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MARKETING | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Deconstructing the shopping experience of tourists to the Dubai Shopping Festival

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Abstract: Shopping Festivals are being promoted as tourism products, thus attracting large number of tourists. Recent years have seen the growth of shopping festivals and shopping gaining greater significance in tourism, given its contribution to the retail and tourism sectors of a destination. This empirical study discusses the shopping experience of international tourists visiting the Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF). Data was collected from 603 international, English speaking tourists, using the mall intercept technique, during the XVIII edition of the DSF from January to February 2013. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to delineate seven factors which suggest that tourists do not shop independent of the shopping environment. Shopping experience involves much more than the acquisition of goods. Store Attribute, Mall Atmospherics, Safety, Mall Amenities, Product Attribute and Staff Service positively influence tourists' shopping experience. The findings of this study will help the stakeholders in designing specific products and shopping environments.

Subjects: Consumer Behaviour; Marketing; Retail Marketing; Tourism; Tourism Behaviour

Keywords: shopping; shopping environment; shopping experience; shopping festival; tourist shopping

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Shopping is an integral part of the overall travel experience of a tourist. It is a major component of a tourist's expenditure. Many destinations have come to be known for the quality of their retail offerings. Independent stores, shopping districts and malls have become "must-see" on a tourist's itinerary. Shopping festivals are being promoted by different destinations as tourism products in a bid to capitalize on the synergistic relationship between shopping tourism and retail. Shopping festivals attract large number of international tourists. Are there factors beyond the pure shopping element which influences the shopping experience? This article describes the shopping experience of tourists visiting the Dubai Shopping Festival. It was found that the shopping experience of tourists involves much more than the acquisition of goods. An understanding of the shopping experience will help stakeholders in designing specific products and shopping environments.

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1. Introduction

Shopping is inherent to tourist behaviour and is a growing component of the tourism value chain (UNWTO, 2014). The relationship between shopping and tourism can be understood in two ways—Tourist Shopping and Shopping Tourism. In the first case, shopping constitutes an activity on the tourist's itinerary. In the latter, shopping constitutes the primary motive for travel (Timothy, 2006). Tourist shopping has been widely studied in terms of souvenir purchase, shopper typology, shopping preferences and shopping satisfaction (Lehto, Cai, O'Leary, & Huan, 2004; Lehto, Chen, & Silkes, 2014; Turner & Reisinger, 2001). In the context of Shopping Tourism, shopping and retail facilities serve as tourist attractions. Shopping Festivals may be viewed as a type of Shopping Tourism. They have come to be promoted as tourism products by the destination marketing organization (DMO), as they attract tourists and contribute to the local economy. A few examples of shopping festivals are Dubai Shopping Festival (DSF), The Great Singapore Sale, Ankara Shopping Festival, Magnificent Mile Shopping Festival, Amazing Thailand Grand Sale and 1 Malaysia Year End Sale.

Tourism shopping is intrinsically linked to the retail industry. Hence tourism shopping should be an important aspect of a destination's development and marketing plan. Tourism shopping experiences entail interactions between tourists, and shopping environment, product attributes and services; and is a sum of the perceptions of products, services and place. It constitutes an important part of destination experience (Tosun, Temizkan, Timothy, & Fyall, 2007). Previous research on tourism shopping experience have emphasized on service and merchandise. Shopping experience, however, is also impacted by the shopping environment, with shopping in a diversified environment leading to leisure experience. The aim of this research is to explore the shopping experience of tourists to a shopping festival.

Shopping festival benefits the retail sector besides driving tourist arrival. Various stakeholders such as the DMO, mall managers and retailers seek to benefit from this synergistic relationship between retailing and tourism by encouraging more sales, re-visits and positive word of mouth for the destination. Tourists visiting a mall during a Shopping Festival experience decorated malls, in-mall events, cheerful sales staff, attractive window displays reflecting that their shopping experience involves much more than the acquisition of goods. The growing number of shopping festivals and the intense competition between destinations to attract tourists for shopping necessitates an understanding of what comprises a shopping experience at the shopping festival.

