



Importance of Product Attributes for Souvenir Purchase Preferences: A Viewpoint of Foreign Tourists in South Africa

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Abstract

Souvenirs are one of the prevalent elements of the travel experience that depict images, boost identities, and trigger positive memories of a person's vacation. Even though the purchase may take on many forms, the likelihood of purchasing a souvenir depends substantially on customers' perceptions of the souvenir's attributes. Unfortunately, there are limited studies on product attributes and how they influence tourists' decisions to purchase souvenirs. Hence, this study seeks to examine the importance of product attributes and their influence on tourists' perception towards souvenir purchase in South Africa. To achieve this end, a survey was conducted where respondents (foreign tourists) were asked to rate a set of criteria based on their importance when buying a souvenir. A five-point Likert-type scale questionnaire was used comprising of questions, which cut across the design performance and cultural evaluation indices. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the findings show that most tourists' purchase a souvenir to remind them of their travel experiences. Therefore, the main attribute that tourists seek is for the souvenir to evoke pleasant memories their travel experiences. Besides this, local branding, functionality, portability, innovative and traditional features are additionally important attributes that positively influence tourists' souvenir purchase preferences.

Keywords: Tourist, tourism experience, product attribute, souvenir, purchase preference

Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world, contributing 9% of the global GDP, and it also accounts for one in eleven jobs worldwide (World Tourism Organization, 2015). As for South Africa, which has been one of the uppermost tourism destinations in Africa, the foreign tourist arrivals in 2016 grew by 12.8% to ten (10) million. The foreign tourists' direct spend amounted to R75.6 billion, which is a 10.8% increase compared to 2015 and 74% of the total direct spend (R102.1billion) (SA Tourism Strategic Research Unit, 2016). The high volume of leisure tourists and the top attractions across the country, mostly natural attractions and shopping malls, drive the increased revenue generated from tourism.

One of the ubiquitous activities and important leisure pursuits of many people during vacations and trips is shopping (Oh, Chia-Kuen, Xinran & Joseph, 2004). Apart from visiting tourist attractions, many tourists purposefully seek enjoyable shopping opportunities as a familiar activity in an unfamiliar environment. According to the 2016 annual report of the South African Tourism department, shopping and nightlife are the top activities for tourists in South Africa. The estimated value of revenue generated from shopping in 2016 is R22.2billion and this remains the biggest spend category in South African tourism (SA Tourism Strategic Research Unit, 2016).



Even though the complexities, meanings, and practices of shopping have not been well understood (Swanson & Timothy, 2012), studies shows that shopping in terms of souvenir purchasing is one of the distinctive reasons why people travel to other places (Brennan & Savage, 2012; Lunyai, Run, & Atang, 2008; Swanson, 2004). According to Brenna and Savage (2012), souvenirs are central to the tourism experience, because, they possess strong embedded semiotic messages that transform intangible experiences into tangible memories. Besides this, souvenirs enable one to freeze a passing moment in an extraordinary reality and to re-live the experience in routine time and space (Collins-Kreiner & Zins, 2011). Hence, the host communities or tourism destinations are economically benefiting from souvenir design, production and sales. 'Souvenir', which is a French word, refers to objects that remind us of places, people, and events; that link us to the past or revive the past and allow them to interweave into daily lives (Cohen, 2000; Love & Kohn, 2001; Stewart, 1993). Thus, souvenirs are often items of high esteem acquired during a vacation, or as concrete evidence of visiting a place or showing something unique about the society and culture. They are also purchased as mementoes of individual leisure vacation time and sometimes used to illustrate or tell part of the story of a person's life (Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995), which, consequently, can build an individual's sense of self-worth and status (Belk, 1988).

