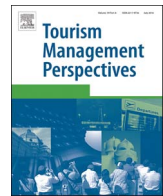




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The more the merrier: Souvenir shopping, the absence of choice overload and preferred attributes

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ABSTRACT

This study explores choice overload in a souvenir-shopping context, and employs a grounded theory approach to identifying some attributes tourists prefer when choosing souvenirs. The research data were gathered using 19 semi structured interviews from international tourists, representing 9 different nationalities, visiting Rovaniemi, Finland. The findings indicate that none of the participants encountered choice overload when purchasing souvenirs. Instead, they all preferred large choice sets compared to small ones (i.e. more than 50 versus less than 20). None of the respondents expressed regret, and they were satisfied with their purchased items while at the destination. Uniqueness emerged as one of the preferred attributes when choosing souvenirs. The findings support some studies indicating that more choice is always good and challenges those suggesting that more choice is harmful and cause regret and dissatisfaction. The managerial implications include that souvenir stores should offer unique and large assortment of souvenirs to visitors.

1. Introduction

While travelling from home to away and while at the destination, tourists make multiple choices about the various elements of the vacation itinerary over an extended period (Decrop & Snelders, 2005; Hyde & Lawson, 2003), from where to go to what to do once there and beyond (Choi, Lehto, Morrison, & Jang, 2012; Smallman & Moore, 2010). Some decisions are made before the trip (Fesenmaier & Jeng, 2000), while others are made on-site (Smallman & Moore, 2010); this study focusses on on-site decisions regarding the purchase of souvenirs. One of the most ubiquitous components of travelling is purchasing souvenirs (Swanson & Timothy, 2012) and offers avenues for tourists to express themselves (Lo, McKercher, Cheung, Law, 2011; Wilkins, 2011). Many tourists feel that a trip is not complete if they have not purchased souvenirs (Swanson & Horridge, 2006), either for themselves or for their friends and relatives (Wilkins, 2011). These souvenirs are often considered special possessions (Belk, 1997; Decrop & Masset, 2014; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988) and mementos of places visited and tourism experiences (Cave, Lejolliffe, & Coteau, 2012), and they may trigger positive memories of holidays (Torabian & Arai, 2016). According to Clawson and Knetsch (1966), tourism experiences can be classified into five stages (i.e. anticipation, travel to, onsite, travel back, and recollection) and these experiences are valuable only when they are stored and remembered through the recollection phase.

Souvenir purchasing is a relatively recent topic of scholarship

(Hu & Yu, 2007; Kong & Chang, 2016; Kemperman, Borgers & Timmermans, 2009; Swanson & Timothy, 2012), although it has been a relevant part of the leisure experience for many visitors for some time (Lloyd, Yip, & Luk, 2011; Murphy, Moscardo, Benckendorff, & Pearce, 2011). Recent studies have focussed on the meaning and value of souvenirs (Decrop & Masset, 2014; Haldrup, 2017) and tourists' actual souvenir-shopping behaviors (Kong & Chang, 2016). Swanson and Timothy (2012, p. 490) suggested two conceptions to better understand the role of souvenirs. 'One involves the tourist's perspective, which is that souvenirs are tangible objects or intangible experiences that are symbolic reminders of an event or experience. The other conception concerns the supplier's perspective, which is that souvenirs are tourism commodities that can be found in souvenir shops and handicraft markets'. The focus of this study is on the tourist's perspective.

Studies indicate that having more options is preferable because the provision of choice can increase an individual's sense of personal control (Rotter, 1966; Taylor, 1989; Taylor & Brown, 1988). However, recent studies have suggested that having more choices can cause the opposite outcome (Park & Jang, 2013; Thai & Yuksel, 2017a). In fact, studies indicate that with excess choices beyond a certain level, consumers may experience regret (Thai & Yuksel, 2017a) and lower satisfaction with their chosen alternative (Scheibehenne, Greifeneder, & Todd, 2009; Thai & Yuksel, 2017a). This counterintuitive phenomenon is termed 'choice overload' (Diehl & Poynor, 2010;

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Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Mogilner, Rudnick, & Iyengar, 2008). In today's experiential marketplace, people are offered a variety of souvenirs to choose from while at the destination; however, choice overload has been extensively studied in terms of ordinary retail products (Park & Jang, 2013). In fact, Park and Jang's (2013) and Thai and Yuksel's (2017a, 2017b) studies represent the only empirical evidence of choice overload in the tourism sector. The present study investigates whether tourists experience choice overload when choosing souvenirs, whether they prefer large choice sets (i.e. more than 50 items) versus small ones (i.e. less than 20) when choosing souvenirs and why, whether they regret or are satisfied with the souvenirs purchased while at the destination and the attributes they prefer when choosing souvenirs.

2. Literature review

2.1. Tourism souvenirs: what are they, what do they do and why are they purchased?

Souvenirs may be described as 'metonymic representations of events, places or experiences, which are imbued with meaning and significance. Souvenirs can trigger an imaginary return to memorable times and places, and they are often strategically placed within the home where they can best be seen by family members and visitors' (Peters, 2011, p. 235). According to Ramsay (2009), souvenirs are material objects, such as objects displayed on shelves or refrigerators, which link people with places and memories. These commercial objects purchased during travel remind us of past experiences and places visited (Gordon, 1986), and they encapsulate intangible emotional experiences (Kong & Chang, 2016; Swanson & Timothy, 2012). According to Swanson and Horridge (2004, p. 372) 'arts and crafts; jewellery (Turner & Reisinger, 2001); antiques (Grado, Strauss, & Lord, 1997); collectable items (Blundell, 1993; Gordon, 1986; Michael, 2002); clothing (Asplet & Cooper, 2000; Turner & Reisinger, 2001); and food (Gordon, 1986) are all suitable souvenirs'. According to Wilkins (2011, p. 245), 'the souvenir product mix includes clothing, hats branded with a destination name and logo, a destination's specialty food, a destination's arts and crafts, photographs and paintings of the destination and other items (such as key rings, fridge magnets and mugs) representative of the destination'.