This paper is organized as follows. A brief review of relevant literature is followed by the research context, which focuses on the DSF. This is followed by sections on research design and methodology, data analysis and findings, interpretation, discussion, conclusion and implication.

2. Literature review

A tourist's attitude and feeling towards a destination is impacted by various factors such as the destination's environment and its service infrastructure. These factors merge to constitute a tourist's experience (Mo, Howard, & Havitz, 1993; Tosun et al., 2007). Services such as shopping at a destination influence the destination experience (Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000). Shopping is an important activity on a tourist's itinerary, with shopping in a diversified and attractive environment creating a leisure experience, even for tourists who have access to comparable shopping centres and malls at home (Kinley, Josiam, & Kim, 2003).

Tourist shopping experience is the sum of tourist satisfaction or dissatisfaction gained from the individual attributes of products and services purchased (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). Service and merchandise provided by retailers constitute an important part of the destination experience (Murphy et al., 2000), with malls and shopping centres being tourist attractions (Kinley et al., 2003). In destinations where retail/shopping is a main attraction, merchandise, service quality and shopping itself can influence a tourist's satisfaction with his/her shopping trip (Timothy, 2014). Tourists' judgement of the service quality in a shopping environment is often based on the cues provided by the environment itself, with their patronage intention being strongly influenced by the service quality rather than

merchandise (Yüksel, 2013). Trust in a shopping destination has also been stated as an important factor in shopping experience (Choi, Law, & Heo, 2016). Studies on tourist shopping experience indicate that shop attributes such as opening hours and cleanliness, staff service quality, product attributes such as price, variety, quality, reliability affect satisfaction with shopping (Albayrak, Caber, & Çömen, 2016; Choi, Liu, Pang, & Chow, 2008; Heung & Cheng, 2000; Tosun et al., 2007; Wong & Law, 2003). Wong and Wan (2013) suggested additionally that destination facilities like transportation, safety, cleanliness impact a tourist's satisfaction with the shopping experience. Yeung, Wong, and Ko (2004) compared the shopping experience of international tourists to Hong Kong and Singapore and opined that shopping experience varied with the destination. Product attributes such as reliability and variety, and shop attributes such as opening hours and cleanliness were stated to be important shopping attributes whereas window display and lighting, physical setting of shop, language ability of staff and availability of sales label were least important shopping attributes. A tourist's impression about the products (variety and quality), and satisfaction is positively moderated by a service-oriented selling behaviour. A product-oriented selling behaviour negatively impacts satisfaction and impression about the products (Chang, Yang, & Yu, 2006). Wu, Wall, and Pearce (2014) evaluated the shopping experience of tourists to Beijing's Silk Market on Price, Fun and Bargaining wherein price was an important factor which impacted the shopping experience. The colour of the store exterior and crowdedness impacts tourists' assessment of store's service and product quality (Yüksel, 2009). Shopping facilities and other attributes such as décor, service quality, assortment of stores and merchandise, safety, reasonable prices, pleasant environment, entertainment are attributes considered important by tourists when selecting a mall (Josiam, Kinley, & Kim, 2005; Kinley et al., 2003; Littrell, Paige, & Song, 2004). LeHew and Wesley (2007) studied tourist and resident shoppers across four malls in USA and opined that tourist shoppers and resident shoppers differed on their satisfaction on mall and store attributes, with resident shoppers being more satisfied. Christiansen and Snepenger (2002) studied shopping experience in terms of shopping value, novelty derived from shopping in a different mall and encouragement of social interaction. Value derived from the shopping trip is impacted by the occasion of shopping (at home or at the destination) and the mall where the tourist shops. Tourists derive hedonic, utilitarian, novel and social experience when shopping at a tourist mall leading to increase in money spent, impulse purchase and an increase in the time spent shopping.

