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ASSESSING TOURISTS' SATISFACTION WITH THEIR SHOPPING EXPERIENCE IN ISTANBUL

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Abstract: Even though it is rarely the main motivator for travel, shopping is a very important activity once tourists have arrived at the destination. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this study has investigated whether or not tourists visiting Istanbul were satisfied with their shopping experience. We found that the great majority of them had indeed had an excellent or good shopping experience. With the exception of gender and "shopping as a secondary motivation to travel", demographic, travel, and motivation attributes were not found to determine statistically significant differences in shopping satisfaction levels. Most of the complaints referred to the behavior of the salespersons, considered to be too aggressive and, sometimes, dishonest, price variations and the culture of bargaining, the low quality and lack of originality of some products and the lack of variety in Turkish shops. Tourism planners could act to eliminate or, at least minimize, the main shortcomings to a satisfactory shopping experience as evidenced by tourists in our interviews while marketers could use the results to better target their customers.

Key words: shopping tourism, shopping satisfaction, Istanbul, Turkey

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INTRODUCTION

Shopping has been part of the tourism experience from its earliest forms (Coles, 2004). Even in communist systems shopping played an important role in attracting tourists and in keeping them happy with a destination (Svab, 2002). We can safely say that shopping is one of the most important motivators for tourism (Timothy, 2005) and, in popular shopping destinations (such as Hong Kong), shopping may even be the main motivator for tourism (Mak et al., 1999; Lehto et al., 2004). Previous studies have highlighted the importance of shopping tourism in income generation, provision of foreign currency, destination attractiveness and tourist motivation (Jansen-Verbeke, 1991, Moscardo, 2004, Oh et al., 2004, Timothy, 2005, Egresi & Kara, 2015).

Moreover, attractive shopping areas, offering good tourist shopping experiences, could also be used in tourism marketing, to build a favorable image of the tourist

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destination (Tosun et al., 2007; Heung & Qu, 1998). In this sense, Kozak & Rimmington (2000) argued that satisfaction plays an important role in planning marketable tourism products and services. If tourists enjoy their shopping experience we could conclude that they will be satisfied (Dholakia, 1999) and satisfied customers will continue to consume those products and services in the future (Heung & Cheng, 2000). Indeed, it is hoped that satisfied tourists will sometime return and spend even more on shopping (Huang & Hsu, 2009). The practical conclusion is that shopping has an important contribution to the development of tourism in an area; therefore, creating ample shopping opportunities could entice tourists and make them stay longer and spend more (Murphy et al., 2011; Egresi & Kara, 2015).

This study attempts to assess satisfaction with shopping experiences of tourists visiting Istanbul, the largest city and the economic capital of Turkey. With more than 100 modern shopping centers (malls) and numerous traditional markets (bazaars), Istanbul has a very active commercial life (Egresi, 2015). While the city concentrates only 15% of Turkey's population, it has 34% of its shopping malls (Ertekin et al., 2008). This amazing retail growth is explained not only by the existence of a huge market of more than 14 million people (making Istanbul the largest city in Europe and in the Middle East) but also by the growing purchasing power of the population (Dokmeci & Berkoz, 1994) and the increasing number of tourists who visit the city not only for its numerous historical and cultural attractions but also for its shopping opportunities (Egresi, 2015). Situated in a strategic location between Europe and Asia, on the traditional international trade routes, the city was visited by over 11 million international overnight tourists in 2014 (7th rank in the world) who spent a total of almost 9 billion dollars (Anonymous, 2015).

In this study we wanted to understand to what degree tourists were satisfied with their shopping experience in Istanbul. We divided tourists into three groups based on their shopping experience (excellent, good and bad) and, using the Kruskal-Wallis test, we tested for statistically significant differences among the three groups. Moreover, using qualitative methods we analyzed the responses to two-open ended questions in our survey. The results of this study should have a number of practical implications. Tourism planners could act to eliminate or, at least minimize, the main shortcomings to a satisfactory shopping experience as evidenced by tourists in our interviews while marketers could use the results to better target their customers.

