



Research Article

**A NETNOGRAPHY APPROACH ON THE GUIDED PUB CRAWLS EXPERIENCES OF
TOURISTS: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine and understand the experiences of tourists who participate in a guided pub crawls experience in Istanbul. By analyzing tourist reviews, this study used a qualitative case study approach to user-generated content. The data obtained from TripAdvisor, which is the most prominent travel site for tourists, collected from tourist reviews (n:1845) between 18 September and 22 November 2022. The guided pub crawls experience findings are diverse and based on components of guide attributes, memorable experience, safety, satisfaction, recommendation, and revisit intention, value/price, socialization/meet people, and servicescape. Since there are no empirical studies on tourists' guided pub crawls experiences in the tourism literature, it is expected that this study will make a substantial contribution to the existing body of knowledge and fill the gap. Furthermore, from a management perspective, this research gives a thorough insight of the pub crawls experience in tourist destinations.

Keywords: Pub crawls, Guided pub crawls, Nightlife, Netnography

Introduction

The focus of tourism destinations has always been on tourist experiences (Otto and Ritchie, 1996; Seyfi et al., 2020). In the context of tourism literature, experience is described as the total of a tourist's emotional, rational, entertaining, fascinating, and memorable memories related with an event (Aho, 2001; Oh et al., 2007). Instead of stereotypical travel experiences, tourists increasingly demand from destinations more meaningful, memorable, and engaging travel experiences (Yiğit and Şahin-Perçin, 2021; Gursoy et al., 2021). In response to growing tourist demand, destinations attempt to provide a variety of new tourism experiences that are unique, engaging, and memorable (Cuomo et al., 2021; Olorunsola et al., 2023)._Therefore, tourism destinations offer a variety of experience opportunities to satisfy the special interests of tourists (Seočanac and Dimitrovski, 2022).

Nightlife is central to the city's social and cultural life, and it offers tourists with memorable experiences (Haslam, 2015). Therefore, there is growing interest in the nightlife experiences of popular tourist destinations all over the world (Seočanac and Dimitrovski, 2022). The term nightlife refers to the "increased provision, engagement, and consumption of leisure activities and experiences" in metropolitan areas during formal work hours or after dark (Rowe and Bavinton, 2011). Nightclubs, pubs, and bars in tourist areas allow tourists to spend their free time socializing and having an enjoyable experience with music and dancing activities (Sellars, 1998). When selecting on a travel destination, a significant majority of tourists assess the quantity and variety of nightclubs, pubs, and bars (Goulding and Shankar, 2011). This circumstance demonstrates the impact of nightlife experiences on both visiting destinations and tourist satisfaction (Giritlioğlu et al., 2013).

There are studies on pub crawls in the literature (Lugosi and Bray 2008; Tutenges, 2015). However, no empirical study could be found in the literature to investigate the pub crawls experiences of tourists. A qualitative study on pub crawls has been conducted (Tutenges, 2015), the purpose of this study is not to analyze the pub crawls experience of tourists in depth, but rather to evaluate it within the context of classic crowd

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theory. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate and comprehend the pub crawls experiences of tourists in Istanbul. Istanbul has been chosen as a research location in terms of the richness of nightlife activities organized especially for tourists in Istanbul. It is hoped that this study will fill a gap in the literature on tourist pub crawls experiences. To close the research gap, this study established main primary research question. Our research question is: What are the components of the guided pub crawls experience? Identifying these components will help service providers of pub crawls determine minimum requirements for their services, thereby avoiding adverse situations.

Conceptual Framework

Pub Crawls as s Nightlife Experience

Nightlife businesses (e.g., bars, pubs, and nightclubs) are open from evening until early morning, serve alcoholic beverages, and predominantly offer dancing as a form of entertainment with music genres that appeal to various groups (Crim, 2008; Purcell and Graham, 2005). According to Demant (2013), nightlife businesses are a free and hedonistic environment for experience and entertainment seekers. Therefore, nightlife businesses' products and services may both be regarded part of the customer experience (Tian et al., 2022).

People go to nightlife businesses to get away from their everyday stresses. To distinguish itself from the outside world, the nightlife businesses develop a carnival atmosphere (Tian et al., 2022). The fact that the majority of people who favor nightlife activities are between the ages of 18 and 25 indicates that the products and services supplied by businesses are customized to this demographic. For example, nightlife activities provide a combination of music, dancing, and people having fun together, which is why they have grown to be one of the most significant entertainment activities for young people (Gluhak et al., 2006).