Retail literature states that the physical environment wherein shopping takes place in addition to the service itself, place plays a significant role in the consumer's experience and influences purchase behaviour (Bitner, 1990; Smith & Burns, 1996; Spies, Hesse, & Loesch, 1997). In-store atmospheric cues (music, lighting, colour, design and digital signage), shopping centre atmospheric cues (architecture, variety of stores) and tenant mix impact shopping behaviour in various retail settings (Babin, Hardesty, & Suter, 2003; Garlin & Owen, 2006; Léo & Philippe, 2002; Summers & Hebert, 2001; Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Store attributes such as displays, signs, lighting, temperature affects customer's perception, approach behaviour and impulse buying (Mohan, Sivakumaran, & Sharma, 2013). In addition to the store environment, the mall environment also impacts perception of product/service quality which in turn impacts approach/avoidance behaviour (Michon, Chebat, & Michon, n.d.). Retail density is also an important aspect of retail atmospherics which impacts the perception of the shopping environment which in turn impacts the perception of product quality (Michon, Chebat, & Turley, 2005).

Above-mentioned literature suggests that shopping experiences involve more than the purchase of goods and encompass experiences resulting from the interaction with the shopping environment. Studies on tourist shopping experience have been few and far between and have been conducted in the context of shopping as a travel activity. Service, merchandise, price differentials and cultural background were stated to be the reasons influencing tourists' shopping experience. Shopping Festivals are staged events, where shopping constitutes the core of the festival with malls and retailers participating in the festival. Retail literature suggests that various variables like atmospheric stimuli, store attributes and product attributes also impact shopping experience. There has been no study thus far on the shopping experience of tourists travelling to a shopping festival, and this study

aims to address this gap. This study differs from the previous studies in the following ways. Firstly, it considers product attributes, mall attributes, atmospherics and store attributes as we contend that tourists do not shop independent of the shopping environment. Secondly, the shopping experience is studied in the context of shopping festival, which is being used as a platform by various destinations to attract tourists to shop. The findings of this study will enable a better understanding of the factors which constitute tourist shopping experience.

3. Research context

DSF has been the longest running shopping festival. Its first edition in 1996 was largely a street festival. The shopping festival has positioned Dubai, an emirate city in the United Arab Emirates as a retail hub in the region with the destination being promoted as a shopping destination with various shopping festivals like DSF, Dubai Summer Surprise and Eid in Dubai. About 70 malls and 6,000 retailers participated in the 32 day annual shopping event in 2013. Various factors like the ethnic mix, lifestyle changes and economic prosperity have been stated as reasons for a shift from traditional shopping habitat-souq to shopping centres (El-Adly, 2007).

Dubai Mall, with a total retail floor area of 12.1 million square feet, has 1,200 stores and is stated to be among the world's most visited malls for shopping. Similarly, the Mall of the Emirates measures 2.4 million square feet and has 520 stores. Burjuman, Deira City Centre, Ibn Battuta, Mirdiff City Centre, Festival Centre, Dubai Marina, Mercato Mall, Wafi Mall are some of the popular malls participating in the shopping festival. Each of these malls is architecturally unique with varied attractions for visitors. The malls organize various in-house raffles and in-mall events like theatre, dance, music and fashion shows. The malls have extended shopping hours to facilitate shopping and the stores organize various promotions on merchandise to encourage sales.

The paper aims to identify the shopping experience of tourists. This is part of a larger study on the shopping behaviour of tourists during a shopping festival. DSF by virtue of its popularity is chosen as the setting for this study on the shopping experience of tourists attending the shopping festival.

4. Research design and methodology

This is a descriptive and a cross-sectional study, which included the investigation of a sample selected from the population of tourists visiting the shopping festival at a specified point in time. The target population for the study were tourists who visited the XVIII edition of DSF, spanning 32 days in January–February, 2013.

