramwell, 1998; Oppermann, 2000; Postma and Jenkins, 1997). Thus, the following hypotheses can be made:

- H1: Extraordinary camping experience is positively linked to nostalgic intensity of the experience.
- H2: Extraordinary camping experience is positively linked to WOM activity.
- H3: Extraordinary camping experience is positively linked to WOM praise.

According to Martin (2010), tourists' intentions to recommend and revisit a destination increase with their positive and pleasant memories from their vacations. Bruwer and Alant (2009) suggested that when the nostalgic intensity of an experience increases, the intention of wine tourists to discuss their extraordinary experiences with others (i.e. friends and colleagues) increases. Furthermore, in the context of advertising, studies show that the attitude toward an advertisement increases when the ad contains high levels of nostalgic cues (Baumgartner et al., 1992). In addition, Marchegiani and Phau (2010) found that by increasing the intensity of personal nostalgia in advertisements, viewers' attitudes toward the brand and intention to buy the brand increases. Kolesar and Galbraith (2000) suggested that service experiences should produce strong memories, resulting in the repurchase of the service being offered. Moreover, they argued that an increase in the intensity of memories of an experience raises the probability that consumers will return. Thus, the following hypotheses can be made:

- H4: Higher levels of nostalgic intensity will result in higher levels of WOM activity regarding the campsite.
- H5: Higher levels of nostalgic intensity will result in higher levels of WOM praise regarding the campsite.

H6: Higher levels of nostalgic intensity will result in higher levels of intentions to revisit the campsite.

## Methodology

### Construct measures

In order to measure the core-consumption experience of camping services, this study used the revised version of the extraordinary experience scale of river rafting that was developed by Arnould and Price (1993). This scale was modified in order to fit the camping experience. The extraordinary experience scale was a three-factor construct where each factor (i.e. harmony with nature, *communitas*, personal growth, and renewal) was represented by six items. WOM communication was measured using WOM activity and WOM praise scales developed by Harrison-Walker (2001). Four items were used to measure WOM activity and two items were used to measure WOM praise. The nostalgia intensity scale proposed by Holak and Havlena (1998) was used in order to measure the nostalgia intensity of the camping experience. This scale consisted of four items. It was modified so respondents can indicate the nostalgic intensity of their camping experiences. All items of the aforementioned scales were evaluated on five-point Likert scales ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. Finally, intention to revisit the campsite scale was taken from Grewal et al. (1999) and included two items. These two items were evaluated using a five-point scale ranging from 'very low' to 'very high.'

### Data collection

An online version of a self-administered questionnaire was designed. The link for the online survey was forwarded by the owners of various Greek camping sites to their Facebook fan page members. The posts regarding the survey were renewed frequently in order to improve the response rates. Respondents were prompted to recall their recent camping experiences and then fill out the questionnaire.

Facebook was deemed as an appropriate medium for reaching the study's population, since visitors of Greek campsites are mostly young people (Kousounis, 2011) and Facebook is widely used among Greek individuals below 34 years of age (FocusBari, 2011). Online surveys offer researchers the opportunity to obtain

a large sample, in a short time, and in a cost-effective manner (Evans and Mathur, 2005). Moreover, online surveys reduce researcher bias.

It should be noted that the selected organized campsites were located near beaches surrounded by Mediterranean greenery. At these locations, visitors can lodge near the beach, enjoy the natural scenery, and engage in a wide range of outdoor recreational activities. For these reasons, the beach camping experience was the main focus of the present study.

The research was piloted on 20 students of a large business university who had a recent camping experience. After the pilot study, a few items were reworded to improve the clarity of the questions used in the study. The main study lasted from October 2010 to January 2011.

