

TOURISTS' SHOPPING SATISFACTION IN ISTANBUL'S TRADITIONAL MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

Shopping is rarely the primary reason for traveling; however, once at the destination, shopping is an important activity without which, for many, the tourist experience cannot be considered complete. For tourists, shopping is a good way for experiencing the local culture and for tourism-based local economies shopping is an important earner of hard currency. Moreover, previous studies have shown that the experience tourists have while shopping will be reflected in their evaluation of the place and of the country as a tourist destination. In spite of its significance, tourists' shopping experience has seldom been researched by academics. Using content analysis of customer reviews posted on Trip Advisor this study will examine shopping satisfaction of tourists visiting Istanbul' largest traditional market, the Grand Bazaar.

Keywords: shopping tourism, shopping satisfaction, Grand Bazaar, Istanbul, Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

Shopping is rarely the primary reason for traveling; however, once at the destination, shopping is an important activity without which, for many, the tourist experience cannot be considered complete [1]. Shopping allows tourists to interact with local people and experience their culture [2]. A well-developed, diverse and attractive retail sector is also an important element of the local tourism industry. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of shopping tourism in income generation, foreign currency, destination attractiveness and tourist motivation [3] & [1]. Moreover, attractive shopping areas offering good tourist shopping experiences could be used in tourism marketing, to build a favorable image of the tourist destination [4].

Most studies on shopping tourism were based on Western Europe, North America (including Hawaii), or Australia and New Zealand. There is also a solid literature on shopping tourism in East and Southeast Asia. However, very little has been written about shopping tourism in other parts of the world, some with very well-known shopping attractions, such as Turkey and the Middle East. Moreover, in spite of the retail sector's importance for the local tourism industry little is known about how tourists perceive the quality of the local shopping outlets and how they rate their overall shopping experience. This study intends to fill in this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of international tourists' satisfaction with their shopping experience in Istanbul.

With over 13 million inhabitants, Istanbul is one of the most populated cities in Europe and Asia. Displaying the perfect combination of old and new, this city in Turkey was ranked the most popular destination in the world in 2014 by Trip Advisor. Istanbul is also a significant shopping destination boasting a wide variety of shopping venues from traditional shopping centers (bazaars, local arts and crafts centers, gift shops, etc.) to the

ultimate malls. As of late 2014, there were almost 100 malls and big, modern, shopping centers in Istanbul, with many other being in different stages of construction or planning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature reports on the existence of different types of shopping, such as utility shopping and pleasure shopping. In this study, we focus on pleasure shopping and, within this, tourism pleasure shopping. While tourists may do some utility shopping, most of the time, shopping while traveling is perceived as a social phenomenon and a cultural experience in which case it is not just the quality and price of the product or service that matters but also interaction with salespeople and fellow shoppers as well as the venue [4] & [5].

While there is a rich literature on pleasure shopping, we need to keep in mind that shopping while traveling may be different from shopping in the hometown [1]. During a holiday travel, tourists usually have more time and more money to spend than at home, especially when the uniqueness of the destination (with unusual settings, products and services) also stimulates shopping at a hedonistic, even irrational level [1]. Even persons who do not normally enjoy shopping at home could spend a significant amount of time and money on this activity while away on a trip [6].

The tourist shopping experience is derived from how tourists perceive their shopping experience compared to their expectations [7]. It is a mixture of perception of products, services and places [5]. If the experience meets or exceeds the expectations they are satisfied; if not, they are dissatisfied [7].

There are different factors that influence tourists' shopping perception and satisfaction of shopping experience. Some of these factors are related to the characteristics of the place visited (including shopping venue, quality, variety and price of merchandise, service, and overall interaction as well as other attributes of the place not related directly to shopping) and others to the tourists background (country of origin, ethnicity, religion, etc.) [4] & [8].

A number of studies concluded that tourists are interested in authentic local products, this being one of the most important factors for shopping tourism [5]. However, Kozak [9] argued that tourist shopping interests may differ between nationalities of tourists and places visited. For example, a study in a famous market in Auckland, New Zealand found that European visitors were interested mainly in value for money when buying something and were concerned over "authenticity", whereas Asian shoppers valued more the overall ambience [10].

Similarly, destination characteristics were found to be another important determinant of tourists shopping behavior. Some destinations provide tourists with a unique environment (very different from the home environment) which may be stimulating for shopping. Therefore settings, range of goods and the ambience of the stores could be very important in stimulating to tourists to shop [3].

Heung and Cheng [11] when measuring tourist satisfaction with shopping in Hong Kong identified four dimensions of shopping satisfaction: tangible quality, service quality, product value and product reliability. Of these, the study showed that staff service quality is the most important in determining tourists' satisfaction level.

In a somewhat similar fashion Wong and Wan [7] found that shopping satisfaction is based on: 1) satisfaction with the merchandise value; 2) satisfaction with service product and environment; 3) satisfaction with staff service quality; and 4) satisfaction with service differentiation.