4.1. Survey instrument

The survey instrument consisted of questions on the shopping attributes, shopping environment and demographic characteristics. A total of 50 items describing the shopping environment and shopping attributes were drawn from review of multidisciplinary literature (Hart, Farrell, Stachow, Reed, & Cadogan, 2007; Heung & Cheng, 2000; Sit, Merrilees, & Birch, 2003; Stoel, Wickliffe, & Lee, 2004; Tosun et al., 2007). The items were then discussed with tourists, retailers and travel experts during DSF 2012, to assess the suitability of the items to the shopping festival. This established the validity of the questionnaire. The scale (questionnaire) was tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha (.71), signifying an acceptable level of internal consistency among the variables (De Vaus, 2002). A five-point Likert scale was used to record the responses on shopping experience with values ranging from 1 being "strongly disagree" to 5 being "strongly agree". Nominal scale was used to record responses related to tourists' demographic profile.

4.2. Sample

The total sample consisted of 603 international tourists who visited Dubai during DSF 2013. Cluster sampling was employed for the purpose of data collection. Data was collected through personally administered questionnaires, using the mall intercept technique from five malls, chosen based on their footfalls (as shown in Table 1) and homogenity in terms of physical amenities, entertainment facilities and festival-specific promotions. The malls from where data was collected were Deira City

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Table 1. Summary of mall footfalls and sample size

Mall	Annual visitors (million)	Year	Sample size
Dubai Mall	54	2011	230
Mall of Emirates	31	2010	132
Deira City Centre	19.6	2010	83
Mirdif City Centre	13	2010	56
Dubai Festival City	24	2010	102
Total	141.6	–	603

Source: Compiled from websites of individual malls.

Centre, Mirdiff City Centre, Mall of Emirates, Dubai Mall and Dubai Festival Centre. The potential respondents were screened based on two criteria. Only free independent travellers and English speaking tourists were included in the study. The mall intercept technique is frequently used in studies on shopping behaviour, as it provided access to tourists in the shopping environment, immediacy of data collection and reduction of artificial influences (LeHew & Wesley, 2007; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007).

5. Data analysis and findings

Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 16.0). A series of cross-tabulations were performed to analyse the demographic profiles of the respondents as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of demographic profile of the respondents

Demographics	Percentage	Demographics	Percentage
Gender		*Nationality*	
Male	55	UK	31
Female	45	France	17
Age		Azerbaijan	22
20–29	5	Kazakhstan	17
30–39	41	South Africa	20
40–49	43	Kenya	4
50–59	11	Japan	11
Education		China	10
High school	7	Australia	7
Graduate	38	New Zealand	2
Technical/trade	26	Philippines	4
Postgraduate	25	South Korea	4
Others	4	India	6
Employment		Pakistan	4
Student	6	Saudi Arabia	4
Employed	57	Jordan	3
Self-employed/business	33	Oman	12
Others	4	Kuwait	2
Income		Russia	10
<US$ 20,000	9	USA	7
US$ 20,000–US$ 49,000	33	Canada	4
US$ 50,000–US$ 79,000	39	Uzbekistan	4
>US$ 80,000	19	Egypt	2

The respondents were grouped into 23 nationalities (Table 2) based on their country of origin-UK, France, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, South Africa, Kenya, Japan, China, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, Kuwait, Russia, USA, Canada, Uzbekistan and Egypt. The respondents were not differentiated based on their nationality prior to data collection. In terms of gender, the respondents were equally represented, with majority of them aged between 30 and 49 years. Majority of the respondents possessed either a graduate or technical or postgraduate degree and were employed or self employed. In terms of family annual income, 33% of the respondents earned USD 20,000–USD 49,000 and 39% of the respondents earned USD 50,000–USD 79,000.

5.1. Delineation of shopping experience: a principal component factor analysis

Factor analysis was performed on the 50 items (used to assess the shopping experience) using the Principal Component Method with VARIMAX rotation. The purpose of factor analysis was reduction of the large number of variables into smaller number of factors. The extracted factors were to be used subsequently in the analysis. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Table 3) were used to examine the appropriateness of factor analysis and to check the correlation of the variables to be factor analysed. The analysis yielded seven factors having Eigen values greater than 1.0. Items which had a MSA greater than .50, factor loading of .40 and above and communalities above .50 were retained in the analysis (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The seven factors extracted explained 69.64% of the total variance. The coefficient alpha estimates of the factors indicated acceptable reliability. Each factor was named based on the common characteristics of the items. Table 3 details the items, factor loadings, Eigen values and percentage of variance, coefficient alpha explained by the individual domains. The seven factors were labelled as (1) Mall Attributes (2) Staff Service (3) Product Attribute (4) Mall Atmospherics (5) Cleanliness and Spaciousness (6) Store Attribute (7) Safety.