We will proceed next with a comprehensive review of the extant literature on shopping tourism, with a special focus on tourism satisfaction. Then, after a detailed description of the methods used, we will elaborate on our findings. Next, the results will be discussed and contextualized. The article will end with the concluding remarks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several types of shopping while traveling (Timothy, 2005). However, while tourists may do some utility shopping (for example when forced to buy new swimwear because they left the old ones home) most of the time shopping while traveling is perceived as entertainment and recreation (Jones, 1999; Bar-Kolelis & Wiskulski, 2012; Tömöri, 2010) as well 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 is important but also interaction with salespeople and fellow shoppers, as well as the venue (Tosun et al., 2007; Murphy et al., 2011). Also, not everyone enjoys shopping; some do it out of necessity to fulfill personal and familial needs. For others, however, shopping could be "a fun, entertaining, or leisure activity from which hedonic or ludic pleasures can be realized" (Timothy, 2005: 12). The tourist shopping experience is derived from how tourists perceive their shopping experience compared to their expectations (Wong & Wan, 2013). It is based on a mixture of perception of products, services and places (Murphy et al., 2011; Reisinger & Turner, 2001; Wong & Law, 2003). If the experience meets or exceeds the expectations they are satisfied, if not they are dissatisfied (Wong & Wan, 2013; Wong & Law, 2003). 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) (Heung & Cheng, 2000; Wong & Law, 2003) and others to the tourists background (country of origin, ethnicity, religion, etc.) (Tosun et al., 2007; Turner & Reisinger, 2001).

Heung and Cheng (2000) 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 & Wan (2013) 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
4. Satisfaction with service differentiation.

In the Turkish region of Cappadocia, Tosun et al., (2007) 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. They found that the majority of the respondents (64%) had a positive shopping experience. However, there were also critical views. More than 45% of the respondents were of the opinion that the area was overcommercialized and more than half (51%) believed that the sales staff was too aggressive when looking for customers and almost half disliked bargaining (in spite of its cultural significance).

This brings up two important issues. Firstly, tourists are interested in authentic local products, this being one of the most important factors for shopping tourism (Murphy et al., 2011). Because shopping while traveling is not only a leisure activity but also a way to experience local culture, it is important for visitors to have access to locally made handicrafts and souvenirs that genuinely represent local culture (Tosun et al., 2007). For example, a study examining tourists' satisfaction with the Victoria Market in Auckland, New Zealand, found that only four respondents out of the 25 were entirely satisfied. The majority had some critical opinion mainly related to perceived authenticity (Kikuchi & Ryan, 2007). Also, Le Hew and Wesley (2007) found that local shoppers were more satisfied with their shopping experiences at regional malls in the USA and Canada than tourist shoppers. Malls carry mainly global brands and are the very images of globalization. It is very unlikely that tourist shoppers will find authentic local products in a mall.

Secondary, Reisinger & Waryszak (1994) argued that the interaction between customers and salespeople is very important for determining satisfaction (also in Heung & Cheng, 2000; Yuksel, 2004; Yuksel, 2007; Choi et al., 2008). For shopping satisfaction, service of retailers could actually be more important than product attributes (Christiansen & Snepenger, 2002) or price (Hui et al., 2007). A study by Chang et al. (2006) also argued that, besides the quality of products, the quality of service tourists receive in the process of shopping is also important in determining satisfaction for Taiwanese tourists. Attitudes and behavior of shopkeepers or salespersons are paramount for the satisfaction of tourist shoppers. Jones (1999) and Wang (2004) also confirmed that salespeople who cheat or insist too much can ruin tourists' shopping satisfaction.

Yuksel (2007) has argued that the goal of tourist shopping is not necessarily buying something but rather the excitement associated with the process. Therefore, location, convenience and size of the shopping area (Le Hew & Wesley, 2007; Yuksel, 2007) as well as the quality, attractiveness and safety of the shopping environment (Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007) are very important for attracting tourists. Yuksel (2007) found that a pleasing shopping environment will influence the tourist shoppers' enjoyment of shopping, will determine them to spend more time and money and return with another occasion. Consequently, creation of an attractive shopping environment could be paramount in the planning of shopping destinations (Yuksel, 2004; Murphy et al., 2011). Yuksel (2007: 59) call this shopping environment the tourist shopping habitat (TSH), an area with a mix of retailers which unlike modern shopping are characterized by "atmospheric inconsistency", a term by which the author understands an unstructured environment in which "colors, scent and noises from different and often small shops are intermingled". This could eventually create a unique and appealing attraction for shopping and experiencing local culture (Hsieh & Chang, 2006). When all these conditions are right, Murphy et al. (2011) found that even tourists who are normally opposed to leisure shopping could be satisfied with their shopping experience.

