

Business travellers' orientation towards shopping: An exploratory study in Dubai

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Objectives | Dubai is best known for its shopping malls and it has the world's most visited and largest shopping mall, namely Dubai Mall, which is adjacent to the world's tallest tower (Burj Khalifa). This location is also a popular tourist destination as it comprises the world's largest aquarium and choreographed fountain system. Similarly, there are several shopping malls, such as Mall of the Emirates, Deira City Center, Mirdif City Center, Ibn Battuta Mall, etc., that encourages visitors to engage in shopping activities. This study focuses specifically in the area of business travellers' shopping orientation, as it contributes to the retail industry of Dubai. Although the business travellers' primary purpose of visit to a destination is to attend exhibitions, business meetings, conferences and seminars, they also engage in shopping activities, which provide direct benefits to the local retail industry. Nevertheless, tourism literature has given very limited attention to research on business travellers' orientation towards shopping. This study deals with this subject and provides information that can support the enhancement of shopping activities of business travellers. Different attributes of shopping behaviour of business travellers in Dubai were studied, as well as how these attributes relate to these tourists decision-making about shopping while visiting Dubai for business events around the year.

Methodology | A survey was carried out to explore the shopping orientation of business travellers who attended meetings, conferences and exhibitions in Dubai during 2012-13. A self-administered questionnaire was designed consisting of questions related to business travellers' visit and shopping orientation. Specifically, the focus was on questions about the travelling purpose (exhibitions/business meetings/conferences and seminars), what do tourists shop, for whom do they shop during their visit, where do they shop (exclusive brand outlet/stand-alone departmental stores/stores in shopping malls/super markets), their reason(s) for their preferred choice and their satisfaction with different attributes of the stores. The survey was executed using both printed and *online* format of the questionnaire. As part of the consultancy work, the second author of the study visited several exhibitions held in Dubai, such as Gulf Information Technology Exhibition, Gulfood, Hotel Show, Arab Health, Road Show, etc., and met business travellers to Dubai on

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business meetings, seminars and conferences. The second author of the study personally met the respondents during these exhibitions and other respondents who visited Dubai for business meetings and seminars and conferences. The printed format of the questionnaire was given to the respondents who agreed to participate in the survey and they filled in the questionnaire at that moment. The respondents that asked to fill in the questionnaire later were requested to provide their e-mail address and the questionnaire was sent to them as an e-mail attachment. Most of the respondents sent back the filled-in questionnaire to the second author of the study. In this process, the researchers were able to collect data from 71 business travellers to Dubai.

Main results and contributions | Among the respondents, 56% of them visited Dubai for exhibitions, 35% for business meetings and 6% for seminars and conferences. All the business travellers that participated in this study are oriented towards shopping in Dubai. Most of the business travellers (73%) preferred to buy apparel and clothing, followed by gifts/souvenirs (59%). Household furnishing was found to be the least preferred item in their shopping list. Around 63% of business travellers preferred to buy goods from exclusive brand outlets and 46% from stores in shopping malls. Interestingly, supermarkets are the least preferred places to buy goods when travellers plan to go on shopping. With respect to the reasons for their preference to a particular format of retailer, the provision of quality products was found to be a significant reason for their preference towards exclusive brand outlets in Dubai. Their preference for stand-alone departmental stores in Dubai is due to the ease in shopping variety of available products. The availability of different brands is found to be the most significant reason for their preference to shop at stores in shopping malls. Among the store attributes that influence the preference of business travellers by a particular store, around 80% of them identify friendliness of the salespeople as an important attribute, followed by 56% of respondents that identify politeness of the salespeople as an important attribute. The ability to wrap goods was the least mentioned attribute. Regarding business travellers' satisfaction, the attribute related to the store environment is the most relevant, followed by visual merchandising, store lighting and store location. The price registered the lowest satisfaction level. The results are useful in identifying business travellers' preferences toward shopping in Dubai. Also, these findings would be useful for destination managers, policy makers and destination marketing professionals who are involved in initiating structure and promote business events and shopping related activities in the destination. Furthermore, the findings of the study would be useful to the retailers to design their marketing strategies that could potentially attract business travellers who visit Dubai.

Limitations | The sample size of the study is of just 71 business travellers and also only people who visited Dubai during the research period have been included in the study. This suggests that the findings have the limitation that it cannot be extrapolated to other cities or countries. Furthermore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all business travellers to Dubai, as this is an exploratory study with a small size and non-probability sample.

Conclusions | This work's conclusions were gathered from results that focus on business travellers' shopping orientation in Dubai. Most of the business travellers visit Dubai for various exhibitions held in the country. This supports Dubai's status of having won the organisation of Expo 2020. Regarding business travellers' shopping orientation in Dubai, the study primarily suggests that most of these visitors prefer to buy apparel and clothing, and from exclusive brand outlets due to the variety of goods. The availability of a good mix of several brands is found to be the reason for shopping at stores in shopping malls in Dubai. Among the store attributes, business travellers identify friendliness and politeness of the salespeople as major reasons for their preference toward a particular store. Most of the business travellers are satisfied with their purchase, especially with respect to store environment, and, interestingly, their satisfaction with respect to price is found to be low.