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Understanding the Travellers' Mosque Experiences: The Case of Istanbul

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Visiting holy places is one of the important parts of faith tourism. Travellers visit religious sites not only for worship but also for secular pleasures. This study analysed online reviews to understand how travellers rate holy sites and what experiences they gained after their visit. In this sense, the mosque, which is the place of worship in Islam, was chosen as the holy place, and Tripadvisor, one of the most popular online travel-sharing platforms was used as the sharing platform. As a sample, travellers who visited Suleymaniye mosque in Istanbul, one of Turkey's most important tourist destinations, were considered suitable. In this regard, online comments (n=524) for Suleymaniye Mosque in *Istanbul* between 2019 and 2021 were collected, and the data were analysed using the MAXQDA program. Most of the comments were made in 2019 (69.47%) and a significant portion of the travellers who commented on the mosque were from Europe (38.54%). Through content analysis, five main components / themes were identified: 'sense of awe', 'architectural factors', 'spiritual and religious factors', 'environmental factors', and 'historical factors'. The research confirms previous findings that travellers visiting sacred sites tend to focus on architecture, history, and significant figures. The experiences of travellers visiting Suleymaniye Mosque in the future can be examined empirically and compared with the results of this research.

Key Words: religious travellers, User-Generated Content (UGC), TripAdvisor, Istanbul, Suleymaniye Mosque

Introduction

From a historical perspective, the concepts of religion and travel have been intertwined since ancient times (Hashim *et al.*, 2007). People have visited and still visit religious sites for religious reasons. In the modern age, the reasons to travel to religious areas have diversified, and religious areas have evolved from 'holy places visited by people who follow their faith' (Singh *et al.*, 2023). Today, many people want to visit religious sites for various reasons, even if they are not related to their own beliefs (Abdul Razak, 2019). At this time, the modern tourism industry facilitates this desire of travellers.

Religious tourism is a type of tourism that involves travel to religious areas, irrespective of whether individuals have a personal connection with the faith (Raj & Morpeth, 2007). In other words, the reasons for visiting religious sites such as mosques, churches, temples, or cathedrals

go beyond worship and spirituality, to encompassing diverse tourism activities such as acquiring historical-cultural information and seeking entertainment (Ballantyne *et al.*, 2016). However, not all religious sites can be considered sufficient to attract tourists (Hughes & Chu, 2020). Generally, tourists seek elements such as legendary stories, natural or mystical beauty, experiences associated with famous individuals, and historically, culturally, artistically, and architecturally appealing characteristics (Nyaupane *et al.*, 2015).

With the growing popularity of sacred sites, particularly in the late 20th century, tourist interest in religious destinations has significantly increased (Shackley, 2008). Despite the increasing tourist interest in religious areas and the increase in religious tourism studies, there is a lack of research on religion-motivated tourism and the direct experiences of such tourists (Albayrak *et al.*, 2018). In this context, the present article focuses on the visits

and experiences of international travellers to mosques, the places of worship of Islam.

When considering number of believers, Islam is one of the most widespread religions, along with Christianity (Kessler, 2015). Putting aside Mecca and Medina, which are the most important centers for the religion of Islam and where non-Muslims cannot enter, important mosques have been built throughout history and continue to be built in many countries and places of the world. Istanbul, which is the research area of this study, has many sacred places that are considered very important spiritually and architecturally for believers in Islam and other religions. In addition, Istanbul is an important touristic destination attracting not only believers but also tourists.

This study aims to develop an approach to understanding travellers' experiences at mosques by utilising the TripAdvisor website and employing text mining techniques. Within this context, the research question is formulated as follows: What are the main components of the mosque visit experience of travellers coming to *Istanbul*?

The structure of the present article is as follows. Following the introduction, the first section of the research provides an overview of the literature related to religious tourism. The second section details the methodology, including data collection and analysis procedures. The third section presents the findings from the data analysis and includes relevant comments. The final section of the article contains the conclusions drawn from the study and discusses its limitations.