Snepenger et al., (2003) and others (Choi & Chu, 2000; Kozak, 2002; Jansen-Verbeke, 1987; Turner & Reisinger, 2001; Tayfun & Arslan, 2013; Michalko & Ratz, 2006) have argued that satisfaction is function of tourist expectations which then are related to personal and group attributes (based on ethnicity, religion, gender, age, stage in the family lifecycle, etc.). For example, in one study, male tourists reported higher satisfaction levels with their shopping experiences than females (Xu & McGehee, 2012).

Ethnicity could also be an important differentiating factor (Pizam & Sussman, 1995). For example, Mak et al., (1999) has reported that the shopping behavior of Japanese tourists is different not only from that of Western tourists but also from that of other Asian tourist groups. One dichotomy identified in the literature is between domestic and foreign tourist shoppers. In general, from a cultural standpoint we assume that local shoppers would be more satisfied with their shopping experience because of cultural match. Indeed, as we have mentioned earlier, Le Hew and Wesley (2007) found that local shoppers were more satisfied with their shopping experiences at regional malls in the USA and Canada than tourist shoppers. Other studies, however, found that the opposite was true. For example, Jafari (1987) argued that, when away, tourists behave differently than they would at home. In a shopping tourism context, it could be argued that this tourist culture is more tolerant to the conditions of a new environment than the original culture of the tourists (Tasci & Denizci, 2010). Similarly, Yuksel (2004) noted that domestic tourists are more critical of their shopping experiences than foreign tourists.

In another study made in Hong Kong, Wong & Law (2003) and Hui et al. (2007) found that there was a significant difference between Western and Asian tourists concerning the expectations and satisfaction with the shopping experience. The study found that western tourists were more satisfied with their shopping experience in Hong Kong than Asian tourists. This does not mean that Asian tourist shoppers are more difficult to satisfy as Chinese outbound tourists surveyed in Shanghai generally reported high satisfaction levels (Guo et al., 2008). The explanation may be that when further away from home, tourists tend to be less critical and more positive about shopping. To ensure satisfaction, retailers should adapt their approach when catering to tourists from different parts of the world (Wong & Law, 2003). Other studies (Armstrong et al., 1997; Huang et al., 1996) have shown that tourist motives and satisfaction may vary not only based on nationalities but also on the places visited. In a study measuring the preference of tourists between Hong Kong and Singapore based on their shopping satisfaction, Yeung et al.

(2004) found that Singapore outperforms Hong Kong in many areas such as language ability, attitude and efficiency of service staff. A similar study published by Mak et al. (1999) compared Hong Kong and Singapore in the eyes of Taiwanese visitors. The study found that differences between the two "shopping paradises" were minimal when looking at product and service quality. Hong Kong was reckoned to offer a wider selection of goods but salespeople there were perceived to be less honest than in Singapore.

METHODS

The great majority of studies on shopping tourism have relied on quantitative methods and only a very small minority has been based on qualitative methodology (Xu & McGehee, 2012; Baruca & Zolfagharian, 2013; Kikuchi & Ryan, 2007). Both procedures have advantages and disadvantages (Hara, 2008; O'Brien, 1992; Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). For these reasons, in this study we preferred to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009).

The main query instrument was a questionnaire distributed between October and December 2013. The survey was written in English and administered by five research assistants fluent in this language. It was conducted in a number of tourist locations situated on both sides of the Bosphorus such as: the Grand Bazaar, Eminönü, Sultanahmet, Taksim, Galata Square (on the European side) and Üsküdar (on the Asian side). A number of questionnaires were also collected in hotel lobbies as well as on the premises of three major transportation hubs (Atatürk International Airport, Sirkeci train station and Harem bus station).The assistants were instructed to approach each n^{th} person where n was based on the volume of the human traffic in those places. If the persons approached confirmed their tourist status they were asked to spare a few minutes of their time to answer some questions for a tourism study. More than 90% percent of those approached, a total of 417 tourists, agreed to be interviewed.

The first part of the interview was structured and included four sections. The first set of questions was designed to collect information on the demographic profile of the respondents (country of origin, gender, age, education, occupation and income). Because the question related to income is perceived in certain cultures as a very personal one and is therefore considered to be very sensitive and because the tourists interviewed could potentially come from very different economic systems (where income could be expressed as pre-tax or post-tax - with the tax varying between 0% in some Middle Eastern countries and over 60% in some north European countries – and in different currencies) we preferred to ask the respondents to self-evaluate their income within the following categories: excellent, good, satisfactory and not satisfactory.

