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Research Paper

Cultural tourism in Istanbul: The mediation effect of tourist experience and satisfaction on the relationship between involvement and recommendation intention

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to empirically test a model linking involvement, experience quality, satisfaction, and recommendation intention. The study also analyzes the mediating effect of experience quality and satisfaction on the relationship between involvement and recommendation intention in a cultural tourism destination context. Data were collected from tourists using a survey from a historical area of Istanbul, the Sultanahmet district. The results reveal that experience quality and satisfaction mediate the relationship between involvement and recommendation intention in the cultural tourism context. This study discusses the theoretical and management implications of these findings. The suggested strategies would diversify and boost the Istanbul tourism industry by targeting different tourist groups.

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1. Introduction

Some of the most desirable tourist spots are coastal areas offering the elements of sun, sea, and sand. These locations are preferred tourist locations worldwide (Page & Connell, 2009). Despite this, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that cultural and natural heritage tourism is the most rapidly growing area in the tourism industry (UNESCO, 2005). Europa Nostra also stated that 'more than 50% of tourist activity in Europe is driven by cultural heritage' (Europa Nostra, 2006, p. 15). Cultural tourism has become a central component of economic revitalization and, therefore, destinations are striving to develop their cultural capital to encourage international visitors (Alzua, O'Leary, & Morrison, 1998). Despite the growth in cultural tourism, efforts by destinations that focus solely on the quality and quantity of their cultural capital do not guarantee an optimal visitor experience. The various service companies that operate in the destination, their employees, employee relationships with visitors, and customer-to-customer interactions affect the service experience (Baron, Harris, & Davies, 1996; Martin, 1996).

Providing a superior customer experience is extremely

important in today's business world (Verhoef et al., 2009). Visitor experience and emotions are extensively analyzed in tourism literature (Grappi & Montanari, 2011; Komppula, 2006; Obenour, Pattersen, Pederson, & Pearson, 2006; Yuksel & Yuksel, 2007). The experience concept is considered an antecedent of behavioral intentions associated with one or two perceived value and satisfaction variables (Chen & Chen, 2010; Han, Back, & Barrett, 2009; Han & Jeong, 2013). Mixed results exist in the literature with regard to the relationships among these constructs (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005). For instance, one study found no mediating effect on satisfaction in the relationship between emotional experience and behavioral intentions (Prayag, Hosany, & Odeh, 2013), whereas other studies have found evidence of a mediating effect (Han et al., 2009; Walsh, Shiu, Hassan, Michaelidou, & Beatty, 2011). A direct relationship has been found in some studies between experience quality and behavioral intentions (Cronin, Brady, & Hult, 2000; Petrick, 2004), whereas an indirect relationship and a mediation effect was found in another study (Chen & Chen, 2010).

The concept of involvement is generally discussed as an antecedent of emotions based on cognitive appraisal theory (Gao, Ma, Scott, & Ding, 2013; Nyer, 1997) or as an antecedent of perceived value, satisfaction, place attachment, and tourist loyalty (Chiu, Lee, & Chen, 2014; Hou, Lin, & Morais, 2005; Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Martin, Collado, & Bosque, 2013). However, the effect of involvement on experience quality (as a flow of thoughts and feelings)

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and the potential mediating effect of experience quality and satisfaction between involvement and behavioral intentions are not yet investigated as a comprehensive model in either the tourism or the cultural tourism literature. Consequently, there is a need for studies that examine experience, behavioral intentions, and the associated constructs (such as involvement, motivation, service quality, image, satisfaction, and perceived value) to provide a broader understanding of visitors' behavior.

This study focuses on the mediating effect of experience quality and satisfaction on involvement and recommendation intention regarding a destination in the cultural tourism context, as well as an analysis of the relationships among involvement, experience quality, satisfaction, and recommendation intention. The results provide practical information concerning the relationship between these variables and will provide recommendations for service adjustments to meet visitors' needs.

2. Conceptual background and hypothesis

Cultural tourism opportunities differ from encounters with cultural objects to immersion into the societal culture (Bourdieu, 1986). However, cultural tourism does not have a generally accepted definition because of the complex nature of 'culture' (Alzua, O'Leary, & Morrison, 1998). The concept of cultural tourism has various definitions depending on the perspective of the writer or researcher. For example, according to a broader definition by Adams (1995), cultural tourism is a type of travel for personal enrichment. Other researchers prefer a narrower definition and focus on the cultural services consumed by the tourist ignoring the motivation of travel (Foo, 1998; Hughes, 2002; McKercher, 2002). Therefore, a tourist who consumes a cultural product is assumed to be a cultural tourist by definition. For this study, the second of these approaches is employed to define a cultural tourist.