The first factor, *Mall Amenities*, with a factor mean 4.32 included items such as "adequate number of lifts in the malls", "number of department stores in the mall", "centre brochure in the malls" and "extended shopping hours in the malls". The second factor, *Staff Service*, with a factor mean 3.78 included items such as "the staff can speak different languages", "the service in the shops is good" and "the staff in the shops are helpful and friendly". The third factor, *Product Attribute*, with a factor mean 4.26 included the items such as "the prices of products are lower than what I get at home" and "I get the latest variety/model of product". Factor four, *Mall Atmospherics*, with a factor mean 4.48 included items such as "décor throughout the mall is good", "well lit malls", "atmosphere of mall" and "air conditioned malls". The fifth factor, *Cleanliness and Spaciousness*, with a factor mean 2.61 included items such as "the malls are clean" and "spaciousness of mall" and the sixth factor, *Store Attribute*, with a factor mean 4.58 included two items, namely "the window displays are attractive" and "there is an excellent variety of stores". The seventh factor *Safety*, with a factor means 4.46 included two items, namely "the mall is a safe place to shop" and "security guards on duty make shopping safe experience".

6. Interpretation of the findings

The factors which positively influenced the shopping experience of tourists were (in the order based on factor mean as in Table 3)–*Store Attribute, Mall Atmospherics, Safety, Mall Amenities, Product Attribute* and *Staff Service*. Tourists desire attractive window displays and variety of stores. Window displays help in store entry decision, product information and in increasing sales (Edwards & Shackley, 1992; Sen, Block, & Chandran, 2002). Tourists are faced with paucity of time and information and may not be aware of the products and retailers at the destination. In this regard, attractive window displays can attract tourists and influence their store entry decision. Aesthetic ambience (interior design, decorations) of tourist-oriented shopping malls attracts tourists (Kim, 2002). Atmospheric stimuli like lighting, cleanliness, temperature, décor and spaciousness create a pleasant atmosphere for shopping, influencing the customers multiple senses thereby influencing them to stay longer. They also influence customer behaviour-avoidance/approach, time spent at the venue and sales, impact the shopping experience and hence the shopping value (Babin & Attaway, 2000;

Table 3. Summary of factor analysis result						
Shopping experience factors and items	**Factor mean**	**Item mean**	**Factor loading**	**Eigen value**	**Variance explained (%)**	**Coefficient alpha**
F1: Mall amenities	4.32			2.791	14.69	.81
There are adequate number of lifts in the malls		4.14	.848			
There are a number of department stores in the mall		4.26	.834			
Centre brochures in the malls are available		4.36	.730			
Extended shopping hours in the mall		4.27	.653			
F2: Staff service	3.78			2.174	11.44	.73
The staff can speak different languages		3.35	.806			
The service in the shops is good		3.93	.800			
The staff in the shops are helpful and friendly		4.07	.747			
F3: Product attribute	4.26			1.874	9.865	.81
The prices of products are lower than what I get at home		4.28	.868			
I get the latest variety / model of product		4.24	.867			
F4: Mall atmospherics	4.48			1.835	9.66	.71
Décor throughout the mall is good		4.46	.807			
The malls are well lit		4.43	.615			
The atmosphere of mall is good		4.52	.532			
The malls are air conditioned		4.51	.489			
F5: Cleanliness and spaciousness	2.61			1.716	9.032	.69
The malls are clean		2.60	.825			
The malls are spacious		2.63	.727			
F6: Store attribute	4.58			1.549	8.151	.65
The window displays are attractive		4.58	.812			
There is an excellent variety of stores		4.58	.709			
F7: Safety	4.46			1.292	6.801	.67
The mall is a safe place to shop		4.47	.767			
Security guards on duty make shopping safe experience		4.46	.690			
Total variance	69.6%					
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy	.687					
Chi square	3.493					
Significance	.000					