## Results

### Confirmatory factor analysis: Experience scale

The sample consisted of 407 respondents. Confirmatory factor analysis, using Amos 8.0, was performed in order to verify the three-item factor structure of the experience scale proposed by Arnould and Price (1993). The analysis was initiated with 18 items. The goodness-of-fit measures of the initial 18-item model suggested a poor fit of the data. As a result, the researchers turned to modification indices in order to increase the strength of the data fit. After excluding three items from the initial scale (namely, *I felt freedom from obligations*, *I felt I pulled my weight*, and *I felt I made new skills*), based on the modification indices, the values of the indices goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI) and non-normed fit index (NNFI) (Tucker-Lewis index (TFI)) of the respecified model exceeded the 0.90 criterion. The The root mean square error of approximation fit index (RMSEA) value was smaller than the 0.07 threshold proposed by Bentler (1992) ( $p$ : 0.000,  $\chi^2/df$ : 2.93, GFI: 0.92, CFI: 0.96, NNFI: 0.95, RMSEA: 0.069), suggesting a reasonably good model fit. The demographic characteristics of the summer campers are presented in Table 1.

Table 2 shows the mean values and the standardized deviations of the items that comprised the camping experience scale. Most of the items of the *Personal Growth and Renewal* factor had low mean values. This could be attributed to the nature of beach camping, which is a form of soft adventure. Consequently, extreme

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the sample.

Demographic variable	Frequencies (%)	Demographic variable	Frequencies (%)
Gender		Marital status	
Male	165 (40.5)	Single	346 (85)
Female	242 (59.5)	Married	57 (14)
		Divorced	4 (1)
Age (years)		Occupation	
Younger than 19	15 (3.7)	Freelancer	90 (22.1)
19–24	134 (32.9)	Unemployed	42 (10.3)
25–35	220 (54.1)	Private sector employee	134 (32.9)
36–50	35 (8.6)	Housewife	2 (0.5)
51–65	3 (0.7)	Retired	2 (0.5)
		Student	117 (28.7)
Education		Civil sector employee	20 (4.9)
Primary education	9 (2.2)	Monthly income (in €)	
High school	118 (29.0)	Less than 800	105 (25.8)
TEI graduate	85 (20.9)	800–1200	125 (30.7)
Bachelor	124 (30.5)	1201–2000	93 (22.9)
Master	66 (16.2)	2001–3000	47 (11.5)
PhD	5 (1.2)	3001–5000	20 (4.9)
		More than 5000	17 (4.2)

TEI: Technological Educational Institution.

**Table 2.** Descriptives and standardized regression weights of final scales.

Items	Mean	SD	Stand. load.
Harmony with nature (AVE: 0.49, CR: 0.83, $\alpha$ : 0.83)			
I felt harmony with nature	3.55	1.15	0.65
I felt like I explored new worlds	2.62	1.28	0.79
I felt like I escaped into a different world	3.37	1.32	0.77
I felt I got a new perspective on nature	2.96	1.36	0.69
The camping was like getting away from it all	4.07	1.18	0.60
Communitas (AVE: 0.49, CR: 0.89, $\alpha$ : 0.85)			
I felt in harmony with others	2.88	1.24	0.64
I felt I interacted well with others	2.99	1.22	0.68
I felt I made new friends	3.17	1.38	0.72
I felt my skills were appreciated by others	2.65	1.26	0.77
I felt needed by a group	2.41	1.25	0.67
Personal growth and renewal (AVE: 0.70, CR: 0.92, $\alpha$ : 0.92)			
I felt a sense of adventure and risk	2.52	1.34	0.91
I felt personally challenged	2.57	1.38	0.94
I felt an adrenalin rush	2.46	1.41	0.88
I felt I learned new things	2.73	1.38	0.74
I felt I tested my limits	2.52	1.45	0.69

AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: composite reliability;  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's alpha; Stand. load: standardized loading.

adrenaline rush and a heightened sense of danger were not induced by this type of camping.