Souvenir shopping is an important source of enjoyment, excitement (Wagner & Rudolph, 2010) and satisfaction during a traveller's trip (Murphy, Moscardo, Benckendorff, & Pearce, 2011), and it is an essential activity that helps in shaping travel experiences (Hu & Yu, 2007). Souvenirs contribute to satisfying the psychological needs of the traveller, even if the purchase is not the main travel motivation (Tosun, Temizkhan, Timothy, & Fyall, 2007). Graburn (2000) argued that an individual who brings a souvenir home can relive the experience at a routine time and place, and it can thus bring the extraordinary to an ordinary space in some small way. In some cases, souvenir purchases can represent a significant portion of a tourist's consumption, directly affecting his or her travel experience (Onderwater, Richards, & Stam, 2000; Swanson, 2004). Souvenirs are also purchased as gifts for family and friends to maintain social networks and meet interpersonal obligations (Wilkins, 2011). Overall, 'souvenirs are central to the tourism experience, and many tourists want to take home mementos of places they have been and things they have done' (Brennan & Savage, 2012, p. 144).

Turner and Reisinger's (2001) study found three significant product attributes for tourists purchasing cultural products, as follows: value (range, quality), product display characteristics (colour, display, packaging, size) and uniqueness (memory of the trip). Throsby's (2003) study indicated that aesthetic properties, spiritual significance, symbolic meanings, historic importance, artistic trends, authenticity, integrity and uniqueness are all important characteristics of cultural products. Timothy (2005) further identified seven reasons why people shop while on vacation, that is, 1) a desire for keepsakes and memories,

2) a quest for authenticity, 3) novelty seeking, 4) functional needs, 5) boredom/excess time, 6) buying gifts for people at home and 7) altruism. More recent studies indicate other factors that might entice tourists to purchase souvenirs, for example, location, high quality window displays, ease of movement, and layout as well as pleasant attitude, non-pushy sales persons and the need for greater authenticity (Cave, Leejolliffe, & Coteau, 2012), souvenir quality (Cave, Jolliffe, Trinh, & Lemky, 2015) and staff attitude (Albayrak, Caber, & Çömen, 2016). In the same vein, a recent study by Trinh, Ryan and Cave (2014) indicated that the authenticity of the product, relating to the destination, is an important factor when tourists buy souvenirs. Moreover, the shopping literature has frequently indicated that uniqueness and authenticity are key attributes considered in souvenir shopping (Gordon, 1986; Littrell, Anderson, & Brown, 1993; Swanson, 2004; Swanson & Horridge, 2004; Throsby, 2003; Turner & Reisinger, 2001; Wong & Cheng, 2014).

2.2. Choice overload

Choice overload is also referred to as over choice, and the term typically refers to a scenario in which the complexity of the decision problem an individual faces exceeds his or her cognitive resources (Simon, 1955; Toffler, 1970). Choice overload concerns the causal relationship between the number of alternatives and choice-related experiences (Chernev, Böckenholt, & Goodman, 2015; Scheibehenne, Todd, & Greifeneder, 2010), such as dissatisfaction (Iyengar & Lepper, 2000, Greifeneder, Scheibehenne, & Kleber, 2010), regret (Inbar, Botti, & Hanks, 2011) or choosing nothing due to indecision (Park & Jang, 2013).

Contrary to studies indicating that more choice is 'always good', there are several studies indicating that more choice might not necessarily be good (Chan, 2015), as this may result in indecision, making it hard to justify choosing one option and inducing regret; such experiences reduces consumers' satisfaction with their chosen options (Gourville & Soman, 2005; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Iyengar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006). For example, Iyengar and Lepper's (2000) study set found that a larger display of jams (24) attracted more attention than a smaller display of jams (6). However, 30% (31) of the consumers in the small choice-set subsequently purchased a jar of Wilkin & Sons jam. On the contrary, only 3% (4) of the consumers in the large choice-set did so. Their study concludes that consumers initially exposed to limited choices are more likely to purchase the product than consumers who had initially encountered a much larger set of options. Park and Jang's (2013) study in the tourism context indicated that having more than 22 destination choices increased the likelihood of making no choice, regardless of the destination type, suggesting that choice overload also exists in the tourism industry. In the same vein, a recent study by Thai and Yuksel (2017a) supported this finding; the authors claimed that choosing from larger choice sets results in lower satisfaction and higher regret in the context of holiday destinations.

According to Chernev, Böckenholt and Goodman (2015, p.335) 'choice overload is captured by changes in consumers' internal states, such as decision confidence, satisfaction, and regret, whereby higher levels of choice overload are likely to produce lower levels of satisfaction/confidence and higher levels of regret'. They further state that choice overload is measured as a subjective state of the decision maker (satisfaction, confidence, and regret) and/or as a specific behavioral outcome (choice deferral, switching likelihood, assortment choice, and option selection). In the same vein, post choice satisfaction and regret are both commonly structured as consequences of choice overload (Greifeneder, Scheibehenne, & Kleber, 2010; Iyengar & Lepper, 2000), and they directly reflect participants' reactions to their choices (Thai & Yuksel, 2017a). Causal relationships exist between choice overload and people's subjective states, such as satisfaction and regret, or behaviors, such as not choosing or switching to another option (Chernev, Böckenholt, & Goodman, 2015). Both post-choice regret and satisfaction are commonly seen as

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