Nightlife businesses have a dynamic and self-renewing structure due to the audience they appeal to and the services they offer. This is the most important feature that distinguishes nightlife businesses from other tourism businesses (Skinner et al., 2005). In addition, nightlife businesses have an economic impact that cannot be ignored. Nightlife businesses in popular city centers and tourist destinations are estimated to have an economic impact of more than 15 percent (i.e. the ratio of tourism-related turnover of an industry to overall corporate turnover) (Stabler et al., 2010; Christou et al., 2022).

Nightlife, from an experiential perspective, provides tourists with distinct offerings and experiences than daytime experiences. Destinations develop distinctive atmospheres, light shows, entertainment, and nightlife activities to create such experiences (Jiang and Hong, 2023). Nightlife experiences, according to Taheri et al. (2017), are a feeling of togetherness and an experience in which people willingly interact with others based on shared understandings. Although nightlife activities can cause safety risks and negative effects such as excessive alcohol consumption, substance use, noise, and conflicts, they can also offer positive tourist experiences (Tutenges, 2012; Nofre et al., 2018).

Pub crawls are one kind of event that is organized as part of the scope of nightlife activities. Pub crawls, which are also called beer crawls, bar tours, and circuit drinking, are a type of ritual in which a group of people drink alcohol while going to different places to drink over the course of one night (Dodd et al., 2012; Tutenges, 2015). Its events are popular in tourism destinations and mostly young people participate in these activities (Bell, 2008). In tourism destinations, pub crawls are typically arranged by travel agencies and their guides. The guides lead the participants from venue to venue and set up games, drinking contests, and group dancing. In addition, these events organized as part of pub crawls help tourists socialize and meet new people (Andrews, 2005).

Istanbul as a Nightlife Destination

Istanbul's natural, cultural, and historical riches make it a significant tourist destination (Okumus and Cetin, 2018; Atsız et al., 2022). For example, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Istanbul hosted around 15 million tourists from 195 nations (Yiğit, 2022). Aside from its tourist attractions, Istanbul is also a famous nightlife destination. The number of bars, clubs, and pubs, which are the most obvious examples of Istanbul nightlife for tourists, is at a considerable level (Garipağaoğlu et al., 2021). There are a number of tours and activities offered to tourists for Istanbul nightlife experiences. Therefore, tourists can experience Istanbul's nightlife by spending their free time and nights anywhere they choose. Pub crawls are one of the organized nightlife experiences in Istanbul for tourists. For this reason, Istanbul was chosen as the research area.

Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to determine "what kind of experiences do pub crawls offer to tourists". To gain a deeper understanding of the guided pub crawls experience, we utilize a qualitative research approach, which is more appropriate when a complex phenomenon requires a detailed description and explanation. We selected netnography as the research method to implement the study. Netnography analysis is based on the collection of customer reviews published on the internet with detailed information about their experiences. In contrast to other qualitative research methods, netnography excels at telling the story, comprehending complicated social phenomena, and assisting the researcher in developing themes from the customers' perspective (Kozinets, 2002; Thanh and Kirova 2018). As suggested by Kozinets (2010), the main steps of the netnographic approach were carried out: planning, entrée, data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation.

Planning and Entrée

The first step involves identifying the most relevant online communities to review the guided pub crawls experience. In this phase, Kozinets (2010) emphasized that while selecting an online platform, researchers should consider the research objective, active users, a big number of followers, and a diversity of members in order to provide researchers with rich data. Thus, TripAdvisor was selected as the study's online community. TripAdvisor is one of the most well-known websites for tourists to share their experiences and opinions (Jeacle and Carter, 2011).

Data Collection

The data was collected from TripAdvisor in November 2022. Direct copy from computer-mediated communications of online community members will be used in this investigation. Certain aspects were considered when selecting the tourist reviews. First, among the comments, those with experience aspects were selected. Second, French, German, Russian, etc., which are languages that the authors do not know other languages have been removed from the review pool. A total of 1,845 English reviews posted on TripAdvisor were collected between January 2014 and September 2022. Due to the utilization of publically accessible secondary data, the study does not necessitate permission from an ethical committee.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Content analysis, according to Tavakoli and Wijesinghe (2019), is one of the most often utilized data analysis approaches in netnography studies. Therefore, content analysis was employed as the method of data analysis in this study. Content analysis is a method of observational research that is used to examine the symbolic content of any recorded communication (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). Content analysis was carried out with the help of a software program such as MAXQDA that helps with qualitative data analysis. To investigate the components of guided pub crawls experiences in Istanbul, the authors followed the guidelines for qualitative data analysis and interpretation recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

