

SOUVENIR PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES: PREFERENCE OF YOUNG MALAYSIAN TOURIST

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Article history

Received date : 1-3-2022

Revised date : 2-3-2022

Accepted date : 25-6-2022

Published date : 1-8-2022

To cite this document:

Yi, L. J., Yung, P. P., & Hiang, G. C. (2022).
Souvenir Product Attributes: Preference of Young
Malaysian Tourist. *International Journal of
Accounting, Finance and Business (IJAFB)*, 7(41),
219 - 228.

Abstract: *Tourism industry is one of the major contributors to Malaysia's socio-economic development. However, the Covid-19 pandemic that started in year 2020 has greatly affected the tourism industry. One year later, domestic tourism has become a pathway to revive the tourism industry in countries around the world. Several initiatives have been taken to promote domestic travel and local tourism operators in Malaysia are keen to welcome domestic travelers. As souvenir is also an essential component of the tourist experience, this paper explores souvenir product attributes that affect the purchase preference of domestic young tourists. To this end, a survey that involved 120 young Malaysians age between 15 to 30 were conducted. Findings of the study indicated that in general, postcards and booklets are the most popular souvenirs among young Malaysian tourists. Interestingly, aesthetic souvenir product attribute is the key factors that influences souvenir purchases decision. While the Ministry of Tourism has formulated and implemented the Tourism Recovery Plan under the National Tourism Policy 2020-2030, understanding the souvenir purchase preference of local tourists is also important as many retail businesses located nearby or at tourist destinations depend heavily on the selling of souvenirs for survival. Besides, information on tourist souvenir purchase preferences can be an indicator for marketing strategy as well as quality control guideline for countries that are tourism dependent.*

Keywords: *souvenir, attributes, tourist, preference*

Introduction

Tourism is one of the leading and fastest growing service industries in the world that contributes much to the global GDP (Olalere et al., 2017). In Malaysia, the tourism industry has significantly contributed to government revenues, national income, and foreign exchange earnings. Apart from stimulating both the national and regional development, the tourism sector has also created job and business opportunities for the local communities in many countries (Puah et al., 2018), (Muzafar et al., 2019), (Thongphon et al., 1991). In 2019, the Malaysia

Tourism Promotion Board (Malaysia et al., 2019) reported that shopping has become a major contributing activity to the tourism industry in Malaysia as it has contributed RM28.94 billion which is 33.6% of the total tourist expenditure for the year. While research shows that souvenir purchasing is one of the reasons for tourist to travel to different destinations (Brennan et al., 2012), (Olalere et al., 2017), data collected by the Malaysian government shows that handicraft and souvenirs is one of the most popular shopping items among tourists who visited Malaysia in 2019 (Azmi et al., 2019), (Malaysia et al., 2019). This demonstrates that souvenir is one of the important elements in the Malaysia tourism industry.

‘Souvenir’ is a word that indicates ‘to come into the mind’ or ‘to remember’, originated from the Middle French and Latin word ‘subvenire’ (Elomba et al., 2017), (Singh et al., 2018), (Swanson et al., 2012), (Weerawan et al., 2018). Souvenir is a tangible marker that reminds and symbolises leisure travel experience for tourist (Collins-Kreiner et al., 2011), (Sthapit et al., 2018). Swanson & Timothy (Swanson et al., 2012) elaborated that souvenirs serve as tourist commodities which are often found in souvenir shops or handicraft markets. As a result, selling souvenirs has also been frequently considered as a way to benefit the local communities through tourism (Kong et al., 2012), (Lacher et al., 2015). In view of this, understanding consumer preference towards souvenir product attributes is important to provide indicators to develop helpful ideas for quality improvement and further enhance souvenir product attributes. This will then indirectly benefit both the national economy and retail businesses that rely on souvenir trade. While coronavirus outbreak has posed a significant threat to the tourism industry around the world, domestic tourism is expected to play an important role in leading the initial recovery phase for tourism industry in most of the countries (OECD et al., 2020). In Malaysia, domestic travel is also on the rise. However, most of the previous research only focused on the meaning of ‘souvenir’, authenticity of souvenirs, tourist satisfaction, purchase patterns and intentions and travel motivations coming from the perspective of international tourists (Olalere et al., 2017), (Wilkins et al., 2009). This explains that there is a distinct gap, relatively little is known about local tourists’ preference towards souvenir product attributes. As domestic tourism is seen as a pathway to revive the tourism, this paper addresses findings on preference of souvenir product attributes of young Malaysian tourists.