The turning point in souvenir trade can be traced back to the Victorian era when there was a rapid growth in tourism and an intensified interaction between producer and consumer. As a result, artisans were subjected to the tastes, preferences, ideas and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market (Phillips & Steiner, 1999). Thus, they link local uniqueness or features with customers' perceptions by transforming their arts and crafts into the cultural creative design (e.g. souvenir, tourist arts, and so forth) that are mainly based on the beauty that lies in the eyes of the beholder (tourist expectations). Although some scholars believe that souvenirs, tourist arts or ethnic arts weaken racial stock and are degenerative, it can be argued that according to a cultural evolutionist principle, contact and cross-fertilization are essential to the advancement of culture (Phillips & Steiner, 1999). Therefore, tourist art, souvenirs or ethnic art, should be considered as a manifestation of interaction with other cultures rather than a sign of the destruction of the markers' culture. In other words, these artefacts are not a rejection of the culture but a way of coming to terms with it by keeping in touch with our fundamental sensual appetites for beauty and creativity. According to Hsu, Chang and Lin (2013), the interactive process of transforming traditional and cultural characteristics can make old or obsolete things fashionable through creative design.

Marketing specialists at various tourism destinations have also attached an enhanced importance to souvenirs; this is because souvenirs have the potential of conveying the essence of the tourism destination and its products to potential consumers. Hence, souvenirs have become lucrative aspects of expenditure in tourism. Swanson and Timothy (2012) document that tourist expenditure for shopping ranges from 33 percent to 55 percent of total travel expenses. Hence, the host community or tourism destinations are economically benefiting from souvenir design, production and sales.

Therefore, souvenir objects have received scholarly attention due to their importance in the tourist experience and in tourist expenditure. Researchers have studied souvenirs through historical, economical, functional and philosophical lenses. Besides, many researchers have also conducted empirical studies on souvenirs, with research focusing on: the meaning of a souvenir (Scott, 2010; Gordon, 1986; Collins-Kreiner & Zins, 2011; Lasusa, 2007); souvenir purchases (Swanson & Horridge, 2006; Wilkins, 2010; Fairhurst, Costello & Holmes, 2007; Anderson & Littrell, 1996); issues of authenticity (Asplet & Cooper, 2000;



Chang, Wall & Chang, 2008; Maruyama, Yen & Stronza, 2008; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2007; Littrell, Anderson & Brown, 1993); purchase intentions (Kim & Littrell, 2001) and travel motivations (Swanson & Horridge, 2006). However, there are apparently limited studies that examine the importance of product attributes and the level at which they influence tourists' decisions to purchase souvenirs. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the influence of product attributes on foreign tourists' perception towards souvenirs purchase in South Africa.

Product Attributes: A Dimension of Souvenir Purchase Behaviour

Product attributes are the characteristic qualities that reside in a product. From a tourist point of view, product attributes act as a tangible medium that satisfy the intangible images tourists encounter or experience during a trip or vacation. Before tourists decide whether to purchase a souvenir, they consider the relative attributes of the product, which includes: the authenticity, relationship to the local area, portability, usability and price of the product (Goeldner, Ritchie & McIntosh, 2000). According to a report by Littrell et al. (1994), other product attributes that are also considered are the criteria of design, superior quality workmanship, attractive colours, traditional themes and nature-based souvenirs.

Furthermore, tourists also select purchases based on the symbolism of the place visited, and the aesthetic and functional qualities of the product. Research by Turner and Reisinger (2001) categorized the important attributes that tourists considered when purchasing souvenirs into three (3) key domains, which are the product value (e.g. quality), product display characteristics (e.g. colour, packing, size) and product uniqueness (e.g. memory of the trip). Thus, product attributes determine product choices, because buyers often purchase based on the attribute that they considered important. Hence, it is essential to have a better understanding of how tourists perceive souvenirs and the attributes that they seek, to increase the likelihood of product purchase and advance the connection of the product with tourists' preferences.