First, the authors coded reviews line-by-line using an open coding procedure that allows reviews to be coded in segments. Following this, axial coding was used to identify themes that represent components of the guided pub crawls experience. To create a conceptual framework and integrate parts of the data, selective coding was utilized, and seven main themes were determined. The authors determined that theoretical saturation had been reached since the collected data did not reveal any additional meaningful insights that would assist to understand the experience of guided pub crawls. The final corpus was determined by the authors as 1,228 reviews. In qualitative research, the depth of data analysis is more important than quantitative data on the research sample (Czernek-Marszałek & McCabe, 2022). Therefore, the research focused on analyzing each individual's experience.

Researchers using the technique of content analysis must additionally consider the trustworthiness of content analysis. The literature emphasizes that researchers may show the trustworthiness of content analysis using several methods (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005; Elo and Kyngas, 2008). First, to ensure the validity of the study, complete details on the research methodology and phases must be provided. In this study, every attempt has been taken to give clear and comprehensive information regarding the research methodology and procedures. Readers will be able to see exactly what stages the study went through and how it was carried out using this procedure.

Second method of demonstrating trustworthiness is to explicitly quote from the analyzed content to demonstrate the link between data and findings. Thus, direct quotes from participant reviews were related with each findings in this study. Finally, the coding procedure should be conducted by at least two independent

coders to ensure the reliability of the content analysis (Hall and Valentin, 2005). Therefore, the coding process in this study was carried out by the authors and two independent coders who are experts in qualitative research.

Results

The content analysis identified seven components applicable to tourists who partaking the guided pub crawls experience in Istanbul. This study uncovered those components; guide attributes, memorable experience, safety, satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention, value/price, socialization/meet people, and servicescape (Figure 1). The following part discusses an analysis of the findings from the netnographic research relating to the guided pub crawls experience components.

Figure 1. Components of the Guided Pub Crawls Experience

Guide Attributes

The content analysis identified seven components applicable to tourists who partaking the guided pub crawls experience in Istanbul. This study uncovered those components; guide attributes, memorable experience, safety, satisfaction, recommendation and revisit intention, value/price, socialization/meet people, and servicescape (Figure 1). The following part discusses an analysis of the findings from the netnographic research relating to the guided pub crawls experience components.

The guide was friendly and accommodating, and showed us a great time (R103)

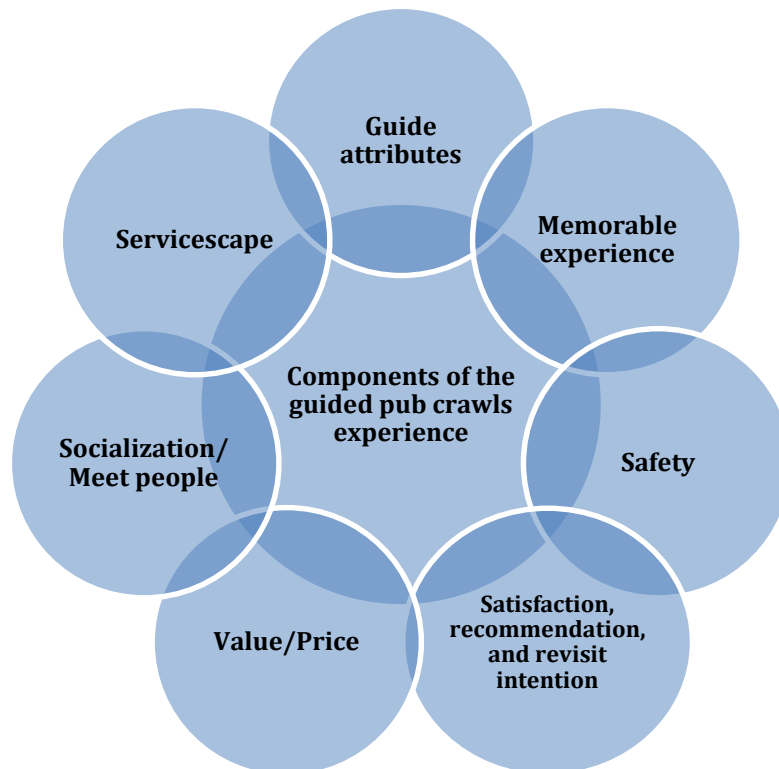
The guides who were very helpful, friendly, and organized (R274)

The guides were excellent in keeping the group entertained, organized and looking after us. (R409)

Cohen (1985) claimed that tour guides serve as mentors and leaders. As they plan tours, tour guides work as both leaders and mentors, engaging the tourist group in participatory and informative activities. Therefore, tour guides play an important role in the performance and tourist experience of a tour (Wang et al., 2002; Huang et al., 2010; Seyitoğlu, 2021).