The second set of questions asked tourists about their trip to Istanbul (means of transportation) and their stay in the city (length of stay, type of accommodation) and the places they have visited or intended to visit. The third set of questions inquired about our respondents' motivation to shop while visiting Istanbul. The results from this set of questions are the subject of another article and will not be discussed here. The last part of the structured questionnaire included questions related to the tourists' satisfaction with their shopping experience in Istanbul.

The responses from the 417 questionnaires were then processed, evaluated and explained using the latest version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). We used descriptive statistics to create the demographic and tourist behavior profile of the respondents and the Kruskal-Wallis H test to test for statistically significant differences in our data sets related to shopping satisfaction. The survey included also two open-ended questions. The first asked respondents to mention some problems they encountered while shopping as tourists in Istanbul. The second asked them to propose solutions that would make the city more shopping-friendly and more attractive to international tourists. The responses to these two questions were recorded and analyzed using qualitative methods. Based on qualitative content analysis methods (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Burnard et al., 2008; Elo & Kyngas, 2008), the two authors' thoroughly read all the comments to the two questions trying to find common themes. These were then coded using categories and subcategories. While we started from the four categories for shopping satisfaction discussed by Wong & Wan (2013), we kept an open mind for possible new categories. After a second reading, the categories and subcategories used in the coding were revisited, some of these being eliminated in the process while a few new ones were added. The final version resulted from merging the two lists and after a thorough discussion between the two researchers of the resulted categories and subcategories.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

More than 63% of our respondents were from Europe. The top five countries based on the number of respondents were: 1. Germany (35), 2. UK (31), 3. The Netherlands (30), 4. Italy (20), and 5. Spain (18) (table 1).

Table 1. Geographical origin of surveyed tourists

Region	Total number	Percent of total	Valid Percent
Europe	253	60.7	63.1
Middle East and North Africa	54	12.9	13.5
Other Asian countries	33	7.9	8.2
Subsaharan Africa	33	7.9	8.2
The rest of world (America and Oceania)	28	6.7	7.0
No country declared	16	3.84	
Total	417	100	100

Respondents were almost equally distributed between males (52.9%) and females (47.1%) (table 2) . The majority of our respondents was young (almost 74% under 40 years old and 10.6% under 20) and highly educated, with almost 80% having a university bachelor's degree or higher. They came from all walks of life, with the highest numbers being managers (24.3%) and students (18.2%) (table 2). Our study showed that 51% of our respondents shop regularly (of which half shop often or very often) and less than 20% shop rarely or almost never (table 2).

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

Attribute	Freq.	Valid %	Attribute	Freq.	Valid %
Total number of respondents	417				
Gender			**Income level**		
Male	218	52.9	Very good	95	23.6
Female	194	47.1	Good	189	46.9
Valid	412		Satisfactory	85	21.1
Missing value	5		Not satisfactory	34	8.4
			Missing	14	
Age					
Under 20 years	44	10.6	**Frequency of shopping**		
20-39 years	264	63.3	Very often	31	7.7
40-59 years	87	20.9	Often	70	17.4
60 and older	22	5.3	Regularly	104	25.8
			Rarely	124	30.8

Education			Very rarely	56	13.9
Post-graduate	91	21.8	Almost never	18	4.5
University	240	57.6	Valid total	403	100.0
High school	65	15.6	Missing	14	
Less than high school	21	5.0			
Occupation					
Farmer	3	0.7			
Factory worker	10	2.4			
Service employee	18	4.4			
Education sector	39	9.5			
Health care	27	6.6			
Management	100	24.3			
Housewife	8	1.9			
Unemployed	13	3.2			
Retired	13	3.2			
Student	75	18.2			
Other	105	25.5			
Total valid	411	100.0			
Missing	6				

Information related to travel and accommodation

More than two-thirds of our respondents have traveled to Istanbul with family and friends, close to 21% have traveled alone and the remaining 11% have arrived to Istanbul with an organized group. Almost 96% have traveled by air with very few using other means of travel. Close to 63% were staying at hotels (mainly 4-5 star hotels), about 20% preferred other forms of accommodation and only 9% were staying with family and friends (table 3). More than two-thirds of all visitors surveyed were first timers and only one-third was repeat visitors, of which about 12% have visited the city many times. Over 72% of the tourists we surveyed had stayed or planned to stay in Istanbul for at least three nights (table 3).

