

Effect of Memorable Tourism Experiences to Destination Competitiveness: Winter Tourist – Oriented Research

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Abstract

The matter of maintenance and strengthening the competitive positions of the destinations in the increasingly competitive tourism market has been deemed to be an issue with growing importance every day elapsing. It is being upheld that this issue shall be resolved once the destinations have offered a unique environment oriented towards experiencing the lifestyle outside their daily routines to their guests. However, a study theoretically or empirically analyzing this way of perception has not been encountered. Therefore, by addressing the effect of memorable tourism experiences to the destination competitiveness has been intended to make contribution to the literature. In consideration of a memorable winter vacation which may be offered to incoming tourists, the research has been actualized in Erzurum being one of the most important ski centers in Turkey. The questionnaire forms developed have been distributed to the tourists based on convenience sampling method, who have come to the city for the purpose of winter sports and tourism. As a result of the elimination of missing questionnaires filled out questionnaires were a total of 366 ratings. As a result of the elimination of incomplete surveys, totally 366 surveys have been considered for assessment. In the analysis of data, descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, and structural equation model were utilized. In consequence of the research, it has been seen that memorable tourism experiences have a significant and positive impact over all factors of destination competitiveness. The outcomes have been discussed considering the marketing – oriented effects of the research and suggestions have been provided for the researches to be carried out in future.

Keywords: Memorable Tourism Experience, Competitiveness, Destination Competitiveness, Winter and Sport Tourism, Winter Tourism Destination, Erzurum, Turkey.

1. Introduction

The concept of experience academically addressed for the first time in 1980s, upon the concept of experience economy suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1998) its evaluation as a new economical presentation has been initiated. In subsequent years, a great deal of studies has been accomplished on the experiences and a new tourism phenomenon defined to be empirical tourism has emerged. The main idea behind this type of tourism is based on the mentality during which the tourists do not only travel but also gain experiences by observing the other realities and cultures. Now, they want to live the sense of adventure and discovery particularly in the authentic environments where the tourism experiences are met with nature, history, and culture.

In addition, the destinations are today trying to establish and offer memorable experiential tourism environment where the tourist wish to live. Thus, it is upheld they would obtain a big advantage versus their competitors by increasing the number of tourists and their expenses. However, a study that has empirically and theoretically scrutinized has not been come across. Because the destination development – oriented perspective using marketing concepts such as tourism experiences is rather new. Therefore, it is intended to prove the influence of memorable tourism experiences on the destination competitiveness and to fill the gap in the literature.

2. *Tourism Experiences*

Tourism experiences have been initially named as the novelty seeking and depicted as the opposite of daily life. After these first attempts, it is intended to achieve a more holistic understanding of the tourism experience structure (Otto and Ritchie, 1996: 165-174). However, despite the numerous and more integrated approach to the different perspectives of the social sciences, even on a single definition of the tourism experience so far a consensus has not been achieved. Instead, it was concluded that the complexity of the experience should be considered. However, despite the numerous integrated approaches from different perspectives of the social sciences, up to now, consensus has failed to be achieved even on a single definition of the tourism experience. Instead, it has been concluded that the complexity of the experience should be considered. However, while a number of tourism resources and stakeholders indirectly use the term of "tourism experience", some authors have tried to define the term of "tourist experience" (Jennings et al., 2009: 300). Reaching at a concise definition of tourism experience or tourist experience covering a variety of complex factors is rather difficult (Selstad, 2007: 21). In general, the perspectives of authors to this matter and some of their definitions being different from each other they made moving here from are as follows:

Li (2000: 864-866) has stated that tourism experience is artificial and a created consumer movement, response to the problems of ordinary life, search of authenticity and contains a versatile entertainment. Stamboulis and Skayannis (2003: 41) have expressed the tourist experience to be the experiences emanating from interaction between destinations deemed to be "theater" where the experience takes place and the tourists being the actresses/actors playing their roles according to the degree of having given rein to. The tourist experience to Larsen (2007: 15) is the past personal travels – related activities which were strong enough to enter the long-term memory. As for O'Dell (2007: 41), he has emphasized that the tourist experience could be something more than continuation of a simple daily life which physically affects people and leaves the perception of having participated in an extraordinary thing. Selstad (2007: 20) stated that the tourist experience may be defined to be a combination of novelty and familiarity closely linked to individual search for identity and quest of self-realization which would lead to symbolic representation of aesthetics and actions with permanent flow of perception.