Literature Review

Swanson & Timothy (Swanson et al., 2012) noted that a souvenir represents an object, a place, event, occasion, or a person to be remembered although the term ‘souvenir’ is widely and often associated with tourism. They also argued that souvenir can also serve as a memento to memorable times and places. The term ‘souvenir’ should include items obtained without being purchased such as photographs, immigration stamps or even museum entrance tickets. Most importantly, souvenir is a universal element of travel experience that contributes to the tourism economy. Although souvenirs serve as a trigger to memories, Swanson & Timothy added that not all souvenirs have the same emotional functions. In the meantime, another scholar, Singh (Singh et al., 2018) mentioned that souvenirs serve multiple functions. It is an item to be brought back home, a central to tourist experience, a worldwide advertising tool, as well as a tool for generating profitable economy. Through the purchase of souvenir as gifts to friends and family members, cultural knowledge and history of a destination is imparted indirectly (Kong et al., 2012), (Singh et al., 2018), (Swanson et al., 2012). Souvenir is also playing a significant role in the development of sustainable tourism.

Meanwhile, Olalere (Olalere et al., 2017) researched on how product attributes influence tourists’ decisions in purchasing souvenir. The characteristics that reside in a product are

product attributes. Olalere claimed that product attributes are tangible objects that help to fulfil intangible images of tourists' encounters or experiences during their travels or vacation. Product attributes helps the tourists to make purchasing decisions. Authenticity, emotional attachment to the local area, portability, usability and price of the product are the main product attributes that are considered (Kong et al., 2012), (Olalere et al., 2017). Criteria such as design, workmanship, colours used, traditional themes and nature-based of a product will be considered by tourists who fall into the category of relief seekers (Kong et al., 2012). In the meantime, nature seekers would buy something new and innovative; experience seekers would consider the price of the souvenir and familiarity seekers would consider the attribute of both the price and design of the souvenir. Olalere (Olalere et al., 2017) also argued that it is crucial for marketers of souvenirs to understand the priority, needs and preferences of different target groups in order to cater better to tourists' needs and liking.

As we discussed about souvenir, it is important to understand that souvenir shopping is a common practice in the travel experience when visiting a destination. Different studies show the importance of souvenirs in the tourism industry (Amaro et al., 2020). Through their research 'Towards a deeper understanding of the purchase of souvenirs', Amaro, Ferreira & Henriques (Amaro et al., 2020) noted that souvenir industry is an attractive market as many tourists purchase souvenirs and majority of them are inclined to buy at least two souvenirs. Souvenir collector tourist were found intend to purchase more souvenirs and willing to pay higher prices for souvenirs. However, their research also found that not all tourists are willing to spend high amount for souvenir shopping. Through this research, typical local products, magnets, t-shirts, and keychains are the most purchased souvenirs. Similar with Olalere's research (Olalere et al., 2017), Amaro, Ferreira & Henriques (Amaro et al., 2020) concluded that understanding tourists' preferences is important to decide the type of souvenirs that should be made and sold.

Review of existing literatures disclosed that there is growing opportunities in the expanding souvenir market. Nevertheless, understanding the preferred attributes among target tourist is helpful to formulate marketing and design strategies and increase sales. Many past research studies focused on preferences and needs views of international tourist. While domestic tourism has resumed in most of the tourism destinations in Malaysia and is helping to mitigate the damage done by the Covid-19 pandemic, information that look specifically into domestic tourists' preference of souvenir attributes are not only crucial for marketers and retailers but also souvenir product designers.

There is a connection between product attributes and product choice. Tourist often made purchase decision based on the attribute that they considered as (Olalere et al., 2017). Turner and Reisinger (Turner et al., 2001) categorised souvenir product attributes into three key domains namely, product value, product display characteristics and product uniqueness. According to Elomba & Yun (Elomba et al., 2017), when a tourist looks at a souvenir, there is a need to look into the authenticity of its intangible attributes. To validate a souvenir's authenticity, attributes should cover the features, materials, presentation, spirit and feelings, image and interpretation of the souvenir. Swanson and Horridge (Swanson et al., 2006) developed souvenir product attributes scale based on review of literatures and item generation from different scholars and panel of merchandising professionals. The scale identified 3 key domains which are care and travel selection factors, aesthetic selection factors as well as unique selection factors. The scale items were adapted in this research as it is helpful to identify important attributes that young Malaysian tourists consider when purchasing souvenirs.

