

Exploring the role of quality tourism experiences as a driver of quality of life through personal lifestyle

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Abstract

Tourism experiences have been recognized for their transformative potential and contributing to improving tourists' quality of life. Despite this, little is known about the factors that trigger these impacts. This study examines the link between service quality, experiential quality and lifestyle and the influence these have on tourists' quality of life. Using the Partial Least Square (PLS) technique, data from 367 tourists who participated in cultural and nature-based tourism experiences were analyzed. Results revealed that service quality and experiential quality favor the improvement of tourists' quality of life, and this impact is mediated by the influence of lifestyle.

Keywords: service quality, experiential quality, tourists' quality of life, lifestyle, transformative experiences

1. Introduction

Research on quality in tourism has generally been associated with service quality (Lai et al., 2018). However, the rise of the experience economy has generated a growing interest in tourism experience quality (Pearce & Dowling, 2019). Each type of economic offer requires a different

way of assessing its quality. The methods that proved suitable for assessing the quality of services now have limitations in covering the characteristics of experiential offerings (Cai & Alaedini, 2018). The literature points out that experience combines functional and emotional elements (Sorensen & Jensen, 2015) that are important in its formation and influence the evaluation of its quality.

Service quality and experiential quality are central concepts to examine the quality of the tourism experience. Service quality assesses the functional component (Soler & Gemar, 2019), and experiential quality examines the affective (Jin et al., 2015). Otto and Ritchie (1996) state that service quality and experiential quality are complementary measures to assess the quality of the tourism experience. However, both concepts have been mostly examined independently, with limited studies that analyzed both as a formula to obtain an overall overview of the quality of the tourist experience, and as a novel approach to find comparative effects of both measures on outcome variables (e.g., Cole et al., 2002; Cole & Illum, 2006; Cole & Scott, 2004; Habibi & Rasoolimanesh, 2020). This implies a lack of a holistic view of tourists' perceptions of the quality of their tourism experiences and the underlying outcomes.

A large body of research considers service quality and experiential quality key factors in increasing tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions (e.g., Chen & Chen, 2010; Domínguez-Quintero et al., 2019; Jin et al., 2015; Sharma & Nayak, 2019). However, Dagger and Sweeney (2006) state that there is a need to examine quality of life as possibly one of the most relevant outcomes of the consumption process. Several studies have recognized the importance of tourism in increasing tourists' quality of life (e.g., He et al., 2020; Hernández-Mogollón et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2015a, 2015b). Despite this, few studies attempted to integrate quality of life as a consequence of tourism experience (Su et al., 2016). Because of this, there is still little information on how service quality and experiential quality contribute to increasing tourists' quality of life.

Tourism experiences have also been recognized for promoting lifestyle changes (Reisinger, 2013). However, several studies confirmed that individuals had modified their lifestyle after participating in tourism experiences (e.g., Dillette et al., 2019; Fu et al., 2015; Hunt & Harbor, 2019; Kirillova et al., 2017a), information on the factors that trigger these changes remains scarce. This points to the need for a greater understanding of the circumstances that lead to personal transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017b; Magrizos et al., 2021) and how service quality and experiential quality influence tourists' willingness to modify their lifestyle. Tourism literature has not sufficiently examined how changes in tourists' lifestyles improve their quality of life (Yang et al., 2012).

Against this background and the gaps in the literature, this study is framed in the experiential context of tourism. It proposes to determine how providing quality tourism experiences improves tourists' quality of life through stimulating lifestyle changes. This study examines the link between service quality, experiential quality and lifestyle and their influence on quality of life. This work applies to cultural and nature-based tourism. While several studies examined the tourism experience in these contexts, more empirical research is still needed to understand the complexity of the experiences offered by these forms of tourism (Wei et al., 2020) and, above all, the benefits they have on the personal sphere of tourists. This work aims to better understand the mechanism by which tourism experiences contribute to increasing the quality of life of tourists.

2. Conceptual antecedents

This research is framed within the precepts of the experience economy. In the tourism sector, the experience is at the heart of the customer journey (Schlesinger et al., 2020). The tourism experience refers to a personal travel-related event that results from the interaction between internal and

external factors. External or functional factors comprise elements offered by the experience provider. Internal or emotional factors represent the tourists' subjective responses (Sorensen & Jensen, 2015). Due to the presence of both factors in the experience, this study aims to assess the quality of the tourist experience involving both elements. Alnawas and Hemsley-Brown (2019) state that by integrating both aspects, a broader assessment of the quality of the tourism experience could be obtained. Functional factors will be measured through service quality, and emotional factors will be evaluated through experiential quality. Subsequently, lifestyle and quality of life are introduced as subjective outcomes of this holistic evaluation of the quality of the tourist experience.

As theoretical bases, the Transformative Service Research (TSR) and the Bottom-up Spillover Theory were employed to study consumer-oriented outcomes regarding lifestyle and quality of life. Anderson et al. (2013) state that TSR examines the role of services in promoting positive changes and improvements in well-being. Regarding the Bottom-up Spillover Theory, it has been widely applied in tourism to study the concept of quality of life. From this approach, quality of life is determined by how satisfied individuals feel with different life domains, such as family, work, health, and leisure (Sirgy, 2019). Hence, the more satisfied an individual is with various life realms, the higher their quality of life will be. Finally, the Cognitive Appraisal Theory (CAT) was employed to assess the influence of affective responses on consumer behavior (Choi & Choi, 2019). The conjunction of these conceptual frameworks is expected to explain how the design of quality experiences should aim to contribute with benefits that transcend functionality and have a deeper meaning in consumer's life.