The reliability and the convergent and the discriminant validities of the revised model of the camping experience were also assessed. The model showed adequate internal reliability since Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the three experience factors ranged from 0.83 to 0.92, exceeding the 0.70 criterion suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). All the standardized coefficients of

the 15 indicators were significant (critical ratios  $> 1.96, p = 0.000$ ) and exceeded the 0.50 threshold (Janssens et al., 2008) (Table 2). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the factors *Harmony with Nature* and *Communitas* was 0.49, slightly below Fornell and Larcker's (1981) critical value of 0.50, while for the factor *Personal Growth and Renewal*, the AVE was 0.70. Furthermore, composite reliabilities of all experience factors exceeded the accepted 0.70 value criterion (Hair

**Table 3.** Inter-construct correlations.

Discriminant validity for the camping experience scale			
	Harmony with nature	Communitas	Personal growth and renewal
Harmony with nature	0.49		
Communitas	0.43	0.49	
Personal growth and renewal	0.45	0.42	0.70

**Table 4.** Validity and reliability measures, standardized regression weights, and descriptive statistics of post-consumption experience scales.

	Stand. load.	Mean	SD
Nostalgia intensity (AVE: 0.71, CR: 0.88, a: 0.88)			
I felt a longing for the past experience	0.876	3.437	1.344
The experience is highly nostalgic	0.843	3.930	1.416
The experience is a very gratifying one for me	0.831	3.970	1.148
WOM activity (AVE: 0.66, CR: 0.88, a: 0.88)			
I mention this camping service to others quite frequently	0.817	4.012	1.183
I've told more people about this camping service than most other camping services	0.797	3.975	1.288
I seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about this camping service	0.822	3.073	1.492
When I tell people about this camping service, I tend to talk about the camping service in great detail	0.825	3.326	1.376
WOM praise (AVE: 0.61, CR: 0.75, a: 0.82)			
I have only good things to say about this camping service	0.803	2.960	1.387
I am proud to tell others that I use this camping service	0.761	3.117	1.464
Satisfaction (AVE: 0.90, CR: 0.96, a: 0.96)			
I am satisfied with my decision to visit this campsite	0.934	3.958	1.189
I think that I did the right thing by deciding to visit this campsite	0.972	3.921	1.198
My choice to visit this campsite was a wise one	0.949	3.864	1.207
Revisit intention (AVE: 0.85, CR: 0.92, a: 0.94)			
The likelihood that I would consider visiting this campsite again is ...	0.860	3.948	1.272
If I were to visit a campsite, the probability that I would visit this campsite is ...	0.845	3.901	1.284

AVE: Average Variance Extracted; CR: composite reliability; a: Cronbach's alpha; Stand. load: standardized loading.

et al., 1998). Therefore, it can be argued that the experience scale showed acceptable levels of convergent validity. Finally, the discriminant validity of the experience scale was established since the AVE of each factor was larger than the square of the correlation between the examined factor and the rest of the factors of the experience scale (Table 3).

Table 4 shows the validity and reliability measures of the post-consumption experience scales (nostalgia intensity, WOM activity, WOM praise, and revisit intention). Specifically, for the nostalgic intensity scale, the item '*I have very little desire to re-experience the past*' was removed from further analysis since it had an insignificant and very small standardized coefficient (standardized coefficient: 0.007,  $p$ : 0.900). The revised nostalgic intensity scale as well as

