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A Qualitative Research on the Development of Shopping Tourism in Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Shopping directly affects consumers' tourism activity. People participate in tourism activities for sightseeing purposes and buy products from cheaper destinations than the region they live in. This study examined qualitative approaches to developing tourism in destinations with shopping potential. 34 people were interviewed within the scope of the study. In line with the analysis, 4 themes, 7 categories, and 77 codes were determined. According to the study results, the most emphasized code in the category of Türkiye's place in shopping tourism was affordability. Academic and sectoral recommendations were presented in the conclusion part.

Keywords: Shopping Tourism, Shopping Tourism In Türkiye, Shopping Destinations.

JEL Classification Codes: L80, L83, M31, O2, R11

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, 1.5 billion individuals worldwide engaged in the tourism industry before the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not reliable to depend on 2020 data since the COVID-19 pandemic, which erupted in Wuhan, China, drove several nations to shut down their borders, impose restrictions, and implement full lockdowns. The growth rate of tourism slowed down in 2019. The tourism movement grew by 6% worldwide in 2017 and 2018 and by 3.8% in 2019 (UNWTO, 2021). The tourism sector grew at a slower rate in 2019 compared to previous years because of some negative factors including the Brexit process, Thomas Cook's bankruptcy, the global financial crisis.

Given that one-sixth of the world's population engages in tourism, it was observed that the industry impacted numerous business fields, both directly and indirectly. Following 2020 and 2021, the pandemic's diminished global impact in 2022 led to the normalization of tourism trends. While 963 million people travelled around the world in 2022, the total spending was 1 trillion $12 billion. When Türkiye's tourism statistics were studied, it was found that the country almost attained the pre-pandemic high of 52 million visitors in 2019, with 51 million 387 thousand visitors in 2022. In 2022, tourist spending was $901 per person. In 2023, the total number of visitors increased to 56.7 million, while spending increased to $952 per person (MCT, 2024).

One of the alternative tourism types is "shopping tourism", defined by the World Tourism Organization as 'the visit of people outside of their area of residence to purchase products' (UNWTO, 2021). The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, the Spice Bazaar, and the Historical Kemeraltı Bazaar in Izmir are some of the bazaars in Türkiye frequently visited by tourists. According to a study conducted in 2020 by the General Directorate of Investment and Enterprises of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye, shopping expenditures constitute 20% of total tourism income (MCT, 2020). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Türkiye's tourism activity decreased significantly in 2020 compared to 2019 as it did in the rest of the world. In 2020, when roughly 12 billion USD in tourism-related spending was made, food and beverage, retail, and package tour costs were the expenses that brought in the most money. Visiting tourists primarily bought clothing and footwear, souvenirs, other expenses, carpets, and rugs. 2 million 126 thousand 261 (4.1%) of the 51 million 860 thousand 42 visitors who came to Türkiye in 2019—the year the

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epidemic had not yet begun—came for shopping (TURKSTAT, 2020). This rate was 4.9% in 2023 (TURKSTAT, 2024). In addition, it was found that visitors coming for shopping purposes mainly visited in the second quarter of the year (April, May, June). However, there was a homogeneous distribution in the year's first, third, and fourth quarters (Figure 1).

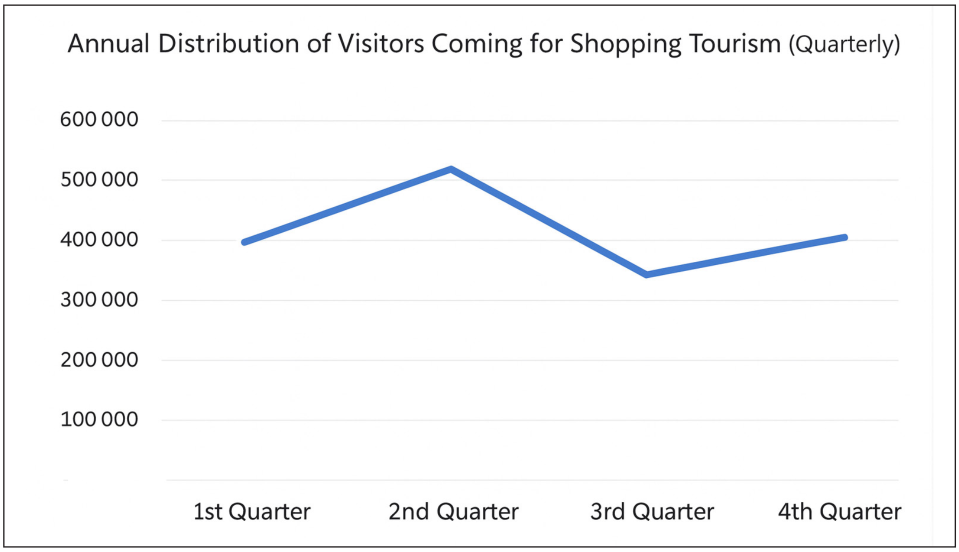

Figure 1. Annual distribution of visitors coming for shopping tourism (2022-quarterly)

Source: Data was taken from TURKSTAT, and the authors created figures.

Figure 1 illustrates the year-round activity of tourists who visit Türkiye for shopping. The "seasonality" of tourism, or the fact that it is restricted to a particular time of year, is one of Türkiye's largest problems. The third quarter of the year (July, August, and September) saw a 40% increase in tourists to Türkiye. Numerous negative effects are brought on by this circumstance, including regional intensity, the formation of excessive tourism, difficulties with the infrastructure in tourist areas, etc. All studies stressed that alternative tourism forms would replace Türkiye's regional and seasonal tourism approach. When the numbers were looked at, shopping tourism may be seen to disperse this intensity.

Türkiye's border gates continue to see a significant influx of shoppers. Tourist entries for shopping purposes in Turkey are from Bulgaria in Edirne, from Greek islands in Izmir and Muğla, and from Georgia in Artvin. Bulgaria leads the way when it comes to shopping purposes. According to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism data, Bulgaria took second place after Russia in 2020, with 1.2 million visitors under pandemic conditions (MCT, 2020).

95% of foreign visitors to Türkiye from Bulgaria enter through the Kapıkule border gate. 5 million 731 thousand 717 people entered Türkiye through the Edirne Kapıkule Border Gate in 2019. The number of visitors coming to Türkiye from Bulgaria in the same year was approximately 2.3 million. The number of visitors from Bulgaria to Türkiye in 2019 increased by 14.5% compared to the previous year. Tourists from Bulgaria constituted 5% of the total number of foreign visitors in 2019. Excluding the pandemic period, it was seen that the number of visitors coming to Türkiye from Bulgaria in 2022 reached 2.9 million (TURKSTAT, 2023). This indicates that Türkiye is a vital shopping destination for Bulgarian citizens.

2,155,994 tourists visited Izmir in 2022. Approximately 1.5 million of the incoming tourists were foreigners, while the rest were domestic tourists and Turkish citizens residing abroad. The most foreign tourists visiting Izmir were from Germany (530,754) and England (158,661). The number of tourists coming to Izmir from Greece in 2022 was 22,311. Port of Çeşme is one of the border gates through which tourists come to Izmir by sea. Arrivals from the Port of Çeşme in 2020, 2021, and 2022 were provided in Figure 2 (Izmir MCT, 2022).

As seen in the figure above, the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted the world in 2020 and 2021, also negatively affected tourism movements. With the normalization in early 2022, an approximation to 2019 figures was observed. 5,145 foreign tourists entered the port of Çeşme in 2020, only 944 in 2021, and 68,319 in 2022. The majority of foreign tourists coming to Çeşme port were Greek citizens. The main reason was the

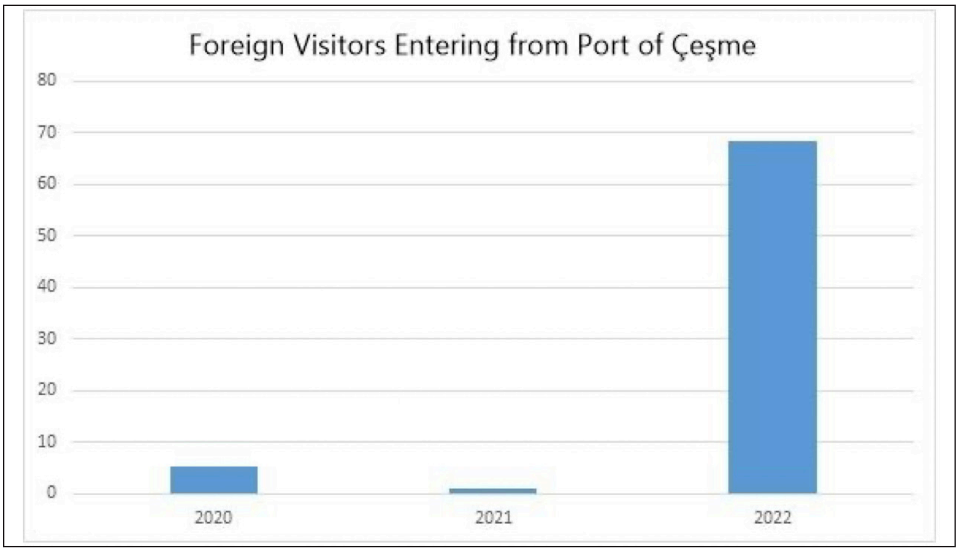

Figure 2. Foreign visitors entering from port of Çeşme

Source: Data was taken from Izmir MCT, and the authors created a figure.

reciprocal ferry services from the Greek island of Chios, which is approximately 45 minutes away from Çeşme, especially in summer. There is intense passenger traffic between Çeşme and Chios Island by these ferries. While visiting, Greek tourists who come to Çeşme by ferry from the island of Chios also visit Izmir and Izmir's historical Kemeraltı Bazaar for shopping purposes. At the same time, the fact that the currencies of Greece (Euro) and Bulgaria (Leva) are valuable in Türkiye enables visitors to shop more (Izmir MCT, 2022).

