AN EXPLORATION OF TOURISTS OUT-SHOPPING EXPERIENCE IN JOHOR BAHRU, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The number of development projects made to promote Malaysia as a shopping tourism destination has increased abruptly, so as the research made on shopping tourism. However, studies which focused on the out-shopping experiences are still at its scarcity especially in Asian countries. Therefore, to fulfil this gap, the main purpose of this study is to examine the out-shoppers shopping experiences in several shopping malls in Johor Bahru and to identify the factors influence the tourists to choose this city. Johor Bahru, the southern state in Malaysia, is one of the cities recognised by Tourism Malaysia as one of the top shopping destinations within Malaysia in 2016. Qualitative research strategy was employed as an attempt to understand the out-shopping experiences of international tourists visiting Johor Bahru. Thirty respondents were interviewed using mall-intercept survey with in-depth semi-structured interview questions. The transcribed interview data were analysed using qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS.ti for coding, themes, and visualisation. The findings disclosed that the out-shoppers perceived shopping malls in Johor Bahru to be identical like other shopping malls and considered as convenient malls. In addition, they are motivated to shop in shopping malls in Johor Bahru due to its product and service availability, price affordability, and the mall ambience. Apart from that, to confirm the validity and reliability of this study, a prolonged engagement in the research site, as well as the disconfirming evidence procedure was conducted by the researcher. This study can be beneficial for the shopping tourism sector and mall retailers as it provides a dense factor on the experience and perception, along with the factors influencing out-shopper to shop in a mall.

Keywords: shopping experience, shopping tourism, shopping landscape, retailing, out-shopper’s mall experience

INTRODUCTION

These days, shopping is not only a simple activity to get daily essentials, but it has become a crucial element while travelling. Most tourists’ travel itineraries are considered incomplete without the possibility of shopping activities (Filipović, Jovanović, & Cicvarić Kostić, 2013; Jin, Moscardo, & Murphy, 2017). Shopping is also one of the motivating factors for people to travel. During shopping, most tourists sought souvenirs that remind them about their visits as they will normally recall the experiences they gained during their travel. Besides remembering the trip they had for themselves, souvenirs are often made as a gift to remind others about the visit they had at some fascinating travel destinations (Anderson & Littrell, 1995). Apart from that, shopping activity is seen to be one of the popular travel
preferences and it often related to travel motivations in most literature. In some cases, shopping is combined together with the destination image as it becomes the subject to promote a particular destination (Lehto, Cai, O'Leary, & Huan, 2004), and it is normally associated with large cities with various shopping places such as shopping malls and retail stores. Moscardo (2004) stated that shopping is a factor that determines the selection of travel destination. While shopping at the mall, there is an interaction occurs between the shoppers with the features that will contribute to the level of interesting shopping experience (Ibrahim & Ng, 2002), and these features are classified as ‘retailer factors’ which consist of determining the goods and services, prices, store environment and the salesperson (Jones, 1999). The experience gained from shopping can lead to shopping satisfaction whereby, shopping satisfaction is dependent on the shopping enjoyment gained from the tourist experience (Murphy, Moscardo, Benckendorff, & Pearce, 2011).

Despite the countless number of research made in regard to tourism and shopping, comprehensive review on tourist shopper experience on out-shopping is still in its infancy. In addition, most of the studies of the past researches focused on shopping as an activity that is done as part of travelling, not as the primary motive to travel (Moscardo, 2004; Murphy et al., 2011; Timothy & Butler, 1995). Meanwhile in a smaller scope of study, there is currently limited number of studies made on tourists shopping experience in Asian countries especially in Malaysia. Hence, by selecting Johor Bahru as the setting, this study is conducted to fill in the gaps in shopping tourism. The city was chosen in corresponding to the media statement released by Tourism Malaysia in November 15, 2015, claiming that Johor ranks the third among eight major shopping destinations in Malaysia, coming after Klang Valley and Penang.