Tourism at Religious Sites

Travel for religious purposes has been practiced since ancient times (Zamani & Eid, 2016). The primary objective of travel to religious sites in ancient times was to fulfill religious obligations and attain spiritual enlightenment. However, in the modern age, travel to religious areas has become more diverse, with additional motivations beyond the traditional ones (Raj & Griffin, 2015; Raj *et al.*, 2015; Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo, 2020). Non-religious motivations, such as an interest in architecture and history, seeking cultural experiences, spontaneous decisions, curiosity, and leisure activities,

have emerged as significant driving factors (El-Gohary, 2016; Hughes *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, tourists embark on these travels due to reasons such as a fascination with a particular religion, personal development, and the desire to witness religious practices firsthand (Liogier, 2012; Tjahjani & Sondakh, 2023).

There are many thousands of holy places belonging to various religions, especially the three major religions of the world, and these sites lead to significant population movements (Rojo, 2007). According to estimates by the UNWTO, between 300 and 330 million travellers embark on religious journeys annually (UNWTO, 2014). Another perspective is that approximately 140 million people visit the 32 main destinations around the world each year (Alliance of Religions and Conservation, 2014). In addition to pilgrims and tourists, researchers also show interest in religious sites and publish articles on visits to sacred places.

Upon reviewing the literature, it is evident that many researchers have compared religious and non-religious travel motivations (Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006). In this context, visitor motivations are an important criterion in these comparisons and are used to distinguish between faith / religious tourism and pilgrimage (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Lupu *et al.*, 2019; Olsen, 2010). The concept of pilgrimage, as mentioned above, means visiting holy places by people of that religion at certain times of the year. The concept of religious tourism can be succinctly defined as individuals' travels to religious attractions for reasons that are non-religious, partially religious, or entirely religious (Kujawa, 2017; Raj & Morpeth, 2007). According to Bremer (2014), the travels of tourists to religious sites are increasingly blurred and it is difficult to distinguish between pilgrims and tourists. In this context, it is seen that travels to religious areas have been categorised by many researchers and various definitions have been offered on the subject (Henderson, 2011; Fleischer, 2000; Francis *et al.*, 2010; Kato & Prozano, 2017; Tirca *et al.*, 2010; Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014; Weidenfeld, 2006).

One example of such classification is provided by Francis *et al.* (2010), who divided tourists visiting religious sites into two groups: 'thinking' and 'feeling'. Rodrigues and McIntosh (2014) are among the researchers who have

developed classifications on the subject; they separated the tourists visiting these areas into: (1) religious; (2) personal (i.e. searching for nostalgia, peace, and satisfaction of curiosity) and; (3) social (i.e. attracted by social events, festivals, and hospitality).

According to Tirca *et al.* (2010), the literature presents two different approaches regarding the distinctions between tourists and pilgrims. The first of these approaches thinks that these two concepts are similar, if not the same. The second approach posits that pilgrims are distinct from tourists, and the two concepts are seen as contradictory. Furthermore, several studies have observed that the journeys of tourists and pilgrims to religious sites are multidimensional and dynamic in nature (Andriotis, 2009; Bond *et al.*, 2015). In summary, this research suggests that those who travel to religious sites can have more than one purpose at the same time (Lupu *et al.*, 2019).

While studies on travel to religious areas are increasing day by day, most research on religious tourism focuses on specific religions (Albayrak *et al.*, 2018). Case studies are conducted at a single sacred destinations or holy place of the chosen religion. Following this model, in the research for this paper, Islam, one of the monotheistic religions, was chosen based on previous literature. Typically, mosques, churches, temples, cathedrals, and synagogues are among the important holy places that lead to travel activity. In this regard, the site chosen for the current research is Suleymaniye Mosque, located in Istanbul, one of Turkey's most popular tourist destinations, which is also on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2018).

The relationship between tourism and religion has attracted considerable attention from researchers, but the number of studies on the relationship between Islam and tourism is limited (Battour *et al.*, 2014). It can be noted that the primary focus of research related to Islam and tourism concentrates on halal tourism and pilgrimage (Jafari & Scott, 2014). However, this paper seeks to take a broader perspective and the aim of this study, conducted to address a gap in the literature, is to determine the broader components of travellers' experiences at mosques.

Methodology

The aim of this study is to determine the experiences of travellers visiting mosques and identify the factors that may influence the experiences of religious travellers. In line with this objective, a qualitative case study was deemed appropriate for this research. The data were analysed using traditional content analysis, a qualitative research method (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Content analysis helps condense large amounts of data into a concise summary, making it easily understandable for readers. (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). In this context, in the current study, travellers who visited the Suleymaniye mosque, one of the most important mosques in Turkey, were seen as a suitable sample in order to present the the experiences of travellers during their visit to the mosque. For this purpose, their comments about their experiences were taken from TripAdvisor.