This study's primary goal is to investigate, via a qualitative lens, the dynamics of cross-border shopping tourism in Türkiye and to add to the body of knowledge by offering perspectives that can guide destination development plans. The scope of this study was planned in three stages. First, questions were asked of visitors coming to Türkiye from the Edirne border for shopping purposes. The second target group was foreign visitors from Chios Island who visited the port of Çeşme and the historical Kemeraltı Bazaar of Izmir. In the third and last group, data was collected from tradesmen serving in the most visited bazaars for shopping tourism in Edirne and Izmir.

When the literature was examined, it became clear that the qualitative approach to shopping tourism was lacking. This situation supports the originality of the study. Moreover, suggestions for growing Türkiye's shopping tourism potential were included in the study's conclusion section. Shopping tourism is a type in which per capita expenditures are higher than mass tourism. This study is essential in supporting the creation of shopping tourism destinations, providing results and bringing forward new suggestions to identify the deficiencies of current shopping tourism destinations. This study, whose data was collected in Izmir and Edirne, should be carried out across the country, compared with successful destinations in shopping tourism worldwide, and Türkiye's current shopping potential should be developed.

The study's primary objectives were to assess the current state of shopping tourism, which is crucial to the growth of destinations, to identify the types of tourism that can be developed through shopping tourism, and to highlight the shared expectations and issues that arise between tourists and local businesspeople in this sector. The study also aims to reveal;

- The activities that need to be done to develop shopping tourism in destinations (advertising, promotion, use of social media),
- Expectations of tourists visiting the region from the businesses they shop at,
- Perception of businesses towards shopping tourism and tourists,
- Considering shopping tourism as an alternative to prevent Türkiye's tourism from being limited to specific regions and seasons,
- Threats and opportunities for Türkiye's shopping tourism,
- Systematic studies of chambers of commerce, local

governments, and the state to develop shopping tourism.

This study focuses on strategies for the growth of shopping tourism, which generates higher expenditures than mass tourism. Data was gathered from the two parties that make up shopping tourism (customers and sellers) following the study's aim. Research questions were developed by reviewing pertinent studies in the literature that matched the research's topic and goal. The following inquiries were made by the participants as part of the study:

- What are the expectations of shopping tourism and tourists from the destination?
- What is the contribution of shopping tourism to the destination?
- How should shopping tourism destinations be planned?
- How can existing shopping destinations be made more successful?
- What are the expectations of tourists and businesses in shopping tourism?
- What are the problems of businesses serving in shopping tourism destinations?
- What is Türkiye's place in shopping tourism?
- What are Türkiye's problems regarding shopping tourism?
- Can the development of shopping tourism be an alternative to "seasonality" and "regional intensity", which are Türkiye's main tourism problems?

THEORETICAL and CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Few studies have tried to examine the economic impact of shopping tourism from a theoretical perspective, despite the fact that the body of research on the subject is expanding. To help close this gap, this study takes a qualitative approach backed by theories of travel motivation. Travel motivation theories seek to explain why people travel. One prominent framework is the travel motivation theory, which identifies two primary motivational factors: push and pull factors (Lee, 1966; Dann (1977). Push factors are internal desires or needs that "push" a person to travel, originating from within the individual. These can include a need for escape from daily life, seeking relaxation, social interaction, self-discovery, or prestige (Yuan & McDonald, 1990; Kim et al., 2003). On the other hand, pull factors are external attributes of a destination that "pull" a person toward it. These might include the destination's unique attractions, cultural events, natural beauty, recreational opportunities, or a reputation for quality services. A person's decision to travel often results from the interplay between these two forces: an internal push to satisfy a need, and an external pull from a destination's appeal (Turnbull & Uysal, 1995). This study addresses shopping tourism within the scope of push and pull factors. Push factors include the geographical proximity of Izmir and Edirne to tourist-sending countries, the desire to discover new cultures, and acquiring new experiences; while pull factors include various shopping opportunities, affordability, cultural, historical, and physical values.

Numerous research has been conducted on the topic of "Why do people travel?" (Dann, 1981; Papatheodorou, 2001; Otoo & Kim, 2018). From the inception of the tourism phenomenon to the present, the question's answer has been given in various ways. According to a 1964 survey, there are 18 reasons why people choose to travel. Even though shopping was not one of the study's 18 reasons, it seemed inevitable that when the same individuals were asked what they did while traveling, shopping would be the top response (Kent, Shock & Snow, 1983).

Shopping tourism was first studied in the early 1980s. Over the past roughly 40 years and up to the present, various research studies have been carried out addressing shopping tourism (Table 1). Examining the studies revealed that they were primarily conducted using quantitative approaches. A detailed review of studies related to shopping tourism can be seen in Table 1.

Examining the literature revealed that most of the studies used quantitative methods. Most studies focused on subjects like visitor motivation, crowd, experience, and compliance. The findings demonstrate that the phenomenon of shopping boosted tourism. It was emphasized that factors such as correct planning, original products, reasonable prices, information flow, and promotion would enable destinations to stand out in shopping tourism. The number of studies on cross-border shopping was quite limited. It was solely focused on a specific part of some research.

The development of conceptual or theoretical models that explain shopping tourism behavior has been hampered by the prevalence of quantitative approaches in the literature.

Table 1. Shopping tourism themed researches

Study	Method	Subject	Findings
Kent vd., 1983	Quantitative	Why isn't shopping one of the main reasons people travel?	- Shopping contributes tremendously to the destination economy. - The strong tourist attraction feature of shopping should be used in destinations. - Shopping is becoming one of the main essential components of the tourism industry.
Swinyard, 1993	Quantitative	Mood, involvement, and quality of shopping intention	- Mood does not have any direct effect on shopping intention. - The level of involvement moderates the effect of mood on intention.
Heung & Cheng, 2000	Quantitative	Determination of factors affecting tourists' satisfaction during shopping	- The quality of service personnel has a great impact on tourists' shopping experience. - The second most important factor is the product value.
Turley & Milliman, 2000	Literature Review	Determining the effects of the environment on shopping behavior	- Environment variables have a significant impact on shopping behavior. - It was emphasized that environmental studies needed to be increased and that there was a gap in the literature on this subject.
Turner & Reisinger, 2011	Quantitative	Evaluation of differences in shopping satisfaction of domestic tourists classified according to a developed theoretical framework	- There is a definite sequential causal relationship leading to shopping satisfaction. - Shopping is an all-encompassing activity in domestic travel. - The most crucial point that domestic tourists attach to the product they buy is to buy the best product at the most affordable price, that the product reminds them of their travels, and that it is also exclusive.
Yüksel, 2004	Quantitative	Evaluation of shopping experiences of domestic and foreign visitors	- The two groups differ significantly in their shopping preferences. - Service evaluations of domestic visitors were seen as more negative than those of international visitors.
Eroğlu vd., 2005	Quantitative	Determining the effects of crowds on the shopping experience	- The crowd in the environment slightly affects the shopping values of tourists. It was especially emphasized that this effect was not too much. - In the second study evaluated within the scope of the research, it was determined that the shopper's emotions had a mediating effect on the perceived crowd. When these emotions come into play, the crowd of people in the environment positively affects shopping satisfaction.
Hsieh & Chang, 2006	Quantitative	Determining the motivational sources that affect tourists' shopping	- The main motivations driving tourists to shop are seeking novelty, exercising, and experiencing local culture and costumes.
Kikuchi & Ryan, 2007	Qualitative	Evaluation of street markets as tourist attraction centers	- In the study comparing the European and Asian groups, it was emphasized that the European group wanted to get the return (value) for the product they paid more for, while Asians paid more attention to the general ambiance.
Burt, 2007	Review	Review of the book on shopping tourism written by Timothy (2005)	- The book focuses on the importance of shopping tourism in the context of holidays and tourism. - It was emphasized that it was a source that answers why the tourist buys, what s/he buys, and where s/he buys it.
Tosun vd., 2007	Quantitative	Evaluation of perceived tourist satisfaction based on local shopping culture, employee service quality, product value, physical characteristics of the business, payment methods, and reliability factors.	- Shopping is one of the most important attractions for visiting a destination. - The most crucial determinant in the success of shopping tourism destinations is providing adequate information flow to tourists. This will also benefit the economic development of the destination. - The most important factor that pushes tourists to shop is the originality of the products.
Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007	Quantitative	Determining the effect of shopping risk perception on tourists' satisfaction, feeling, and loyalty intention	- It was observed that tourists shop more in areas where they feel safe. - As risk perception increases, satisfaction and loyalty intention decrease.

