

In Search of Sweet Pot: Assessing Visitors' Satisfaction with Putra Mosque

Nur Maisarah Saiful Nizam¹, Mazlina Mahdzar^{2*}, Nurul Kasih Mohd Rashid,³ and Nurain Khadijah Mohd Nizam⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

*corresponding author: ²nina@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

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This paper presents the findings of a study that examines the "sweet spot" concept, which suggests a significant association between visitors' satisfaction and engagement in four specific aspects of the tourism experience. Due to the rapid growth of Islam, mosques are being built at a faster rate than any other place of worship. These mosques vary in architectural styles and serve different purposes around the world. The mosque tourism business in Malaysia is widely recognised for its substantial contribution to community income and economic potential. This study aims to examine the relationship between the experience economy and visitors' experience at Putra Mosque. This study analysed the four realms of the tourism experience, namely education, entertainment, aesthetics, and escapism, to determine the impact on visitor satisfaction in the experience economy. A questionnaire was distributed to respondents to collect data, resulting in 281 received responses. Regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between the variables. According to the findings, there is a significant relationship between education and aesthetic experiences within visitors' satisfaction. The research findings are analysed from the perspective of individuals who frequent mosques.



1. INTRODUCTION

Mosques are cultural and religious heritage monuments that serve as essential and understudied subjects in transdisciplinary research (Koren-Lawrence & Collins-Kreiner, 2018). Mosque tourism is a specific form of cultural and religious tourism that focuses on visiting Islamic heritage sites, which are considered part of heritage tourism. This type of tourism is particularly associated with Arabic heritage within the broader context of heritage tourism. The increasing influx of Islamic tourists who aim to establish a connection with their historical heritage presents a burgeoning prospect for tourism in Europe. Consequently, there have been suggestions for implementing suitable marketing tactics to cater to this specific form of tourism (Hall & Prayag, 2019). The potential of tourism at mosques has been acknowledged as a feasible element of this growing business (Hall & Prayag, 2019). The pleasure of guests is crucial for maintaining visitation at the mosque, as it directly impacts their experience. Studies validate that a contented client is inclined to revisit, is open to spending more, and will endorse the destination to others (Baker and Crompton, 2000; Yoon, Y. & Uysal, M., 2005). In their 1999 publication, Pine and Gilmore identified four distinct sorts of experiences that significantly impact the overall pleasure of visitors to tourism destinations. The experiences in this theory vary based on the distinction between active and passive engagement, as well as the contrast between absorption and immersion. According to the theory of Experience Economy, the most favourable outcomes are obtained when a customer engages in all four categories of experience. The concept coined by Pine and Gilmore to describe the optimal blend of experiences is referred to as the "sweet pot".

Due to the complex and diverse nature of visitors' experience, it is impossible to quantify it with a single numerical value. In order to provide a comprehensive depiction of the diverse array of experiences found in attractions and destinations, it is necessary to employ a number of methodologies to assess these experiences (Jorgenson, 2019). The research on visitor satisfaction with mosque tourism at Putra Mosque is conducted using the four-experience economy framework proposed by Pine and Gilmore. This framework includes education, entertainment, escapism, and aesthetics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Experience Economy

Pine and Gilmore (1998,1999) presented the experience economy as a new paradigm for improving corporate performance in a variety of industries, including tourism and hospitality. The notion of the experience economy has been brought to tourism research providing dimensions to which to interpret visitor experience. Experiences encompass behaviour, perception, cognition, and emotions, which can be either explicitly or implicitly expressed (Oh, Fiore, Jeoung, 2007). They are formed by a process of acquiring knowledge and deriving pleasure from engaging in an activity (Stramboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Individuals construct their own unique experiences by drawing upon their personal origins, values, attitudes, and beliefs in any given setting (Jurowski, C., 2009). Pine and Gilmore (1999) proposed a framework that categorises tourism experiences into four distinct realms. These realms are defined by their level of participant engagement, ranging from active to passive, and their level of absorption or immersion. The boundaries between these realms are flexible and can overlap. This framework was further discussed by Oh et al. (2007). The experiences were categorised into four distinct realms: education, aesthetics, escapism, and entertainment.