Numerous travellers utilise user-generated content (UGC) platforms to access unbiased reviews about tourist destinations. Thus, UGC websites, including TripAdvisor, have the potential to directly impact consumers' decision-making regarding their travel choices (Tanrıverdi & Çıkkı, 2022). With the development of the internet and the increasing interest of consumers, UGC platforms have become an important area of attention for researchers as well as users (Thanh & Kirova, 2018). In comparison to traditional data collection methods (such as questionnaires / interviews), data mining provides easy access and analysis of large datasets (Seyyedamiri *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, this research utilised online comments from travellers about their experiences, specifically gathered from TripAdvisor, which selected due to its extensive user base and the abundance of user reviews (Filiari *et al.*, 2015).

The collection of research data was carried out between 15 May and 10 June 2022. Only comments made between the years 2019-2021 were included in the scope of the research. This ensured that the data were up to date - the earliest narratives are from 2019 - and these 3 years were deemed to be enough to achieve a sufficient volume of reviews. The comments were downloaded for analysis and to maintain consistency, all of the comments included in the research were in English. The obtained data were analysed through content analysis, using the

Figure 1: Süleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c0/Istanbul_asv2020-02_img49_S%C3%BCleymaniye_Mosque.jpg

MAXQDA program. The coding process was done by two authors independently of each other. After the authors read the data at least twice, they started coding the material. After multiple readings, the themes and sub-themes were agreed (Seyitoglu, 2020). After the themes and sub-themes were finalised, the results were recorded by the authors (Seyitoglu & Ivanov, 2020).

Research Site: Süleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul

There are more than 3000 mosques in *Istanbul*, which is considered one of the most important touristic destinations in Turkey. The historical city, which was the capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, has tangible and intangible heritage resources and is seen by travellers as one of the most important cities in the world in terms of cultural and heritage resources (Altunel & Erkut, 2015). For this reason, it has been chosen as a research area.

The religious tourist attraction chosen in Istanbul is Süleymaniye Mosque. The construction of the mosque began on the orders of Suleiman the Magnificent and was

completed in 1557 (Almughrabi *et al.*, 2015). Built by Mimar Sinan it is one of the most important examples of Classical Ottoman Architecture (Ediz & Ostwald, 2012). The Süleymaniye Conservation Area, which includes Süleymaniye Mosque and its surroundings, is on the UNESCO World Heritage List (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2022; UNESCO, 2018).

Findings

This study used content analysis to understand the experiences of travellers during their visit. In the research, comments made in English between the years 2019-2021 were taken into account. As a result of the data collection process, 524 usable comments were extracted. Most comments were made in 2019 and the distribution of comments by year is given in Table 1.

Of the comments made, 147 (28.05%) were submitted by males and 86 (16.41%) by females. In the remaining comments examined, travellers did not share their gender. A significant number of travellers (38.54%) commenting on Süleymaniye Mosque come from the European

Table 1: Distribution of Traveller Comments by Year

Year	Number of comments (n)	Percentage distribution (%)
2019	364	69,47
2020	89	16,98
2021	71	13,54
Toplam	524	100

continent - the largest group being from England (n=84). Travellers from the USA take second place (n=62) while 126 travellers do not provide information about the country they live in.

When the evaluations undertaken by travellers to indicate their satisfaction level were examined, it was calculated that a maximum of 5 points out of 5 were allocated by 84.3% of the respondents. The mean score of the

evaluations of all participants regarding satisfaction levels was 4.79.