In the Turkish region of Cappadocia, Tosun et al. [4] examined tourists' satisfaction with local shopping experience. They gauged tourists' perception on the following attributes: local shopping culture, staff service quality, product value and reliability, physical features of shops, payment methods as well as a number of other shopping and shop attributes. Similarly, Yüksel [8] examined the satisfaction of tourists regarding the following attributes of the shopping process: personal attention, service quality, product quality, staff knowledge, shop appearance, cleanliness of shops, exhibition/design, product/service variety, prices, respect, safe shopping and ease of communication.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to investigate satisfaction with shopping of tourists visiting Istanbul's Grand Bazaar.

The study is based on the qualitative content analysis of travel reviews posted on Trip Advisor. According to their website (tripadvisor.com), Trip Advisor is the largest online network of travelers in the world, with operations in 45 countries, 315 million unique visitors per month and more than 200 million reviews and opinions.

Qualitative content analysis [12] was used to analyze the textual data. We used a directed approach taking into account results of previous studies which we attempted to validate or extend.

The research process followed like this: First, we thoroughly read the entire text highlighting key concepts or variables which were coded. Recurring themes were identified based on knowledge provided by previous research using predetermined codes; however, we kept an open mind during reading the text to identify new code categories or subcategories. After the text was entirely analyzed coding categories subcategories were revisited. Based on the information supported by the text some new subcategories were added, a few were dropped and others were merged.

FINDINGS

A total of 210 reviews published between 1 November and 31 January were analyzed. While we do not claim our sample to be representative, as table 1 demonstrates, the population is quite diverse.

After carefully analyzing the reviews posted we identified a number of 15 attributes for shopping experience in the Grand Bazaar grouped under four major categories. The main findings of the study are presented in table 2.

The main attributes of shopping satisfaction will be discussed in more detail next.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of reviewers

Gender	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	Origin	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent
Male	72	34.3	56.7	Europe	74	35.2	45.7
Female	55	26.2	43.3	Middle East	14	6.7	8.6
Total valid	127	60.5	100.0	North America	45	21.4	27.8
Missing	83	39.5		Oceania	9	4.3	5.6
				E & SE Asia	7	3.3	4.3
Age	Freq.	Percent	Valid Percent	South Asia	5	2.4	3.1
18-24	11	5.2	11.7	Africa	5	2.4	3.1
25-34	15	7.1	16.0	South America	3	1.4	1.9
35-49	42	20.0	44.7	Total valid	162	77.1	100.0
50-64	21	10.0	22.3	Missing	48	22.9	
65+	5	2.4	5.3				
Total valid	94	44.8	100.0				
Missing	116	55.2					

PRODUCT AND SERVICE ATTRIBUTES

Most reviewers agreed that prices in the Grand Bazaar are very high compared to other retail outlets in Istanbul where similar products can be found and advise fellow travelers to window shop but not buy anything. However, many admit that the prices quoted initially by shop keepers can be significantly reduced if the buyer is willing to haggle:

“Haggling is a must otherwise you are paying a lot of money; you can make great deals and buy cheap quality stuffs.”

Male traveler from Brazil

Most, but not all, reviewers lauded the great variety of products displayed in the 4000 shops, although many shops seemed to sell the same type of products. Although certain types of products characteristic to Turkey and the Middle East seemed authentic, many reviewers complained that there were too many fake products made in China and elsewhere. Fewer reviewers referred to the quality of the products sold in the Grand Bazaar and the opinions were split.

Table 2: Main attributes of tourists' shopping experience perception in the Grand Bazaar

Code Category	Code Subcategory
Product or service attributes	The prices are very high
	There is a great variety of products
	Many products sold there are not unique and/or authentic
	Products sold there are of relatively good quality
Staff attributes	The sellers are annoying and pushy
	Bargaining with the sellers is the norm
	Sellers speak many languages
Shop attributes	The bazaar is huge with thousands of shops
	The bazaar is a unique historical complex with an attractive architecture and design
	The bazaar has a great location in the heart of Istanbul's historical quarter and is easily accessible on foot and by public transport
	The bazaar's layout is complicated and it is easy to get lost
Shopping environment attributes	The bazaar is very crowded
	The shopping environment is unique/authentic and provides a great cultural experience
	Shopping there is fun.
	The place is not safe

STAFF ATTRIBUTES

Most reviewers interpreted close personal attention towards Western customers as counterproductive and labeled the staff as annoying and pushy.

“Being accosted verbally at every turn to come see their wares, or eat their food, or see what they have to offer you...is very inundating and draining. It was like that everywhere I went in Old Istanbul and aggravated me for the entire week I was in Turkey.”

Female traveler from Canada

However, not everyone perceived the behavior of the shopkeepers in a negative way. Many perceived the behavior of salespeople as friendly and were, in fact, impressed with the hospitality of Turkish retailers who they described as very patient and not all about business and willing to socialize with customers over a cup of tea. This is how one reviewer described his or her interaction with the sales people:

“To me the Grand Bazaar was an interesting experience! I had a lot of fun there. People are very nice - when you step into the store they offer you a glass of their excellent apple tea. They would talk to you for hours, make you laugh and so on.”