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative, exploratory research method in the form of a survey to examine the influence of product attributes on souvenir purchasing decisions. The population for the survey is the foreign tourists who had visited South Africa within the last five years (2012-2016). The study targeted a total of 250 respondents, a value which was determined by using the FPC factor as recommended (Smith, 2013). Thus, the name and contact details (email) of tourists were retrieved from International travel blogs through purposeful sampling techniques. According to the definition by Puhlinger and Taylor (2008), travel blogs are the equivalent of personal online diaries written by tourists to report back to friends and families about their activities and experiences during trips.

The Google blog search was used with the following search phrase: tourism and souvenir in South Africa, shopping and souvenirs in South Africa, and South African Tourism. Tourists selection from the blogs was narrowed based on two criteria: 1) the person's entries on the travel blog must reflect that he/she was a foreign tourist to South Africa 2) the person must report shopping as part of his/her activities during the trip to South African. The reason for the second criteria is to focus specifically on recreational or leisure shoppers as first profiled by Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980).



To make it easier reach the selected respondents, the survey questionnaire was designed and administered through the Qualtrics Online Survey Software. The survey link was sent to respondents through the travel blogs or their emails, and the questionnaire comprised of two sections. Section 1 included six demographic questions while Section 2 posed questions developed based on ten (10) evaluation indices, which cut across the design performance and cultural elements as proposed by Hsu et al. (2013).

A five-point Likert-type scale was used, ranging from 5, 'very important' to 1, 'very unimportant.' The respondents (foreign tourists) were asked to rate the criteria they used when purchasing a souvenir during their visit to South Africa. The outcome of the research was analyzed using descriptive statistics, with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results and Discussion

After distributing the questionnaire to 364 respondents (foreign tourists), 231 responded to the survey, which amounts to 63.5 percent responses. However, prior to data analysis, 23 incomplete questionnaires were removed, leaving a total of 208 samples. The sample consists of both male (61.1 percent) and female (38.9 percent) participants with the age range from 18 to 59 and the highest percentage (46.2%) being between the ages of 18 and 29. 38.5% of the participants have an education background in Arts and Design, and 42.3% have income range from \$1000 to \$3999 per month (Table 1). The highest percentage of the participants (57.7%) reported that they travel between 2 to 4 times per year for vacation. When asked the major purpose of their trip, nearly two-third (65.4 percent) of the respondents reported the purpose of their trip to be leisure tourism, 15.4 per cent are education tourists while 7.7 per cent are business tourists.

Table 1: Demographic data of participants

| Demographic Factor | | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 127 | 61.1 |
| | Female | 81 | 38.9 |
| Age | 18 _ 29 | 96 | 46.2 |
| | 30 _ 44 | 72 | 34.6 |
| | 45 _ 59 | 40 | 19.2 |
| Education Background | Arts and Design | 80 | 38.5 |
| | Science and Engineering | 40 | 19.2 |
| | Business, Commerce & Management | 64 | 30.8 |
| | Others | 24 | 11.5 |
| Income per month | Less than \$1000 | 80 | 38.5 |
| | \$1000 - \$3999 | 88 | 42.3 |
| | \$4000 - \$11,999 | 40 | 19.2 |
| How often do you go on vacation? | Once per year | 64 | 30.8 |
| | 2-4 times per year | 120 | 57.7 |
| | 5-8 times per year | 24 | 11.5 |
| What type of tourist do you often go for? | Business tourist | 16 | 7.7 |
| | Education tourist | 32 | 15.4 |
| | Leisure tourist | 136 | 65.4 |
| | Others | 24 | 11.5 |

The nature of this study was to identify why tourists purchase souvenirs during their trips to South Africa, and the product attributes that influenced their purchase decision. When asked about the major purpose for buying a souvenir, the foreign tourists were allowed to respond with as many answers as were deemed to be applicable to them. The results obtained based on the descriptive statistics revealed that 53.8 percent of the participants purchased a souvenir to serve as a reminder of their travel experience. Additionally, 46.2 percent reported they bought souvenirs as evidence of visiting a place, while 42.3 percent indicated that they bought souvenirs as a representation of famous icons seen by them, and also as gifts for family and friends (Figure 1).