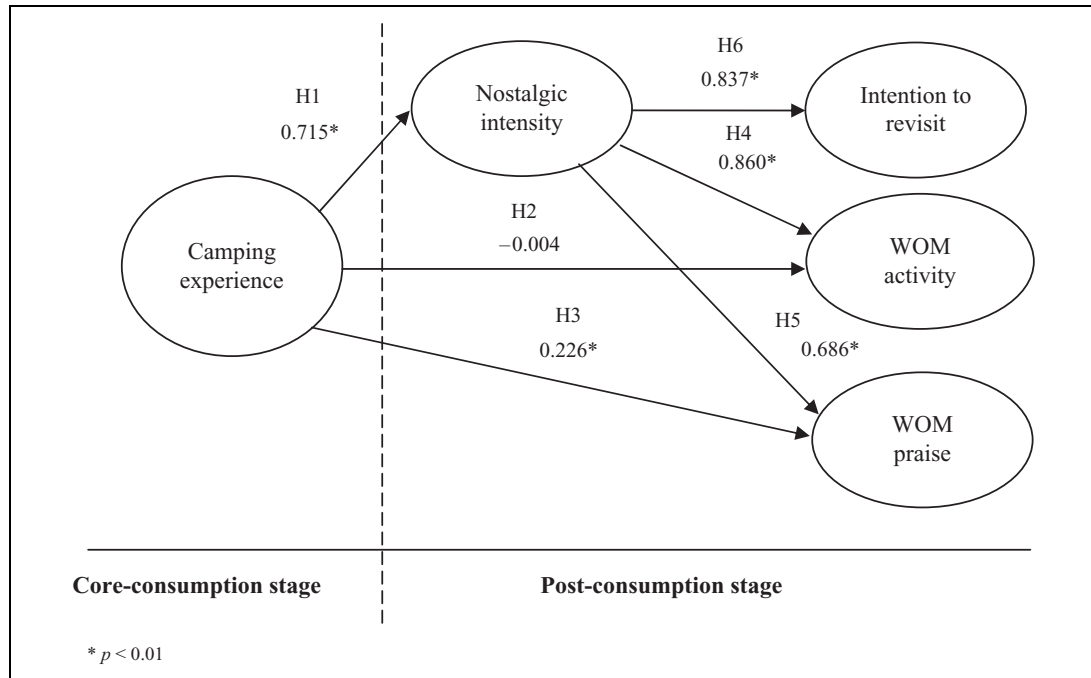
the other constructs (i.e. WOM activity, WOM praise, and revisit intention) had good reliability and validity, as Table 4 indicates. Table 4 also shows the mean values and SDs of the post-consumption variables. The low mean values for WOM praise items could be due to the fact that campers had neutral WOM comments, although they tend to engage in high WOM activity.

#### CFA experience scale: Second-order model

In order to test the four hypotheses, core-consumption experience was treated as a higher-order construct. Results of confirmatory factor analysis revealed high levels of correlation among the first-order factors (Table 5). Hence, we can assume the presence of a higher-order consumption experience construct. Thus, we

**Table 5.** Goodness-of-fit measures for the models of experience.

	$\chi^2/df$	<i>p</i>	RMSEA	CFI	NNFI	NFI
First-order final model	2.935	0.000	0.069	0.957	0.947	0.937
Second-order model	2.986	0.000	0.070	0.955	0.945	0.934
Correlations among first-order factors						
Harmony with nature – <i>communitas</i>					0.661	
<i>Communitas</i> – personal growth and renewal					0.653	
Harmony with nature – personal growth and renewal					0.674	



**Figure 2.** Estimated structural equation model.

tested the fit of the second-order model of experience. The goodness-of-fit indices indicate a reasonably good model fit (Table 5). As a general rule, ‘the goodness of fit of a second order model can never be better than the first order model’ (Yavas and Babakus, 2009: 519). As expected, the second-order model had slightly lower indices than the first-order model. Moreover, the value of the target coefficient (ratio of the  $\chi^2$  of the first-order model to the  $\chi^2$  of the second-order model) was 0.96, meaning 96% of the covariation of first-order factors is explained by the higher-order model (Marsh and Hocevar, 1985). This study provides evidence of the existence of a second-order consumption experience construct. Moreover, the estimates of the standardized regression coefficients of the three latent factors (i.e. harmony with nature, *communitas*, and personal growth and renewal) were

significant: 0.759 (composite reliability (CR): 11.08), 0.830 (CR: 13.06), and 0.849 (CR: 13.60), respectively.

**Structural equation modeling**

A structural equation analysis was conducted for testing the hypotheses. The goodness-of-fit measures of the model suggested an acceptable fit of the data ( $\chi^2/df$ : 2.86, *p*: 0.000, CFI: 0.93, NNFI: 0.92, NFI: 0.90, RMSEA: 0.068). Figure 2 shows the estimated structural equation model.