2.1. Service quality (SEQ)

SEQ assesses consumers' perceptions of the service received (Soler & Gemar, 2019) and generally involves functional aspects of consumption (Chen & Chen, 2010). For example, the appearance of the physical environment, the willingness of employees to provide the service, the ability to perform the promised service, or the competence to provide individualized attention (Parasuraman et al., 1985). These factors are essential in shaping the consumer experience (Walls, 2013), improving the quality of life of individuals (Dagger & Sweeney, 2006) and promoting changes in their lifestyle (Fu et al., 2015). Although the elements of the service initially have a functional nature, in this new experiential and transforming context of tourism their symbolic value seems to take greater importance since they have become a source of external stimuli capable to induce individuals to rethink their current lifestyle and increase their quality of life. Magee and Gilmore (2015) state that those elements trigger internal cognitive, emotional or physiological responses capable of influencing consumer behavior.

2.2. Experiential quality (EXQ)

EXQ represents the affective component of the experience (Otto & Ritchie, 1996) and determines tourists' affective reactions (Jin et al., 2015). To determine EXQ, multiple dimensions have been employed in tourism literature to capture tourists' subjective perceptions. The most used dimensions are escapism, participation, fun, learning, peace of mind and relaxation (Suhartanto et al., 2020). These factors lead tourists to view their experiences as valuable and to develop a positive attitude towards a destination (Chen & Chen, 2010; Moon & Han, 2019). Affective aspects of the tourist experience could also represent an essential means of promoting changes in the individuals' lifestyle (Kirillova et al., 2017b), given that emotional stimuli can lead the individual to develop a more flexible and open mindset to explore new configurations and meanings that lead to restructuring beliefs and behaviours (Gaggioli, 2016).

2.3. Lifestyle (LFS)

Tourism literature has recently emphasized the potential of tourism experiences to promote personal transformation (Teoh et al., 2021). Clark (1991) determined three types of transformation: 1) psychological, a person changes their understanding of themselves; 2) convictional, a person modifies his belief system; and 3) behavioral, a person makes changes to their lifestyle. Similarly, Pala and Cetin (2022) identified three types of personal transformation: behavioral, attitudinal and personality changes. Considering these preceding classifications of personal transformation, this study focuses on behavioral transformation by analyzing lifestyle. Pung et al. (2020) argue that tourism experiences provide stimuli that lead tourists to modify their lifestyle. Several studies determined how a person changes their lifestyle after participating in a tourist experience. For example, Pomfret and Varley (2019), in adventure tourism, demonstrated that people improved their lifestyle by developing healthy habits in terms of "starting to eat healthier and drink more water" (p. 8). Hunt and Harbor (2019) found that tourists modified their lifestyle by incorporating environmentally responsible consumption habits, such as "avoid buying things made of plastic" (p. 5), "be more aware of the use of water" (p. 7) or "plan the way of consuming things" (p. 6). As these studies evidence, lifestyle changes involve the modification of a person's attitudes, behaviors and interests (Fu et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2012). Little (2012) states that these modifications can have a lasting effect that improves individuals' quality of life.

2.4. Quality of life (QOL)

QOL captures individuals' perceptions of how they feel about certain aspects of their lives (Su et al., 2018). This includes feelings of happiness, subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Kim et al., 2015a, 2015b). The contribution of tourist experiences to improving tourists' quality of life has

been evidenced in several studies. For example, Sthapit and Coudounaris (2017) verified that tourist experiences that offer enjoyment have a positive impact on people's quality of life. Hwang and Lee (2019), based on the Pine and Gilmore (1998) model, found that experiences framed within educational, entertainment, aesthetic and escapist categories positively affect the quality of life. Di-Clemente et al. (2019), within the gastronomic context, confirmed that memorable experiences contribute to improving people's quality of life. According to these findings, the positive effect of tourist experiences in improving tourists' quality of life is evident. Hence, destination management agencies must ensure the delivery of quality tourism experiences to provide visitors with the desired benefits (He et al., 2020; Su et al., 2016, 2018).

3. Theoretical model

TSR established that services are capable of driving positive changes in customers and increasing their well-being (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). Given that SEQ indicates the level of performance of services (Parasuraman et al., 1985), this study proposes that SEQ could impact the LFS and QOL of tourists. Regarding the relationship between SEQ and LFS, the TSR establishes that service providers enable the emergence of transformative effects on people (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). In tourism literature, qualitative studies analyzed the factors that drive the realization of changes in the personal sphere. Little (2012) notes that the extent of personal transformation depends on the characteristics of services and tourists' interaction with the environment. Based on the TSR, Magee and Gilmore (2015) found that, in dark tourism experiences, the servicescape elements facilitate the process of personal transformation. Fu et al. (2015) confirm that SEQ stimulates the realization of personal change. Neuhofer et al. (2020) found that creating the right environment and atmosphere facilitates personal transformation. Teoh et al. (2021) established that service

providers facilitate consumer transformation. According to these studies, the attributes of the service encourage the realization of personal change.

Referring to the impact of SEQ on QOL, the TSR identified a relationship between service consumption and customers' well-being (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). In this regard, research has considered SEQ as a factor conducive to personal well-being. Dagger and Sweeney (2006) found that SEQ evaluations directly affect QOL perceptions. De Keyser and Lariviere (2014), by adopting the TSR framework, confirmed that service quality -technical and functional- directly influence consumer happiness. In tourism literature, studies have also evaluated the relationship between SEQ and subjective well-being. However, the findings show that the impact is indirect and influenced by other variables (He et al., 2020; Su et al., 2015, 2016). Within the TSR framework, Anderson et al. (2013) state that an individual's well-being can be affected by how an employee provides a service, the design of an offering, or the service process. Thus, it could be assumed that SEQ affects the QOL of individuals.

