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RESEARCH LETTER



Examining the relationships among nature-based tourists' travel motivations, ecologically responsible attitudes and subjective well-being within the scope of self-determination theory

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to reveal the relationships between nature-based tourists' self-determined travel motivations, ecologically responsible attitudes and subjective well-being within the scope of self-determination theory. Empirical analyses show that there are positive relationships between nature-based tourists' self-determined travel motivations, ecologically responsible attitudes and subjective well-being. The conceptual model was tested using Smart-PLS with 268 valid survey responses. The results of the study showed that there are positive and significant relationships between nature-based tourists' self-determined travel motivation, ecological responsibility attitudes and subjective well-being. Research integrating self-determination theory and nature-based tourism is relatively limited and the results of this study enhance our understanding of the topic.

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KEYWORDS

Nature-based tourism; self-determination theory; self-determined travel motivation; ecologically responsible attitudes; Türkiye

1. Introduction

Nature-based tourism (NBT) is a type of so-called ecologically sustainable tourism that focuses on experiencing natural areas (Lewis & Fok, 2014). There is a growing interest in this type of tourism with the primary goal of protecting and sustaining the environment and natural ecosystems (Dodds, 2007). As the interest in nature-based experiences keeps rising, it becomes increasingly important to comprehend the elements influencing tourists' behaviour and well-being (Apollo et al., 2022). In this context, the current research is grounded in self-determination theory (SDT). This theoretical framework aims to elucidate and explore how a nature-based tourism experience can potentially enhance individuals' intrinsic motivation.

SDT serves as a valuable framework for apprehending individuals' motivations and behaviours in various domains, including tourism (Vansteenkiste et al., 2010). According to SDT, when individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence are satisfied, their motivation becomes more intrinsic and personal (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the context of tourism, SDT provides insights into how tourists evaluate their travel motivations, preferences, and vacation experiences (Mackenzie & Hodge, 2020).

In line with the aim of the research, two main objectives were identified. One is to contribute to the body of knowledge integrating SDT and NBT. The second aim is to explore the relationships between nature-based tourists' self-determined travel motivations (SDTM), ecologically responsible attitudes (ERA) and subjective well-being (SWB) through empirical data based on the SDT framework.

This research contributes to our comprehension of the intrinsic motivations of NBT and their connection to ecological responsibility. In this way, grasping the powerful intrinsic dynamics behind nature visitors' attitudes can provide conscious insights to promote more sustainable and conscious NBT.

In the field of tourism, qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted confirming that SDTM has a significant impact on tourists' SWB (Cini et al., 2013; Sie et al., 2021). Based on the findings of previous studies, it can be hypothesized that nature-based tourists' SDTM can influence SWB. Based on this, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H1: Nature-based tourists' SDTM influences their SWB.

On the other hand, studies have been conducted to reveal the relationship between tourists' ERA and SWB. Ma et al. (2018) found that travel motivations are strongly related to tourists' environmental attitudes and environmentally responsible behaviours. Kil et al. (2014) confirmed the relationships between recreation motivations and environmentally responsible behaviours. In this context, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Nature-based tourists' SWB influence their ERA.

Tourism literature examining the relationship between ERA and SWB has revealed that ERA is very likely to be interrelated and influence SWB (Shen et al., 2022; Su et al., 2018). Based on previous research, the following hypothesis is formulated.

H3: Nature-based tourists' ERA influences their SWB (Figure 1).

2. Methodology

2.1. Research instruments

The data analysis of this study was designed on the basis of a quantitative approach. In this context, a questionnaire consisting of a total of four sections including demographic questions was used in the study. The questionnaire started with demographic questions (e.g. gender, age, etc.) and continued with SDTM, ERA and SWB sections respectively. The following scales adopted in previous studies were used in the current study: twenty-one items for SWB (McCabe & Johnson, 2013), thirteen