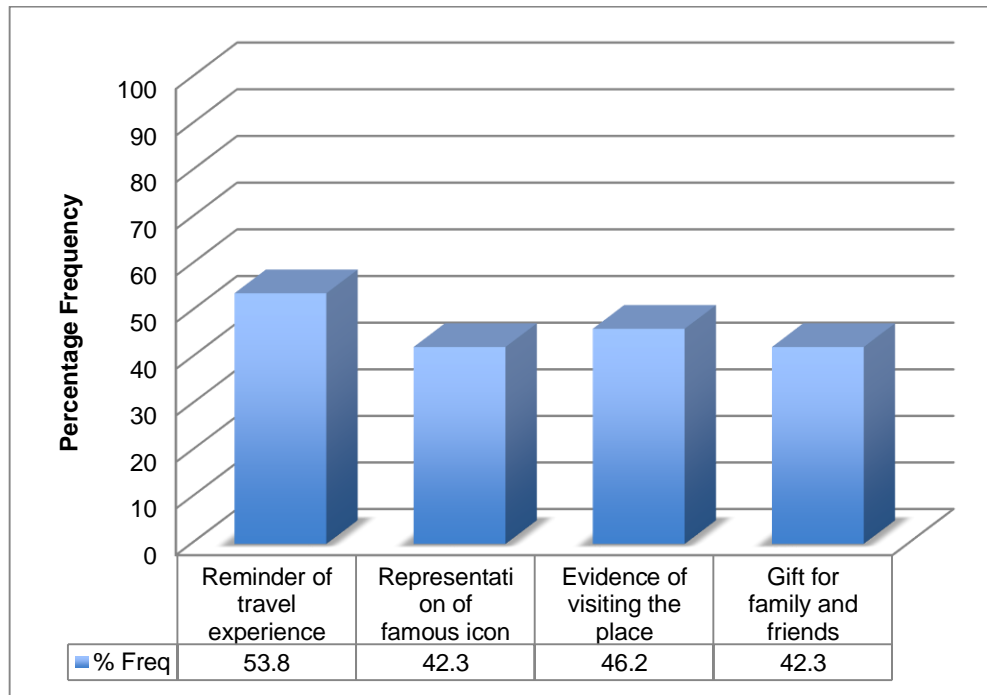


Figure 1: Purpose of souvenir purchase

Figure 1 shows that “reminder of travel experience” is the highest reason for buying a souvenir. The cross tabulation analysis (Fig 2) also revealed that nearly two-thirds of respondents across the age groups (18-29= 75%; 30-44= 66.7%; 45-59= 60%) reported the “reminder of travel experience” as the purpose of souvenir purchase for them. This is evidence that the souvenir plays a significant role in sustaining travel experiences, which is similar to Brenna and Savage’s definition of souvenir as “central to the tourism experience that transforms intangible into tangible experiences” (Brennan & Savage, 2012). Similarly, Collins-Kreiner and Zins, (2011), and Swanson (2004) opine that souvenirs helps tourist to re-live the experience in routine time and space.

It is interesting to note that there are variations in the purpose of buying souvenirs that manifest across different age groups. The cross tabulation analysis shows that the highest percentage of respondents that selected “reminder of travel experience” and “evidence of visiting a place” as the reasons for purchasing souvenir, were foreign tourists within the age group 18-29 years of age. Records also show that the highest percentage of respondents within 30-44 and 45-59 respectively reported “representation of a famous icon” and “gift for family and friends” as their purpose of souvenir purchase.