Based on the above considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1a_SEQ has a direct positive effect on LFS.

H1b_SEQ has a direct positive effect on QOL.

This study also proposes that EXQ could be related to LFS and QOL. This is in line with the CAT assumptions that establish that personal events are capable of eliciting subjective responses that could influence behavioral outcomes (Choi & Choi, 2019). Thus, it could be inferred that, as EXQ address tourists' subjective response toward an experience, it can be seen as a potential factor influencing LFS and QOL as behavioral outcomes. Regarding the influence of EXQ on LFS, few studies addressed this issue. Ardoin et al. (2015) state that when experiences promote direct contact with nature and convey conservation messages, visitors could adopt an environmentally

responsible lifestyle. Hunt and Harbor (2019) found that immersion in local culture and environment influences tourists' decisions to modify their lifestyle. Kirillova et al. (2017b) argue that encounters with nature and contact with novel cultural environments prompt tourists to make personal changes. These studies highlight the importance of the affective component of the tourism experience in promoting lifestyle changes.

Concerning the influence of EXQ on QOL, few studies have explored the effect of the affective component of the experience on the QOL of tourists. For example, Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2020) confirmed the link between EXQ and QOL. Hwang and Lee (2019) found that feelings of enjoyment and learning contribute to improving people's well-being, and Dekhili and Hallem (2020) determined that tourists' involvement in their experiences contributes to improving their quality of life. According to these studies, affective responses influence tourists' quality of life.

Based on the above considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H2a_EXQ has a direct positive effect on LFS.

H2b_EXQ has a direct positive effect on QOL.

Dekhili and Hallem (2020), Dillette et al. (2019) and Fu et al. (2015) state the need to examine QOL as an effect of the behavioral changes people experience. Following the Bottom-up Spillover theory, it can be inferred that LFS is a potential precursor of QOL. This is because, across each life domain, several attitudes and behaviors can be identified, the same ones that reflect an individual's lifestyle (Lawson & Todd, 2002). Therefore, to the extent that people are satisfied with certain aspects of their lives, they are also satisfied with their lifestyle and tend to have a better quality of life. Similarly, Yang et al. (2012) found that people who improve their LFS are also likely to improve their QOL. Little (2012) argues that a tourism experience that has a lasting effect

on the LFS of the participants will also impact their QOL. According to these considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3_LFS has a direct positive effect on QOL.

Considering the effect of SEQ and EXQ on LFS and their impact on QOL, this study proposes to determine how lifestyle can function as a nexus to strengthen the influence of service quality and experiential quality on tourists' quality of life. The TSR establishes that the desire of individuals to improve their quality of life must be accompanied by a modification of their behavioral and thinking patterns (Finsterwalder et al., 2017). Wolf et al. (2017) and Pope (2018) also provide conceptual support for this relationship as they developed a conceptual framework that states that tourists' interaction with a set of elements that make up the tourism experience results in the process of personal transformation that leads to improved quality of life. This suggests that tourism experiences improve tourists' quality of life through a process involving factors such as personal transformation. In this way, lifestyle changes can be seen as a means by which tourism experiences foster a better quality of life for individuals, as Gierszewska and Seretny (2019) point out when they state that quality of life implies the need to incorporate new values and lifestyles. Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H4_LFS mediates the relationship between SEQ and QOL.

H5_LFS mediates the relationship between EXQ and QOL.

Figure 1 presents the proposed theoretical model.