According to the findings, five main religious and non-religious themes were identified (Figure 2). The main components of the experiences of mosque visitors are as follows:

- (1) Sense of Awe;
- (2) Environmental Factors ;

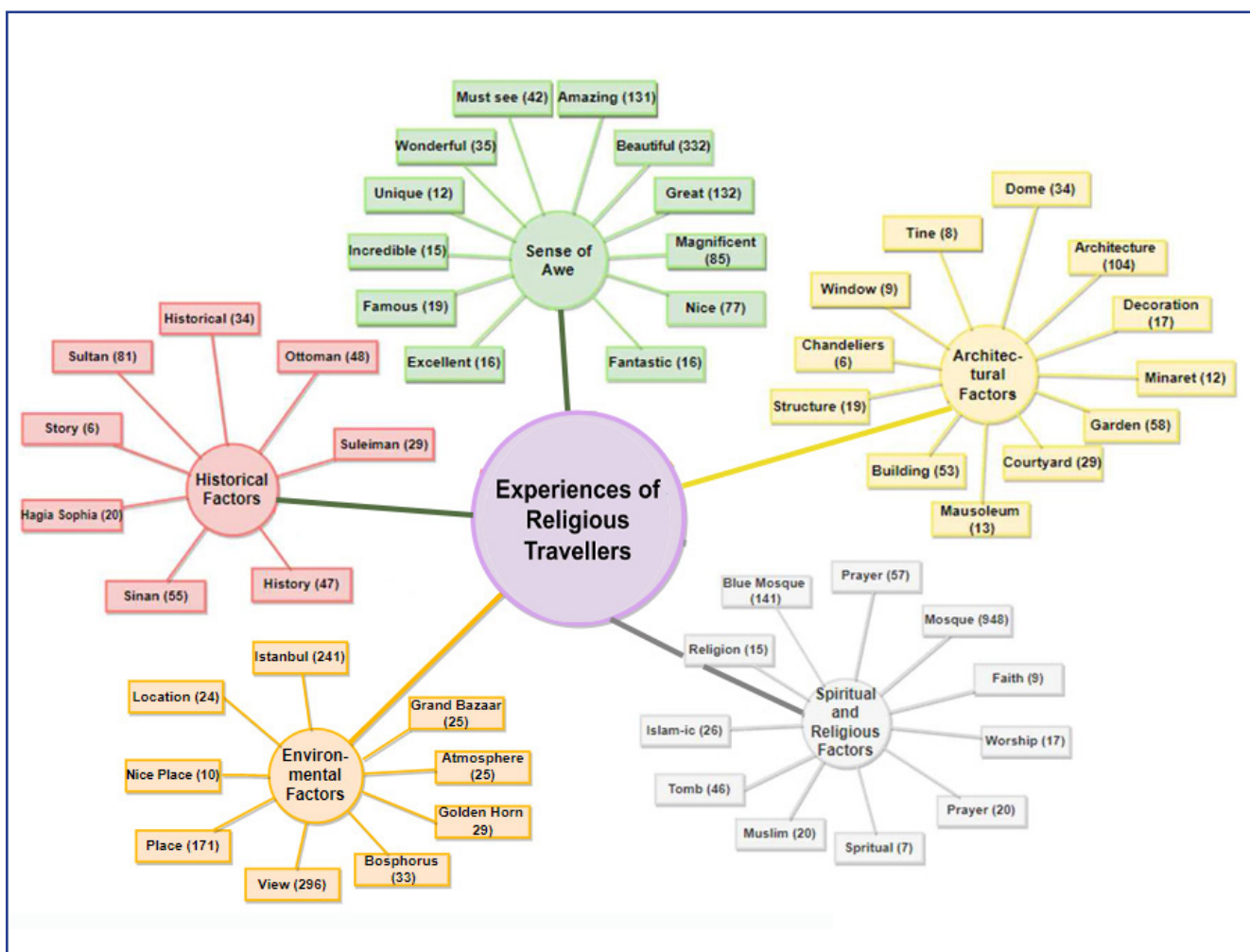
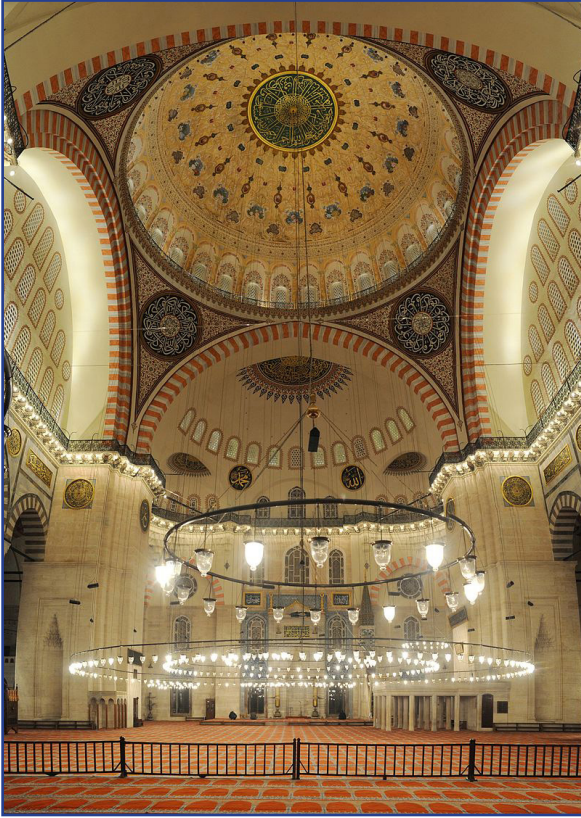
Figure 2: Components of Mosque Travellers' Experiences in Istanbul