Jones, 2010	Quantitative	Determining whether shopping behavior differs across cultures	- In the study comparing two groups, the main difference is the perceived shopping satisfaction in spatial crowds. - The positive relationship between shopping satisfaction and values is higher in one group than the other.
Byun & Mann, 2011	Quantitative	Determining the effects of over-crowding in shopping areas and businesses on tourists	- When the perceived crowd of people mediates perceived shopping competition, tourists' hedonic shopping value is triggered and tourists have positive feelings towards shopping and business.
Henderson vd., 2011	Literature Review	Determining the relationship between shopping and tourism	- Tourism and shopping are concepts that should be evaluated together. - Vital factors in the success of a shopping destination are product variety and quality. - The support of the state and local governments is very important in the development of shopping destinations.
Baker & Wakefield, 2012	Quantitative	Determining how consumer shopping compliance affects perceived stress, crowd, and excitement	- Control and intimacy strongly influence social shopping compliance. - Causal relationships between consumers' shopping motivation, shopping compliance, and emotional reactions to stress and excitement were revealed.
Saayman & Saayman, 2012	Literature Review	Determining the effects of shopping on tourism in developing regions	- Shopping is one of the most important reasons why international tourists in the researched region prefer that destination.
Wong & Wan, 2013	Scale Development (Quantitative)	Investigating tourists' shopping satisfaction and examining its dimensionality	- The created scale can be used to determine the regions where tourists are satisfied and unhappy. - The main factor affecting tourists' shopping satisfaction is ease of transportation.
Choi vd., 2015	Literature Review	Evaluation of the process in shopping tourism	- The definition of shopping tourism remains unclear. - While some studies distinguish shopping tourism from tourist shopping, some studies use these concepts interchangeably. - The concept of cross-border shopping is quite common among people living in countries that border each other.
Lee & Choi, 2020	Quantitative	Determining the asymmetric effects of shopping tourism features in shopping destinations	- Shopping tourism qualities are categorized as must-have, hybrid, and value-added.

This study attempts to advance a more theoretically informed understanding of cross-border shopping tourism by using a qualitative approach. The concept of shopping tourism has frequently been approached descriptively in the literature; however, recent scholarship emphasizes the need for stronger analytical frameworks. According to Timothy (2005), shopping tourism should be regarded as an integral part of the tourism experience, not only in economic terms but also in relation to cultural and spatial dynamics. Similarly, Jansen-Verbeke (1991) conceptualizes shopping tourism as a magic concept for the tourism industry, highlighting accessibility, retail diversity, socio-emotional values, and destination image as key analytical dimensions. Choi, Heo, and Law (2015) have framed shopping tourism as an area of significant progress in tourism studies, identifying gaps in measurement, visitor motivation, and destination attributes. Likewise, Lee and Choi (2020) classify destination attributes into must-have, hybrid, and value-added categories, revealing their asymmetric effects on overall tourist satisfaction. These analytical perspectives suggest that shopping tourism can be systematically examined under three interconnected dimensions such as motivational, spatial/environmental and planning. The motivation dimension is the primary driver of shopping-related travel. The spatial/environmental dimension is the physical environment, accessibility, and retail mix. Planning is the strategic integration of shopping into destination development. By incorporating these perspectives, this study aims to move beyond descriptive accounts and contribute to the conceptual advancement of shopping tourism.

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on business owners who operate in shopping destinations and foreign tourists who travel to Türkiye for shopping. Due to time and financial restrictions, the study was only conducted in the Edirne and Izmir regions. From a broader standpoint, carrying out research with high-budget projects or research assistance across the country or even abroad, employing comparative mixed methods may produce different outcomes.

Many studies emphasized that shopping tourism has been studied extensively from the perspective of tourists but has not been evaluated from the retailer's perspective (Heung & Cheng, 2000; Hsieh & Chang, 2006; Choi, Heo & Law, 2015). The fact that people living in countries that border each other change countries for shopping purposes (with ease of transportation) helps the economic development of destinations. This shopping activity is observed in Türkiye, which borders nations such as Georgia, Bulgaria, Greece, Iran, and Syria.

This study's focus is on Bulgarian shoppers who visit Türkiye in Edirne, Greek shoppers who travel from Chios Island in Greece to the Kemeraltı Bazaar in Izmir, and the businesses that tourists in Edirne and Izmir visit. When the literature was examined, it was seen that the concept of shopping tourism was not adequately addressed in qualitative terms. The study aims to fill this gap in literature. The study's originality is that it simultaneously examines the two main heroes of shopping tourism (seller and buyer). Conducting the survey qualitatively aims to fill the literature gap and reveal new themes on the subject thanks to the inductive approach of qualitative research.

This study was conducted using a phenomenological design within qualitative research methods. The main purpose of the study is to examine the effects of shopping tourism on destination development and to elucidate the mutual expectations and problems experienced by visitors and local business owners. Accordingly, the research aims to achieve a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences, articulated in their own words.

This study was conducted using qualitative methods, in which data was collected in a natural environment and were more successful in behavioral modeling and revealing human behavior. The study was implemented using the case study technique, one of the qualitative research methods. The group determined to collect data was identified using the criterion sampling technique, one of the purposeful sampling methods. Data was collected by audio recording with the participants' permission, and then analysis and coding were carried out. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and on-site observations. The visitor interview protocol encompassed questions addressing shopping experiences, expectations, motivations for destination choice, and interactions with local vendors. Interviews with shopkeepers, on the other hand, concentrated on customer profiles, sales practices, adaptations to accommodate tourists, and the challenges faced in the course of business. The use of multiple qualitative techniques enhanced both the credibility and the richness of the collected data. The opinions of academicians and industry representatives who were experts in their fields were taken to test the validity and reliability of the prepared interview form. Data was collected from the participants via individual (in-depth) interview methods using the interview form. The collected data was first analyzed and divided into codes, categories, and themes. The content analysis method was used to create themes.

When the literature was examined, it was seen that the subject had been studied many times with quantitative methods and the results were repetitive. This study discussed the topic from a qualitative aspect, with its unexplained points. Firstly, the audio recordings obtained from the interviews were transcribed. Written interview data was transferred to the MAXQDA 2022 program. In comparison to hand-held analyses, the MAXQDA program offers a more methodical study of data due to its Turkish interface, extensive use of visual analytic tools, and ability to be employed in mixed research methodologies in addition to basic statistical studies (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2019).

The qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, supported by the MAXQDA software. Thematic analysis was adopted as it enables the identification, examination, and reporting of patterns within qualitative data, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of participants' perspectives.

In the first stage, interview recordings and relevant documents were transcribed verbatim, after which preliminary codes were generated through open coding. Subsequently, these codes were refined and systematically clustered into themes and subcategories in accordance with the research questions, ensuring both analytical rigor and consistency with the study's objectives.

The Code Matrix function was employed to compare the distribution and intensity of codes across the four document groups (İzmir– International, İzmir–Local, Edirne– International, Edirne–Local). This comparative approach enabled the identification of key distinctions, such as the specific problems highlighted in the shopping experiences of international tourists in contrast to those reported by local visitors. In addition, the Code Map function was utilized to visualize interrelationships among codes, thereby uncovering clusters of expectations and problems that exhibited stronger associations. The varying thickness of the connecting lines reflected the strength of these relationships, offering an additional analytical dimension that enriched the interpretation of the findings. After the codes were created in the MAXQDA program; the hierarchical code-sub-code model, statistics of the sub-codes, and code cloud analyses were extracted and added to the report for easier understanding and explanation of the data and the generated codes.