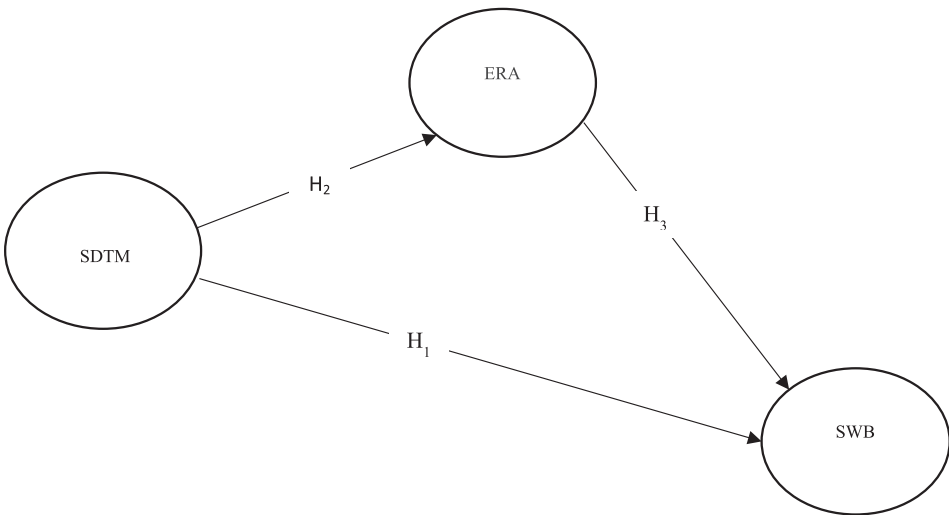


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

items for tourists' SDTM, and eleven items for ERA (Chow et al., 2019). For all 3 scales adopted, a 5-point Likert scale was used (ranging from strongly disagree: 1, to strongly agree: 5).

Prior to the data collection process, the questionnaire was presented to one academican who is an expert in the field of tourism in order to ensure the content validity of the questionnaire. As a result of the feedback from the academican, it was determined that the questionnaire did not need any modification. In addition, a pilot test was conducted with a convenience sample of 30 participants to ensure face validity. This pilot test confirmed that the questionnaire was successfully structured and no modifications were needed. The survey was administered in the Turkish language.

2.2. Sample and data collection

This study's sample comprises tourists who visited Dilek Peninsula in the Kuşadası destination of Aydın province, Turkey, during the period from 01.05.2023 to 25.06.2023, a location that annually attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors (Kuşadası District Governorship, n.d.). While the participants were reached through convenience sampling method, only Turkish participants over the age of 18 were included in the survey. In total, 450 questionnaires were distributed to tourists, yielding 268 (~60%) valid questionnaires (See Table 1 for the results).

3. Results

3.1. Results of reliability and validity

In this study, descriptive statistics were performed with Jamovi. Then, partial least squares (PLS) was used for data analysis using structural equation modelling. Table 2 shows the results of the reliability analysis. To confirm internal consistency for each construct, composite reliability values should be higher than 0.7. Furthermore, convergent validity is confirmed when the average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than 0.5 and Cronbach's alpha coefficient is higher than 0.7. However, when the square root of AVE for each construct is higher than the correlations with other constructs, discriminant validity is confirmed.

Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's ω (omega) coefficients for the scales are above the threshold value of 0.70. In addition, it was determined that all factor loadings were 0.50 and above.

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics.

Gender	Counts (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	140	52.2
Female	128	47.7
Marital Status		
Single	143	53.3
Married	125	46.6
Age		
18–25	30	11.2
26–34	79	29.5
35–42	82	30.6
43–50	58	21.6
51 and above	19	7.1
Education		
High school and below	61	22.8
Associate/undergraduate degree	157	58.6
Graduate	50	18.7
Annual Income		
8500 TL and below	37	13.8
8501–10000	71	26.5
10001–15000	43	16
15001–20000	50	18.6
20001 TL and above	67	25

Table 2. Construct reliability and validity.

Scale	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
SDTM	0.792	0.837	0.832	0.802
SWB	0.823	0.871	0.881	0.858
ERA	0.840	0.853	0.925	0.925

Table 3. Discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion).