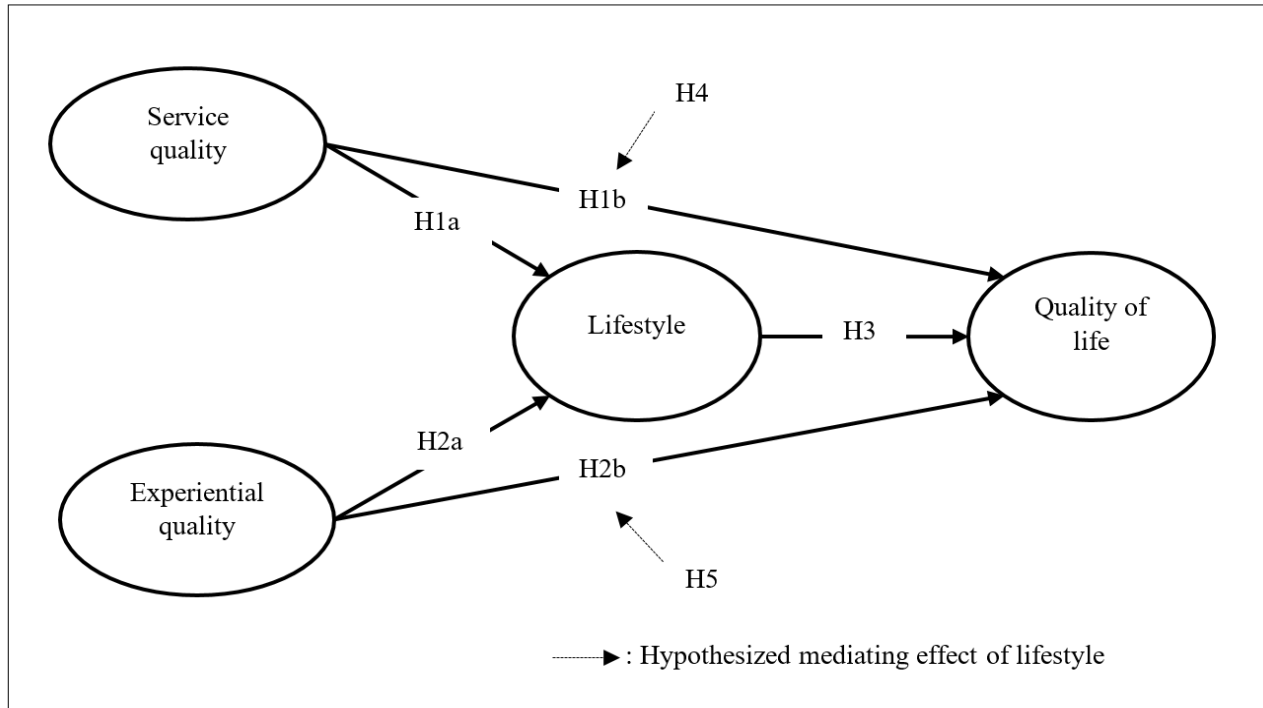


Figure 1. Theoretical model

4. Methodology

This study adopts an exploratory approach. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. To prevent common method variance (CMV), the order of measurement of the dependent and independent variables was modified (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The questionnaire was prepared in English, French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. Before the survey was launched, a pre-test was conducted to assess content validity. The pre-test was performed with 17 academics and researchers. A pilot test with nine people of different ages and nationalities was also carried out to verify the proper functioning of the survey.

To measure the variables, scales tested in previous research were adapted to the context of this study, considering aspects that, according to the literature, best reflect the intentionality of each variable. For SEQ, the Habibi and Rasoolimanesh (2020) scale was adapted. EXQ was measured with seven indicators adapted from Domínguez-Quintero et al. (2019). For LFS, the scale of Yang

et al. (2018) was adapted, and QOL was measured with a scale adapted from Kim et al. (2015b). Variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale following the recommendations of Chen et al. (2015).

An online survey was used for data collection as it facilitates collecting data at an international level and contacting more participants. Besides, as the empirical work has coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, the possibility of conducting face-to-face surveys has been reduced due to mobility restrictions and social distancing rules. Therefore, an online survey was the most appropriate way of collecting data (Dodds & Hess, 2021).

A non-probability convenience sampling was used. The sample comprises tourists who participated in cultural and nature-based tourism experiences offered internationally. A large number of visitors travel the world attracted by cultural and natural resources. Therefore, cultural and nature-based tourism constitute important market segments in the tourism industry (Fossgard & Fredman, 2019; Richards, 2020). Both types of tourism represent the starting point towards the emergence of other specific market niches (e.g., culinary tourism, adventure tourism, creative tourism). However, this study focuses on cultural and nature-based tourism in general to emphasize that the process of experiencing culture and nature could have a deeper meaning beyond the act of visiting, seeing or doing something.

The experiences were selected considering the characteristics of each type of tourism. Cultural tourism experiences include activities that allow visitors to interact with the local culture, like visiting a museum or a historical monument, participating in local activities or a traditional cooking class. Nature-based tourism experiences include activities in natural areas, such as excursions to national parks, cycling, water activities, nature photography, sport fishing, hiking, and wildlife watching (Fossgard & Fredman, 2019). It was also established that to be identified as

tourism experiences, these had to include elements of one of the dimensions of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) model.

Data were collected from February to May 2021. Participants were contacted through the Facebook page of the companies offering the experiences selected above. The tourism experience companies also collaborated by disseminating the survey among their customers via email and social networks. Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from participants. The required sample size was calculated with a statistical power analysis in G*Power 3.1.9.7 software (Faul et al., 2007; Hair et al., 2019). Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2=0.15$), a significance level of 0.05, a statistical power of 0.80 and three predictors (Cohen, 1988; Faul et al., 2007), the results showed that a minimum of 77 observations are needed. Since the final sample consists of 367 valid responses, this sample size is acceptable for this study.

Descriptive analysis was performed using IBM SPSS 26.0.0 software. The Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was used to test the model. It is suitable for exploratory studies, works well with small sample sizes, is not demanding in terms of data distribution, and shows higher statistical power in estimating causal relationships (Hair et al., 2019). SmartPLS v.3.2.9. software was used to work with PLS-SEM. Before performing the statistical analysis, the homogeneity of the sample was checked, given that the data corresponds to a cultural and nature-based sample. Based on the t-test results for independent samples, the two data sets were treated as a single sample.

To check the presence of CMV, Harman's single factor test was performed using an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) without rotation of all constructs with their indicators (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Results of the EFA detected four factors explaining 63.31% of the total variance. The first factor accounts for 38.14% of the variance of these four factors. This indicates that CMV is

not present in the data since the percentage of the total variance explained by the first factor is less than 50% (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The statistical power of the final sample was also assessed (Peng & Lai, 2012). Assuming a medium effect size ($f^2=0.150$), a significance level of 0.05 and using three predictors (Faul et al., 2007), the results showed that the sample size ($n=367$) reaches a statistical power of 0.99. Therefore, the statistical power of the final sample exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.80 (Cohen, 1988) and is adequate to estimate the proposed model and detect effects of interest.

According to the analysis of the sample profile, most participants are female (71.8%), aged between 26 and 45 (51.6%), reside in Mexico (20.0%), Spain (14.3%) and Chile (11.5%), and completed university studies (76.9%). The period of participation in the tourist experience corresponds mostly to 2019 (37.6%), followed by 2018 (19.3%) and 2017 (15.0%).