RESULTS

The study was conducted in two different cities and groups. These groups were 7 domestic participants and 9 foreign participants from İzmir; 8 domestic participants and 10 foreign participants from Edirne. These participants were coded between İZYE1 and İZYE7, from İYA1 to İYA9, EYE1 to EYE8 and EYA1 to EYA10 (Table 2). Participants were selected using criterion sampling, a purposeful sampling technique, to ensure that they met the study's inclusion criteria as active actors in shopping tourism. Data was obtained through semi-structured interviews, which were conducted and recorded by the researcher. In total, 34 interviews were carried out between June and September 2023 in Edirne and İzmir. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes

Table 2. Participant Profiles

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Occupation	Interview Duration (min)
İYA1	29	Female	University student	35
İYA2	41	Male	Small business owner	36
İYA3	35	Female	Civil servant	28
İYA4	52	Male	Retired	29
İYA5	26	Male	Sales assistant	32
İYA6	47	Female	Housewife	38
İYA7	38	Male	Tourism sector worker	27
İYA8	33	Female	Bank employee	42
İYA9	58	Female	Housewife	43
İZYE1	44	Male	Shop owner	40
İZYE2	36	Female	Salesperson	42
İZYE3	28	Male	Market vendor	41
İZYE4	50	Male	Textile shop owner	38
İZYE5	32	Female	Boutique owner	41
İZYE6	39	Female	Jewelry seller	27
İZYE7	55	Female	Handicraft seller	32
EYE1	46	Male	Grocery store owner	31
EYE2	34	Female	Clothing vendor	30
EYE3	29	Male	Café worker	38
EYE4	57	Female	Souvenir shop owner	43
EYE5	42	Male	Market vendor	36
EYE6	31	Female	Sales assistant	33
EYE7	48	Male	Butcher	37
EYE8	53	Female	Textile seller	29
EYA1	24	Female	Student	35
EYA2	39	Male	Farmer	36
EYA3	46	Female	Civil servant	40
EYA4	35	Male	Driver	35
EYA5	62	Female	Retired	28
EYA6	51	Male	Self-employed professional	37
EYA7	44	Female	Housewife	37
EYA8	24	Male	University student	29
EYA9	37	Female	Civil servant	40
EYA10	64	Male	Retired	36

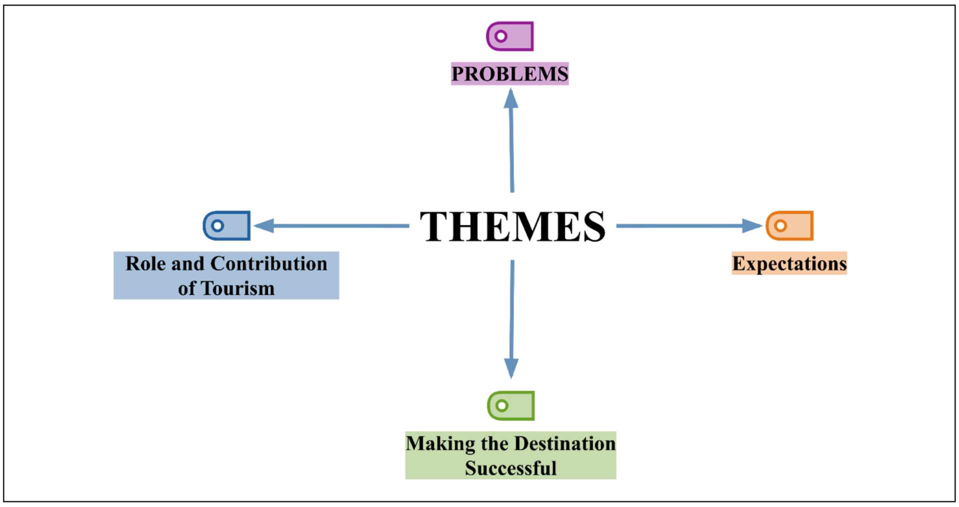

Figure 3. Themes

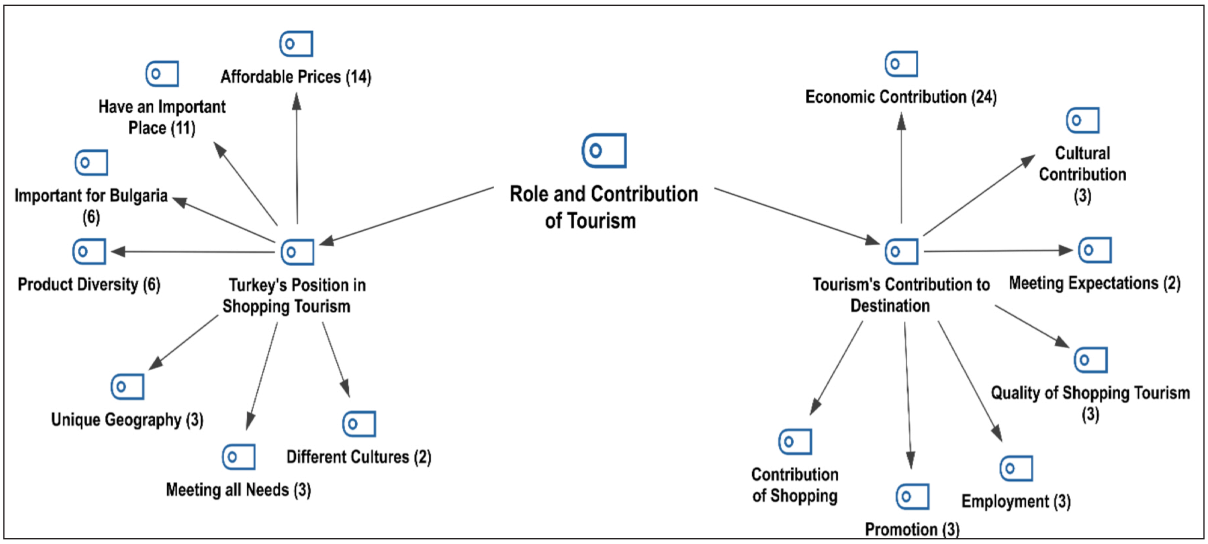

Figure 4. The place and contribution of tourism hierarchical code sub-code model

and took place either at participants' workplaces (shops, stands, or marketplaces) or at mutually agreed-upon public settings. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The demographic profile of the participants reflected a diverse group in terms of age, gender, and occupation. Among the 34 interviewees, 18 were female and 16 were male. The age range extended from 22 to 64 years, with the majority clustered between 30 and 50 years. Approximately one-third of the participants were retailers or shop owners directly involved in shopping tourism, another third were service sector employees (e.g., sales staff, market vendors), and the remainder were consumers from Bulgaria and Greece with various professional backgrounds. The average interview duration was approximately 38 minutes.

Data was collected within the framework of 4 themes. These themes are presented in Figure 3. The themes are as follows; the place and contribution of tourism, making the destination successful, expectations, and problems.

The theme of the role and contribution of tourism and the categories created under the theme was provided in Figure 4. 7 codes were made in the context of the first of the codes under the theme of the role and contribution of tourism, the category of Türkiye's Position in Shopping Tourism. The codes created in the context of the answers given to the participants when they were asked about Türkiye's position in shopping tourism were coded as; "affordable prices" 14 times, "have an important place" 11 times, "product diversity" 6 times, "important for Bulgaria" 6 times, "unique geography" 3 times, "meeting all needs" 3 times, "hosting different cultures" 2 times.

Information on the sub-codes of the category of Türkiye's place in shopping tourism was included in Figure 5. Accordingly, participants responded regarding the codes as; 14 of the participants responded to

Figure 5. Türkiye's position in shopping tourism

"affordable prices", 11 of them to "have an important place", 6 of them to "product diversity", 6 of them to "important for Bulgaria", 3 of them to "meeting all needs", 3 of them to "unique geography", 2 of them to "hosting different cultures".

- Affordable prices;

"Previously, we were coming for shopping, not for tourism and the sea, and that was because it was so cheap." (EYA3)

- Have an important place;

"Türkiye has always been an important destination in shopping tourism." (İYA4)

"I think it is awesome. There is a great deal of product diversity in Türkiye." (İYE1)

- Product diversity;

"There is a great deal of product diversity in Türkiye, but the market is not scattered around. They lack conveying the beauty of their country. Here in Edirne, they may serve the products specific to this region and other provinces." (EYA7)

- Important for Bulgaria;

"In my opinion, Türkiye's place in shopping tourism is important, especially for Bulgaria." (EYA4)

- Meeting all needs;

"There are lots of shopping areas from old markets. The largest bazaar in Europe. We can say that Türkiye is a kind of shopping paradise." (İYA7)

Unique geography;

"I think it is a very important place. Because it has a unique geography." (İYA1)

- Different cultures;

"Türkiye hosts different cultures from both Asia and Europe. It has both for shopping." (İYA9)

Another category under the theme of the place and contribution of tourism is "the contribution of tourism to the destination". Participants' responses regarding the contribution of tourism to the destination were coded as; "economic contribution" 20, "promotion" 3, "cultural contribution" 3, "employment" 1, "shopping tourism is of high quality in Türkiye" 3, "contribution of shopping" 2, "meets their expectations" 2 times.