Table 3. Travel and accommodation attributes and motivation to travel

Attribute	Freq.	Valid %	Attribute	Freq.	Valid %
Total number of respondents	417				
Number of persons traveling with respondent			**Previous visits to Istanbul**		
Alone	87	20.9	Many times	51	12.3
With Friends	139	33.4	A few times	37	8.9
With family	145	34.9	One time	47	11.3
With group	45	10.8	Never	281	67.5
Missing	1		Missing	1	
Means of travel			**Length of stay**		
By air	397	95.7	More than a week	65	15.7
By train	7	1.7	Between three nights and a week	235	56.6
By bus	9	2.2	1-2 nights	79	19.0
By private car	2	0.5	A few hours	36	8.7
Missing	2		Missing	2	
Accommodation			**Primary motivation for traveling**		
Hotel 4-5 stars	158	38.3	Business	83	19.9
Hotel 1-3 stars	101	24.5	Pleasure	275	65.9

Other forms of accommodation	84	20.3	Visiting family and friends	29	7.0
With family and friends	37	9.0	Transit	30	7.2
Other	33	8.0			
Missing	4		**Pleasure - subcategories**		
			Visit historical and cultural sites	146	50.5
			Shopping	27	9.3
			Experience a new culture	116	40.1
			Missing	2	

Shopping experience

All in all, our respondents had a good shopping experience in Istanbul as only 2.4% of our respondents complained for having a bad experience. More than 41% rated their experience as excellent while 56% encountered some small problems while shopping so they rated their experience as good (table 4)

Table 4. Evaluation of tourists' shopping experience

Shopping experience	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Excellent	160	38.4	41.3	41.3
Good	217	52.0	56.1	97.4
Bad	10	2.4	2.6	100.0
Valid	387	92.8	100.0	
Missing	30	7.2		
Total	417	100.0		

Kruskall-Wallis H test was run to determine if there were differences between the three groups of participants with different shopping satisfaction levels: excellent, good and bad satisfaction level groups. We first visually inspected the boxplots to check if the distribution shapes of the groups were similar. If the distribution was found to be similar for all groups then the median scores were used in the computations. If the distribution shapes were not found to be similar for all groups in the boxplot mean ranks were used instead. When analyzing the differences in shopping satisfaction levels based on demographic characteristics, we found that they were statistically significant only for gender ($X^2(2)=11.103$, $p=0.004$). Female tourist shoppers were more likely to rate their shopping experience as excellent whereas men were more likely to rate their shopping experience as good or bad (table 5). World region of origin ($p=0.688$), age ($p=0.978$), education ($p=0.480$), income ($p=0.202$), and frequency of shopping in home country ($p=0.110$) were not found to determine statistically significant differences in shopping satisfaction levels.

Table 5. Gender-based differences in shopping experience

Gender	Shopping experience – percent total same gender percent total this satisfaction level)			
	Excellent	Good	Bad	Total
Male (n=204)	33.8 (43.7)	62.7 (59.3)	3.43 (77.8)	100.0 (53.3)
Female (n=179)	49.7 (56.3)	49.2 (40.7)	1.1 (22.2)	100.0 (46.7)
Total (n=383)	41.3 (100.0)	56.4 (100.0)	2.3 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)

When we looked at travel characteristics (number of persons traveling in the party, travel means, type of accommodation, number of previous visits to Istanbul, and length of stay) we found that none of these determined statistically significant differences in shopping satisfaction levels. Similarly, primary motivation to visit Istanbul (p=0.213) was not found to be a reliable predictor for shopping experience rating. However, shopping as a secondary motivator to travel was shown to produce statistically significant differences in tourists' satisfaction with their shopping experiences ($X^2(2)=9.349$, $p=0.009$) with those for which shopping was a secondary motivator being more likely to have an excellent shopping experience (table 6).

Table 6. Differences in shopping experience based on attitudes towards Shopping as a secondary motivator for travel to Istanbul

Shopping as a secondary motivator to travel to Istanbul	**Shopping experience – percent total response (percent total this satisfaction level)**			
	Excellent	**Good**	**Bad**	**Total**
No (n=154)	32.5(31.2)	63.6 (45.4)	3.9 (60.0)	100.0 (39.9)
Yes (n=232)	47.4 (68.8)	50.9 (54.6)	1.7 (40.0)	100.0 (60.1)
Total (n=386)	41.4 (100.0)	56.0 (100.0)	2.6 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)

As already mentioned, our questionnaire also included two open-ended questions. The first question asked tourists to discuss the main problems they encountered while shopping in Istanbul. Their responses are synthesized in table 7.