The initial domain of *education* experience comprised individuals who belonged to the active absorption quadrant. Participants in this form of encounter actively assimilate the experiences as a cognitive state. For instance, visiting a mosque provides an educational experience that enhances visitors' understanding of Islam and its religious practices, so empowering them to make informed decisions. Moreover, a traveller assimilates the unfolding events in their surroundings while actively engaging their mind and/or body through interactive participation. Individuals enhance their understanding through firsthand experiential learning in tourism sites (Oh et al., 2007). Usually, individuals acquire broad or specific skills and knowledge through educational encounters at the locations they travel to. The second realm, *aesthetic* experiences, refer to passive absorption experiences that appeal to the senses. These experiences are referred to as aesthetic because, unlike educational experiences, they do not impact or modify the mind while being fully engaged in the world. For instance, engaging in activities like exploring a mosque with distinctive architecture and design might be categorised as aesthetic experiences when the visitors passively appreciate the surroundings without actively participating. Crozier (2012) argues that the aesthetic aspects of a mosque environment are influenced by historically significant architecture and location, as well as intangible elements that use sensory cues to stimulate visitors' imagination.

Escapism experiences entail active engagement and complete absorption to the extent that the tourist directly influences the performance or phenomena. Participating in mosque events such as an Islamic appreciation programme, Halal Food Festival, the apostle's maulidur discourse, and a religious talk by a notable Malaysian preacher are activities where the visitor's efforts influence the outcome of the experience. People pursue novel experiences to escape from their repetitive and predictable daily patterns (Hwang & Hyun, 2016). Escapism fosters a state of relaxation, allowing individuals to rejuvenate their mental and physical well-being (Moon & Han, 2018). In the realm of *entertainment*, individuals engage in passive absorption experiences when they do not actively influence the occurrence or environment. They simply appreciate or absorb activities and performances, such as visiting a mosque and quietly observing the actions of religious preachers (Oh, et al, 2007). According to Thyne (2001) and Scott (2007), mosques are often perceived as captivating, offering opportunities for entertainment and pleasure. The four realms were discovered to have distinct capabilities in influencing the visitor's encounter.

2.2 Visitor's Satisfaction

Satisfaction is determined by the comparison of expectations before and after visiting a site (RamseokMunhurrum, Naidoo, Seebaluck, and Pillai, 2006). The satisfaction of visitors has been identified as a significant factor that impacts the success of industries (Som and Badarneh, 2011; Adetola, Adewumi, and Olonimoyo, 2016) due to its potential to shape visitors' future behaviour (Hussein, 2016) and cultivate visitor loyalty (Ohn and Supinit, 2016). According to Jensen (2017), expressive acts are the only means to generate satisfaction. According to Jensen (2017), when it comes to describing overall satisfaction, the expressive indicators that make up the fundamental recreational experiences are more significant than the other expressive indicators. Expressive aspects were regarded as highly motivating and capable of producing satisfaction, while instrumental components were seen as maintenance factors that have the potential to cause unhappiness if they are absent. Thus, it is evident that facilities and attractions have distinct expressive and instrumental functions that might contribute to overall happiness in a complimentary manner. Visitor satisfaction refers to the sense of contentment derived from the many experiences encountered during tourist activities. The tourism activities were deemed crucial in acquiring experiences that could distinguish the place from its competitors (Walls, Okumus, Wang, and Kwun, 2011). Visitor satisfaction has a crucial role in determining their future investment and intention to revisit (Choo et al., 2016). Dissatisfaction among visitors

might lead to negative behavioural intentions in the future (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000). The level of pleasure that visitors have with the products and services provided in a tourism destination directly affects how often they choose to visit that destination. For instance, people who are content with the place are likely to return to the destination and actively endorse it to others. The contentment of visitors with the destination is a determining element in their visit to attractions. The satisfaction of tourists is influenced by the performance of attraction providers (Mahdzar, 2017). Moreover, there is a positive correlation between the level of service experience perceived by visitors at the destination attraction and their level of satisfaction (Mahdzar, 2020).