Figure 3: Süleymaniye Mosque Interior Looking Towards the Mihrab



https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/06/20101213_Suleymaniye_Mosque_Istanbul_inside_vertical_Panorama.jpg

- (3) Architectural Factors;
- (4) Spiritual and Religious Factors, and;
- (5) Historical Factors.

A visual representation of the five main themes is provided in Figure 2. In order to synthesise and more clearly present the findings of the main components of the research, travellers' evaluations are supported by direct quotations (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Direct quotations of the travellers were added to the findings with codes used to identify the appropriate review.

Sense of Awe

According to the findings of the current research, the first of the components is 'sense of awe', which expresses the feeling of being affected by the resources of a destination (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021). This theme encompasses various descriptors, including 'beautiful' (n=332), 'amazing' (n=131), 'great' (n=132), 'magnificent' (n=85),

'impressive' (n=55), 'must-see' (n=42), 'wonderful' (n=35), 'excellent' (n=16), and 'incredible' (n=15). The research reveals that a considerable number of travellers highlighting the sense of awe in their experiences recommend prospective travellers to visit the destination (Gursoy *et al.*, 2021), which aligns with existing literature on the subject. A sense of awe has also been identified in previous research as an important component of the traveller's experience (Atsız *et al.*, 2022; Ogretmenoglu *et al.*, 2023; Tian *et al.*, 2015).

Related to the current theme, a traveller posted the following comment on the Tripadvisor website:

Definitely one of the must see sights in Istanbul. It's a magnificent, impressive, beautiful mosque-the biggest in Istanbul. Beautiful view of the city from the garden (M165).

The experience of the mosque was described by another traveller as follows:

I think this is one of the most magnificent structures in history. It manages to impress you from the moment you enter. It has a perfect build. Even though it was my first time here, it made me feel very peaceful. I'm thinking of coming again (M1).

Architectural Factors

Another component obtained from analysing the reviews of travellers is the 'architectural factors' theme. Analysis of the data confirms that the architecture of the building plays a crucial role in shaping the travellers' experiences, aligning with previous studies (Bond *et al.*, 2015; Huang & Chu, 2020). Some of the commonly mentioned indicators that signify the theme of architectural factors include 'courtyard' (n=29), 'dome' (n=34), 'built' (n=38), 'construction' (n=24), 'structure' (n=19), 'decoration' (n=17), 'mausoleum' (n=13), 'wall' (n=9), 'chandeliers' (n=6), and 'acoustic' (n=6).

A traveller from the USA who visited the mosque made the following comment in support of the architectural factors theme:

Inside is breathtaking in its size and simplicity. Beautiful decorations such as floral designs, geometrical patterns, and calligraphy from the Koran. The chandeliers are low and dim, giving you the impression that it was lit by candles.

Massive arches and four columns lift the main massive dome. Suleyman Mosque is one of the most popular sights in Istanbul. Camera and flash are allowed inside the mosque ... (M81).

Another traveller from Israel made the following comment:

... it's a Unesco world heritage site. One of the wonders of Ottoman architecture that was built by the well-known architect Sinan Basha. Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent ordered to build of this amazing mosque in the 16th century and later he was buried in a beautiful mausoleum next to the mosque near his beloved wife Hurram. I recommend everyone who is in Istanbul to visit this site (M94).

