



Making sense of tourist shopping research: A critical review[☆]



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Defines tourist shopping as an activity in which tourists purchase goods to take home during their travel.
- Proposes a descriptive framework for classifying tourist shopping studies from 2000 to 2015.
- Reviews main themes concepts and methods in tourist shopping research.
- Identifies major gaps including issues with a lack of appropriate theoretical guidance.
- Offers suggestions to improve theoretical frameworks for this aspect of tourism.

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ABSTRACT

Shopping is a common activity for many tourists, but research into this phenomenon is piecemeal and fragmented. This paper provides a critical review of tourist shopping research with the aims of identifying progress, presenting a descriptive framework, and suggesting new areas and approaches for research. The paper identifies main themes in tourist shopping research based on a “4W2H” framework that examines who (segmentation), what (product), why (motivation), where (setting and service), how (behaviour and experience) and how much (expenditure). Attention then shifts to a review of conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues. The findings show that the area is dominated by quantitative studies and a reliance on four generic concepts – customer satisfaction, motivation, culture and attitude. A lack of appropriate and specific theoretical foundations is a major problem for the area and the paper concludes with a discussion of key topics that merit further attention and that could address this problem.

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1. Introduction

The significance of shopping has been widely recognised from the perspective of both the tourist and the destination. Shopping is a pervasive and pivotal tourist activity (Kim & Littrell, 2001; Snepenger, Murphy, O'Connell, & Gregg, 2003; Lehto, Cai, O'Leary, & Huan, 2004; Lin & Lin, 2006; Yüksel, 2007; Tsang, Tsai, & Leung, 2011; Timothy, 2014). In some cases, it functions as a factor in tourists' destination choice (Moscardo, 2004); in others, it is the primary reason for travel (Lehto, Chen, & Silkes, 2014; Timothy, 2005; Wong & Wan, 2013). This act is not only utilitarian with a focus on acquiring daily necessities (Timothy, 2005), but also a way

to obtain reminders of the travel experience, understand local culture and strengthen social networks. For destinations, shopping can be a major revenue source (Murphy, Benckendorff, Moscardo, & Pearce, 2011). Shopping also contributes to a variety of job opportunities and to building a favourable image amid intense competition (Chang, Yang, & Yu, 2006; Heung & Cheng, 2000; Kattiyapornpong & Miller, 2012; Law & Au, 2000; Reisinger & Turner, 2002; Tosun, Temizkan, Timothy, & Fyall, 2007; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007). As such, many places have adopted tourist shopping as the basis of tourism policy initiatives and promotional campaigns (Rabbiosi, 2015; Timothy, 2005).

Despite the close link between tourism and shopping, relatively little attention has been devoted to substantive issues and questions surrounding this theme in tourism research (Timothy, 2014). The extant literature in this area is fragmented, with only a few reviews (Choi, Heo, & Law, 2016b; Coles, 2004; Timothy, 2005, 2014). Coles (2004) adopted the supply chain as an organising principle to incorporate production, distribution and transaction

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into a scholarly agenda for the tourism-shopping-retailing nexus. Timothy's (2005) seminal work provided the most systematic knowledge about shopping and tourism at that time, in which the history and forms of the combination of shopping and tourism, souvenirs, shopping venues and accompanying retail management were included. He later summarised some trends for future research, including alternative venues, place-making and branding, demand and globalisation (Timothy, 2014). Although these reviews provide insights into a research agenda, the phrase "retailing" in their titles suggest an emphasis on "the business of tourism" (Tribe, 2010, p. 30). Most recently, Choi et al. (2016b) assessed the progress in shopping tourism research. This review was, however, more descriptive than critical and conceptual, theoretical and methodological issues are largely omitted.

The present paper seeks to critically examine the literature on tourist shopping and to synthesise it in a holistic manner. The remainder of this paper follows a similar format to that used by Sharpley (2014) in his review of research into host perceptions of tourism. First, the paper addresses the definition of tourist shopping. Second, the review methodology used in this paper is outlined. Tourist shopping research is then reviewed using the major themes emerging from the papers and organised by a descriptive framework. After that, extant research is further evaluated with critical reflections on the key concepts, theoretical underpinnings and methodological issues. Finally, a section is dedicated to key topics that merit future attention.

2. What is tourist shopping?

Three terms – shopping tourism, tourism shopping and tourist shopping – frequently appear in the shopping-related tourism research. Although shopping has captured more attention in tourism academia in recent years, there exist few, if any, conceptual analyses of these terms. At this point it would be valuable to have a clear understanding of what the three terms mean in the existing research.