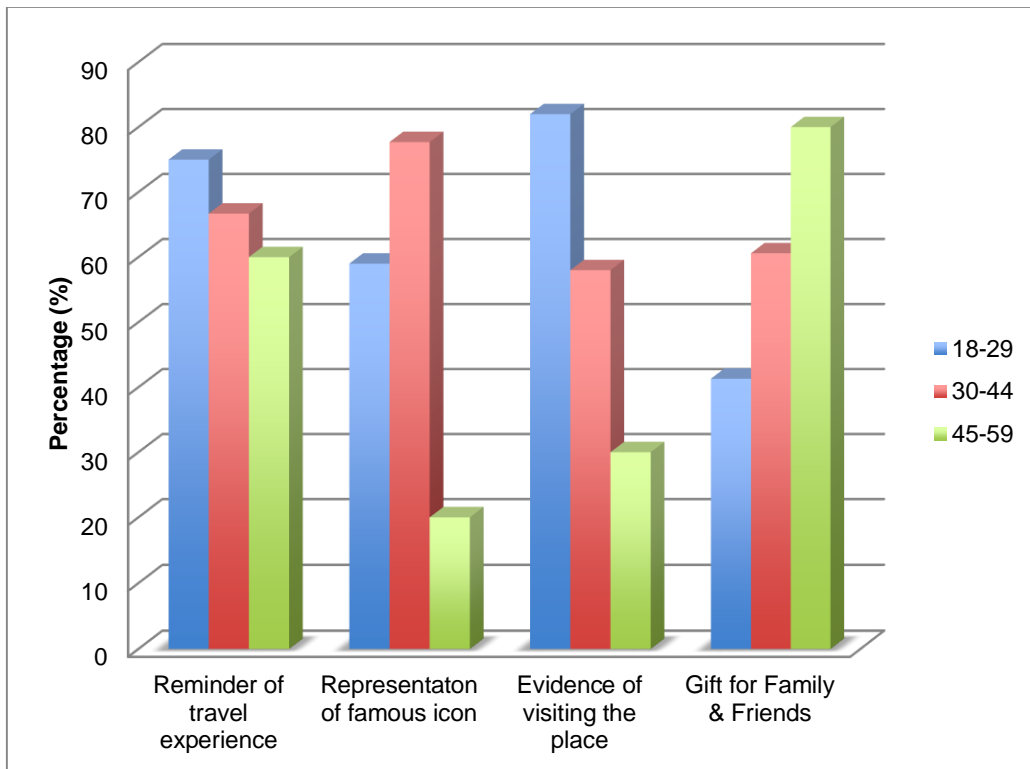


Figure 2: Cross tabulation of age and the purpose of souvenir purchase

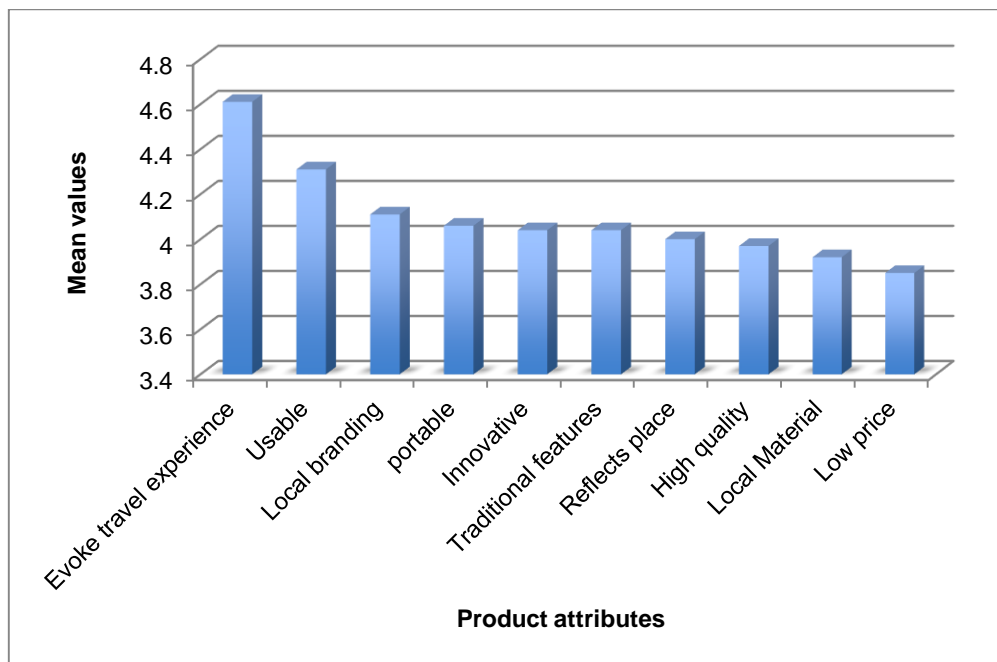


Figure 3: Mean values of the product attributes' influence on souvenir purchase preference

Figure 3 above, shows that the product attribute with the highest mean value of 4.61 is the attribute that evokes a travel experience. This rating corresponds with the respondents' purpose of purchasing a souvenir. That is, the highest percentage of respondents reported "reminder of travel experience" as their purpose for a souvenir purchase and therefore they sought souvenirs that could likely induce memory of their travel experience (even long after



the trip is concluded). According to Desmet (2003), we never buy a product without having some motive for investing our resources; therefore, souvenirs can be regarded as an instrument that helps us accomplish our goals (evoking travel experience). Hence, the anticipated event of possessing the souvenir, which will fulfill a goal (evoking travel experience), is the point of reference for appraising the product as being motive compliant (Desmet & Hekkert, 2002; Desmet & Hekkert, 2007; Luke, 2009) and this results in a desire and the consequential decision to purchase the souvenir.

Usability and local branding are the 2nd and 3rd highest rated attributes respectively. The functional attribute can also be linked to the purpose of purchasing the souvenir. Since many respondents prefer a product that reminds them of the travel experience, an interactive or engaging souvenir can also be a means of evoking or re-living the travel experience. Furthermore, since the “evidence of visiting a place” is the second rated reason for purchasing a souvenir, souvenirs with the local branding can serve as evidence that the tourist has visited the particular location.

Interestingly and possibly counterintuitively, the price is the lowest attribute that influences tourists’ souvenir purchase decisions. Even though much research shows that price has a significant impact on purchase intention or decisions (Thu Ha & Gizaw, 2014; Álvarez & Casielles, 1993; Seng & Husin, 2015; Faith & Edwin, 2014), this study shows that price has much smaller influence on souvenir purchase decisions than was predicted to be the case.