Spiritual and Religious Factors

The 'spiritual and religious factors' theme stands as another significant component that shapes the experience of travellers during their mosque visits. The religious aspects of visiting holy places are also identified as one of the main travel motivations of travellers in previous studies (Lupu *et al.*, 2019). Some of the indicators

associated with this theme include 'prayer' (n=57), 'tomb' (n=46), 'Islamic' (n=26), 'masjid' (n=23), 'Muslim' (n=20), 'worship' (n=17), 'religion' (n=11), 'faith' (n=9), 'spiritual' (n=7), and 'sacred place' (n=4). The most prevalent concept associated with this theme is 'mosque' (n=948). Moreover, travellers mentioned churches on six occasions and made personal comparisons between mosques and churches.

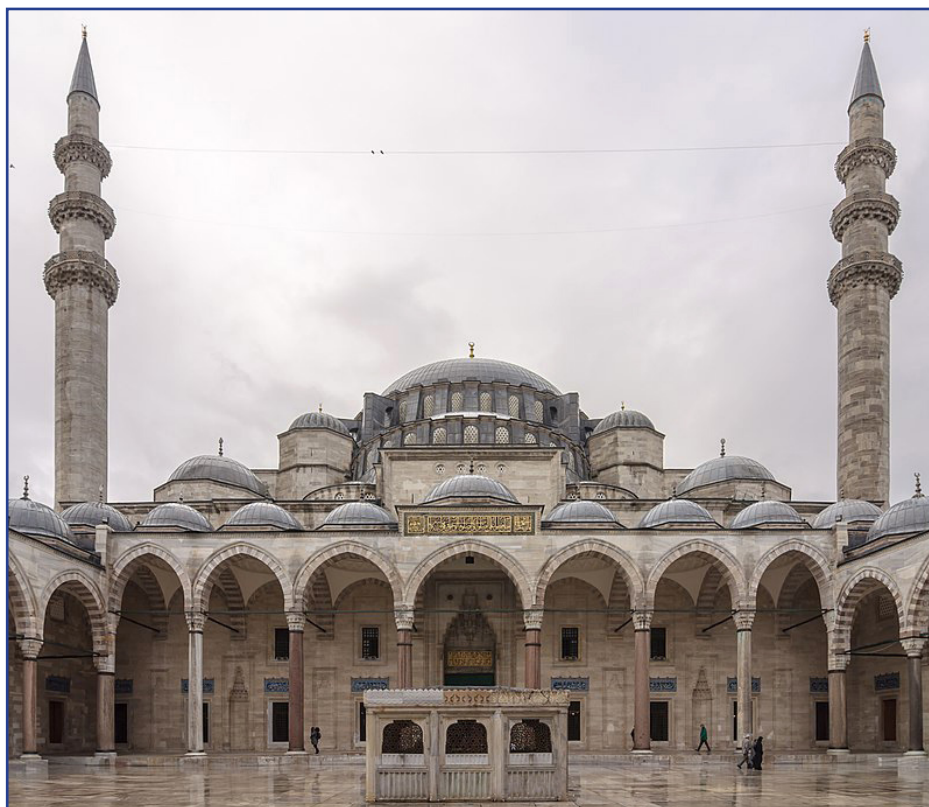
For example, a traveller's review read:

First I must you the truth, in all my life I have never felt a [peace] as I felt in a Suleymaniye Mosque. And this is a remark of an orthodox traveller. I see religion as a bridge between people, if you cross the bridge you will understand the catholic, orthodox, and Moslem spirit (M420).

Another traveller from Australia made this comment:

... Especially in Suleymaniye Mosque, where the number of visitors is [more] limited than in other places, ... one can feel the peace and the glorious closeness of God, whatever name you honor him ... (M282).

Figure 4: North Facade of Süleymaniye Mosque with Forecourt and Central Fountain



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BCleymaniye_Mosque#/media/File:Cour_mosquee_Suleymaniye_Istanbul.jpg

Environmental Factors

According to the analysis, 'environmental factors' is another theme that affects the experiences of mosque travellers. Travellers commonly expressed their experiences related to this theme using terms such as 'view' (n=296), 'Istanbul' (n=241), 'place' (n=171), 'Bosphorus' (n=33), 'Golden Horn' (n=29), 'atmosphere' (n=25), 'location' (n=24), and 'close to' (n=11). A traveller from England who came to see the mosque expressed their experiences related to this theme as follows:

Best Mosque we visited. This Mosque is very very beautiful but also has stunning grounds with fantastic views. We walked up from the grand bazaar, about 15-20 minutes, and were rewarded with a view of the whole of Istanbul (M474).