Table 7. Main problems with shopping while in Istanbul

Code categories	**Code subcategories**	**Percent complaints in this category**
Problems with the merchandise value	Low quality products	9.5
	Fake products	
	Expensive products	
Problems with service product and environment	The culture of bargaining	28.8
	Price variations/dual pricing	
	Very crowded shopping venues	
	Problems with infrastructure	
Problems with staff service quality	Aggressive salespersons	46.3
	Dishonest salespersons	
	Salespersons did not speak foreign languages/communication barrier	
	Low quality of service	
Problems with service differentiation	Too many shops with same or similar goods/lack of variety	18.4
	Lack of information on shopping centers in Istanbul	
	Difficulties with exchanging money	

The table reveals that more than 46% of all complaints were related to staff service quality. Many tourists felt intimidated by the aggressive behavior of the salespersons. For example, this is how a female tourist from a Western country characterized the behavior of Turkish staff in the shops she visited: *"I don't like their behavior; if I want to know something about the things I want to buy I'm able to ask myself. They should let the customers decide when he or she wants help. Most of the tourists feel disturbed when they come close while saying: 'Yes, please, beautiful lady...' They should stop doing that"*. Another tourist customer explained: *"They keep coming after you when you saw something. It doesn't matter if you want to buy it or not." (young man from the Netherlands*. This behavior may be acceptable at the beginning, perhaps even considered interesting by some tourists. But *"if this happens several times a day it is inconvenient"* (middle-aged male tourist from a

European country). Eventually, this attitude may *"ruin the cultural interaction and cheapen the experience"* (man from the USA with good income). The attitude of many sellers was considered not only aggressive but also rude to the point where when they find out you don't intend to buy anything *"they start to treat you like garbage and with no respect"* (young man from Belgium). Many tourists also complained of the lack of honesty of many salespersons. Sometimes tourists ask for a price only to find out later, when they express their intention to buy, that the product actually costs more (woman from Spain with very good income). Moreover, some have tried to cheat tourists while returning change: *"Shop assistants return less change. For example, a bottle of water costs 5 lira. Gave them 20 lira and they gave 5 lira back"* (woman, 40-59, from the United Arab Emirates). Many respondents have opined that, at least to a certain extent, these problems with staff service could be due to communication barriers as many salespersons do not speak English (or any other foreign language for that matter).

The second major group of problems (28.8% of all complaints) could be labeled as "problems with service product and environment". One major issue for foreign tourists is that *"You don't know the price of the products: the same thing has really different prices being the same quality"* (woman, 20-39 years, from Argentina). This is confusing for many tourists because, as one respondent put it: *"It is not easy to know if the vendor is multiplying prices or giving the real prices. Sometimes tired to discuss over price"* (man, 20-39 years, from Argentina). Many tourists resent the fact that prices are not fixed because they *"do not know how to bargain which is a necessity when shopping in Istanbul especially if one wants to get a good deal"* (tourist from Germany). Without bargaining, prices in Istanbul could be quite high, to the point where the same products could be *"cheaper in Turkish shops in Belgium"* (middle-aged female tourist from Belgium). Prices that are not fixed create distrust among the tourists as they are not sure whether they are getting a good deal or are being cheated. Many believe they are paying more because they are foreigners: *"I feel like I am expected to pay triple price because of the color of my skin. While bargaining, many shopkeepers will not even sell me things at a normal or above normal price" (*woman from Greece, 20-39 years*)*.

A number of tourists have also complained of the crowds that characterize many Turkish retail centers (modern or traditional) which could make the shopping experience quite uncomfortable especially for Western tourists. The situation is exacerbated by infrastructural problems that make it more difficult for tourists to find the shopping centers or to get there. Also, tourists were displeased to see that many shopping areas were filled with tourists as they were looking for places with a more local feel.

Some tourists have found that information about shopping opportunities and shopping centers in Istanbul was limited. Others have reported problems with exchanging money or dealing with taxi drivers. Many tourists have complained about lack of diversity in Turkish shops as most were selling the same range of products.

Finally, almost 10% of our respondents complained about the low quality or value of some products on sale. For example, this is the shopping experience one respondent shared with us: *I bought a leather jacket and it wasn't very good quality. I was very disappointed* (woman, 40-59, with university degree, from Germany). Another observation related to the products on sale was that, while many products had the logos of famous brands, these were fake which concerned our respondents because they were generally of low quality and because they "*violated industrial rights*" (man, 20-39 years of age, with university degree, from Czechia). Moreover, there were relatively few products that tourists could buy as souvenirs or to offer as gifts to their friends and relatives at home. Most of the products that were sold as souvenirs were actually not representative for the Turkish culture and/or were not made locally (most were made in China).