5. Results

5.1. Model assessment

The analysis with the PLS-SEM technique has been performed following the two-step process suggested by Hair et al. (2019): 1) evaluation of the measurement model and 2) evaluation of the structural model.

5.1.1. Measurement model

The constructs were measured reflectively following the guidelines of Hair et al. (2019). The analysis includes checking individual indicator reliability, internal consistency, and convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019). The results showed that external loadings of the indicators have values between 0.576 and 0.930. The average variance extracted (AVE) values are between

0.465 and 0.791, with EXQ being the lowest and less than 0.50. Hair et al. (2019) suggested that items can be removed only if this improves the composite reliability or the AVE values. To achieve optimal results in the measurement model of EXQ construct, the EXQ4 indicator was removed as it had the lowest factor loading ($\lambda=0.604$) of all items. This allowed the AVE values to increase above the reference value. After removing this indicator, the measurement model was re-evaluated.

Table 1 shows that all loadings (λ) values exceed the recommended thresholds of 0.60 and 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), except for the QOL1 item. However, this indicator was retained as this does not affect the other validity and reliability indices (Hair et al., 2019). The AVE values are above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2011), and those of Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability (ρ_c) and Dijkstra-Henseler rho (ρ_A) also exceed the threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). According to these results, the measurement model presents adequate levels of individual reliability, internal consistency and convergent validity.

Table 1. Assessment of the measurement model

Construct/Items	Loadings (λ)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Dijkstra-Henseler's Rho (ρ_A)	Composite Reliability (ρ_c)	AVE
Service quality		0.823	0.844	0.870	0.530
SEQ1_The service provider delivered the promised experience.	0.724				
SEQ2_The service provider was able to respond to possible problems.	0.818				
SEQ3_The service provider offered personalized experiences.	0.747				
SEQ4_The staff were available to help during the experience.	0.776				
SEQ5_The experience's physical environment was pleasant.	0.619				
SEQ6_The experience's site was easily accessible.	0.666				
Experiential quality		0.802	0.801	0.859	0.504
<i>In that experience...</i>					
EXQ1_I had fun.	0.692				
EXQ2_I felt at ease.	0.761				
EXQ3_I felt relaxed.	0.772				
EXQ5_I actively participated.	0.635				

EXQ6_I escaped from the routine by doing something new.	0.671				
EXQ7_I felt safe.	0.720				
Lifestyle		0.866	0.868	0.919	0.791
LFS1_That experience helped me to develop good habits in my life.	0.914				
LFS2_That experience helped me to improve my lifestyle.	0.930				
LFS3_Whenever there is a chance, I participate in experiences that contribute to improving my lifestyle.	0.820				
Quality of life		0.900	0.918	0.925	0.675
QOL1_I felt happy after that experience.	0.576				
QOL2_I felt more satisfied with life in general after that experience.	0.858				
QOL3_That experience helped me to achieve the goals I have in life.	0.840				
QOL4_I felt good with my life after that experience.	0.841				
QOL5_That experience has improved my quality of life.	0.894				
QOL6_After that experience, I felt that I led a meaningful and fulfilling life.	0.880				

Note: SEQ=Service quality; EXQ=Experiential quality; LFS=Lifestyle; QOL=Quality of life

Table 2 indicates that values of the square root of the AVE of all constructs are higher than their correlation with the rest of the latent variables in the model, fulfilling the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Hair et al., 2011). Table 3 shows that HTMT values are below the more conservative threshold of 0.85 (Hair et al., 2019). These findings confirm the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 2. Discriminant validity assessment (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

Constructs	Quality of life	Experiential quality	Service quality	Lifestyle
Quality of life	0.822			
Experiential quality	0.451	0.710		
Service quality	0.451	0.671	0.728	
Lifestyle	0.734	0.401	0.393	0.890

Table 3. Discriminant validity assessment (HTMT_{0,85})

Constructs	Quality of life	Experiential quality	Service quality	Lifestyle
Quality of life				
Experiential quality	0.551			
Service quality	0.523	0.845		
Lifestyle	0.814	0.478	0.453	

Since the measurement model meets all reliability and validity criteria, the structural model is assessed.

5.1.2. Structural model

For structural model evaluation, the variance inflation factor (VIF), the coefficient of determination (R^2), the effect size (f^2), the Stone-Geisser indicator (Q^2) and the statistical significance of path coefficients were analyzed (Hair et al., 2019). Results of the analysis of the VIF values in Table 4 indicate that collinearity is not a problem, as all values are below the threshold of 3.3 (Hair et al., 2014).

Table 4. Structural model VIF values

Constructs	Quality of life	Experiential quality	Service quality	Lifestyle
Quality of life				
Experiential quality	1.894			1.818
Service quality	1.881			1.818
Lifestyle	1.233			

Table 5 shows an R^2 value for QOL of 0.577, indicating that the model has moderate explanatory power (Hair et al., 2011). According to the effect size thresholds established by Cohen (1988), LFS has a significant impact on QOL ($f^2 > 0.35$), while the influence of SEQ and EXQ on LFS and QOL is relatively small ($f^2 < 0.02$). The results also demonstrate an adequate predictive

relevance of the model, as the Q^2 values of the endogenous constructs are greater than zero (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 5. Effects on endogenous variables

Construct/Hypotheses	R²	f²	Q²	Path (β)	Correlation	Explained variance (%)
QOL	0.577		0.381			57.7%
SEQ→QOL		0.019		0.124	0.451	5.6%
EXQ→QOL		0.016		0.112	0.451	5.1%
LFS→QOL		0.788		0.641	0.734	47.0%
LFS	0.189		0.142			18.9%
EXQ→LFS		0.042		0.249	0.401	9.9%
SEQ→LFS		0.035		0.226	0.393	8.9%

Note: SEQ=Service quality; EXQ=Experiential quality; LFS=Lifestyle; QOL=Quality of life

Table 6 and Figure 2 present the path coefficient estimation and hypothesis testing results. By running the bootstrapping with 5000 samples (Hair et al., 2019), the path coefficients were significant, and therefore, all proposed hypotheses are empirically supported.

