How would you like your Turkish coffee? Tourist experiences of Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this study is to examine and understand the experiences of tourists in the Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul, Turkey.*

Design/methodology/approach – *In this study, a qualitative case study method was used to analyze tourists' comments with user-generated content technique by analyzing tourists' comments. The data used in the study was collected through TripAdvisor, which is considered one of the most famous websites with tourist reviews and comments, between 20 May and 10 June 2020 from tourists' reviews (n:219).*

Findings – *The findings show that Turkish coffee house experiences are heterogeneous based on the dimensions of coffee characteristics, place, satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention, value/ price and value-added experience. Moreover, value-added experience includes some sub-themes such as a memorable experience, authentic experience and culture learning experience.*

Originality/value – *There are some studies on Turkish coffee and Turkish coffee culture in the literature, but there have been no empirical studies investigating the Turkish coffee house experiences of tourists. For this reason, this study aims to examine and understand the experiences of tourists in Turkish coffee houses. Therefore, it is believed that this study will fill the current gap in the literature on tourists' experiences of Turkish coffee houses.*

Keywords *Turkey, Experience, Turkish coffee, Turkish coffee houses*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

Several researchers have stressed in the current literature that local food and beverages are relevant elements as a differential feature for a destination in which they are produced or consumed (Sanchez-Canizares and Castillo-Canalejo, 2015; Tseng *et al.*, 2015; Castillo-Villar, 2020) and are recognized as authentic, original, traditional and special (Björk and Kauppinen-Räisänen, 2014; Seyitoğlu, 2020a). Besides, local food and beverages include varied elements including learning, curiosity to experience new food and beverages, pleasure and consumption, all of which meld to form gastronomy tourism (Smith and Xiao, 2008; Ahmad *et al.*, 2019). On the other hand, it is also stated that local foods and beverages are the intangible gastronomic heritage of a region and are important for providing authentic, cultural experiences to tourists. (Okumus *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, local food and beverage experience is seen as a both cultural and enjoyable activity, as well as being an important part of the tourist experience as it offers new tastes and different traditions for tourists' consumption (Fields, 2002; Hjalager and Richards, 2002; Kim *et al.*, 2009; Ting *et al.*, 2019). At this point, the coffee cultures of the countries can also create an attraction point for tourists (Anbalagan and Lovelock, 2014; Wang *et al.*, 2019). Coffee has been a part of our daily life and a socialization tool that keeps social life alive and lively.

Coffee has been represented as an indispensable part of special moments because of its unique smell and taste. Despite various prohibitions and beliefs against coffee throughout its history, coffee rituals are still common around the world as "coffee culture" or "coffee drinking habits" (Yılmaz et al., 2017). Although coffee is prepared and served differently in different cultures, it still represents a cultural symbol that strengthens the ties and friendship among people (Toros, 1998).

There are studies on Turkish coffee and Turkish coffee culture in the literature (Fendal, 2014; Akarçay, 2014; Yılmaz et al., 2017; Karaman et al., 2019; Acar et al., 2019), but there have been no empirical studies investigating the Turkish coffee house experiences of tourists. For this reason, this study aims to examine and understand the experiences of tourists in Turkish coffee houses. Therefore, it is believed that this study will fill the current gap in the literature on tourists' experiences of Turkish coffee houses.

Literature review

Coffee has become an indispensable part of our lives for several years. When the historical journey of coffee is analyzed, it is proposed that coffee is not only a matter of consumption, but it also symbolizes the different colors of the life circle (Argan et al., 2015). The name of the coffee is thought to come from the name of Kaffa, a city in southeast Ethiopia, where coffee is produced (Gürsoy, 2005; Woyesa and Kumar, 2020). Today, coffee is the second most-consumed drink after water (Nehlig, 2016). World coffee consumption is approximately 10 million tons in 2019/2020. Coffee consumption in Turkey in 2019/2020 is approximately 90 tons, and it is increasing every year [ICO (International Coffee Organization), 2020]. A large amount of coffee consumed in Turkey is Turkish coffee.