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has attempted to gauge international tourists' level of satisfaction with their shopping experience in Istanbul, the largest city not only in Turkey but also in Europe and the Middle East. The results highlight a number of important issues.

We found that the great majority of the tourists had a good shopping experience in Istanbul, only 2.4% rating their shopping experience as bad. This has also been very clearly evidenced in our respondents' answers to our second open-ended question (see table 8). Almost 28% of all the tourists we interviewed argued that, although retail may be different in Turkey than in their country of origin, this is part of Turkey's cultural attractions so nothing should be changed.

Table 8. Solutions suggested by respondents to improve tourists' shopping satisfaction

Code categories	Code subcategories	Percent in this category
Improve merchandise value	Increase authenticity	8.1
	More local products	
	More souvenirs	
Improve service product and environment	Price regulation	36.5
	Mark prices on products	
	Improve service quality	
	Improve infrastructure	
	Put more signs in English	
Improve staff service quality	Hire more polite and more honest salespersons or train them in this direction	21.8
	Hire shop assistants with good language skills	
Improve service differentiation	Better marketing/advertising	5.6
	Reduce the number of shops	
Don't change anything/keep it as it is		27.9

Unlike previous research we found that only gender influenced significantly tourists' level of shopping satisfaction, women being more likely than men to have an excellent shopping experience (consistent with previous findings by Tayfun and Arslan, 2013 but contrary to the findings of Xu & McGehee, 2012). Other demographic and travel attributes were shown to play an insignificant role as predictors for tourists' shopping satisfaction. This contradicts previous studies that found that, at least, some of these attributes could determine statistically significant differences in shopping satisfaction (Jansen-Verbeke, 1987; Turner & Reisinger, 2001).

Most surprising finding was that tourists' region of origin did not matter significantly in determining shopping satisfaction. Based on our literature review (Tosun et al., 2007; Yuksel, 2004; Kikuchi & Ryan, 2007; Barutçu et al., 2011, among many others), we were expecting to see significant differences in how Western tourists and tourists from the Middle East, Asia and Africa rate their shopping experiences, yet our results could not substantiate such claim. However, our study is different from other studies in the sense that it included tourists' satisfaction with both traditional and modern forms of retail in Istanbul which may have caused a dilution of cultural differences. It may be interesting to replicate this study in regards with traditional forms of retail (bazaars) exclusively and see if the results would turn out to be different.

Based on our findings, we have to agree that demographic and travel attributes are not significant predictors for shopping satisfaction. This may lead us to the conclusion that authorities and retailers do not need to engage in differential marketing except to take into account the lower shopping satisfaction levels for male tourists compared to female tourists. As a matter of fact, the gender-based difference in shopping satisfaction found by this study should be an invitation to more detailed research into this issue. How can we explain this discrepancy? It may simply be because, men, in general, are less likely than women to find pleasure in shopping? However, as previous research has shown, when traveling people behave differently than when in their home environment. Many tourists who consider themselves "necessity shoppers" at home enjoy shopping when visiting other places. Due to this, we consider that further research is needed to understand why male tourists are less confortable with shopping in Istanbul. May it be because the range of products, their presentation, the service, the general atmosphere, etc., is more geared towards pleasing women tourist shoppers? If this is the case, perhaps, by changing some of these shopping attributes to make them more attractive to male tourist shoppers, these tourists would rate their shopping satisfaction higher which would, in turn, result in higher rates of tourist return and higher profits for the retailers.

When we look at the foreign tourists' recommendations to improve the shopping environment in Istanbul we see that more than 36% of them are concerned with the problem of pricing and bargaining. This is confirming previous findings (Timothy & Butler, 1995; Hobson, 2000; Heung & Cheng, 2000) that price differentials is an important motivator for tourist shopping. On the other hand, we should point out that these recommendations take issue with the un-fixed prices and the culture of bargaining which seems to dominate retailing in Istanbul's traditional markets. Here we agree with Tosun et al., (2007) and Barutçu et al., (2011) that, although tourists perceive bargaining as a cultural characteristic of the region, not having an indication of what the real price should be makes the game less fun and tourists end-up losing trust in the sales staff. We believe that local authorities together with the administration of the major retail centers should publish a "guide to bargaining" in all the major foreign languages and offer it to international tourists. This would help tourists better understand the art of bargaining and make them more willing to join the game. Tourists should also be advised on alternative shopping places offering approximately the same range of products but at fixed prices. This way tourists can make their own choice: if they want to experience the culture of bargaining they can shop at certain traditional markets and if they'd rather not do that they have the choice of alternative markets with fixed prices and western retailing practices.