Table 6. Structural model assessment (Direct effects)

Hypotheses	Direct effect (β)	T-test (bootstrap)	Confidence interval 95%	Supported
H1a_SEQ→LFS	0.226***	3.405	(0.121-0.344)	Yes
H1b_SEQ→QOL	0.124**	2.556	(0.048-0.208)	Yes
H2a_EXQ→LFS	0.249***	3.957	(0.147-0.354)	Yes
H2b_EXQ→QOL	0.112*	2.077	(0.024-0.199)	Yes
H3_LFS→QOL	0.641***	16.661	(0.578-0.705)	Yes

* p<0,05; ** p<0,01; *** p<0,001; based on t (4999), one-tailed test (Hair et al., 2019).

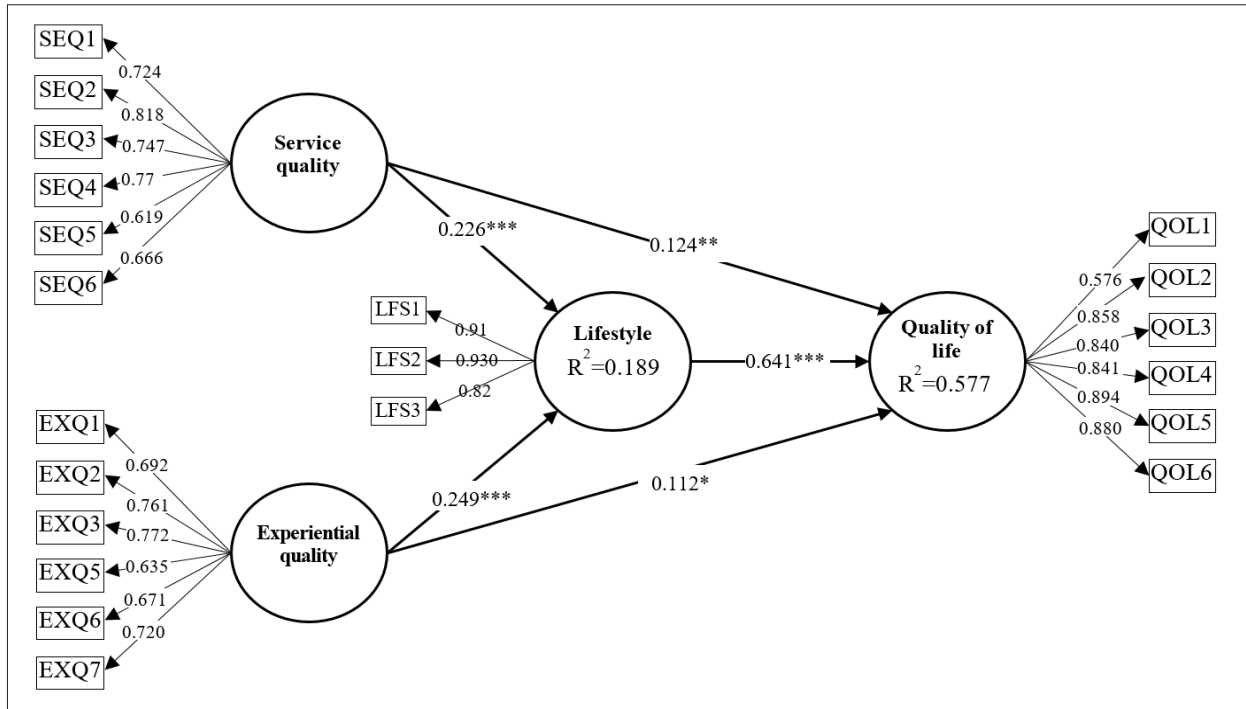


Figure 2. Model assessment

To verify the mediating effect of LFS, we first determined the significance of indirect effects by bootstrapping with 5000 samples (Hair et al., 2019). Table 7 reveals that the indirect effects of SEQ→LFS→QOL ($\beta=0.145$; $p<0.001$) and EXQ→LFS→QOL ($\beta=0.160$; $p<0.001$) are significant. Therefore, hypotheses H4 and H5 are empirically supported.

Table 7. Mediating effects assessment

Hypotheses	Indirect effect (β)	T-test (bootstrap)	Confidence interval 95%	Supported
H4_SEQ→LFS→QOL	0.145***	3.310	(0.077-0.222)	Yes
H5_EXQ→LFS→QOL	0.160***	3.687	(0.092-0.234)	Yes

* $p<0,05$; ** $p<0,01$; *** $p<0,001$; based on t (4999), one-tailed test (Hair et al., 2019).

The magnitude of the mediating effect was verified through Variance Accounted For (VAF). Table 8 shows that 53.90% of the total effect of SEQ on QOL and 59.04% of the total effect of EXQ on QOL are explained through LFS. Both indirect effects have a VAF greater than 20% and less than 80%. This indicates that LFS exerts a partial mediating effect.