Apart from examine the tourists shopping experience in Johor Bahru, this study seeks to identify the factors that drive the tourists to choose the city as their shopping destination. Regardless of the recognition given to Johor Bahru as one of the top shopping destinations in Malaysia, there is currently almost absent study made on tourists out-shopping experience in the city and the topic is rather often being overlooked. In addition, the topic on shopping experience is often minimally highlighted in any studies made regarding shopping tourism as previous studies mostly emphasized on shopping behaviours and the occurrence of retail leakages occurred when people shop abroad rather than in their local marketplace. Hence, this study seeks to propose a new element in shopping which is shopping experience which can be further debated in discussion made on shopping and shopping tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Out-shopping Experiences

Out-shopping can be defined as the act of travelling from one community to another larger community due to the unavailability of product diversity, the prices offered are too high or their needs are not being fulfilled by their local market (Blakney & Sekely, 1994). Meanwhile, another scholar defined out-shopping as a condition when someone travels beyond their local shopping places for goods
acquirement. Out-shopping is also known as cross-border shopping and out-of-town shopping (Dmitrovic & Vida, 2007). Tourist involves with out-of-town shopping are known as international outshopper. These types of tourists usually contemplate shopping activities as an opportunity when going abroad (Ceballos, Jin, & Ortega, 2018). Therefore, the definition of out-shopping suggested by Dmitrovic and Vida (2007) is applicable in this study because it is similar to the content. The close proximity of Johor Bahru with its neighbouring country, Singapore, has made international out-shopping as a remarkable feature in the tourism industry in Malaysia.

Shopping experience on the other hand, refers to the values resulted from the shopping activities that were undertaken for both emotional and experiential basis (Singh & Sahay, 2012). The tourist-shopping experience is the sum of tourist satisfaction or dissatisfaction gained from the individual attributes of products and services purchased (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). According to Jin, Moscardo, and Murphy (2017), the experience tourists had while shopping resulted from several factors including shopping activities, perception of shopping dimensions, tourist characteristic, and interactions with others. Shopping experience also plays a vital role in tourists’ subsequent shopping satisfaction and shopping behavioural intentions.

Thus, from the context of this study, out-shopping experiences can be referred as the values resulted from the shopping activities that take place outside the shopper’s local market. Tourists shopping experiences are important as it will create some positive memories gained from the travel activities undertaken. These positive memories will determine the tendency of re-patronage intention as it is associated with satisfaction level perceived after undertaking the shopping activities. It is somehow often overlooked and less highlighted in the previous studies made on out-shopping since most studies emphasized on the behaviour of out-shopping and its adverse impact on economy, such as sales leakages and the reduction in tax revenue of the home country.

Shopping Landscape of Johor Bahru

Shopping is part of the agenda and prominence activity in the Malaysia’s Tourism Transformation Plan 2020. Malaysia Super Sale, Malaysia’s Mega Sale Carnival and Malaysia’s Year End Sale have been held every year to attract tourist and it is recognized in Malaysian Calendar of Events. Within the carnival periods, tourists are awarded with various discounts, special offers, and incentives which include some tax reliefs. Special visitor’s incentive programs are particularly set for tourists by several shopping malls and retailers to attract tourists which also allow them to enjoy great discounts or rebate on normal price item. In recognition of the potential retail sector to further boost tourist expenditure in the country, Tourism Malaysia, in fact, has formed Secretariat Shopping Malaysia (SSM) in 2002 to streamline all efforts in intensifying the development of the shopping sector as a major component of Malaysia’s tourism economy. One of the SSM’s mission is to promote Malaysia as a world-class shopping destination to both domestic and international tourists.
In 2015, Tourism Malaysia has clustered and recognized Johor Bahru as one of the major shopping destinations in Malaysia. Johor Bahru is also recognized as the top five shopping areas among international tourists, scoring 11.7% putting it behind other top shopping spots in Malaysia which are Bukit Bintang, George Town, Kota Kinabalu and Petaling Street with 42.7%, 17.0%, 14.1% and 12.3% respectively (Tourism Malaysia, 2015). In addition, the State Tourism Department declared that there is a high count of tourists and excursionists recorded since 1992 with 9.8 million arrivals from Singapore and it was primarily to shop. Besides indicating that the city received a high number of tourist arrivals, it shows that shopping has become a primary activity that tourists engage in since years back. In accordance to that, the development of tourist-oriented shopping malls has transformed the city as one of the popular travel destinations among tourists.