Many reviewers praised the ability of the shopkeepers to speak foreign languages and their knowledge of other countries and cultures that allowed them to strike conversations with customers very easily. Some tourists were more willing to accept these cultural differences and perceive the interaction with the shopkeepers as part of the shopping experience whereas others were less willing to step outside their comfort zone. The same could be said about the practice of bargaining. Some travelers felt intimidated by the initial prices quoted, discouraged by their lack of bargaining skills and even frustrated with their failure to buy something. Not knowing the “real price” of the products made them distrustful of the shopkeepers who they perceived as dishonest:

“[...] the feeling is as you've just been robbed, but without any weapons against you, just the conversation when they lead you to this mistake.”

Traveler from Dubai

However, most reviewing travelers understood that bargaining is part of the local culture and that for a full shopping experience they should make the most of it.

“My best advice is: go with an open mind, enjoy the apple tea and school yourself in the art of bargaining with the locals.”

Traveler from USA

Some even bragged about their (learned) haggling abilities which saved them a lot of money and posted advice for others to learn from their experience. These reviewers also found shopkeepers to be honest and trustworthy. Unlike other studies on shopping tourism, we did not find in the text analyzed any complaint of staff trailing customers throughout the shop perhaps because shops in the Grand Bazaar are very small.

SHOP ATTRIBUTES

The great majority of reviewers mentioned the size of the Grand Bazaar which is huge by any reference with its more than 4000 shops:

“If you've never been to an eastern or oriental bazaar, then this place is an absolute must on any trip to Istanbul. It's basically an enormous rabbit warren of alleys and walkways - crowded into interconnected Ottoman brick and dome arcades - which contains a veritable cornucopia of shops and stalls.”

(Male traveler from the UK, 50-64 years old)

Most of these references were positive while a few complained of the great amount of time a visit here could take. Besides the size, the complicated layout represents another drawback. Orientation in this maze is difficult and there is a great potential of getting lost.

“It was good to see this bazaar. Problem is the size of it: it is massive. There are doorways that are too many to count. If you see something you would struggle to go back and buy it as you completely get lost because of the size it just goes on and on.”

(Female traveler from UK, shopping fanatic)

Some of the reviewers pointed to the distinctive and attractive architecture and design of this unique historical complex situated in a great location in the middle of Istanbul's historical complex, very close to other attractions and to hotels and easily accessible by public transport.

SHOPPING ENVIRONMENT ATTRIBUTES

It is more than just the shops, the staff and the products on sale that contribute to the great shopping experience. In the words of one reviewer:

“This place has got to be experienced to believe it. The sights, the sounds, the smells all add to a unique atmosphere and experience.”

Male traveler from the USA

The great majority of the reviewers admitted having fun while shopping in the Grand Bazaar.

“The whole feeling is amazing. I personally love shopping but that was the best shopping experience ever!”

They lauded the general shopping ambience there which, they believe, offers a unique and authentic atmosphere, a great cultural environment in which travelers can immerse themselves.

“Even if you are not a shopper or bargainer (sic!), you MUST see the Grand Bazaar. To me, it embodied the real essence of Turkey- the modern mixed with the ancient, hospitality coupled with commerce.”

(Female traveler from Los Angeles)

On the negative side, a few travelers complained that the bazaar was very crowded which may encourage pickpockets and other petty criminals to act.

OVERALL EXPERIENCE

The reviewers rated their overall shopping experience at the Grand Bazaar as good (see table 3)

Table 3: Quantitative evaluation of overall shopping experience

Evaluation of experience	Very Bad (1)	Bad (2)	OK (3)	Good (4)	Very Good (5)	Mean	Median	Mode	St.d.
Frequency	2	14	39	80	75	4.01	4	4	.948
Percent	1.0	6.7	18.6	38.1	35.7				

This transpires also from the reviews. For instance, a traveler described his or her experience at the Grand with the following words:

“It was overall a wonderful experience. We had some Turkish coffee (not a fan); my wife enjoyed it. We met some great people from San Diego at the coffee shop as well! Overall a very good way to spend a few hours indoors on a rainy Istanbul day. I will return for sure.”

Partly this appreciation comes from the fact that the Grand Bazaar is not just a shopping center but also a historical complex and a place where Turkish and Middle Eastern culture can be experienced firsthand. As one reviewer put it:

“Definitely need to experience this. It's better than a busy day at the Mall of America during Christmas shopping season!”

Female traveler from the USA

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Using a qualitative content analysis of peer reviews posted on Trip Advisor this study attempted to assess the international tourists' level of satisfaction with shopping in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar. We found that, in general, tourists were satisfied with their overall experience in this historical shopping complex even though some had reservations in terms of the prices, the quality and authenticity of some products as well as the excessive personal attention of shopkeepers towards customers.

Another important finding of this study was that many attributes describing shopping satisfaction were similar to previous studies [4][8] which used a different method of investigation. However, some of the attributes were different.

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