2.3 Relationship between Experience Economy and Satisfaction

Oh (2007) found that tourist contentment, good assessments of overall destination quality, psychological arousal, and strong recollections are outcomes of the experiences encountered at a place. The relationship between all four realms of experience and visitor satisfaction may be influenced by the empirical character of the force. In addition, escapism has been found to have a significant impact on pleasure with the music festival, while education has been found to affect contentment with a visit to the museum. The variables of education, aesthetics, and entertainment exerted a notable and favourable impact on happiness within the framework of a film festival (Kastenholz, 2017). Prior research has underscored the pivotal significance of each domain within the tourist sector. Chen and Chen (2010) conducted a study on 477 historical visitors in Tainan to examine the correlation between the educational experience and traveller happiness. The findings indicate that the educational experience contributes to an enhanced perception of value, resulting in a high degree of satisfaction among travellers. Hosany and Witham (2010) examined the impact of entertainment on both satisfaction and intention to refer, utilising empirical data obtained from 169 consumers in the cruise industry. They proposed that entertainment has a crucial role in influencing both contentment and intention to recommend. The aesthetic experience was discovered to augment customers' behaviour, encompassing both positive and negative responses and actions (Han, 2019). Ryu, Lee, and Kim (2012) asserted that aesthetics significantly influenced travellers' future behavioural intentions, such as word-of-mouth recommendations or revisiting. Hence, the aesthetic experience has the potential to elicit emotional responses that significantly contribute to visitors' overall happiness with their visit (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004). Prior research conducted by Quadri (2012) has demonstrated the significance of escapist characteristics in the tourist context, which have an impact on the intention to revisit. Boorstin (2012) further corroborated this discovery that persons who lead inauthentic, alienated, and monotonous daily lives sometimes desire to escape or detach themselves in pursuit of a distinctive experience, thus fulfilling their travel aspirations. In their study on Malaysian museum visitors' experiences, Mahdzar (2017) also proposed that the four domains of the experience economy had a favourable and substantial influence on satisfaction. Qu (2017) examined the influence of experience on contentment in the context of a theme park. Oh (2007) found that tourist contentment, good assessments of overall destination quality, psychological arousal, and strong recollections are outcomes of the experiences encountered at a place. The empirical character of the four realms of experience and visitor satisfaction may potentially influence the strength of the link. In addition, escapism has been found to have a significant impact on contentment with the music festival, while education has been found to influence pleasure with a visit to the museum. The factors of education, aesthetics, and entertainment had a notable and favourable impact on happiness within the framework of a film festival (Kastenholz, 2017). Prior research has underscored the pivotal significance of each domain within the tourist sector. Chen and Chen (2010) examined the correlation between the educational background and the level of satisfaction among 477 heritage tourists in Tainan. The findings indicate that the educational experience contributes to an augmentation in perceived

value, resulting in a heightened level of satisfaction among travellers. Hosany and Witham (2010) examined the impact of entertainment on customer satisfaction and intention to refer, utilising empirical data obtained from 169 consumers in the cruise sector. They proposed that entertainment has a crucial role in influencing both contentment and intentions to recommend. The aesthetic experience was discovered to augment customers' behaviour, encompassing both favourable and unfavourable responses and conduct (Han, 2019). Ryu, Lee, and Kim (2012) asserted that aesthetics played a significant role in shaping travellers' future behavioural intentions, such as word-of-mouth recommendations or repeat visits. Therefore, the aesthetic experience has the potential to elicit emotional responses, which in turn enhance visitors' satisfaction with their visit (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004). Prior research conducted by Quadri (2012) has established that escapist variables play a vital role in the tourism context, influencing the likelihood of repeat visits. Boorstin (2012) further corroborated this discovery that persons who lead inauthentic, alienated, and monotonous daily lives sometimes desire to flee or detach in pursuit of a distinctive encounter, thereby fulfilling their vacation experience. Bahrin (2017) proposed in their study on the experiences of museum visitors in Malaysia that the four realms of the experience economy had a noteworthy and beneficial effect on satisfaction. A study conducted by Mahdzar (2020) regarding the experiences of tourists to rural destinations in Malaysia revealed a positive correlation between the four realms of the experience economy and visitor satisfaction. Qu (2017) examined the influence of experience on satisfaction in the context of theme parks. The findings of his research indicated that aesthetic, entertaining, and educational events were strong predictors of satisfaction. Studies undertaken in various tourism contexts have empirically verified the connection between the experience economy and customer happiness. Based on the discussion above, this study proposed the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses 1: There is a significant relationship between experience economy and visitors' satisfaction.

H1a: There is a significant relationship between education experience and visitors' satisfaction.

H1b: There is a significant relationship between entertainment experience and visitors' satisfaction.