Turkish coffee has gained a unique place in world culture. Turkish coffee has developed its own unique rituals over time identifying with Turkish traditions (Girginol, 2017). These traditions and rituals gradually became a culture and formed the Turkish coffee culture. To better understand the Turkish coffee culture, it is necessary to look at the history of Turkish coffee. Although the exact date when coffee was brought to the Ottoman Empire is not known, historians report that the coffee was brought to Istanbul after Selim I's military expedition to Egypt in 1519. (Gürsoy, 2004). The introduction of coffee to the cuisine of the palace was in the period of Mehmet IV (Küçükkömürler and Özgen, 2009). The earliest coffee houses, which formed the basis of the coffee culture in the Ottoman Empire and served only to men, were opened in 1555. These places, which were open day and night, soon became public spaces of daily life (Heise, 2001). Bringing people from different social segments and different cultures together through conversation, coffee contributed to the social development of the Ottoman Empire (Işın, 2001). Turkish coffee culture, which is identified with Eastern culture and especially Ottoman, is described by historians as "a socialization practice adorned with the conversation" (Tarbuck-Gürses, 2011).

Turkish coffee culture is practiced by every member of the society in Turkey; especially families, pottery producers, master-apprentices in coffee houses, workers, coffee grounds sellers are interested in this tradition. Also, tourists who have visited Turkey see this tradition as a symbol of the Turkish lifestyle. This tradition is seen as a part of the cultural heritage by all Turkish society and is shared by individuals from every cultural and intercultural level. With its profound influence on the Turkish lifestyle, Turkish coffee plays a central role in the culture as a sign of hospitality and friendship. To show them respect, special guests are served coffee with more elaborate and special cups than those used in daily life. Tradition permeates people from all walks of life and is called "The heart desires neither coffee nor the coffee house; the heart desires conversation. Coffee is but an excuse" as it is expressed in the Turkish proverb, it is called an excuse for preexisting social relations. Inviting friends for coffee is an indication of the need to have an intimate conversation or share daily events. As a common custom, after drinking the coffee, a wish is made, the cup is inverted, laid upside down on the saucer and allowed to dry. As a means of entertainment, clear shapes

in the coffee cup are interpreted according to fortune telling "rules" (ARAGEM, 2013). Having all these features and being one of the most important elements of cuisine culture, Turkish coffee was registered in the list of "Representation of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" by UNESCO in 2013 on behalf of Turkey. There are some proverbs such as "A single cup of Turkish coffee is remembered for 40 years" that reveal the importance Turkish society has given to Turkish coffee. Turkish coffee and Turkish coffee culture are also used as a means of promotion within the concept of gastrodiplomacy. "Turkish Coffee: The Taste of Friendship for 500 Years." project was implemented in 2012. To introduce Turkish coffee and Turkish coffee culture "Turkish Coffee Truck" visited five US cities and introduced Turkish culture through Turkish coffee. The project was sponsored by a Turkish coffee company, the American-Turkish Business Association and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey and received extensive media coverage (Suntikul, 2019).

Turkish coffee differs from other types of coffee with its preparation technique, presentation, special equipment and the way of drinking. Turkish coffee with a lot of foam is the only type of coffee offered with its grounds in the world, and it is served with a glass of water and Turkish delight (Figure 1). Roasting, size reduction, brewing and storage conditions are important for producing good Turkish coffee (Yüksel *et al.*, 2020). Because of all these features, Turkish coffee is a very important social and cultural heritage for Turkish people from the past to the future. Furthermore, Turkish coffee is an important gastronomic tool to promote Turkey (Aşık-Akşit, 2017), and it is frequently used in tourism marketing. Turkish coffee culture frequently takes place on the internet or brochures that provide information about Turkey (Okumus, *et al.*, 2007).