Memorable Experience

In our study, memorable experience is an important component of the guided pub crawls experience. A memorable tourism experience is one that is retained in the memory of the tourist long after the event has occurred (Kim et al., 2010). The tourists indicated that their experience with guided pub crawls in Istanbul was one of the best experiences of their life and that they would never forget it. This created an memorable guided pub crawls experience for them. Tourists often describe their memorable guided pub crawls experience as an



unforgettable, best, truly memorable, fantastic, the highlight, a true experience. Some of relevant reviews of tourists are given as follows:

Certainly, one of the most memorable nights I've had in a long time. (R21)

I met some great people from all over the world and got to experience some fantastic Istanbul night life! (R274)

I have a memorable night with pub crawl in İstanbul. (R478)

The researches emphasize that prior memorable experiences have a major impact on prospective behavioral intentions and that tourists see them as reliable and valuable sources of information (Hoch and Deighton, 1989; Chen and Rahman, 2018). Therefore, memorable experiences have a great impact on tourists' revisiting a destination (Atsız and Seyitoğlu, 2023).

Safety

In the reviews of the tourists, there are no negative aspects related to the safety issue. Most of the tourists made positive comments about the safety issue. Most of the tourists described safety mainly get home safely, safe way to experience Istanbul nightlife, feel safe, the safest way and safe environment posted as below.

It's totally safe and perfect for solo travelers. (R89)

I felt really safe the entire time. (R803)

I'd totally recommend Pub Crawl for anyone who wants to experience the highlights of Istanbul's nightlife in a fun and safe way. (R924)

Safety issues are acknowledged in the literature as one of the most significant elements influencing tourist choices (Hecht and Martin, 2006; Radder and Wang, 2006; Seyitoğlu, 2021). There are studies in the literature that pub crawls create security problems (Berthelot, 2015; Dodd et al., 2012). It is of great importance that tourists do not encounter any negativity about safety, especially from activities such as pub crawls, where alcohol consumption is high (Quigg et al., 2013).

Satisfaction, Recommendation, and Revisit Intention

In the tourism literature, satisfaction is often employed to assess the consistency of an experience (Ryan, 2002). In this study almost every tourist, they described satisfaction and recommendation and revisit intention as perfect, amazing, would recommend, must do, would join in again and want others to experience posted as below.

If you visit Istanbul and you like to party this is the way to do it. There is no way you could have this much fun by yourself. (R7)

Would recommend to anyone who would like to experience night life in Istanbul and meet a lot of nice and positive people. (R872)

I definitely will go again next time I visit Turkey and highly recommend this for anyone looking for a fun night in Istanbul. (R1047)

Satisfaction, recommendation, and revisit intention are the most desired outcomes for service providers in destination since they want tourists to be happy with their services or products. Numerous empirical studies in the literature have shown that tourists' experience and satisfaction with a destination are the primary factors of their intention to revisit (Choo and Petrick, 2014; Ranjbarian and Pool, 2015; Seetanah et al., 2020).

Value/Price

Indicators of interpretation for value/price were mentioned such as best price, worth the money, worth the time, well priced, worth the every penny and worth experience. The majority of tourists mentioned in their reviews that the guided pub crawls were worth their money and time. For instance, R285 states that "Price is fair and is definitely worth the experience" and emphasized by R1045 "Definitely worth every penny". In addition, tourists stated that the guided pub crawls were worth the time they spent, apart from the money they spent. In this vein, R108 implied that "Pub Crawls in Istanbul is definitely worth the time".

The price of products and services is a reliable indicator of their quality (Yi et al., 2018). Price is a major factor in determining the quality of a product or service during a tourist's experience (Oh, 2000). In their study,

Chiang and Jang (2006) demonstrated that the price of a product or service influences tourists' opinions of its quality and value. In addition to these, the time spent by the tourist must be worth the experience.