Information on the sub-codes of the contribution of tourism to the destination category was included in Figure 6. Accordingly, 20 of the participants responded to the code 'economic contribution', 3 to the 'cultural contribution', 3 to 'promotion', 3 to the code 'Shopping tourism is of high quality in Türkiye', 2 to the code 'meets their expectations', 2 to the code 'contribution of shopping' and 1 to the code 'employment'.

- Economic contribution;

"I expect that Edirne's shopping tourism will bring in a substantial amount of foreign currency." (EYA8)

"The purpose of the customer's visit is very important. It's shopping tourism, but if people come here just for shopping, it doesn't contribute to Edirne in other aspects. They solely spend the money. They do the shopping and go back." (EYE7)

"I think it is a lifeline in the economic crisis. So, normally, as tradesmen, we have been going through difficult times

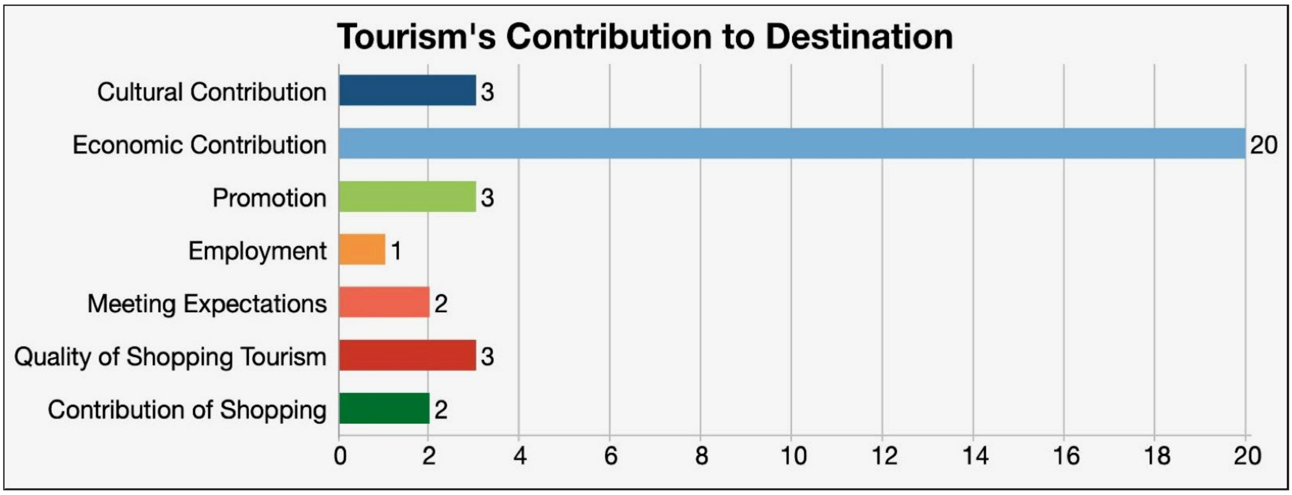

Figure 6. Contribution of tourism to the destination

for the last two to three years. A lifeline for that matter. It's just an expectation like everyone else." (İZYE5)

- Cultural contribution;

"First of all, it contributes to culture. Even we, while working here, can learn many things about their culture. Likewise, it is a very serious source of income from an economic perspective." (İZYE4)

- Promotion;

"It has a contribution for promotional purposes. For example, Edirne has various kinds of soaps on television and in the press today. Various kinds of soaps, such as lemon and olive oil, are produced in various molds. Thus, this is for promotional purposes. As I mentioned, Edirne Kavala Cookie is famous everywhere in Türkiye. This way it contributes." (EYE2)

- Shopping tourism is of high quality in Türkiye;

"Shopping tourism is sufficient and there are enough products, so it has a contribution." (EYA3)

"Shopping tourism is sufficient in Edirne." (EYA5)

Another theme created within the framework of the participants' statements is making the destination successful. Participants' opinions on making the destination successful were collected under this theme. The codes created within the context of this theme and the frequencies of the codes are shown in Figure 5.

- Building Trust;

"We show our goodwill, give them confidence, provide them with our phone number if necessary, and they contact us. When they go back to their own country, they

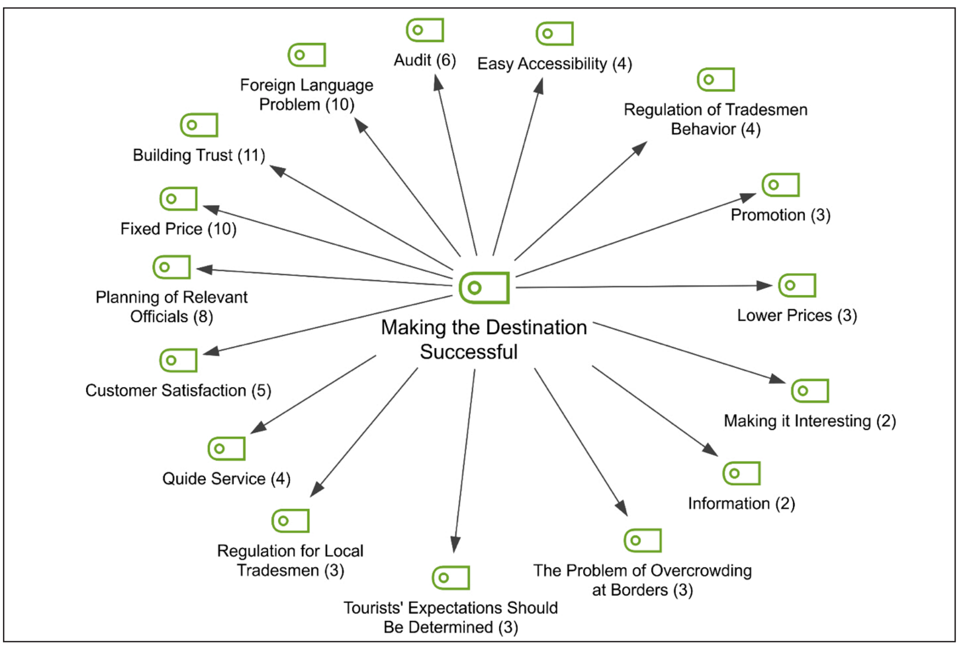

Figure 7. Making the destination successful hierarchical code sub-code model

call us and ask for products. They reserve the goods they wish to buy. Trust is essential in this regard. If they trust, they come again. Most of our customers are like that. They come every year and stop by. They bring their friends. Trust is very important. We try to help every customer." (İZYE1)

- Fixed price;

"We should be able to make flat-rate purchases. They sell us for higher prices than usual and this is very bad. We enter a store, the same product is more expensive or cheaper, this situation must be corrected. When one seller is winning, the other should also win." (EYA6)

- Foreign Language Problem;

"For example, people in the food and clothing industry should pay attention to promotions and campaigns. Additionally, knowing English will make the destination more attractive for tourists." (İYA5)

- Planning of Relevant Officials;

"I think success can be achieved with a common plan if people who want to take this tourism move forward create the suitable atmosphere." (EYA7)

- Audit (Inspection);

"It needs to be put in order. This is probably under the control of the municipality, the governor's office, those who deal with food tourism, the provincial directorate of food and agriculture, the provincial directorate of health, the municipal police, or the police teams. These authorities should conduct inspections on sellers. Moreover, great attention should be paid to hygiene in the places to be visited. Welcoming the customer and sending the customer off requires attention. The toilet is a huge problem in Edirne. Traffic and parking are also big problems, and these problems need to be solved." (EYE7)

Participants' expectations from shopping tourism were gathered under the theme of expectations. In the theme context, participant responses were divided into two categories: tourists' and tradesmen's expectations. When the tourists' expectations category was examined, the most recurring code was the reasonable price code. Statements regarding tourists' expectations are as follows:

- Reasonable Price;

"First of all, it's crucial to provide infrastructure-related opportunities, easy crossing from the border for me and those who come with me, easy access to shopping malls and low prices." (EYA9)

"My first expectation is the low price and then the friendly attitude of the sellers." (İYA2)

"When I think about it as a storekeeper... Quality and cherishing the customers. For example, I have a business in Bulgaria. I came here to buy my product because the prices were more favorable. Then, I sell it back there." (EYA6)

- Product Quality;

"Generally, tourists prefer branded products. As you can see, we do not have any branded products. That's why we generally appeal to domestic customers. However, tourists especially show excessive demand for counterfeit products. Instead of going there and paying 6-7 thousand euros, they buy it from us for 300-400 liras. Apart from that, they want to see more historical places. They want to experience more traditional things. That's why they prefer the Kızlar Ağası Inn." (İZYE4)