Experiencing local, regional or national types of foods and beverages in a destination is increasingly attracting the attention of international tourists (Atsız *et al.*, 2021). For this reason, many destinations focus on bringing their food and beverages to the forefront to attract potential tourists and integrate these tourism products into the overall tourism products (Robinson and Getz, 2014). Also, with effective marketing strategies, destinations use food and beverages as an attraction to position and differentiate themselves from other destinations (Hendijani, 2016). Tourists aspire to experience different types of food and beverages to enhance their knowledge and gain insight into the eating and drinking behavior of local people as well as discovering local foods and drinks they do not know in their daily lives (Mak *et al.*, 2012). At this point, Turkish coffee culture and Turkish coffee houses offer a great opportunity to meet these desires of tourists and develop tourism opportunities. Tourists, who experience a true Turkish coffee culture in a Turkish coffee house, can have the opportunity to observe and develop their knowledge about the culture of the host country.

Figure 1 Traditional Turkish Coffee Presentation

Source: It was taken by the author

Methodology

This study aims to examine and understand the experiences of tourists in Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul. In accordance with this aim, those who had a Turkish coffee and Turkish coffee house experience in Istanbul were purposefully selected as a sample group for the study. In this study, a qualitative case study method was used with the user-generated content (UGC) technique. UGC is considered a very important source of information for tourists and tourism businesses (Narangajavana-Kaosiri *et al.*, 2019) as tourists from all over the world use UGC to help them during travel decision-making process (Yoo and Gretzel, 2011). Qualitative case studies in the literature are considered useful and suitable for analyzing social phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2014). As there is no generalization purpose in qualitative research, it is more important to try to understand it in depth rather than measure the event or phenomenon under investigation. The data used in the study was collected through TripAdvisor, which is considered one of the most famous websites with tourist reviews and comments (Jeacle and Carter, 2011).

Data collection

The data were gathered between 20 May and 10 June 2020 from travelers' online reviews (n = 219) describing experiences they had between January 2015 and June 2020. The data were collected from reviews starting from June 2020 working back to older reviews. The total number of comments (comments that belong to non-Turkish people and that are in English) related to Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul on the first day of data collection (May 20) was 532. After the 219th review, the sampling process was stopped. The authors decided that the themes and categories were clear and theoretical saturation was achieved (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Data analysis

A systematic content analysis perspective was used in the study. First, the filtering process of the raw data was carried out and then tourists' statements were determined in line with the objectives of the study. Finally, the selected themes and categories were agreed on by the two independent coders with experience in qualitative methods and data analysis.

Researchers who decide to use the content analysis method should also take the issues related to the reliability of the content analysis into account. Graneheim and Lundman (2004), Elo and Kyngas (2008) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005) state that researchers can use several different methods to prove the reliability of their content analysis. In this way, the reader can understand exactly what stages the research went through and how it took shape (Özdemir and Nebioğlu, 2015). For this reason, detailed information was tried to be given about the research method and stages used in this study. Another way to show reliability is to quote directly from the analyzed text to show the links between data and findings. In this study, direct quotations were taken from the participants' comments and they were associated with each finding. Also, coding in content analysis is a process that plays a critical role in reliability. To ensure reliability, the coding process must be done by at least two different encoders (Özdemir and Nebioğlu, 2015). For this reason, two researchers carried out the coding process separately in this study.

The researchers who carried out the study read the obtained answers more than once. Meanwhile, the researchers coded, determined and named the categories. After the readings, the coding scheme was formed. Following this step, with the coding scheme created, the texts were reviewed and the contents of the texts were assigned codes. This process was done by two researchers separately and then these two researchers came together and discussed their results. As a result of these discussions, the differences regarding the codes were eliminated and a final agreement was reached.

Findings

The tourists who experienced Turkish coffeehouses in Istanbul and were included in this study, did not make any negative comments about the coffee houses. For this reason, analyzes were made only on positive comments. Five main themes emerged from the data analysis: coffee characteristics, place, satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention, value/price and value-added experience. Moreover, value-added experience includes three sub-themes which are memorable experience, authentic experience and culture learning experience.