Socialization/Meet People

It is clear from tourist reviews that socialization/meet people is an important component influencing their the guided pub crawls experience in Istanbul. Similarly, the existing literature indicates that tourists are eager to meet new people and make new friends from around the world (Thyne et al., 2005). Tourists reviewed that meeting with new people from different countries of the world was a wonderful experience for them. Most of the tourist described socialization/meet people mainly as socializing, meet people from different countries, meet interesting people, great way to meet new people. This is highlighted by the reviews of several tourists;

Great experience, got to meet a lot of very nice people from different countries. (R78)

The pub crawl is a great way to meet new travelers from all over the world. (R394)

Really funny experience, that allowed us to meet a lot of funny people from all over the world. (R635)

Servicescape

The majority of tourists defined servicescape primarily as good music, nice atmosphere, great bars, cool clubs and ambience of the pubs/clubs. Tourist reviews show that the servicescape is an important component of the guided pub crawls. Some of relevant reviews of tourists are given as follows:

We visited several clubs, everywhere was good music and nice atmosphere. (R514)

The Clubs & Bars were great as well, roof top experiences & we were able to dance under the moon and stars! (R872)

The clubs and pubs we were taken to were of good quality. (R888)

According to Bitner (1992), the term servicescape refers to the physical environment (built environment) that affects the behavior of consumers in service sector. The servicescape, which is made up of many elements including color, music, fragrance, layout, and design in a physical setting, is the physical environment of a service organization where the service transaction takes place (Lin and Mattila, 2010). There are many studies in the literature suggesting that the service environment has a strong influence on tourist experiences (Kotler, 1973; Bitner, 1992; Reimer and Kuehn, 2005).

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study is to examine the components of guided pub crawls experience in Istanbul. To achieve this purpose, tourist reviews published on TripAdvisor were analyzed. The findings from the analysis revealed seven main components; memorable experience, satisfaction and recommendation and revisit intention, value/price, socialization/meet people, guide attributes, safety and servicescape. These are the components affect the quality of guided pub crawls experiences and the tourist's satisfaction. Theoretically, this research fills an academic gap by identifying the components of a pub crawls experience based on empirical evidence from tourists. In order to verify these findings, it is required to explore the components of guided pub crawls using quantitative methods. As this is the first study to analyze the experience of guided pub crawls in depth and no analogous studies exist in the literature, the results of this study are original. Therefore, this study will serve as a guide for researchers and practitioners, while future research may throw further light on the issue.

Managerial Implications, Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study have implications for service providers who provide guided pub crawls. The components of guided pub crawls experience were discovered in this study, which may assist service providers build methods to ensure that tourists' experiences on pub crawls are satisfactory. Although there are negatives about pub crawls in the literature (Berthelot, 2015; Dodd et al., 2012), it emerges from participant reviews that guided pub crawls tours can be an important alternative for nightlife experience in destinations.

The findings provided valuable management insights for service providers. Firstly, the data reveal that 'guide attributes' is the most important factor that may affect tourists' pub crawls experiences. For tourists, the behaviors, characteristics, and attitudes of guides are critical elements. This is a critical and significant insight that pub crawls service providers should consider when selecting guides. Since tour guides are the public faces

of tour agencies, countries, and destination, they should be pleasant, well-educated, and competent individuals who can properly introduce tourists to the destination.

Secondly, a memorable experience is important for tourists visiting a destination. In considering the role of memorable experience in pub crawls experience, service providers should focus mainly on memorable experience. To increase tourist satisfaction and provide a more inclusive memorable experience, service providers can add gastronomic elements such as local street delicacies to the end of their pub crawls. In this way, tourists will have the opportunity to get to know the local culture better.

Lastly, the study also reveals that “safety” is another important factor for tourists’ pub crawls experiences. Therefore, service providers and guides must pay special attention to safety concerns during pub crawls activities. The locations visited as part of pub crawls activities should be picked from among those where there will be no safety issues. Safety issues may have a significant impact on both service providers and the region's reputation.

This study has some methodological limitations. This study's unit of analysis is a compilation of internet reviews describing the experiences of tourists who participated in guided pub crawls in the Istanbul. This study's findings cannot be generalized since the sample size was limited to tourists engaging in guided pub crawls in Istanbul. Future researchers may conduct in-person interviews with pub crawls participants to capture their first-hand experiences. In addition, researchers can study the role of guides in pub crawls experiences.

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