- Easy crossing of the border;

"The border should be controlled because we wait for an hour or two, and there are huge queues." (EYA5)

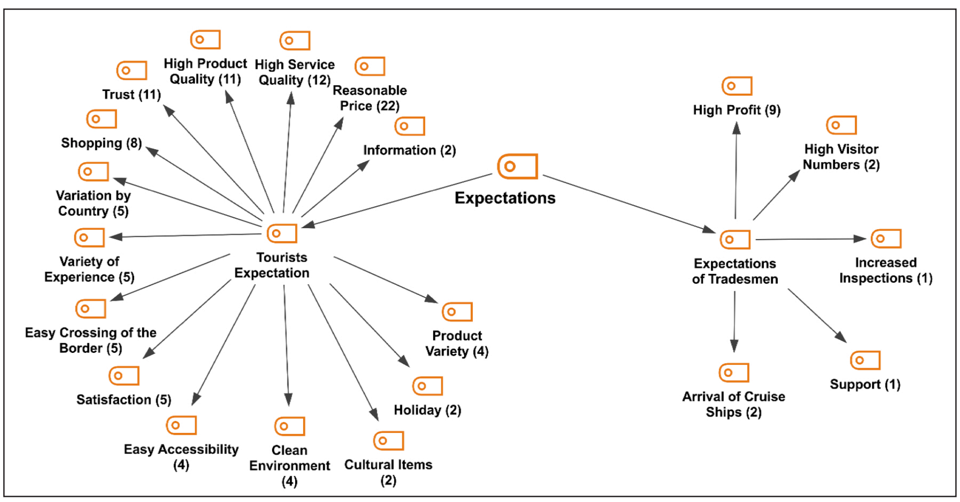

Figure 8. Expectations hierarchical code sub-code model

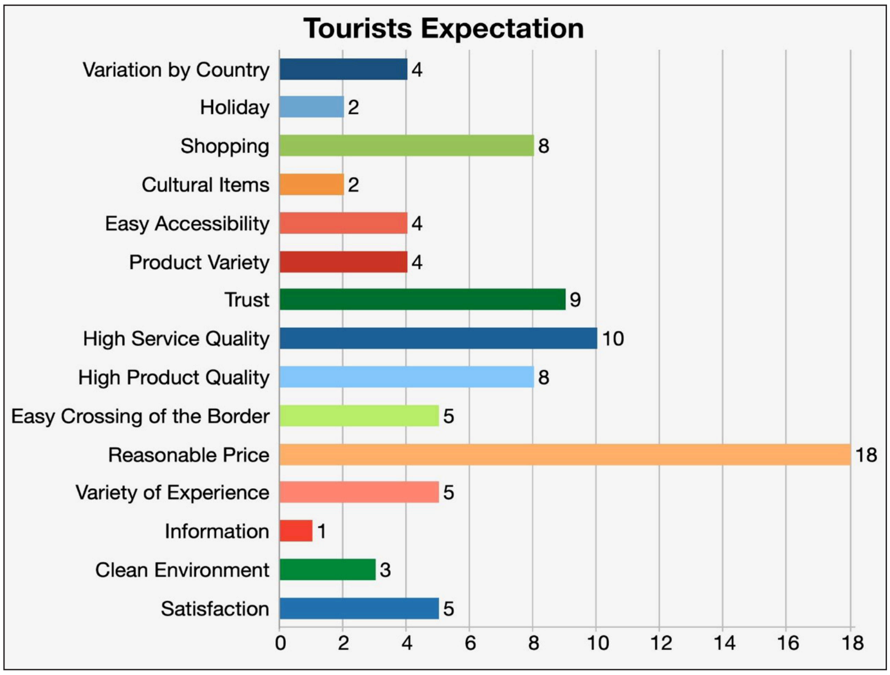

Figure 9. Statistics of tourists' expectations sub-codes

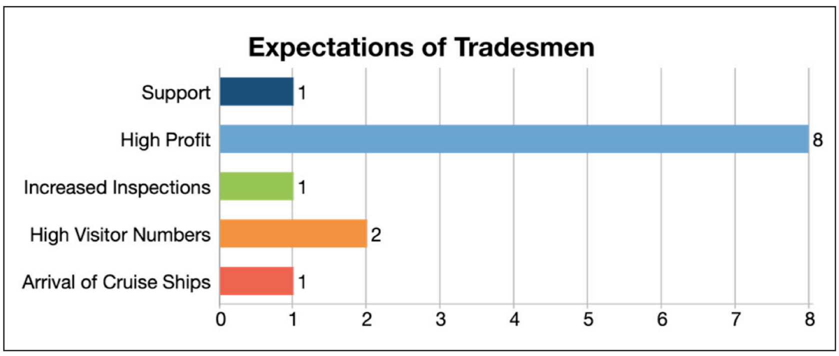

Figure 10. Statistics of tradesmen's expectations sub-codes

- Trust;

"As a tourist, I expect honesty from the seller where I buy products." (EYA7)

When the expectations of the tradesmen were examined, it was observed that the codes were in the direction of increasing earnings. The prominent statements of the participants regarding the expectations of the tradesmen are as follows;

"Now tourists want good deals, so that's O.K. The attitude of quality work at low prices can naturally lead to higher turnover and, thus, higher profits. Businesses expect abundant profits. Tourists expect to be satisfied with the products they purchase when they return home." (EYA10)

"I think these ships should get here. Those big cruise ships need to enter here because all the tradesmen liven up on the day those cruise ships arrive. In other words, those who eat and buy shoes, especially these counterfeiters in Kemeraltı, do more business at that time, but there is a point that disturbs us very much. There are approximately 80-100 hazanci, or hanutçu, who wander around here and there, aiming to take money from tourists by showing them around They disturb everyone. In other words, if a tourist buys a product from us for 100 liras, they buy it for 150 liras because of them." (İZYE3)

The participants' problems regarding shopping tourism were grouped under the theme of the issues. The theme was divided into 3 separate categories (the problems of tourists, and tradesmen, can shopping tourism be a solution to tourism problems) in terms of statements.

When the problems of tourists were examined, the most repeated codes were language problems, the negative behavior of tradesmen, and high prices. The prominent statements of the participants regarding this category are as follows:

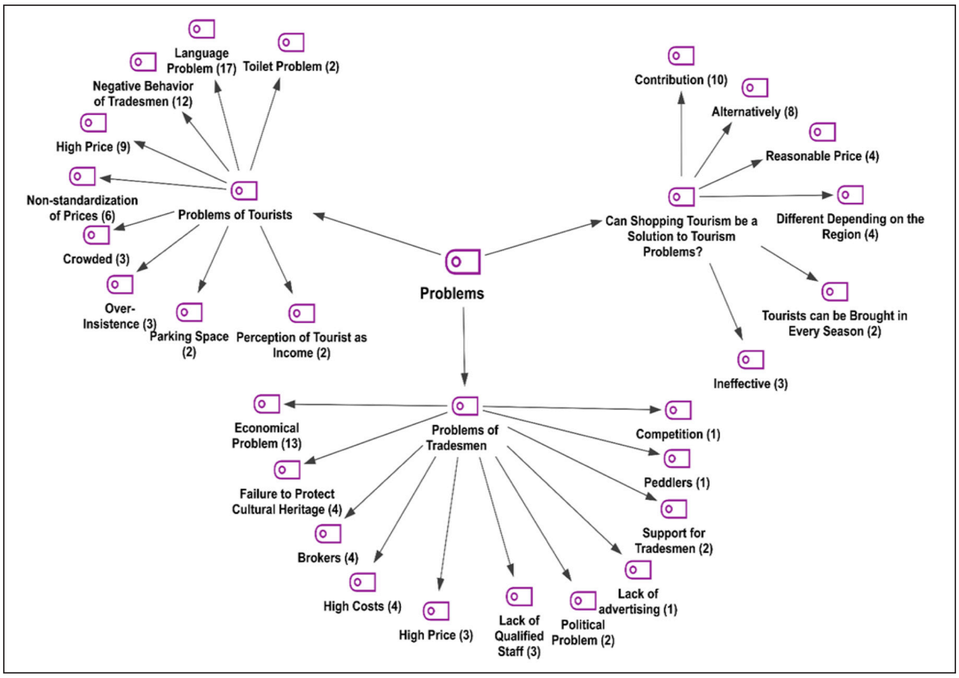

Figure 11. Problems with hierarchical code subcode model

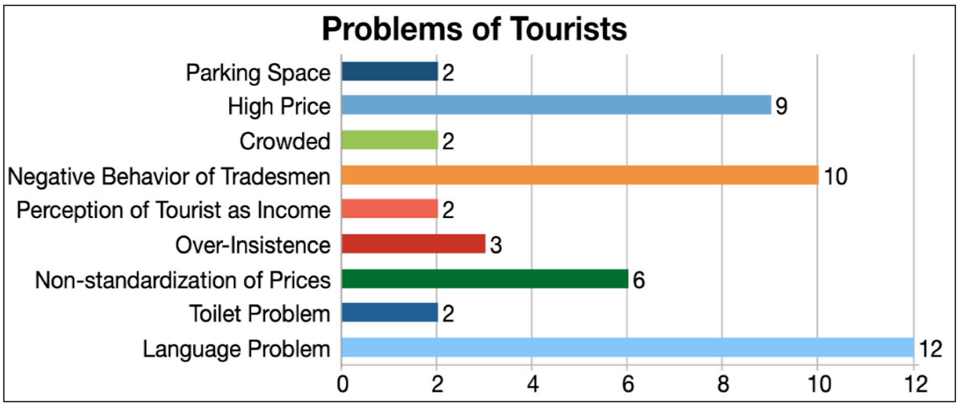

Figure 12. Statistics of tourists' problems sub-codes

"Language problem. The number of people who speak English and Bulgarian is low." (EYA2)