Coffee characteristics

Coffee characteristics emerged from the data as an important theme. Tourists have often mentioned the characteristic features of Turkish coffee. This is the issue related to Turkish coffee that also determined the tourists' Turkish coffee house experiences in Istanbul. Tourists have especially highlighted some characteristics of Turkish coffee such as aroma, foam and taste. Some comments made by the tourists on the characteristics of Turkish coffee are as follows:

> The thing that makes this coffee a legend is, the foam on the coffee is very strong and tasty. You can understand the quality of the Turkish coffee from its foam [. . .] (T58).

> It was so delicious and the sweetness was perfect, just the way I liked it (medium). It was strong but not too strong [. . .]. (T87).

> The Turkish coffee is very thick [. . .]. Strong aroma [. . .] (T39).

> The beautiful aroma of the coffee can be sensed throughout the street [. . .] (T115)

Place

After the characteristic features of Turkish coffee, the most emphasized subject by the tourists is the place. In their comments, the tourists often mentioned places that serve Turkish coffee as historical and authentic places with a good atmosphere and they also mentioned that they served Turkish coffee in a traditional way. Examples of comments relating to this subject are given as follows:

> I like places with a bit of history and have to say I wasn't disappointed - definitely the best or at least one of the best Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul [. . .] (T2).

> [. . .] it was really good and the atmosphere was really nice and quiet inside [. . .] (T44).

> [. . .] When I arrived at Istanbul I decided to have a real cup of Turkish coffee [. . .] I found this place [. . .] Very authentic, simple, and down-to-earth [. . .] (T73).

> One of the most traditional Turkish coffee house in Istanbul where a lot of locals frequent [. . .]. (T102).

Satisfaction, recommendation and, revisit intention

The tourists' comments show that most of the tourists in the study/who leave reviews are satisfied with the Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul. They, therefore, recommend this experience to others and want to revisit these places one more time. Some comments reflecting the satisfaction of these tourists are as follows:

> This Turkish coffee house won't be disappointed to you [. . .] I even bought ground Turkish coffee from them for back home [. . .] Highly recommended (T4).

Recommend it to anyone who loves Turkish coffee and would like to get such an authentic experience! [...] I would like to come back for sure [...] (T27).

I have to admit, till now I thought I was drinking Turkish coffee [...] Today I tasted real Turkish coffee. Highly recommended! (T59).

Just visit [...] and experience the best Turkish coffee in Istanbul [...] Go there twice, three times, or four times [...] (T82).

Value/price

Value/price emerged as one of the dimensions of the Turkish coffee house experience in Istanbul. Most of the tourists in the study stated that the Turkish coffee was worth the price it cost and that they did not regret going to the Turkish coffee houses. Some of the related comments from tourists are as follows:

The price of Turkish coffee is just [...] liras [...]. You can buy the pack with a reasonable prices [...] (T23).

TL for a fabulous Turkish coffee in center of Istanbul. What's not to like? (T34)

The price of Turkish coffee is the cheapest miracles on the world (T97).

Reasonable price and great value [...] [...] (T201).

Value-added experience

Value-added experience emerged from the data as an important theme and included sub-themes as memorable experience, authentic experience and culture learning experience. These are the issues related to Turkish coffee that also determined the tourists' Turkish coffee house experiences in Istanbul.

Memorable experience

Some experiences that are described as unforgettable after the event are defined as memorable experiences (Morgan and Xu, 2009). These memorable experiences can have a permanent place in people's memories. Experiencing the local food or beverage culture of a destination is also considered crucial for creating a memorable experience (Morgan and Xu, 2009; Seyitoğlu, 2020b). The tourists included in this study often mentioned memorable experiences using words and phrases such as "ever had in my life," "best coffee," "favorite," "the most memorable," "will remember and "will never forget." Related tourists' comments that include indicators of memorable experiences are given below:

I've had a lot of Turkish Coffee from various places all my life but believe me when I say that this was the best cup of Turkish coffee that I've ever had [...] (T11).

We have tried several Turkish coffee house, but this one is definitely the one we will remember [...] (T178).