A consensus has been reached on shopping tourism, which is seen as a distinctive form of tourism where shopping is the primary purpose for taking a trip (Coles, 2004; Timothy, 2005; Choi et al., 2016b). It entails people travelling explicitly to shop, or to destinations where shopping is recognised as one of the most significant attractions (Timothy, 2014). As such, tourists belonging to this category are less likely to be content with their travel if retail conditions do not meet their expectations (Timothy, 2014). Places such as Hong Kong and Dubai, and border areas in North America and Europe, are often used to illustrate the emergence and sustained development of shopping tourism.

The other two terms, tourist shopping and tourism shopping, have not yet been consistently defined and deployed. Some researchers tend to favour the use of one term over the other, such as tourist shopping for Wu, Wall, and Pearce (2014) and tourism shopping for Reisinger and Turner (2002); Others often use the terms tourist shopping and tourism shopping interchangeably (see Heung & Cheng, 2000; Li, Deng, & Moutinho, 2015; Littrell, Paige, & Song, 2004). No matter which term is used, with a few exceptions (Heung & Qu, 1998; Law & Au, 2000; Chang et al., 2006; Tosun et al., 2007; Murphy, Moscardo, Benckendorff, & Pearce, 2011; Saayman & Saayman, 2012; Tsang, Lee, & Liu, 2014; Oviedo-García, Vega-Vázquez, Castellanos-Verdugo, & Reyes-Guizar, 2016), it has rarely been explicitly defined. Where definitions have been provided, there is considerable variety but also overlap in the aspects included in the definitions. For example, Heung and Qu (1998) and Law and Au (2000) for statistical purposes equated tourism shopping to tourist expenditures on goods purchased. Chang et al. (2006) defined tourism shopping as the purchase behaviours of

tourists at their destination. More recently, Tosun et al. (2007) and Murphy, Benckendorff, et al. (2011) and Murphy, Moscardo, et al. (2011) treated tourist shopping as a contemporary recreational activity that involved looking, touching, browsing and buying.

"Shopping as a tourist activity" (Jansen-Verbeke, 1994, p. 349) has been acknowledged and underlined in most of the existing research, regardless of the use of the term tourist or tourism shopping. It can also be argued that it is more useful to see tourists' expenditure on purchasing goods and their purchase behaviours as two important facets of shopping as a tourist activity. In spite of the conceptual difference between tourist and tourism (Leiper, 1979), the two terms tourist shopping and tourism shopping in the extant research have not been used to describe distinctly different phenomena, but rather have functioned as two varied names for the same phenomenon. In other words, it seems that either the term tourist or tourism shopping has been employed depending on the researcher's habit and preference without much difference in the meaning. This is similar to the common usage of the two terms tourist experience (e.g., Uriely, 2005) and tourism experience (e.g., Wang, 1999) in the literature. Taking shopping as a tourist activity as the starting point, the term tourism shopping is not essentially distinct from, but can be understood as a variation of, the term tourist shopping. In order to avoid confusion, this paper proposes to use the term tourist shopping and defines it as a recreational activity in which tourists browse, select and purchase goods to take home during their travel. Although this operational definition guides the paper, a range of terms, as noted in the following section, were used to search for relevant studies.

3. Literature review methodology

Briner and Denyer (2012) identified a number of different types of academic reviews including:

- traditional, narrative reviews providing detailed coverage of all the relevant studies on a topic, often presented in chronological order;
- meta-analytic reviews involving additional analysis of data reported in specific types of quantitative research papers; and
- expert, thematic or argument based reviews where academics provide a synthesis of key aspects of a topic.

According to Webster and Watson (2002) the expert thematic literature review is important for theoretical development and can direct new research through the identification of topics that have not been examined in detail and by attempting to describe cumulative patterns of results that can support theoretical development. The aim of such a review is to provide a broad overview of what has been done, identifying major themes emerging from the field and critically assessing the overall direction and progress in a field with the focus being more on synthesis than comprehensive description. Briner and Denyer (2012) acknowledge the value of this type of review but also argue for more systematic reviews which provide explicit details on how the review is conducted. Such a process should involve a clear description of the methods used for locating and appraising the studies that are reviewed, and that method should attempt to minimise any bias from the reviewers that might influence how the papers are chosen (Briner & Denyer, 2012). After deciding on the studies to be included a systematic review should analyse and synthesise the key information on the review topic (Briner & Denyer, 2012).

The authors sought to conduct this thematic review following the guidelines suggested by both Webster and Watson (2002) and Briner and Denyer (2012). Four key academic databases covering the main international tourism journals – ScienceDirect, Sage

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