"I think there is a language barrier. This is very normal but sometimes very difficult. Maybe it would be easier if there was a little more English." (İYA9)

When the category of tradesmen's problems was examined, it was seen that the main problem of the tradesmen was economic problems. The prominent expressions in the tradesmen's problems category are as follows:

"Compared to surrounding provinces, Edirne is a city with chain markets and stores. Therefore, due to the chain stores, much of the income from shopping here does not stay in Edirne. I wouldn't say that the local tradesmen phenomenon is about to end, we can say that it is already over." (EYE3)

"Heavy expenses, rent, insurance. We used to have lunch for 10 TL a day, but now I pay 50-60 TL for lunch. It's a serious monthly expense." (İZYE4)

Another category is "Can Shopping Tourism Be a Solution to Tourism Problems". Participants' opinions on whether shopping tourism can be an alternative to seasonality and regional intensity, among Türkiye's main tourism problems, were gathered under this category. When the codes were examined, most participants thought there might be an alternative solution to these problems. The prominent statements in the context of this category are as follows:

"I think it can. Today, summer and winter are not a matter of issue when shopping. Yet, there isn't every product from every region, for example." (EYA8)

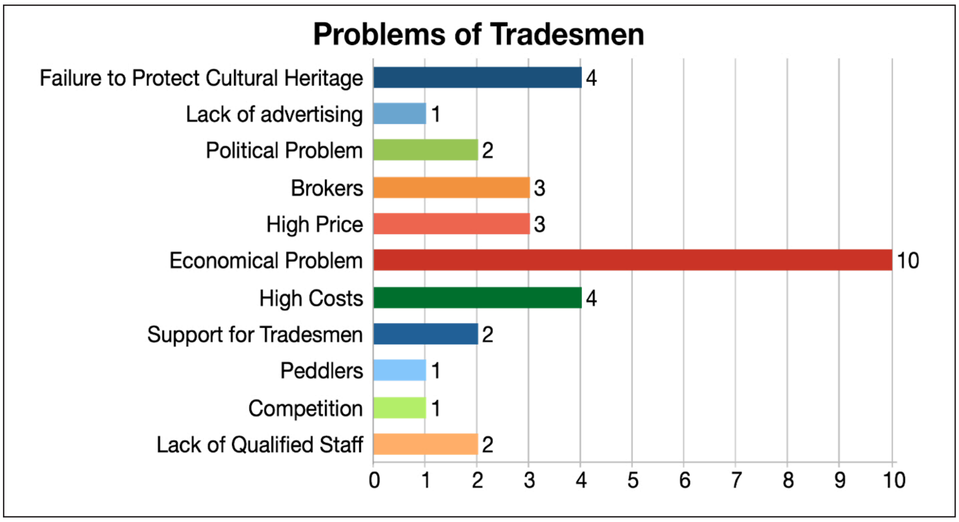

Figure 13. Statistics of sub-codes on tradesmen's problems

"There is no season for shopping. As for the region, if there were such easy transportation, I would go shopping in other regions." (EYA6)

These findings suggest that, for the development of shopping tourism, it is crucial to meet the shared expectations of both visitors and local residents while addressing the challenges encountered. Additionally, international tourists tend to focus on the overall tourism contribution of the destination, whereas local residents emphasize the destination's success and economic benefits. Figure 14 illustrates the interrelations between the themes.

The code map visualizes the relationships among the themes identified in the study. The analysis indicates that the code "Reasonable Price" occupies a central position and stands out as the element with the greatest number of connections (22). This indicates that, in the context of shopping tourism, visitors' primary expectation is directly related to price levels.

The code Reasonable Price demonstrates strong connections with other critical codes, including Good Service (12), Trust (11), Quality Product (11), and High Profit Expectations of Businesses (9). This network of relationships suggests that visitors are not solely concerned with low prices, but evaluate

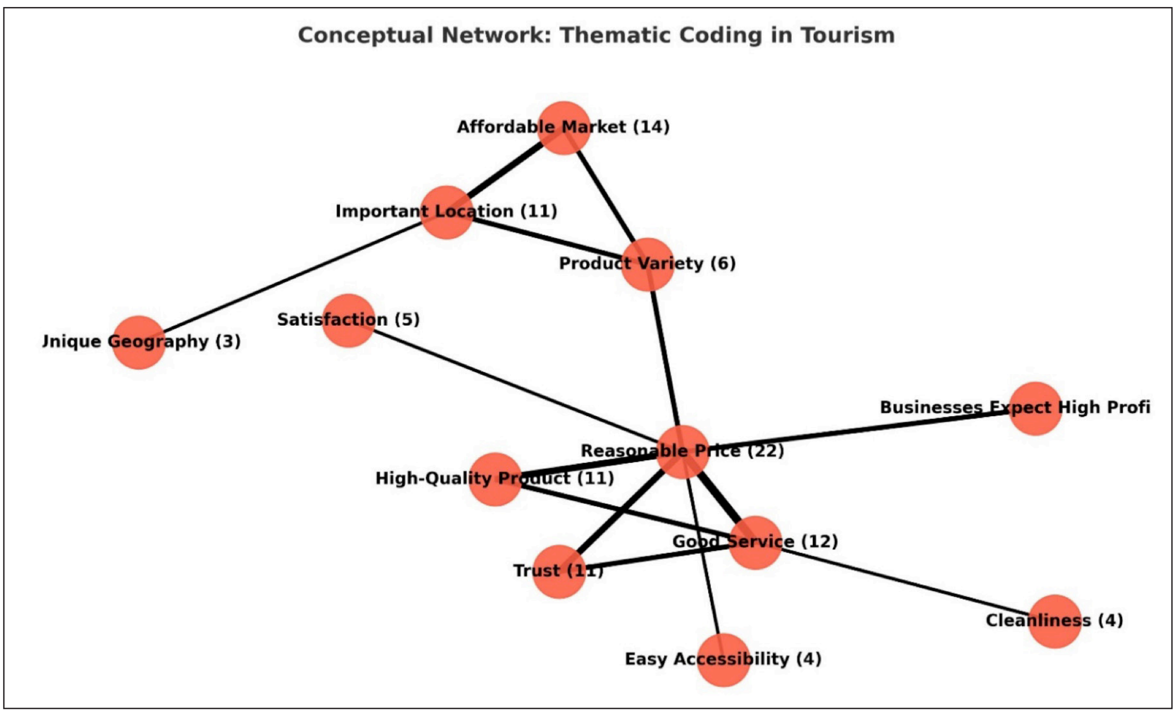

Figure 14. Interrelations between the themes

Table 3. Thematic coding framework

Participants / Codes	Role and Contribution of Tourism	Making the Destination Successful	Expectations	Problems	Total
İzmir International	28	16	31	32	107
İzmir Local	15	21	21	26	83
Edirne Local	18	27	34	34	113
Edirne International	24	17	31	34	106
Total	85	81	117	126	409

price in conjunction with quality, service, and trust. Additionally, Satisfaction (5), Product Variety (4), and Accessibility (4) are also linked to Reasonable Price. This indicates that the shopping experience is not limited to economic considerations alone; factors such as hygiene, accessibility, and variety also support perceptions of pricing.

Overall, the code map demonstrates that Reasonable Price serves as a pivotal focal point in shopping tourism, shaping visitors' expectations regarding trust, quality, service, and variety. This finding highlights that destinations aiming to develop shopping tourism should focus not only on pricing strategies but also on complementary factors such as service quality, product diversity, and accessibility.

The final part of the results section includes the code matrix of the study. The code matrix analysis illustrates how perspectives on shopping tourism are distributed across the four document groups (İzmir–International, İzmir–Local, Edirne–Local, Edirne– International). Table 3 highlights both the most prominent codes and the differences between groups.