Another traveller's TripAdvisor narrative regarding this theme was as follows:

On top of a hill, this beautiful mosque has a sublime panoramic view on the Bosphorus. A little cemetery with colorful flowers and the tomb of Sultan Suleyman, his family, and his harem just next to it. Peaceful atmosphere inside the mosque. Fresh and peaceful place. Sitting on the carpet and watching the magnificent Islamic architecture, listening to the imam speech even if in Turkish which I did not understand but still slow and restful ... (M522).

Historical Factors

The last component derived by content analysis is historical factors. The influence of visits to holy places extends beyond religious reasons, and various non-religious factors can impact the visitors' experience (Voase, 2007). For example, the place, importance, and characteristics of a holy place in history are one of these reasons. Some of the prominent indicators within the theme of historical factors include 'sultan' (n=81), 'Sinan' (n=55), 'Ottoman' (n=48), 'history' (n=47), 'historical' (n=34), 'Suleyman' (n=29), and 'Hurrem' (n=13). The narration of a traveller from Iran regarding this theme is as follows:

This mosque was designed by the great Ottoman architect the architect of Sinan Agha, by the order of the Ottoman king Sultan Suleiman. The

height of the dome of this mosque is 53 meters and the diameter of the dome is 27.5 meters. According to Ottoman tradition, this mosque has four minarets (garlands) which are a symbol of mosques that were built by the order of kings. Its architectural style, like other works of Sinan and Ottoman architects, is a combination of Byzantine and Islamic architectural styles. According to the tradition of that period, this mosque had ancillary buildings such as a school, a bath, a library, an inn, a hospital, and a public kitchen. Such ancillary buildings were called the whole mosque (M9).

Another prominent narrative about this theme is evident in the comments of a traveller from Serbia:

The Suleymaniye Mosque, dedicated to the great Ottoman Sultan and conqueror sits on the hill in the historic Eminonu part of Istanbul. While approaching it from Galata Bridge it dominates the skyline with its beauty and grandeur. It was built on Suleyman the Magnificent orders in 16c. The architecture is pure Ottoman. It's a place not to be missed while exploring Istanbul - a city with more than 3.000 Mosques - yes, you read it right, 3.000 Mosques. Three mosques everyone must visit are the Hagia Sophia Mosque (a museum before July 2020), Sultanahmet Mosque (Blue Mosque), and Suleyman Mosque... (M104).

Conclusion

Studies on the travel of individuals who practice the religion of Islam generally focus on halal tourism and the concept of pilgrimage, which means purely religious visits. In contrast to previous studies on Islamic travel, this research adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the experiences of travellers visiting mosques. In this study, travellers' reviews on TripAdvisor were examined to reveal the main components of their mosque visit experience. The literature on the experiences of faith / religious tourists at holy places remains relatively limited, underscoring the significance of this study's findings and their practical contributions to the field. Moreover, this current research holds the potential to pave the way for future investigations in the field.

As a result of the content analysis, five themes were obtained that define the main components of the travellers' mosque experiences: 'sense of awe', 'architectural factors', 'spiritual and religious factors', 'environmental factors' and 'historical factors'. Considering the themes of the research, it can be said that both religious and non-religious dimensions were obtained and these can be associated with the visits of travellers to mosques.

The themes of the research are consistent with previous studies: 'architectural factors' have been considered by Huang & Chu (2019); 'sense of awe' by Gursay *et al.* (2021); 'environmental factors' by Lupu *et al.*, (2019) and; 'spiritual and religious factors' were studied by Tirca *et al.*, 2010). However, in addition, in this study, the dimension of 'historical factors' was identified, and does not appear to have been considered by previous researchers. Although some of these dimensions are more prominent in the analysis, of travellers' experience, many travellers can generally relate to almost all of these dimensions simultaneously (Tirca *et al.*, 2010).