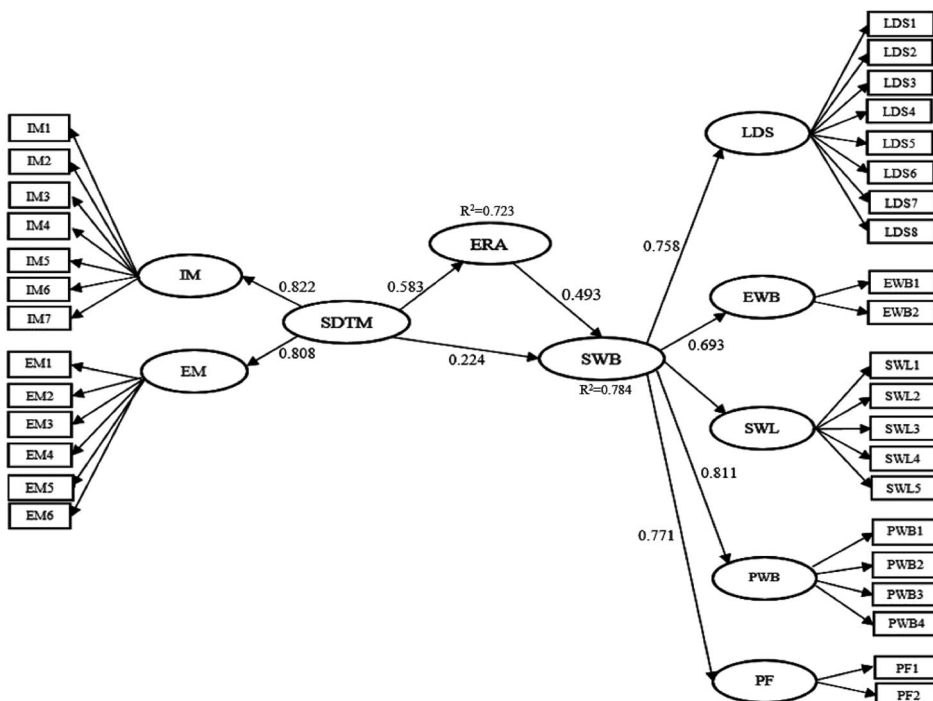
	SDTM	SWB	ERA
SDTM	0.821		
SWB	0.866	0.842	
ERA	0.913	0.763	0.941

Table 4. Results of direct effect.

Relationships	f^2	Direct effect	t-Values	P-values	Supported
SDTM > SWB	0.214	0.583	6.103	0.00	Yes
SDTM > ERA	0.092	0.224	2.277	0.005	Yes
ERA > SWB	0.351	0.493	5.152	0.00	Yes

Bootstrap = 5000

The most conservative approach was adopted by prioritising the Fornell-Larcker criterion among various criteria to assess discriminant validity. The results (Table 3) show the acceptable discriminant validity of the research based on the assessment using the Fornell-Larcker criteria.

**Figure 2.** Results of hypothesis testing.

3.2. Results of hypothesis testing

In this study, PLS (Partial Least Squares) method is used to understand the relationship between variables. The results are presented in Table 4 together with the results of the hypothesis tests (Figure 2).

4. Conclusions

This study focuses on revealing the relationships between SDTM, ERA and SWB in the light of data collected from nature-based tourists visiting Dilek Peninsula. The hypothesized relationships were tested using structural equation modelling (Smart PLS). The analysis revealed a number of meaningful results that make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge. First, empirical evidence confirms positive and significant relationships between tourists' SDTM, ERA, and SWB in the context of NBT. Secondly, this study successfully demonstrates the influence of tourists' SDTM on their ERA. Furthermore, this research uncovers the effect of SDTM on tourists' SWB. Another significant result obtained in the present study is the effect of SDTM on SWB. In conclusion, the study shows that SDT is a substantial instrument in explaining the relationships between nature-based tourists' SDTM, ERA, and SWB. SDT suggests that tourists act with intrinsic motivations when they fulfil their basic psychological needs. This increases the tendency of nature-based tourists to exhibit environmentally sensitive attitudes.

When the literature is examined, it is possible to find NBT studies based on SDT (Chow et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2018), but to the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the few studies that examines nature-based tourists' SWB along with SDTM and ERA in the context of SDT and provides empirical evidence supporting the idea that they are interrelated. However, the study also has some limitations. For example, the study was designed only for domestic visitors. Moreover, only three variables were examined within the scope of SDT and the future behaviour of tourists was not examined in this study. More empirical studies are needed in different destinations, at different times of the year and with different variables.

This research is considered to be unique in two ways. First, it aims to provide a different perspective to the NBT literature and to examine the relationships between the constructs used in the research. In addition, the literature on the use of SDT with NBT is limited and the literature on this topic should be expanded. In this context, this study is considered to contribute to the existing literature.

Disclosure statement

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

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