The code matrix includes a total of 409 references. The most prominent theme is problems, while the least emphasized is making the destination successful. In the İzmir– International group, role and contribution of tourism is the most prominent, whereas in the Edirne–Local group, making the destination successful stands out. The themes of expectations and problems are balanced across all groups.

A total of 85 references were coded under role and contribution of tourism, with the highest intensity observed in the İzmir– International (28) and Edirne–International (24) groups. This indicates that international visitors tend to evaluate shopping tourism primarily within the broader context of the destination's overall tourism contribution. In contrast, local groups demonstrated relatively lower awareness of this contribution.

Making the destination successful theme accounted for 81 references, with the Edirne–Local group showing the highest emphasis (27) and İzmir– International group showing a more limited focus (16). This finding suggests that local visitors in Edirne place greater emphasis on the potential of shopping opportunities to make the city more attractive from a tourism perspective. In İzmir, international visitors appear to associate the success of the destination with more general factors rather than shopping specifically.

With 117 references, expectations was the second most frequent category. The distribution across the four groups was relatively balanced (İzmir– International 31, İzmir–Local 21, Edirne–Local 34, Edirne– International 31). This indicates that expectations are a shared theme for both international and local visitors in the context of shopping tourism. The particularly high value for the Edirne–Local group suggests that residents have clearly defined expectations regarding shopping tourism.

Problems had the highest number of references at 126. This shows that the most frequently mentioned dimension in shopping tourism pertains to problems encountered. The distribution was balanced across groups (İzmir– International 32, İzmir–Local 26, Edirne–Local 34, Edirne– International 34), indicating that both local and international visitors commonly highlight problems, pointing to this as a key area that needs to be addressed for sustainable shopping tourism development.

CONCLUSION and IMPLICATIONS

A total of eight countries has geographical boundaries with Türkiye. Shopping tourism occurs on the borders of Greece and Bulgaria in the west of Türkiye and on the borders of Georgia and Iran in the east. This study aimed to expand shopping as an asset to tourism for the regions of Izmir and Edirne. The current state of shopping tourism in both locations and what could be done to improve it was discussed.

Figure 15. Code cloud

In the analysis, the most emphasized code in the "Türkiye's place in shopping tourism" category was "reasonable prices". Similarly, in the studies of Timothy and Butler (1995), it was emphasized that low product prices create an attraction for shopping tourism. Since Bulgaria and Greece are European Union countries, their price levels are higher than those of Türkiye. The high price levels have turned the citizens of these countries into shopping tourists for border countries.

In the contribution to the destination category, the most emphasized code by both buyer and seller participants was "economic contribution". The development of shopping tourism travel packages was recommended for economic contribution to the destination due to the significant foreign exchange revenues obtained from tourism (Saayman & Saayman, 2012; Wu, Li, &Song, 2012). Timothy and Butler (1995) emphasized that cross-border shopping increased profits. The 'expectations' category indicates that the sellers would primarily like to increase their sales; therefore, they want the number of tourists to increase. It has been determined that one of the biggest challenges facing sellers is economic problems, such as rents and expenses. The intense economic problems after the Türkiye pandemic affected local people's expenditure levels. Thus, shopping tourism has become an important market for local producers.

In the category of making the shopping tourism destination successful, it was observed that the participants especially focused on the problem of trust in shopping, price instability, and the sellers' barrier to foreign languages. The participants prioritized reasonable prices, service quality, trust, and quality products in the expectations theme. Swanson and Horridge (2006) revealed that perceived shopping characteristics such as aesthetics, uniqueness, location, promotion, and sales partners affected the travel motivations of shopping tourists. To increase the attractiveness of shopping areas for tourists, Jansen-Verbeke (1991) proposed specific criteria such as clustering of a wide variety of shops, food and beverage, entertainment and other activities and attractions in a particular area; good accessibility and parking, pedestrian priority over vehicles, a positive image, attractive design (aesthetics) accessibility at leisure (e.g. on Sundays), hospitality (visitor orientation, adequate information, identification of symbolism), social-emotional value and liveliness or animations with surprises.

In the Expectations category, it was determined that the seller participants primarily wanted to increase sales and anticipate an increase in tourists. In the category of Problems, the main issues that tourists emphasized as problems were the foreign language barriers of the sellers, their negative behaviour, and price instability. In the study examining the complaints of tourists about the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, Türkiye's largest tourist market, complaints about high prices, poor quality and counterfeit products, negative behaviour of sellers, and crowding became prominent (Erşahin and Demirkol 2020). Obviously, supervision and training are required to solve these highlighted problems, so the cooperation of public and non-governmental organizations is necessary.

It was observed that the main problems of the sellers were economic, namely rents and expenses. Due to the nature of shopping tourism, it can be considered natural that the most used word cloud was economic contribution and reasonable-affordable price.

Shopping tourism's economic contributions are well-documented, but a broader perspective encompassing planning, policy, sustainability, and socio-cultural outcomes also warrants attention. Henderson et al. (2011), in their study on Singapore, demonstrate that effective shopping tourism requires not only retail development but also state support, spatial organization, and integration into national tourism policy. Similarly, Tosun et al. (2007) emphasize that the success of shopping destinations depends on comprehensive planning, reliable information provision, and visitor security, rather than economic factors alone. From a sustainability perspective, Saayman and Saayman (2012) highlight the potential of shopping tourism to enhance not just economic but also socio-cultural sustainability in developing regions. Wu, Li, and Song (2012) further argue that shopping-related consumption can stabilize tourism economies against fluctuations, provided it is embedded within long-term policy frameworks.

The socio-cultural impacts of shopping tourism are equally significant. Swanson and Horridge (2006) show that the aesthetics, authenticity, and symbolic meanings embedded in shopping experiences shape tourists' identities and motivations. Yu and Littrell (2005) find that handicraft shopping, in particular, contributes to cultural sustainability and reinforces local identity. In addition, Eroğlu, Machleit, and Barr (2005) demonstrate how spatial crowding influences not only satisfaction but also the use and perception of local spaces, underlining the importance of spatial practices in shaping tourist experiences. In this light, shopping tourism emerges as more than a simple economic activity: it is also a vehicle for identity formation, cultural heritage preservation, and the re-functionalization of urban public spaces. Therefore, future planning should integrate shopping tourism into broader tourism development strategies, with policies that simultaneously target economic benefits, cultural sustainability, and local community well-being.

Sectoral İmplications

It could be seen that shopping tourism destinations that have developed spontaneously due to economic conditions are not ready for shopping tourism, and no plans have been made for this situation in Edirne and Izmir. The historical Kemeraltı Bazaar in Izmir is more suitable for tourist shopping than Edirne. Since Izmir is a port city, it has been open to foreign trade and is an important destination for local and foreign tourists. For this reason, tradesmen in Izmir are more successful in hosting tourists, as well as in product variety, quality, and attractiveness. There is a need for planning in Edirne regarding shopping venues, products, additional services, and foreign language education. In this respect, the joint efforts of local governments and non-governmental organizations are important.

It was determined that the participants generally believed that shopping tourism would solve the seasonal tourism problem. It was identified that shopping tourism takes place all year round. Thus, density in destinations continues at the same level. If tourism destinations could also be shopping tourism destinations, seasonality problems could be reduced. Izmir is a tourist destination for culture, history, faith, fairs, congresses, cruises, cities, and holidays (sea, sand, sun) for both domestic and foreign tourists, while Edirne is a historical tourism destination for domestic tourists. With shopping tourism, both destinations will be able to host tourists throughout the year.

The results of the study showed that the participants had problems with trust, price instability, and foreign language issues. Based on this result, businesses can be trained on ethical values, determining the right price policy, and foreign languages to adopt a higher-quality service approach. Creating shopping destinations in regions with shopping tourism potential is recommended through joint efforts between local authorities and the government.

Limitations and Future Research Agenda

Only two Turkish cities where cross-border shopping tourism is common, Izmir and Edirne, are included in this study. As a result, its conclusions cannot be applied to other nations with comparable dynamics or to all areas of Türkiye. The study used a qualitative approach, which limited the capacity to draw more general statistical conclusions but permitted in-depth insights. To improve generalizability, future studies can use a mixed-method approach that blends extensive quantitative data with qualitative insights.

The emphasis on just one stakeholder group per city is another drawback. Future research could improve the analysis by incorporating additional stakeholders, such as tourism organizations, NGOs, or local governments. To give a more global perspective, future research might also look at the comparative dynamics of shopping tourism in Türkiye and its neighbors. Researchers could also look into how the expectations and experiences of shopping tourists are impacted by digitalization, mobile payments, or e-commerce platforms. Additionally, future research that examines participants in shopping tourism from a demographic perspective may offer more individualized results; therefore, studies focusing on demographic factors such as age, occupation, and experience could be conducted.

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