Amazing Turkish coffee, we are coffee addicts and tend to like drinking coffees from all over the world where ever we are, we have also been to many coffee festivals and sampled some great coffee but in terms of authentic Turkish coffee you cannot get better [...] We will never forget [...] (T52).

Best Turkish coffee which I ever had in my life [...] (T71).

Authentic experience

It is clear from the literature that reality, history, culture, traditions, locality and originality are concepts associated with authenticity (Waitt, 2000; Özdemir & Seyitoğlu, 2017). Moreover, an authentic food or beverage experience refers to the consumption of local food or beverage made by local people using traditional methods and ingredients (Kim *et al.*, 2009). A significant number of the tourists that had experienced a culinary tour in Istanbul described their authentic experiences in their comments. They used words and phrases such as "rich with history and story," "traditional" and "authentic culture" as indicators of authenticity. Examples of comments relating to this subject are as follows:

> [...] it's worth enduring experience so you understand behind the Turkish coffee rich with history and stories [...] (T62).

> We could see the coffee's traditional preparation process – exactly what we were looking for [...] (T11).

> Nice to spend a while drinking coffee and "reading your future" with friends [...]. This traditional experience does worth the visit! [...] (T204).

> It's a small Turkish coffee house that the owner using antique old equipment to cook the coffee [...]. You can feel the authentic Turkish culture in every sip [...] (T128).

Culture learning experience

The tourists emphasized that the Turkish coffee house experiences allowed them to learn much about the Turkish coffee tradition. Tourists especially learned about the cultural values and traditions of Turkish coffee. They learned how it is milled and brewed, the tools used in its preparation, its cooking technique, and how it should be drunk. Examples of the tourists' comments related to culture learning experience are given below:

> Note that you order it sade (plain – no sugar), orta (medium sugar), or sekerli (heavy sugar). (Do not add sugar after the fact, or you'll have something quite disgusting. And you don't add milk either. Otherwise, go to one of the third wave coffee bars or one of the chains instead for an espresso drink.) Water is a good chaser for Turkish coffee, especially for first-timers... It was really educational experience for me [...] (T152).

> I learned how to make Turkish Coffee and the technique of brewing from [...] (T69).

> [...] for the cup of Turkish coffee I ordered, unfortunately, they put too much grounded coffee inside. Then I asked to owner why you put too much grounded coffee? [...] He explained to reason even he taught me how to make Turkish coffee [...] (T17).

> Just don't drink the whole cup! [...]. I learned from our guide [...].You have to leave about half an inch in the bottom which is the grounds. Thanks for his great information [...]. (T108).

Discussion and conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to investigate the Turkish coffee house experiences of foreign tourists visiting the Istanbul region by analyzing their comments and reviews posted on one of the world's most popular travel websites through user-generated content. The data analysis revealed five main dimensions of Turkish coffee house experiences in Istanbul, namely, coffee characteristics, place, satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention, value/price and value-added experience. These are the components that affect the quality of Turkish coffee house experiences and the satisfaction of tourists. There is no detailed study on Turkish coffee house experiences and no similar studies are found in the literature; therefore, the findings of this study are original. This study is the first to

comprehensively explore the Turkish coffeehouse experiences of tourists and reveal the relationship between emerging themes (i.e. coffee characteristics, place, satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention, value/price and value-added experience). Therefore, the data obtained from this study fills this research gap.

Within Turkish culture, Turkish coffee should not be considered only as a beverage. Turkish coffee is also a concept that combines cultural spaces, social values, traditions and beliefs in the context of a socialization process. Thanks to these features, Turkish coffee was secured by UNESCO as a cultural heritage. This situation reveals that Turkish coffee is a value for the whole world. In addition, Turkish coffee is used in gastrodiplomacy activities as an intercultural communication tool as well as being a gastronomic product (Suntikul, 2019).