The first of the experience components of mosque travellers is 'sense of awe'. Previous researches emphasised that in order to have a sense of awe, travellers should provide descriptive comments such as impressive, fascinating, and wonderful (Gursay *et al.*, 2021). In this context, it was observed that 51 participants were found to have a sense of awe and then advised other TripAdvisor users to visit this religious site. This finding suggests that sense of awe arising from a mosque visit experience influences travellers' satisfaction and behavioral intentions. In addition, according to Hosany *et al.* (2015), sense of awe can also lead to a sense of loyalty in travellers.

'Architectural' components reflect the physical characteristics and attractiveness of a building. This is another component of this study that explores the experience of visiting a mosque. The architecture of Suleymaniye Mosque is often mentioned because it is a distinctive sacred structure, built by Mimar Sinan. The unique characteristics of the holy place are highlighted in the mosque's walls, dome, courtyard, and various interior and exterior architectural features. The role of architectural elements in the traveller's experience of visiting religious sites has also been emphasised in previous studies (Hughes *et al.*, 2013; Tirca *et al.*, 2010).

Unsurprisingly, this research found that religious aspects play a crucial role in shaping the mosque experience. This links with studies in this field which have consistently shown that religious and spiritual factors serve as significant motivators for visiting religious places (eg. Abdul Razak, 2019; Andriotis, 2009; Ballantyne *et al.*, 2016; Lupu *et al.*, 2019; Rodrigues & McIntosh, 2014; Tirca *et al.*, 2010). Istanbul, as a city with a rich historical heritage, has many religious tourist sites and tourists visit these sites every year.

The research also explores the historical aspects associated with religious sites, including their origins, the prominent individuals involved in their construction, and the significant events that have occurred within their walls throughout history. The absence of this dimension in previous studies on travel experiences to religious sites is a noteworthy aspect that adds to the significance of this research and its contributions to the existing literature.

In this study, the 'environmental theme' emerges as the final component in mosque travellers' experiences, an aspect that has received relatively little attention in previous studies (Andriotis, 2009). As a non-religious component, the 'environmental factors' theme encompasses various elements, such as the surroundings of the mosque, the natural environment, the location, and the scenic view.

Unlike previous studies, in this research, the importance of tour guides and other service personnel in mediating the visitor experience was not among the key dimensions underlying the visitor experience. In addition, factors such as security and staff service, were not among the main dimensions of this research. Finally, although there are comments on topics such as local culture, local people, and socialisation, they were weak and not sufficiently evident for the formation of a main theme. Thus, considering that this study focuses on online narratives concerning a specific sacred place, it is important to acknowledge that different findings may emerge from studies conducted in other sacred places, enabling fruitful comparisons. In this regard, the findings of the current paper support the idea of Nolan and Nolan (1992) regarding the religious experiences of travellers which suggest that religious places belonging to different religions can offer different experiences.

This research was undertaken to address the gap in the existing literature. However, the study also provides practical contributions. The dimensions derived from travellers' experiences in this research offer important insights for destination managers and tourism businesses. For example, tour operators can organise new tours following the dimensions of the current research or customise and evaluate their existing tours. In addition, thanks to the findings, it can be observed that the expectations, experiences and demands of travellers coming to a site can be evaluated together with their profile (Lupu *et al.*, 2019). This leads to potential customised improvements based on visitor demographics and characteristics.

Limitations and Future Research

This research has some limitations. To begin with, it is important to note that this research is based on a qualitative case study, and participants were not queried about their religious affiliation. Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that this study primarily examined the narratives of international travellers, thus limiting the generalisability of the findings to individuals practicing any specific religion. Future studies could consider investigating the mosque experiences of travellers adhering to monotheistic religions using quantitative or mixed methods, allowing for comparisons with the findings of this research. Another limitation is that the study only included comments in English, thereby excluding comments in other languages from the sample. Third, only the TripAdvisor website was used as a user-generated content platform to obtain the data of the research, and therefore, travellers who do not utilise this website were excluded from the research. Fourth, the limited number of studies investigating travellers' experiences at sanctuaries provides uncertainty regarding the comparability of travellers' experiences. Another limitation is the use of the MAXQDA program to analyse research data. Lastly, this study was conducted solely in Istanbul, focusing on a single mosque (Suleymaniye). Future research could explore the experiences of travellers visiting other mosques or holy places associated with different religions in different locations.

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