H1c: There is a significant relationship between escapism experience and visitors' satisfaction.

H1d: There is a significant relationship between esthetic experience and visitors' satisfaction.

3. METHODOLOGY

The sample size used in the study amounted to 278. This sample size fits in with the study according to the table of population and sample size (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). Data has been collected for two weeks in June 2023 from visitors who visited the Putra Mosque. Putra mosque was chosen as it is a popular attraction among the tourists and the mosque tourism offers unique kinds of experiences. 281 questionnaires were distributed using google form and QR code to visitors visiting Putra Mosque and used for analysis. The questionnaires are prepared in English and it comprised three sections. Section A (demographic portfolio), Section B (visitors' experience at Putra Mosque) and Section C (visitors' satisfaction at Putra Mosque). Questions for the visitors' satisfaction contains 4 items and it was adopted from Farahdel (2011), and for visitors' experience, 13 items were adopted from Minkyung Park, Haemoon Oh & Jowon Park (2010). The visitors were approached by the researchers to complete a questionnaire online in a google form willingly after they had experienced the experiential attributes of the mosque.

Descriptive and Regression analysis are then used to explore the relationship between four variables of visitors' experience and satisfaction.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

Based on Table 1, the highest mean value for visitors' mosque experiential attributes for education was 'This Putra Mosque improved my knowledge about Islam' and 'I learned many new things about Islam at Putra Mosque'. For entertainment experience, the highest mean score recorded was on item 'I enjoyed being one of the visitors at this Putra Mosque'; while for escapism experience was on item 'I was completely immersed in this Putra Mosque' and last experiential attribute of esthetics was on item 'The place of the Putra Mosque was attractive in many ways'. According to visitors at Putra Mosque, Putrajaya the least important attributes for visitors' experience were on entertainment ('I enjoyed participating in activities with others at the Mosque').

Table 1: Mean Score and Standard Deviation (SD)

Item	N	Mean Score	Sd
Education Experience			
This Putra Mosque Improved My Knowledge About Islam.	281	4.76	0.504
I Learned Many New Things About Islam At Putra Mosque.	281	4.76	0.504
This Putra Mosque Make Me Desire To Learn More About Islam.	281	4.68	0.468
This Putra Mosque Was A Good Islamic Learning Experience.	281	4.75	0.531
Entertainment Experience			
I Enjoyed Being One Of The Visitors At This Putra Mosque.	281	4.75	0.497
I Enjoyed Participating In Activities With Others At The Mosque.	281	4.42	0.766
I Enjoyed Many Activities At This Putra Mosque.	281	4.46	0.597
Escapism Experience			
I Was Completely Immersed In This Putra Mosque.	281	4.55	0.631
I Could Imagine I Was A Different Person At This Putra Mosque.	281	4.43	0.657
This Putra Mosque Made Me Feel Being In A Different World.	281	4.53	0.615
Esthetic Experience			
This Putra Mosque Setting Was Well Assembled In Harmony.	281	4.84	0.446
The Place Of The Putra Mosque Was Attractive In Many Ways.	281	4.86	0.407
The Putra Mosque Setting Offered A Good Experience.	281	4.83	0.430
Visitors' Satisfaction			
The Putra Mosque Met My Expectations.	281	4.81	0.441
This Visit Is Worth My Time And Effort.	281	4.83	0.433
I Was Really Satisfied With Visiting Putra Mosque.	281	4.84	0.433
Putra Mosque Was The Best Mosque Attraction To Be Visited Compared To Similar Mosques.	281	4.76	0.482

4.2 Regression Analysis

To see whether there is a significant relationship between the four realms of experiences and satisfaction of Putra mosque visitors, a linear regression was conducted. the outcomes

demonstrated that there is a significant relationship between education experience, esthetic experience, escapism experience, entertainment experience and satisfaction. these four realms of experiences were able to explain 44.1% (r-square = 0.441, f-change = 54.474, p<0.000) of the variance in visitors' satisfaction to Putra mosque.