Our hypothesis-testing concluded that the core-consumption experience is an important and strong predictor of the nostalgia experience felt by campers (standardized beta: 0.715). Thus, H1 was accepted. WOM activity was not affected by the core-consumption experience (standardized beta: -0.004). Thus, H2 was



rejected. The H3 core-consumption experience seemed to have a weak but significant influence on WOM praise as the value of the path coefficient indicates (standardized beta: 0.226). Thus, H3 was accepted. The lack of any influence of camping experience on WOM activity could be attributed to the mediating effect of nostalgia experience. It is possible that camping experience will have a significant impact on the WOM activity indirectly through nostalgic intensity. Moreover, nostalgia experience could also be a partial mediator of the relationship between camping experience and WOM praise, which was found to be weak. With respect to H4, H5, and H6, nostalgia derived from experience strongly influences WOM activity (beta coefficient: 0.860), WOM praise (standardized beta: 0.686), and revisit intentions (path coefficient: 0.837). Thus, H4, H5, and H6 were supported.

### Conclusions and implications for marketers

The present study validated the extraordinary consumption experience scale proposed by Arnould and Price (1993) in the context of summer camping. Moreover, this study also provided evidence regarding the relationships between experience, nostalgia, WOM, and intention to revisit. Results suggest that the core-consumption experience influences to a higher extent nostalgia intensity and to a lesser extent WOM praise. Interestingly, experience does not affect WOM activity. However, experience impacts WOM of campers (activity and praise) indirectly through the feelings of nostalgia that arise. Hence, it can be concluded that nostalgia derived from the experience triggers WOM activity and praise as well as revisit intentions. In accordance with van Heerde's (2010) suggestion, the present study clearly indicates that camping experiences should be carefully designed and managed. Camping marketers should try to enhance and improve their experiential offering. Thus, they should design camping services based on the three experiential dimensions: *communitas*, personal growth and renewal, and harmony with nature. In doing so, emphasis should be placed first on the social and self-related dimensions of the camping experience that were moderately felt by campers.

With respect to the social dimension of the experience, results indicate that campers felt mild levels of harmony and interaction with other campers. Camping marketers could increase the levels

of social interaction among campers by organizing special dance and music nights, so that interested campers can dance, sing, or play instruments. Drama nights could also be planned, allowing campers to display their acting abilities for free and work with other campers as well. Moreover, out-of-camp trips are another way for creating bonds between campers in order to enhance the feeling of *communitas*. Respondents also reported experiencing a moderate sense of belonging to a group and self-validation. Special group games and team water sports could improve the sense of teamwork and cooperation among campers.

As stated earlier, campers rated the camping experience as a medium risk and adventurous activity. Extreme sports such as waterskiing and diving can increase the sense of adrenaline rush felt by campers. In addition, the personal growth and renewal aspect of camping experience can be influenced through the development, for example, of special workshops where tourists during their holidays could learn to paint scenes inspired by the natural scenery. Moreover, photography lessons may also enhance the self-related dimension of the camping experience as campers could master their skills through this activity.

Regarding the harmony with nature dimension of the camping experience, it is important that campsites are designed to provide campers with a new perspective of nature. Camping marketers should also organize activities related to nature, such as swimming contests, fishing, hiking, boating, or sailing, that increase the level of contact with nature.

Furthermore, findings revealed that most of the campers' recommendations were neutrally valenced. Marketers could offer memorabilia to these summer campers in order to enhance their nostalgia experience and therefore increase their loyalty and positive WOM recommendations to other potential customers.

### Limitations and further research suggestions

The basic limitation of the present study is associated with the use of an online survey and the representativeness of the sample. The survey employed a convenience sample as respondents were only Greek campers who had a Facebook profile. Since the study did not include non-Facebook members, results should be generalized and interpreted with care. Another sampling concern is self-selection bias. It is possible that respondents who participated in the survey were more prone to complete online questionnaires

than others or had more positive memories about their camping experience compared with the non-respondents. Mixed-mode surveys (both online and paper) could control the sampling selection bias.

Additional research could be directed toward extraordinary experience-based segmentation of summer campers. Furthermore, a comparative investigation of the extraordinary experience felt by campers of different European countries could also provide fruitful insights. Since the study was context-specific (i.e. camping tourism), further research could examine the extraordinary tourist experience in other tourism settings (i.e. farm tourism). Finally, a qualitative investigation of campers' perceptions regarding the way camping services should be designed in order to offer an extraordinary experience could be an interesting study from an experience management perspective.

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