For the past years, numerous development projects have undoubtedly made Johor Bahru as one of the well-known metropolitan cities in Malaysia besides Kuala Lumpur. The development projects have led to the emergence of various tourist destinations that can cater both domestic and international tourists who visit the city for the purpose of sightseeing or shopping. The development made over the years has increased the availability of innumerable number of shopping spots ranging from shopping malls such as Johor Premium Outlet (JPO), the ZON mall, Angsana Johor Bahru Mall, KSL City Mall, Danga City mall, street bazaars, and flea markets. This outstanding phenomenon has transformed Johor Bahru to be among the top shopping precincts in Malaysia.

Factors Influencing Tourists Out-shopping

Most out-shoppers travel to other countries to satisfy their economic and socio-psychological needs (Sharma, Chen, & Luk, 2018). Age, gender, and trip typology or trip activity profiles are among the significant factors influencing the tourist shopping behaviors and preferences (Oh, Cheng, Lehto, & O’Leary, 2004). Different age group, gender, and types of visit might influence the tourists whether they want to shop or just browse. While shopping, an individual perceived shopping value of utilitarian and hedonic also might affect the tourists overall shopping activities (Babin, Darden, & Griffin, 1994). Tourist belongs under the utilitarian shopping includes convenience-seeking, variety seeking, searching for quality of merchandise, and reasonable price rate, etc. (Sarkar, 2011). On the contrary, tourist falls for hedonic shopping is associate with emotional needs of individual for enjoyable and interesting shopping experiences (Bhatnagar & Ghosh, 2004).

Besides the perceived values, tourists will experience different environment at each shopping destination due to the currency and tax imposed in the visited countries. In the context of out-of-town shopping, the factors influencing tourist out-shopping are similar to the factors influencing cross-border shopping as both involve shopping activities of international tourists in countries away from home and extend beyond the international boundaries. The factors influencing the tourists to shop can be grouped into consumer characteristics and market characteristics (Azmi, Sapi, & Rahman, 2015). Consumer characteristics are often used to predict how likely a group of people to purchase a product, thus referring...
to the tourist demographics. This includes age, gender, marital status, education level, occupation, and average income per month. Meanwhile, market characteristic is defined as an attribution that a destination provides to attract visitors. Market characteristic refers to lower price, variety of goods, lower tax, accessibility, communication, social status, and opening hour. Lower price and variety of goods are the dominant factors for out-shopping activities.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed an exploratory qualitative approach as according to Creswell (2009), qualitative research has been proven as an ideal method in exploring individuals’ feelings, thoughts, emotions and perceptions. In light of the purpose of this study, a purposive sampling was utilized to describe the international tourists’ out-shopping experience in Johor Bahru. Furthermore, in tapping the tourists view, information was obtained through in-depth semi-structured interview from thirty (30) international tourists who had experienced visiting shopping malls in Johor Bahru. The researcher starts with the participation observation, walking alongside the tourists as they shopped. Following the shopping session, the tourists were approached using mall intercept survey in three (3) selected tourist-oriented shopping malls in Johor Bahru; they are Johor Premium Outlet (JPO), Angsana Johor Bahru Mall, and KSL City Mall. The international tourists are ruminating as the out-shoppers since they shop outside their home country. A consent letter was given prior to the interview to each respondent. The interview data were recorded and transcribed into a written form. Then, the transcribed interviews were analysed using ATLAS.ti software. Prolonged engagement and disconfirming evidence procedures were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument used and data collected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents’ Profile