The third category of recommendations (almost 22% of all recommendations) are targeting better service and staff education. In the previous section we have seen that one of the most vehement criticisms was of the salespersons who were perceived by our tourist respondents as agressive and even rude for following them around the store and for being very persistent (same findings also in Barutçu et al., 2011; Yuksel, 2004). This, in the opinion of our respondents was bad customer service. However, different cultures value good customer service in different ways (Yuksel, 2004). For example, Turks prefer high context communication (non-verbal) whereas most western customers prefer a more direct, explict and unambiguous communication. In Turkish culture, when a sales staff follows customers through the store this is an indicator of good quality service. Also, calling out loud to potential customers, which our respondents perceived as a very aggressive selling technique, is considered normal in Turkish culture (Tosun et al., 2007). Therefore, we believe that sales staff have no intention to behave aggressively towards customers and are not trailing customers because they don't trust them around the merchandise, as some tourists seem to believe; they simply do what their culture tells them is good customer service. However, we agree with Tosun et al. (2007) and Chang et al., (2006) that sales staff should be educated on how to interact with tourists/shoppers visiting from other cultural regions in order to increase their level of satisfaction.

The second major complaint of tourists in this category is that the sellers do not speak English and/or other languages which complicates communication with tourists and reduces satisfaction. This problem was previously highlighted by Barutçu et al. (2011) in a study on shopping tourism in Alanya. As Reisinger and Waryszak (1994) indicated, the ability of salespersons to speak the language of the tourist customers is considered of great importance by tourists because this is perceived as a sign that they are welcome and will be treated with consideration. However, as a foreign academic who has lived in Istanbul for over six years, the first author has never experienced any problem communicating with sale staff anywhere in the tourist districts. Many shops have staff who can speak at least two or three different foreign languages. We believe that the problems arise when, hoping to find more authentic (and cheaper) products, tourists prefer to visit shopping venues that are patronized mainly by local people.

Many tourists were also concerned with the authenticity of the goods on sale, especially when they intended to buy them for gifts to family and friends back home or as souvenirs to remind them of their trip in Istanbul. This supports the findings by Reisinger and Turner (2002) who argued that many Japanese tourists were dissatified with their shopping experience in Australia because of the shortage of locally-made souvenirs and products, representative for the local culture. Lin and Lin (2006) made the same observation when studying the satisfaction of mainland Chinese with shopping in Taiwan. Tourists in both cases were displeased to see that the products on sale were actually made elsewhere and sold at much higher prices.

Finally, a number of respondents have highlighted the fact that shopping centers, beyond the very “touristy” ones, such as the Grand Bazaar, are not advertised properly. This problem is not exclusive to Istanbul. Almost two-thirds of the tourists visiting Cappadocia complained about the lack of information on shopping opportunities and venues (Tosun et al., 2007). We believe that, if local authorities believe in the advantages of shopping tourism, they should design a better strategy to attract tourists to shop in Istanbul and to keep them satisfied. Tourists would like to spend more money on shopping but they need access to more information. Many are not interested in markets catering chiefly to foreign tourists as they find them more expensive and less authentic. They would like to shop in places where local people shop.

Others are bothered by the Turkish-style customer-service culture (loud calling for customers, trailing customers around the store, bargaining, etc.) and would like to shop in more western-oriented shopping centers. We believe that when tourists check into their hotel they should be handed a brochure highlighting all major shopping opportunities and venues in Istanbul. The brochure should include a map to display location of each shopping center followed by directions to get there. The brochure should also include a short description of each of these shopping centers.

The results of the study also have significant theoretical implications. One of the principal ideas that has arisen from our research is that, although cultural differences are important motivators for tourism, they can also constitute barriers to tourist satisfaction. This is in line with Spierings and van der Velde’s (2008: 501) argument that although one of the main motivators for tourism is “difference”, its consumption should happen in “familiar” environment or atmosphere in order to avoid uncertainty or the annoying and unexpected experiences.

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