Cultural tourism is extremely important for the city of Istanbul, which is the most significant Turkish city in terms of culture and economy. Additionally, Istanbul – the former capital of the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires – is one of the oldest cities in the world. Archeological findings assert that the first settlement dates back at least 8500 years (HowtoIstanbul.com., 2015). Hence, tourists and residents consider cultural tourism to be one of the most important assets of Istanbul.

The power of word-of-mouth, and the process by which tourists intentionally and unintentionally promote a city to others, particularly in the current age of social media, need to be conveyed to managers and planners if they are to leverage these communication factors successfully. The variables used in the model developed in this paper relate to this dynamic, which is also widely addressed in the cultural tourism literature (Chen & Chen, 2010; De Rojas & Camarero, 2008; Hernandez-Lobato, Solis-Radilla, Moliner-Tena, & Sanchez-Garcia, 2006; Martin et al., 2013; Palau-Saumell, Foras-Coll, Sanchez-Garcia, & Prats-Planaguma, 2013; Simpson, 2000; Wu & Li, 2014).

2.1. Involvement

Involvement is a significant and extensively applied variable in models of consumer behavior because of its potential effect on people's attitudes toward an activity and decision-making processes (Josiam, Smeaton, & Clements, 1999). Understanding the extent of a consumer's involvement plays a critical role in the examination and prediction of consumer behavior (Prebensen, Woo, Chen, & Uysal, 2012). The concept has varying definitions depending on the context. Involvement is defined as 'a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests' by Zaichkowsky (1985, p. 342). In a further study by

the same author, involvement is defined according to the level of importance a person ascribes to an object (Zaichkowsky, 1994). Customer involvement is defined as the level of importance a customer attributes to an object, an action, or an activity and the enthusiasm and interest that is generated (Goldsmith & Emmert, 1991). Within a recreational setting, involvement is defined as 'the state of identification existing between an individual and a recreational activity, at one point in time, characterized by some level of enjoyment and self-expression being achieved through the activity' (Selin & Howard, 1988, p. 237). From the perspective of leisure and tourism, involvement is defined as the degree of interest in an activity and the affective response associated with that interest (Manfredo, 1989). In this study, Goldsmith and Emmert's (1991) definition is preferred for the conceptualization of visitor's involvement. As a result, involvement is a key variable in leisure behavior because people who are planning leisure travel will pay more attention to relevant travel information (Reid & Crompton, 1993).

The involvement construct has been operationalized in several ways, and there is no standardized instrument for its measurement. Laurent and Kapferer (1985) propose the customer improvement profile (CIP), which includes five constructs (importance, pleasure, sign, risk probability, and risk consequence). Zaichowsky's (1985) personal involvement inventory is the other useful tool for examining tourist participation and behavior. CIP has been re-evaluated by the leisure and tourism researchers who argue that involvement consists of four constructs (importance/pleasure, sign, risk consequences, and risk probability) (Dimanche, Havitz, & Howard, 1991; Madrigal, Havitz, & Howard, 1992). Kyle and Chick (2004), meanwhile, propose leisure involvement dimensions such as centrality, social bond, identity affirmation, and self-expression. In another study, Gursoy and Gavcar (2003) examined involvement of leisure tourists in three dimensions (pleasure/interest, risk probability, and risk importance). Finally, Prebensen et al. (2012) used risk probability and self-identity to examine the involvement variable.

2.2. Experience quality

The goods-centered view is currently being replaced by service-dominant logic in marketing literature (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), and the subject of whether and how the customer experience might extend beyond service is a focus of scholars (Klaus & Maklan, 2012). It is argued that the content of the scale of service-dominant logic known as SERVQUAL does not fit well with the concept of overall service experience quality (Fick & Ritchie, 1991), and experience quality differs from service quality in certain important respects. For example, experience quality is considered to be subjective in terms of measurement; its evaluation necessarily holistic/gestalt; its scope more general; the nature of its benefit/experiential/hedonic/symbolic; and its psychological representation affective (Otto & Ritchie, 1996).

Service quality and experience quality differ in the tourism context. Service quality refers to the quality of service attributes under the control of a supplier, whereas experience quality refers to the psychological outcome of tourism activities. Experience quality is a more general concept because of the visitors' subjective evaluations, and the term includes the attributes provided by a supplier and conceptualized as 'tourists' affective responses to their desired social-psychological benefit' (Chen & Chen, 2010, p. 30). In another definition, experience quality is defined as 'representing how customers emotionally evaluate their experiences as they participate in consumption activities and interact with the service surroundings, service providers, other customers, customers' companions, and other elements' (Chang & Horng, 2010, p. 2403).

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