Method

This study utilised quantitative research method to unveil souvenir product attributes that are important for young Malaysian tourists. Framework by Swanson & Horridge (Swanson et al., 2006) on souvenir product attributes was adopted and questions in questionnaire were raised based on the original questions raised in the previous research. Young tourists are teenagers, college students, young adults or young professional group of travellers (Han et al., 2016), (Mohamed et al., 2010). Therefore, a total of 120 young Malaysian travelers age between 15 to 30 took part in this survey. The respondents were randomly selected; their participation was fully voluntary. Due to the restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, online survey was carried out between July 2021 to August 2021. Questionnaire based on product attributes scale was set up using Google Forms and link was shared through Whatsapp and Telegram. All the items under care and travel selection factors, aesthetic selection factors as well as unique selection factors were measured using a 4-point Likert Scale; 1 as least likely and 4 as most likely. The collected findings were then analysed using the statistical software SPSS. Care and travel selection factors obtained Cronbach's alpha value of .859, aesthetic selection factors at .837 and unique selection factors at .845 during the pilot test.

Findings

Among the 120 respondents who participated in this study, 66.7% of the respondents were females and 33.3% of the respondents were males. 28.4% of them were in the 15-20 age group, 30% of them were in the 21-25 age group, and a majority of them (41,6%) were in the 36-40 age group. In terms of ethnicity, more than 42% of the respondents were Malays, 35.8% Chinese, 15.8% Indian and 5.8% of the respondents were others. The table below offers insights into the characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	40	33.3
Female	80	66.7
Age:		
15-20	34	28.4
21-25	36	30.0
26-30	50	41.6
Race:		
Malay	51	42.6
Chinese	43	35.8
Indian	19	15.8
Others	7	5.8

Table 2 below represents young Malaysian tourists' interest for different types of souvenir products. The respondents are allowed to choose more than one type of souvenir preferred during domestic travel. Overall, the respondents show high interest in postcards and booklets, followed by local food and other mementos of locations/ attractions. Books about the destinations, history or attractions is the souvenir products that gained least interest among the respondents.

Table 2: Perceived Interest for Souvenir Products

Type of souvenirs	Frequency (%)
Books about the destinations, history, or attractions	33 (27.5%)
Local foods	95 (79.2%)
Postcards or booklets	105 (87.5%)
Accessories	65 (54.2%)
Artistic or authentic clothing	50 (41.7%)
T-shirts, sweatshirts, or other clothes with a name/picture of location/attraction	59 (49.2%)
Other mementos of locations/attractions	86 (71.7%)

Meanwhile, Table 3 below revealed that majority of young Malaysian tourist allocated their budget for souvenir purchase in the range of RM10-RM69. Only a small number of the young Malaysian tourist will spend more than RM70 for souvenir purchase during domestic travel.

Table 3: Souvenir purchase budget

Souvenir purchase budget when travelling domestically	Frequency (%)
Below RM10	5 (4.2%)
RM10-RM39	42 (35.0%)
RM40-RM69	45 (37.5%)
RM70- RM99	10 (8.3%)
RM100 and above	18 (15.0%)

From the findings, it is clear that respondents in general have stronger concern for aesthetic selection factor and least concern for care and travel selection factor. Findings of the young Malaysian tourists' preference of souvenir product attributes are summarised below.

Table 4: Overall Selection Factors

Selection Factors	Mean
Care and Travel	3.33
Aesthetic	3.49
Unique	3.41

Care and Travel

Findings of this study shows that under care and travel selection factors, price is the most important souvenir product attributes that affects the purchase decision for majority of the respondents (65%). The respondents regarded 'usable' and 'easy to care for' souvenir product attributes as key factors while selecting souvenir products. Remarkably, the respondents indicated that 'a good gift' souvenir product attribute is not as important as the other attributes.

Table 5: Care and Travel Selection Factors

Dimensions	Least Likely Frequency (%)	Unlikely Frequency (%)	Likely Frequency (%)	Most likely Frequency (%)	Mean
Easy to care for	10 (8.3)	7 (5.8)	37 (30.8)	66 (55.0)	3.33
Easy to clean	12 (10.0)	8 (6.7)	38 (31.7)	62 (51.7)	3.25
Price	5 (4.2)	3 (2.5)	34 (28.3)	78 (65.0)	3.54
Item can be used	4 (3.3)	6 (5.0)	38 (31.7)	72 (60.0)	3.48
A good gift	15 (12.5)	10 (8.3)	35 (29.2)	60 (50.0)	3.17
Made in the place you are visiting	12 (10.0)	8 (6.7)	42 (35.0)	58 (48.3)	3.22

Aesthetic

As for aesthetic selection factors shown in Table 6 below, the respondents appeared to indicate that both ‘appealing design’ and ‘appealing colours’ product attributes are very important selection factors whereas ‘can be worn’ does not receive much concern from the respondents.