Table 2: Coefficient

Model	Beta	T	Sig.
Education	0.159	2.508	0.013
Entertainment	0.029	0.457	0.648
Escapism	0.120	1.798	0.073
Aesthetic	0.496	8.529	0.000

Dependent: Satisfaction

Table 2 shows the value of beta coefficient for this study. The regression results found that only Education and Esthetic showed a significant relationship with visitors' satisfaction in Putra Mosque (p<0.05), hence hypotheses H1a and H1d are accepted. Meanwhile, Entertainment and Escapism experiences were found not significant resulting in H1b and H1c rejected. Results from this study also show that Aesthetic experience is the most important factor in influencing satisfaction among Putra Mosque visitors in Putrajaya ($\beta = .496$), followed by education ($\beta = .159$), and escapism ($\beta = .120$). Meanwhile, the lowest value is entertainment ($\beta = .029$).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The significance of attaining satisfaction with customers cannot be underestimated. The capacity of an attraction to draw in new and returning visitors is contingent upon the calibre of visitor experiences, since visitors are inclined to acquire items and services based on the anticipation of a gratifying and unforgettable encounter (Tsaur, Chiu, & Wang, 2006). While visitors may construct their own distinct experiences, it is the duty of the destination and the industry operating within that destination to offer the necessary resources for such experiences (Anderson, 2007). Establishing an appealing experience setting is crucial for attaining a competitive edge (Tsaur et al., 2006). Therefore, a comprehensive comprehension of the essence of tourism experiences is crucial for the economic prosperity of tourist locations. In order to achieve successful marketing, it is necessary to thoroughly examine the products or services being offered and carefully analyse the decisions made by consumers (Oh, et al, 2007). Tourism experiences are formed by a cognitive process of acquiring knowledge and deriving pleasure from engaging in various activities (Stramboulis & Skayannis, 2002). An enhanced comprehension of the correlation between engagement in activities and contentment is valuable for tourism destination designers and marketers.

This study aims to analyse the correlation between the four domains of experiences and the level of satisfaction among visitors. The study revealed that the educational and aesthetic aspects of mosque experiences had a substantial impact on visitor satisfaction. The study aligns with the current, scarce literature, shown by Mahdzar's works from 2017, 2020, and 2022, which demonstrate that visitors' range of experiences has a substantial influence on their contentment. The study demonstrates that aesthetics and education exert the most powerful influence and have a significant correlation with visitors' pleasure. These findings clearly demonstrate the significance of mosque tourism operators comprehending and assessing visitors' tourism experiences within the mosque environment, rather than solely concentrating on the tangible parts of their offerings and services. Visitors primarily desired to indulge, immerse themselves in the environment, and share their experiences at the site. Hence, it is

suggested that mosque tourism operators should ensure that the activities and ambiance created at the mosque are centred around providing consumers with aesthetic experiences, such as the atmosphere and mood of the physical space, in order to generate favourable evaluations of mosque visits. In addition, the mosque's notable infrastructure and strategic location, along with intangible elements, play a crucial role in utilising sensory cues to stimulate visitors' imagination. Therefore, it is crucial to provide visitors with the aesthetic qualities of Putra Mosque, including its distinctive architecture and ambiance, in order for them to fully appreciate the pleasing, positive, and artistic aspects of the mosque experience. The mosque administration may arrange events to enhance the educational experience for the guests. For instance, offering mosque tours, souvenirs, and the opportunity to meet and greet a renowned religious teacher (ustaz) in mosques, ensuring that visitors have a lasting memory of the area. The concept of mosque experience in this study enables an examination and comprehension of the effects of visiting a mosque. The mosque experience aims to create distinctive and personalised interactions that combine the favourable subconscious sensory and emotional aspects of visitors, resulting in enduring memories. The focus is on the development of emotions and values through the staged experience. This study, like most other scientific endeavours, has inherent limitations. To ensure tourist satisfaction and loyalty, it is crucial to conduct further study in various mosque tourism settings on the implementation of the four realms of the experience domain.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

NKMR and NKMN carried out the introduction and literature review sections. NMSM collected and refined the data and performed the data analysis as well as wrote the data methodology section. MM wrote the discussion and implication sections. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None declared

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Dr. Mazlina Mahdzar is an Associate Professor of tourism at Universiti Teknologi MARA. Her current research interests in tourism include marketing, experiential, management and nature based tourism. She teaches and supervised undergraduate and postgraduate tourism students.

Nur Maisarah Saiful Nizam, Nurul Kasih Mohd Rashid and Nurain Khadijah Mohd Nizam are final year undergraduate tourism students at Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Puncak Alam Campus.