Some researchers associate some cultural aspects of coffee production and consumption with tourism (Stylianou-Lambert, 2011; Wang et al., 2019). With its characteristic features, history and traditions, Turkish coffee has attractive elements in terms of developing tourism opportunities. Turkish coffee culture and Turkish coffeehouses contain a lot of information about the lifestyle and the way of socialization of Turkish society. With this feature, Turkish coffeehouses offer great opportunities for tourists who seek new experiences and want to get to know new cultures.

The Turkish coffee house experiences can be described as heterogeneous as its components are numerous and varied. The findings show that "coffee characteristics" are one of the main components that can contribute to the Turkish coffee house experiences of tourists. Among the distinctive features of Turkish coffee aroma, foam and taste are important elements for tourists. The second factor affecting the Turkish coffee house experience of tourists is the place where Turkish coffee is consumed. Tourists often talk positively about the coffee houses that offer Turkish coffee authentically and traditionally. It is clear that when Turkish coffee is served in traditional and historical coffee houses, it is appreciated by tourists. The results show that the tourists' Turkish coffee house experiences were mostly positive and satisfying. Therefore, tourists' intention to revisit and recommend this experience to other people was positive. Concerning this situation, it is stated in the literature that local food and beverages are one of the major reasons for traveling to a destination and it is an important driving factor in satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention (Karim and Chi, 2010; Stone et al., 2018; Agyeiwaah et al., 2019; Seyitoğlu, 2020a). Most tourists who have experienced Turkish coffee houses in Istanbul stated that Turkish coffee is worth the price. Value/price is considered a very important dimension that affects positive word-of-mouth reviews (Murphy, 2001). Thus, it is not surprising that the theme of value-added experience emerged as a consequence of tourists' coffee house experiences in Istanbul which is a city full of historical and cultural richness. Turkish coffee house experience generated memorable, authentic and culture learning experiences for tourists. Istanbul can be considered the capital of Turkish coffee in the world and with the combination of Istanbul and Turkish coffee, it is quite normal for tourists to have a memorable and authentic experience. Every stage of making Turkish coffee includes technical information. When the tourists saw these stages and the tools used in Turkish coffee making, they had a culture learning experience. As a result of this study, it was concluded that all the participants had positive experiences. This finding can be seen as an important touristic and cultural experience in user-generated content platforms. During their visit to the Istanbul destination, tourists developed positive emotions and behaviors to revisit and recommend these places as a result of their experiences in Turkish coffee houses. Given this situation, destination planners can include Turkish coffee houses in developing tourism opportunities and encourage potential tourists to visit Turkish coffee houses while planning their next holiday.

Istanbul has the potential to become a coffee destination with its cultural and historical wealth. Jolliffe (2010) divided coffee destinations into three categories: coffee-producing

destinations, coffee-culture destinations and coffee-history destinations. Coffee-producing destinations represent the regions where coffee is produced. For this reason, Istanbul cannot be a coffee-producing destination. However, at this point, because of being the capital city during the Ottoman period and hosting the first Turkish coffee houses, Istanbul is fully compatible with the two other coffee destination categories. For this reason, Istanbul should be included as a coffee destination in the literature.

This study has some limitations because of its method. The analysis unit of the current research consisted of online reviews and commentary reflecting tourists' experiences with the Turkish coffeehouses in the Istanbul region; consequently, study results do not have wider applicability as research findings. As the sample size is limited to tourists visiting and experiencing Turkish coffee in Istanbul and given the existence of many other cities in Turkey, it is not possible to generalize the findings of this study. Therefore, a larger study with more cities included is recommended for further research. In addition, including geographically large cities will add a new dimension to the study. In future studies, the differences or similarities of Turkish coffee and Turkish coffee houses with other coffee varieties and coffee houses can be revealed. In addition to this, the effect of authenticity and the atmosphere in Turkish coffee houses on the Turkish coffee experience can be studied. Also, face-to-face interviews with Turkish coffeehouse customers are recommended for future studies. Finally, in the future, conducting quantitative research on Turkish coffee and Turkish coffee houses may make the obtained results more generalizable.

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