Usually, the tourism is described to be "sales of dreams" and the tourist experience has been conceptualized as a socially and completely configured (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009: 24) marketing arrangement – oriented to the needs (McCabe, 2014: iii). Experiences are evaluated as a link between production and consumption. The supply sources used to produce a tourism experience constitutes the consumption set. The consumption set is achieved by bringing (time, skill, goods and service) together. In achievement of a consumption project, it is considered that the consumers are active and play an important role with the last link of production chain. In addition, the consumption project produces input for the experiences. Here, the point separated from the traditional consumer theory is that the products are purchased so as to be used in one or several consumption projects based on the goal of creating experience and consumption realizes at that moment. The experience composed through a consumption project and using the components of a consumption set depends on the value of the experiences come out (Andersson, 2007: 57). In other words, the experiences are the tourism products of future (Arsenault and Gale, 2004: 1).

Inclusion of experience into tourist products constitutes the basic component of the tourism researches. Because all touristic attractions and services provided by the tourism operations has a hedonistic, aesthetic and emotional structure (Scott, Laws and Boksberger, 2010: 2). Therefore, as an example, especially in the experimental studies, attention is paid to tourism consumption context. In addition, many tourism researchers have developed very interesting perspectives for behavioral processes associated with the distinctive features of tourism (Batat and Frochot, 2014: 112).

Especially in recent years, there is a great deal of discussions related to tourism experiences expressed satisfactory and memorable from the interesting, personal, and social perspectives (Rettie, 2013: 72). Memorable tourism experiences can be summarized to be the experiences which the tourists found worthy to remember following their experience. Researchers have stated that the memorable experiences are quite different from the actual experience and they carry importance in creating a sustainable competition advantage (Kim, 2009: 9-10). Increasing interest to the tourism experienced in practice means that more attention should be paid to the paths addressing to feelings of tourists, rather than what is being offered (Rettie, 2013: 72).

3. Destination Competitiveness

Just like any consumption product harboring a range of multi-dimensional qualities, the tourism destinations have been considered a package consisting of tourism facilities and services (Hu and Ritchie, 1993: 26). Today, although tourism destination is no longer seen just a set of natural, cultural, artistic and environmental resources, it is being evaluated as a product existing in a given area and generally being attractive. Namely, it is a portfolio of complex and integrated services offered by a region which provides holiday experience to meet the needs of tourists (Cracolici and Nijkamp, 2008: 336). In summary, a tourism destination may be defined as geographic areas where the tourists entertaining with various tourism experiences go to (Botti et al., 2009: 9).

Firstly and simply implementation of competitiveness concept to the tourism destinations has realized with the efforts focused on price level (Mazanec, Wober and Zins, 2007: 87). In these studies, the competitiveness has been defined to be directly or indirectly possessing factors like market share, profits more than another destination. The destinations receiving more arrivals and having more tourist expenses or higher in the global market have been considered more competitive (Craigwell, 2007: 9, 12, 19). But today, tendency has begun towards non – price factors in defining the competitiveness of destinations like the political stability of the region or the surrounding area; geographic proximity to busy and bustling market; the political environment of the tourism zone; the impact of activities; accessibility to the destination; quality, uniqueness, diversity of tourism experiences and its rarely measurable natural and improved features (Yuncu, 2010: 46).

Researchers have noticed the importance of the issue in time and made different definitions and explanations on the competitiveness of destinations based on several approaches. Crouch and Ritchie (1999: 137, 150) have defined destination competitiveness as the ability of the destinations to yield high – level living standards within the social and environmental conditions to its locals. In her study (2000: 23), D'Hautesserre has defined the destination competitiveness as the capability the destination has to maintain and sustain its market position and / or improve it in time. And Hassan (2000: 239) has defined the competitiveness to be a capability the destination has in order to create value-added products to ensure the continuity of its sources by maintaining its market position and to integrate these products. Buhalis (2000: 106) has adopted a wider perspective and defined the ability to have a destination to integrate these products have adopted open a little wider perspective and defined the destination competitiveness as the “as well as sustainability of local resources for a long – term achievement to be ensured, yielding a fair return success on the resources used to satisfy all stakeholders”.

Contrary to a certain manufacturing product, the competitiveness in the tourism regions is a very complex structure requiring evaluation of all experiences the tourists have lived at the destination and too many sectors consisting of lines of business very different from each other (Bahar and Kozak, 2005: 140). Moreover, since the sector is affected from many factors such as economic, political, psychological, cultural, and environmental ones, determination of the factors of destination competitiveness considerably gets harder. Therefore, many destination competitiveness models have been developed and one of the most important hereof is the competitiveness model developed by Ritchie and Crouch.