Donovan, Rossiter, Marcoolyn, & Nesdale, 1994; Jang & Namkung, 2009; Kim, 2002). Security is an important attribute of a shopping centre, as consumers may be unwilling to shop in a shopping centre which seems to be unsafe (Singh & Prashar, 2014; Sit et al., 2003). *Safety* has been delineated as a separate factor in this study as influencing shopping experience, as distinct from previous studies. Researchers have emphasized safety as a risk perception during shopping (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007). Perceived/actual risk arising out of fear of being mugged or conned will negatively impact the shopping experience of tourists. Tourists tend to prefer a risk-free and safe shopping environment. In this study, safety has emerged as a factor impacting the shopping experience. It is important for destination managers, mall owners and retailers to consider safety, for a perception of shopping in an unsafe environment can add stress and delimit the activities and experience of the tourists. Physical facilities impact assessment of the shopping environment (Ahmed, Ghingold, & Dahari, 2007). Mall

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amenities like lifts and signage add to the ease of navigation, while extended shopping hours adds convenience to the tourists, who evaluate their shopping experience in terms of the mall amenities. *Product Attribute* was found to be another factor impacting the shopping experience. Price differential between the home country and the destination is an often-stated reason for tourist shopping (Timothy, 2006). Availability of the latest variety of products is also a reason which encourages tourist shopping and constitutes an important part of their experience. Hence retailers should have a wide assortment of products and ensure that they are competitively priced. *Staff Service* quality impacts tourists' satisfaction with shopping (Heung & Cheng, 2000). Tourists have high expectation from staff in terms of their language skills and their attitude. Given that tourism and retailing are service industries, retail stores should emphasize on staff service, especially when they are interacting with tourists from different countries and cultural background. Retail employees' behaviour and attitude towards tourists are critical as they can be used to communicate the retailer's ideals to the customer and forge a customer relationship with the tourist. Cleanliness and spaciousness impacts the image of a mall and mall preferences of tourists influencing their shopping behaviour (Lee, Ibrahim, & Hsueh-Shan, 2005; Littrell et al., 2004). The factor *Cleanliness and Spaciousness* was not a major influence in the tourist's shopping experience as indicated by the mean score. They tended towards neutral on this factor.

Tourist shopping experience involves more than the acquisition of goods which is based on a logical evaluation of product attributes. The findings of this study can be further understood based on the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Tourist shopping experience includes consumer process (e.g. product evaluation, attitude formation) and responses (e.g. shopping satisfaction, purchase behaviour) affected by the shopping environment (shopping mall), situation (shopping festival) and tourist characteristics. Cues in the shopping environment such as physical elements (mall atmospherics, mall amenities), social factors (staff friendliness, overcrowding) and design factors (spaciousness, store layouts) provide an impetus to the tourists which affect their response (e.g. shopping satisfaction, purchase behaviour). The characteristics of the tourists such as shopping motivation, demographics and/or situational variables such as the shopping festival, influence the relationship between the stimulus and response. "The organism includes cognitive and affective intermediary states and processes that mediate the relationship between the stimulus and the individuals' response" (Chang & Chen, 2008). Cognition comprises beliefs, thoughts or perceptions (Fiore & Kim, 2007) and Affect is a "favourable response towards a stimulus that leads to relative preference for the stimulus from a group of options" (Batra, 1986). These two, i.e. cognition and affect, are formed as a result of interaction with merchandise, sales encounters, environment cues and perceived safety in shopping festival. "Response is the result of the internal processes of the organism" (Fiore & Kim, 2007) expressed in a shopping festival as purchasing products, shopping satisfaction and re-patronage intention.