Table 6: Aesthetic Selection Factors

Dimensions	Least Likely Frequency (%)	Unlikely Frequency (%)	Likely Frequency (%)	Most likely Frequency (%)	Mean
Appealing design	3 (2.5)	2 (1.7)	34 (28.3)	81 (67.5)	3.61
Appealing colours	3 (2.5)	2 (1.7)	34 (28.3)	81 (67.5)	3.61
Item can be worn	12 (10.0)	12 (10.0)	36 (30.0)	60 (50.0)	3.20
Item can be displayed at home	3 (2.5)	5 (4.2)	37 (30.8)	75 (62.5)	3.53

Unique

On the scale of 1-4, respondents thought that they hardly look for souvenir product which is made by a well-known craftsperson or artisan. However, they are more likely to look for souvenir which is ‘new and innovative’ and of high-quality workmanship. Apart from that, they are also more likely to purchase souvenir products which are unique and produced in limited quantity.

Table 7: Unique Selection Factors

Dimensions	Least Likely Frequency (%)	Unlikely Frequency (%)	Likely Frequency (%)	Most likely Frequency (%)	Mean
Made by well-known craftsperson/ artisan	13 (10.8)	17 (14.2)	40 (33.3)	50 (41.7)	3.06
Unique, one of a kind, or limited edition	3 (2.5)	6 (5.0)	39 (32.5)	72 (60.0)	3.50
Workmanship is of high quality	2 (1.7)	6 (5.0)	41 (34.2)	71 (59.2)	3.51
New, innovative	2 (1.7)	5 (4.2)	43 (35.8)	70 (58.3)	3.51
Clever idea	2 (1.7)	4 (3.3)	49 (40.8)	65 (54.2)	3.48

Discussion

Young Malaysians today are actively involved in domestic travelling. The Department of statistics Malaysia (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2019) stated that in 2019, majority of domestic tourist were from the age group of 25-39 (37.8%) followed by 15-24 years (26.4%). As noted earlier, understanding of young Malaysian tourists' souvenir product attributes preference is deemed as an appropriate way to develop souvenir design strategies and to increase sales for domestic tourism.

Generally, the mean score reveals that young Malaysian tourists are concerned about all selection factors that are related to souvenir product attributes. The mean score which is above 3.0 for all the selection factors indicated that souvenir product attributes play a significant role to improve sales. The findings are directly in line with previous findings by Olalere (Olalere et al., 2017), where tourists will consider the relative attributes of souvenir product seriously.

As far as the care and travel selection factors are concerned, the findings register highest mean scores, unveiling domestic young Malaysians as being price conscious for souvenir purchase. In a way, this result ties well with previous studies wherein young Malaysian tourists are low in financial resources and that has caused them to have high expectation for the product that they bought during domestic travel (Chiu et al., 2015). Even though much research affirmed the significant role of souvenir as a gift (Amaro et al., 20 2), (Lin et al., 2016), (Marzouki et al., 2020), this study shows that 'a good gift' is one of the lowest souvenir product attributes that influences young Malaysian tourists' souvenir purchase decisions.

Prior research shown that wearable souvenir products such as T-shirts, accessories and jewellery are some of the favourite items among the tourists (Kim et al., 2001), (Swanson et al., 2004). However, the findings of this study shows that young Malaysian tourists has relatively low interest for wearable souvenirs.

Unique selection factors appeared to be the other factor that warrant the attention for young Malaysian tourists' preference on souvenir. It is not surprising that mean scores suggested that innovation strategy is essential to be considered by the tourism industry. While young Malaysian tourists show their concern for new and innovative as well as workmanship quality,

it can be said that young Malaysian tourists will not consider purchasing souvenirs that lack uniqueness and innovation.

In summary, young Malaysian tourists are looking for souvenir products with different attributes. This can be clearly seen from the findings, attributes that a souvenir product contained such as price, appealing design and colours, and can be displayed at home are important factors that attract young Malaysian tourists.

Conclusion

Souvenir product attributes are major stimuli that can influence tourists' purchase decisions. To attract a larger number of customers, it is important for designers, marketers and retailers to understand young Malaysian tourists' preferences for souvenir product attributes to make souvenirs more appealing to the target group. Besides, product attributes preference also changes from time to time. It is necessary for the tourism sector to evaluate the changes frequently in order to maximise tourist satisfaction in souvenirs shopping.

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