Table 8. VAF of the indirect effects

Hypotheses	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	VAF	Mediation
H4_SEQ→LFS→QOL	0.124**	0.145***	0.269***	53.90%	Partial
H5_EXQ→LFS→QOL	0.112*	0.160***	0.271***	59.04%	Partial

Note: *Bootstrapping* based on 5000 samples (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

* $p < 0,05$; ** $p < 0,01$; *** $p < 0,001$; based on $t(4999)$, one-tailed test (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

6. Discussion

The results show that SEQ directly affects LFS ($\beta=0.226$; $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H1a. Similar results were obtained by Fu *et al.* (2015), indicating that service quality stimulates and facilitates the incorporation of personal changes. The results also confirm that SEQ influences QOL ($\beta=0.124$; $p < 0.01$), supporting hypothesis H1b. These results differ from those obtained by Su *et al.* (2015), who found that SEQ has no direct effect on QOL. The effect of SEQ on LFS and QOL would indicate that the way the experience is delivered to consumers influences their decision to incorporate lifestyle changes and contributes to increasing their quality of life. This could be attributed to the fact that elements of service delivery elicit internal cognitive, emotional or physiological responses that influence consumer behavior (Magee & Gilmore, 2015).

Results also reveal that EXQ influences LFS ($\beta=0.249$; $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H2a. This is consistent with previous studies indicating that the affective component of the experience influences tourists' decision to modify aspects of their lives (Dillette *et al.*, 2019; Hunt & Harbor, 2019; Kirillova *et al.*, 2017b). This may be attributed to the activation of affective responses leading individuals to reflect on the life they wish to have and the changes they can make to achieve it (Yu *et al.*, 2021). Literature suggests that when individuals receive and process information successfully, their attitudes and subsequent behavior could be altered (Crano & Prislin, 2006; Yang *et al.*, 2018). In experiential tourism contexts, this would imply that providing quality tourism experiences could provide proper stimuli for triggering episodes that lead tourists to

integrate significant changes in their lifestyles. The results of the positive effect of SEQ and EXQ on LFS also demonstrate that tourism experiences can derive in changes in the attitudes and behavior of tourists, as stated by Pala and Cetin (2022). The impact of EXQ on QOL has also been confirmed ($\beta=0.112$; $p<0.05$), supporting hypothesis H2b. This suggests that people use their affective states as information to make various judgments, including evaluating their quality of life (Kim et al., 2015a). The findings are consistent with Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2020), who demonstrated that EXQ influences QOL in the context of culinary tourism.

Consistent with the results of Yang et al. (2012), this study showed that LFS is a significant predictor of QOL ($\beta=0.641$; $p<0.001$), supporting hypothesis H3. Although SEQ and EXQ also determine QOL, the impact of LFS is superior, as it explains 47.0% of the variance of QOL, while SEQ explains 5.6% and EXQ 5.1%. This is also reflected in the effect size of LFS on QOL ($f^2>0.35$). These results highlight the important role of lifestyle in improving tourists' quality of life. This is pointed out by Reisinger (2013), who argues that personal transformation is the basis of individual well-being. According to this statement, lifestyle changes experienced by tourists can be an important pillar for increasing their quality of life.

The results confirm that LFS partially mediates the relationship between SEQ→QOL (EI=0.145; VAF=53.90%) and EXQ→QOL (EI=0.160; VAF=59.04%), supporting hypotheses H4 and H5. This indicates that LFS explains part of the effect of SEQ and EXQ on QOL. Previous research obtained similar results by determining that service quality influences tourists' well-being indirectly. However, these studies analyzed satisfaction, positive emotions and customer-company identification as mediating variables (He et al., 2020; Su et al., 2015, 2016). Thus, the results highlight LFS as a novel mediating variable that could be incorporated into future studies to examine the relationship between the quality of the tourism experience and individuals' quality of life. When comparing direct and indirect effects, the latter is higher, indicating that the impact of

SEQ and EXQ on QOL is more substantial when LFS intervenes. This would show that LFS constitutes an important nexus to maximize the impact of SEQ and EXQ on QOL and a key variable to understand and explain changes in tourism consumers' subjective sphere.

7. Conclusions

Due to the increasing attention that the tourism experience is receiving as a means to achieve personal transformation and a better quality of life, this study proposes service quality and experiential quality as factors associated with the tourism experience that, by stimulating tourists' decision to modify their lifestyle, promote an increase in their quality of life. The main contribution of this study lies in achieving a better understanding of the conditions under which tourism experiences contribute to better outcomes for the personal sphere of tourists.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to tourism literature by simultaneously examining SEQ and EXQ. The results demonstrated the complementarity of both measures to obtain a holistic assessment of the quality of the tourism experience and to determine their contribution towards outcomes different to those traditionally addressed as satisfaction and behavioral intentions. By simultaneously comparing the influence of both measures, the results highlight that, despite the prevalence of the affective component, the role played by functional elements remains relevant and, therefore, they must go hand in hand with the emotional ones. As Cetin (2020) points out, there is a need to provide certain service quality standards to offer unique positive experiences.

The incorporation of LFS and QOL as consequences of tourism consumption is an important contribution due to the few studies that explored the impact of SEQ and EXQ on outcomes associated with the personal sphere of tourists (He et al., 2020; Hernández-Mogollón et

al., 2020; Su et al., 2015, 2016, 2018). This allows us to expand knowledge on outcomes that reflect individuals' benefit-seeking orientation with a more lasting impact on their lives. By uncovering the important role that LFS plays in improving QOL, this study contributes to the advancement of the literature on quality of life and transformational tourism by providing a starting point for future research that aims to achieve a better understanding of the transformational facet of the tourism experience and the benefits perceived by individuals.