7. Discussion of results

The items such as window displays, variety of products, language ability and attitude of the staff delineated under various factors in this study conform to the findings of Heung and Cheng (2000) implying that in tourist shopping, these attributes play an important role in influencing the shopping experience of tourists. The items-variety of stores, attractive décor, pleasant atmosphere, safety of the shopping centre aligns with the findings of Josiam et al. (2005). Items such as overcrowding and entertainment in the malls were not delineated in the study as items influencing the shopping experience of tourists. The continuity of the shopping festival for 18 years has made it a popular event. The tourists may expect crowding owing to its popularity, thus explaining why the item overcrowding did not influence their shopping experience. Interviews with mall managers and retailers during DSF 2012 revealed that they perceive entertainment options in the malls increase footfalls and provide entertainment to the tourists. The findings of this study however suggest that tourists do not seek mall entertainment, a finding similar to that of Kinley et al. (2003). Tourist shopping is considered a leisure activity and tourists consider malls as shopping venue options rather than as a place to watch movies or indulge in entertainment activities. Research suggests that shopping malls are tourist destinations (Butler, 1991). Each of the malls under consideration in the study is unique in

terms of architecture. Architecture of the mall constitutes an important aspect of the atmospheric stimuli, impacts customers assessment, satisfies sensory stimulation and is an important element of customer patronage (Ahmed et al., 2007; Turley & Milliman, 2000). However, findings of this study suggest that architecture of the malls do not contribute to the shopping experience of tourists. This may be because the marketing messages during the shopping festival focus on sales promotions and events organized during the festival.

8. Conclusion and implications

This study points out that tourists do not shop independent of the environment; mall amenities, staff service, product attributes, atmospherics, cleanliness and spaciousness, store attributes and safety contribute to overall shopping experience.

This study adds to the academic literature in the following ways. It examines the most popular shopping festival, where there has been no study thus far on the shopping experience of tourists. Given that there has been no prior research on the shopping experience of tourists in a shopping festival, this study constitutes the first empirical examination of the concept. Previous studies have focused in isolation on the role of staff service, product attributes, shopping centre in the shopping experience of tourists. These studies have been conducted in the context of shopping as a tourist activity. Malls are important stakeholders in a shopping festival, offering entertainment and shopping opportunity to tourists. This study emphasizes the role of store attributes, atmospherics, safety and mall amenities as influencing shopping experience of tourists.

The findings of this study will facilitate better understanding of the shopping experience of tourists to a shopping festival. This would help the DMO, mall managers and retailers in designing specific marketing messages. For instance, the DMO can emphasize on the safety aspect of shopping in the destination, the mall managers can emphasize on atmospherics and mall amenities and retailers on the staff service and product attributes. The DMO and mall managers should also focus on the uniqueness of the malls participating in the shopping festival. Dennis, Murphy, Marsland, Cockett, and Patel (2002) suggest that brand image of a mall helps in ensuring customer satisfaction and success of shopping malls. The shopping experience can be used in creating a brand experience by focusing on safety, creating exciting atmospherics, store attributes and consistently improving product attributes. Brand experience is one of the drivers of customer patronage (Knowledge@Wharton, 2009). With malls and stores running similar promotions and discounts, one which can be easily replicated in other shopping festivals (Peter & Anandkumar, 2013), the DMO, mall managers and retailers should aim at creating an exciting and engaging shopping experience for tourists, thereby, differentiating themselves from other shopping festivals. The potential for shopping festivals to be developed and promoted as a tourism product depends on what tourists derive from their shopping trip, rather than merely the sale of merchandise.

Findings of this study are limited to the DSF. A key limitation of the study has been the inclusion of only English speaking tourists. Another limitation has been the focus on the shopping experience in the malls only. Furthermore, the cognitive and affective stages have not been considered in the study. The impact of shopping experience on the shopping enjoyment and perceived risk and value perception may be considered in future studies. This research can also be extended by comparing the shopping experience of tourists and residents during the shopping festival and including traditional shopping venues like the high streets and souks.

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