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha | Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | N of Items |
|------------------|--|------------|
| 0.789 | 0.793 | 10 |

Based on the ten (10) items in the evaluation, reliability analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha) was calculated to test the reliability and internal consistency of data. The results show that the alpha coefficient is 0.789. According to Hair et al. (1998), a Cronbach’s Alpha of more than 0.7 indicates that the items are homogenous and measuring the same constant. Thus, the recorded Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.789 recorded, which is higher than the recommended value as suggested by Hair et al. (1998) indicates that the measures in this study are reliable.

Conclusion

This study has been able to identify that the major reasons why tourists purchase souvenirs during their trips to South Africa is to serve as a reminder of their travel experiences. Based on this reason, they mostly seek souvenirs with the attributes that can evoke their travel experience. This is evidence that the tourism industry is also shifting towards the experience economy, where tourists seek products and services that satisfy functional needs at psychological, subjective and emotional levels.

The findings also revealed that the purpose of purchasing a souvenir determines the attributes that the tourist seeks and these attributes influence their purchase decisions or preferences. However, the purpose of buying a souvenir varies across different age groups, which is evidence that priority, needs and preferences also vary across various age groups. Therefore, it is important for souvenir producers and retailers to consider the age group of potential tourists so as to design and sell the right product that suits their needs and preferences at the right time and in the right market.



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