There were thirty (30) international tourists interviewed for this study, consisting of 53 percent male out-shoppers and 47 percent female out-shoppers. Almost 50 percent of the respondents’ age is between 30 to 40 years old. The highest number of respondents are from Singapore (37 percent) as the city located neighbouring to Johor Bahru. The rest of the respondents are from Indonesia (27 percent), Thailand (10 percent), Korea (7 percent), UK (10 percent), Saudi Arabia (7 percent) and Pakistan (3 percent). Most of them (40 percent) came to Johor Bahru for the purpose of shopping, followed by business (33 percent), and leisure (27 percent). Based on the interview, those tourists who came to Johor Bahru for business, shopping was their secondary activity and those who came to the city for leisure denoted shopping as part of the activities. To ensure confidentiality, respondents’ name is coded. R1 refers to Respondent One. The details of the respondents are listed in Table 1.
Table 1: Respondents’ Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>No of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td>20-30</td>
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<td>40-50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose of visit</strong></td>
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<td>Shopping</td>
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<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>8</td>
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</table>

Shopping Mall Experience in Johor Bahru

Out of thirty (30) respondents who had been interviewed, 27 percent of them perceived the shopping malls in Johor Bahru as convenient. Convenience can be referred to as a judgement built from the experience gained when someone uses a service in terms of the degree of effort and time required (Farquhar & Rowley, 2009). In other words, convenience is a condition of ability to do something with slight effort and trouble. A convenient shopping experience can emerge from the shopping facilities provided in the shopping mall. For example, car park availability, store location, and mall size. Most of the respondents (53 percent) mentioned that they faced less difficulties while shopping in the host’s destination, in terms of its traffic and store arrangement. For the store arrangement, the respondents think that it is arranged in a strategic manner while the mall is perceived to be convenient as there is less traffic and more accessible parking spaces.

Apart from that, the respondent perceived the shopping malls in Johor Bahru as identical to each other (30 percent). This is due to the attributes that the malls have as they are very much alike with other malls in other places too. The identical attributes were found to be in terms of appearances of the shopping mall and store selections. Besides that, the findings found that the respondents were pleased and they had an enjoyable shopping trip. From the interview, 30 percent of the respondents shared the same opinion about the selected malls in Johor Bahru as they assumed that the malls are identical. This theme is supported by a previous research made by Shim, Eastlick, Lotz, and Warrington (2001). They asserted that people tend to compare the attribute of a mall based on its multi-brand store, identical interior and the selection of food outlets. Some of the responses that contribute to the emergence of the theme are as follows:

“Here in Johor Bahru, well...it has less hassle as the traffic is not as bad as in Kuala Lumpur. I can even have a parking space for my car easily. You will not experience this in Kuala Lumpur, you will spend at least 30 minutes just to park your car.” (R5)
“All malls have quite similar things especially their food outlets and brand of store...but what I love the most about this mall is its store arrangement. It makes you can find things you need easily, and the mall is located far from the city center. Less traffic, less hassles and for sure, less stressful. The mall also can be easily accessed because it is near the main roads. They also have parking spaces for buses here.” (R9)

“The design of the mall looks similar with each other’s. I mean the store arrangements are almost the same. The facilities are complete, especially its food outlets. There are a lot! You must try the mee rebus in a food outlet right beside the entrance where they have the buskers performing. Yeah, I love being here, it makes us the visitors feel comfortable and make us want to come here again.” (R1)

Factors that Motivate Tourists to Shop in Johor Bahru

The first theme generated from the interview transcript is availability. This theme falls under utilitarian value which can affect customer’s shopping behavior. Kesari and Atulkar (2016) said that utilitarian value will be perceived higher when a shopper needs to buy something as they will buy what they intend to buy and they will leave the store afterwards. Thus, it shows that availability is crucial in providing better utilitarian value as it will satisfy shopper’s need. The availability of a shopping mall can be referred to its wide selection of products and services available. According to Sebastian and Purwanegara (2014), shopping mall or shopping center is a business built to sell goods for final consumption which is not for resale, and it is organized, managed and owned as a unit. In other words, the shopping mall acts as a one stop center where people can acquire items they need from one place. Some feedbacks received from the respondents that indicate the theme availability are as follows:

“JB has everything. You can get anything you want here. There are a lot of shopping malls here. There also have few malls coming. So, it is easy to find things that we need.” (R12)

“The mall is complete. You can have everything you want in one place. I wish there will be a mall like this in the North so that I won’t have shop only when I’m having my business trip in other state.” (R9)

Moving forward, the second theme generated from the interview transcript is affordability. In a similar disposition as completeness, this theme is included in utilitarian shopping value and out-shopping market characteristics. The term affordability is closely related to its price, as it must be within the capabilities of the shopper (Mundel, Huddleston, & Vodermeier, 2017). Shopping malls in Johor Bahru always conduct numerous sales unlike shopping malls in any other state. As in Johor Premium Outlet (JPO), it offers discounted price for all items of high quality throughout the year and this is made to encourage people to support genuine goods rather than the imitated ones (The Star, 2012). From the interview, 27 percent respondents share the same opinion as they think that shopping malls here offer goods at low prices. The following are some of the feedbacks gained from the respondents:
"The goods sold here are very cheap, and it has a lot of varieties. I have been to other premium outlets in the US, and its price is just as affordable as the one they have there. Well...a lot of Singaporeans come here to shop. You can even see a lot of cars in the car park with Singapore registration plate. Because we cannot get this low price in Singapore." (R8)

"The price is low and I can buy a lot of things for my family back in Saudi. The goods sold here are very cheap and they have a lot of varieties. We even bring out whole family just to shop here." (R13)

The third theme found is inducements, which fall within the hedonic value. Hedonic shopping value can be referred to as a sense of pleasure during shopping and shopping malls are presumed as a place of enjoyment and exploring things (Bloch, Ridgway, & Dawson, 1994). This shopping value can be affected by the mall’s consensus image. The image is influenced by external factors, both tangible and intangible such as hygiene, mall’s location, customer service, social relationship, and mall design. Some feedbacks received from the respondents are that reflect ambience as a theme of inducement are as follow:

"There is a counter provided for manual car park payment near the mall entrance, near Clarks shoes store. So, it is good because this mall is taking a good care of their visitor just in case the automatic machine is not working. I also like how those security guards help the visitor to show which level have available parking spaces. It makes us find carpark with less difficulties and it makes me feel safe." (R11)

"What I love the most about this place (JPO) is its store arrangement. It makes you can find things you need easily, and the mall is located far from the city center. Less traffic, less hassles and for sure, less stressful." (R9)

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated the factors that influence tourists to shop in Johor Bahru; availability, affordability, and ambience. While in terms of their experience, the out-shoppers perceived shopping malls in Johor Bahru as convenient and identical. These factors consist of two shopping values which are utilitarian shopping value and hedonic shopping value, and there is an involvement of tangible and intangible factors. The themes derived from the interviews are correlated between each other, nevertheless this relationship is minimally highlighted because most previous studies emphasize on how it affects the tourists’ shopping intention and actual shopping behaviour. Thus, it is recommended that the relationship between variables to be explained further in the future study made on shopping experiences. Furthermore, this study enhanced the knowledge made from the previous researchers on shopping intention and shopping behaviour. In the previous studies, the variable availability, affordability and ambience will affect shopper’s buying intention and behaviour (Albayrak, Caber & Comen, 2016; Kesari & Atulkar, 2016; Shim & Santos, 2014). In accordance to that, these three variables are interdependent to each other. In addition, this study provides a dense factor of the patronage of the shopper to the host’s destination in terms of the theoretical point of view. Meanwhile from the
practical point of view, factors that induce shoppers to shop in a shopping mall can be helpful to the mall retailers for them to have a better understanding on consumer’s shopping behaviour. Besides selecting Johor Bahru as a location, future research can be made in other shopping landscape in Malaysia such as Klang Valley, Penang, Kota Kinabalu and Langkawi as the places have been listed among the top shopping locations in Malaysia by Tourism Malaysia in 2015.

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