Another contribution lies in assessing and measuring lifestyle as a specific type of transformation. This supports the findings of previous studies that identified lifestyle changes as a transformational outcome of tourism experiences (Zhao & Agyeiwaah, 2023). However, this study goes a step further and provides a quantitative evaluation determining through causal relationships its possible antecedents and results. This may constitute a starting point for future studies to consider lifestyle not only as a segmentation variable of marketing but also as a potential outcome of the tourism consumption process that can have a lasting impact on people's lives.

This study also contributes to the literature by extending the application of the TSR framework to the field of tourism and adopting an experiential approach. This responds to the call of previous studies that ask to extend TSR to other areas and contribute with novel findings (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015). Therefore, this study demonstrates the applicability of TSR in tourism settings and shows how experiential consumption of services could be designed to promote positive changes and improve individuals' quality of life. Finally, this research offers a methodological contribution by examining the transformational effects of tourism from a quantitative perspective. Zhao and Agyeiwaah (2023) found that qualitative methodologies prevail in tourism transformation research, while the number of quantitative studies remains small. Hence, this study responds to the need to employ quantitative methods to broaden the empirical evidence and the existing conclusions.

From a practical perspective, SEQ and EXQ are drivers of changes in LFS and improvements in QOL. This demonstrates that as consumer needs have evolved towards experientiality, the expected benefits have also progressed in the same vein. Therefore, for quality assessments, while traditional standards were focused on meeting standards that mostly fulfil utilitarian needs, today, these standards must be aimed not only at meeting the experiential needs of tourists but also at providing subjective benefits that transcend functionality and that have a lasting impact on people's lives. Thus, companies and destination marketers are challenged to start thinking about customers' subjective benefits to create added value, develop attractive tourism products and destinations, and enhance the success of businesses.

Considering the results obtained, practitioners should provide high-quality tourism experiences to ensure the consecution of experiential benefits for tourists. This can be achieved by configuring a pleasant physical environment and encouraging the active participation of individuals. These factors facilitate reflective processes that trigger personal transformation (Kirillova et al., 2017a; Teoh et al., 2021). For example, in an artisanal experience, visitors could make their handicrafts or in a culinary experience, they can harvest the products with which they would make a typical dish. Companies should also promote an environment for learning by, for example, including interpretive activities or educational elements that convey to tourists the symbolic value and importance of the sites they visit or the activities they engage in. Communication techniques, such as storytelling, should accompany these activities or elements to share information in an attractive and dynamic way that arouses emotions.

Given that LFS strengthens the effect of SEQ and EXQ on QOL, tourism businesses should promote experiences that motivate tourists to change their lifestyles. To do so, activities should convey positive energy and inspirational messages (Fu et al., 2015) and enable the acquisition of skills and knowledge that tourists can implement in their lifestyles. For example, a nature-based

experience could include environmental awareness workshops encouraging people to adopt environmentally responsible practices (e.g., solid waste recycling, rational water use, purchase of ecological products or waste reduction). Companies should also design communication strategies that allow customers to learn more about the experience they will have and the benefits it can bring to their lifestyle and quality of life. According to Pala and Cetin (2022), when individuals, companies, and destination managers have a better comprehension of the transformative effects of the tourism experience, there could be better results in promoting and positioning the product from a more transformative approach.

From a marketing perspective, it is important to better understand the behavior of today's consumers. In this regard, it is important to note that the results about lifestyle reflect the shift from experiential to transformational motivations of travel. For instance, from an experiential perspective, tourists look for travel experiences that allow them to escape from their daily routine. However, from a transformational approach, tourists are looking for experiences that provide new perspectives on how to deal with the uncertainties of daily life when they come back home, which, in consequence, will enhance their quality of life. To this end, lifestyle segmentations could lead to the identification of consumers who travel with motivations that transcend satisfaction but rather seek well-being and happiness in their travels. Finally, practitioners should consider that tourism experiences can serve not only to achieve change on a personal level but also on a social or environmental level. Therefore, through tourism experiences, companies could act as agents that lead individuals to greater awareness of current social or environmental problems. Thus, a transformation at a personal level in a person's lifestyle can have repercussions towards benefits at the social or environmental level.

The limitations of this study are related, first, to the use of non-probability convenience sampling, which may somewhat limit the generalizability of the results. Second, this study

identified service and experiential quality as antecedents of lifestyle. Further studies could examine other factors influencing this variable, such as involvement, motivation or authenticity. Further research could even consider the possibility of introducing variables that act as a link between service quality, experiential quality and lifestyle, such as expectations, emotions or satisfaction. In this way, further information could be gained on the mechanism by which the quality of the tourism experience promotes transformative effects. In addition, more information about the proposed effects could be obtained by including control variables such as gender, age, education level, and income. Through in-depth interviews, focus groups or open-ended questions, the types of changes in tourists' lifestyles could be identified. Third, data were collected during a period affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This could have caused the participant's perceptions of their tourism experiences to differ depending on whether the experience occurred before or after the pandemic (Yang et al., 2021). Future studies could compare pre and post-pandemic tourists' perceptions of their tourist experiences and their underlying outcomes. Finally, the application to cultural and nature-based tourism contexts has required adopting a generalized approach that might have left out characteristics specific to each type of tourism. Future studies could delve deeper into the specific characteristics of each tourism typology or address other contexts such as wellness tourism, creative tourism, adventure tourism, community-based tourism, culinary tourism, rural tourism, etc.

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Data Availability Statement

Data employed for the research is contained within the article.

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