4. Research

4.1. Importance and Purpose of Research

It is upheld that the thing that really makes a tourism destination competitive is the ability of augmenting tourism expenses while upgrading welfare of destination residents and maintaining natural resources of such destination for future generations and increasingly attracting visitors and performing these in a profitable manner by offering satisfactory and memorable experiences (Omerzel, 2011: 30; Croes, 2013: 120; Croes and Kubickova, 2013: 148). With this statement, as a prerequisite of increasing the number of visitors clearly, satisfactory and memorable experiences are being referred to (Mazanec, Wober and Zins, 2007: 86; Benedetti, 2010: 39). Therefore, the destinations, accept to be an important source in establishment of desired experiential environment hard to be imitated and substituted (Tsaur, Chiu and Wang, 2007: 47) and is trying to offer a superior tourism experience (Dwyer et al., 2004: 1; Dwyer et al., 2014: 1).

In order to be able to obtain the competition advantage in the tourism industry, a destination is required offer all of its attractions more superior way than the alternative destinations open to potential visitors and provide the memorable tourist experiences (Dwyer and Kim, 2003: 369). Namely, the more the experience creation capacity of a destination, the more power of competition it shall have.

If the destinations are able to provide a unique environment of lifestyle outside their daily routines to their visitors to experience, that destination then possesses a clear competitive advantage. If a lifestyle offered to the tourists is being completed with historical environments in a way to constitute contrast found at their houses, this destination will have a clear competitive advantage in creating memorable experiences (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003: 68).

Many researchers indicate that destination competitiveness depends on superior quality of tourist experience offered by the destination and the quality of experience with which it competes to obtain the competition advantage with of experience a superior tourist destination's competitive advantage depends on the race to achieve. However, it has not been confronted with a research theoretically or empirically looking into this matter. Therefore, by considering the effect of destination – offered touristic experiences on the competitiveness in this study, it is intended to make contribution to the literature.

4.2. Scope and Limitations of Study

Being an Alpine destination, Erzurum Province enjoys the cluster of first winter sports center designed with the master plan in the Republic of Turkey. The city center and the immediate vicinity accommodate many winter and sports tourism center such as Palandoken Mountains, Erzurum Strait locality, Gez Plateau and Konakli Zone (Toy, Eymirli and Karapinar, 2010: 3). For the first time ever in Palandoken Mountains of Turkey, spatial arrangement works have been carried out for the planned winter tourism and winter sports (Kirzioglu, 1993: 44). Palandoken Mountains contained among the first – degree significant and prioritized ski areas in the Republic of Turkey from the aspect of winter sports and winter tourism movements has the characteristic of being an international station. The ski resorts where Alpine disciplined is comfortably exercised is being depicted quite attractive with its spacious and long runways also for the athletes in terms of snow quality. The reason for Erzurum to be taken into the scope of this research is that the winter tourism has developed and now being evaluated as a brand. In addition, also its possession of authentic peculiarities to support the regional winter tourism ensures a substantial advantage. In this way, a memorable winter holiday could be offered to the tourists has been foreseen. The research has been actualized with the incoming foreign tourists to Erzurum for the purpose of winter tourism and in line with the permits acquired from the airport; it has been limited with the certain days of December 2014 and February 2015.

4.3. Determination of Scales Used in Study

In consequence of a wide comprehensive literature screening oriented for conceptual and empirical studies related to tourism experiences, it has been seen that the studies has begun in 1990s, but has gained a huge boost in 2000s. Particularly, the fact that the studies carried out have increased in 2009 and later on is an indicator to the importance paid to the subject. In general, although the subject of experience discussed in the studies was certain touristic attraction or products – oriented visitor experiences (Prentice, Witt and Hamer, 1998; McIntosh, 1999; Goulding, 2000; Fairweather and Swaffield, 2001; Markwell, 2001; Packer and Ballantyne, 2002; Chhetri, Arrowsmith and Jackson, 2004; Arsenault and Gale, 2004; Morgan, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Tsaour, Chiu and Wang, 2007; Kolar and Zabkar, 2007; Rojas and Camarero, 2008; Leighton, 2008; Chan, 2009; Jurowski, 2009; Chen and Chen, 2010; Wu et al., 2010; Martin and Woodside, 2011), travel experience (Sonmez and Graefe, 1998; Li, 2000; Hsu, Dehuang and Woodside, 2009; Volo, 2009; Kim, 2010; Kim, Hallab and Kim, 2012) and consumer experience (Knutson et al., 2007; Walls, 2013), there are also researches oriented towards analyzing the past experiences of tourists (Lehto, O'Leary and Morrison, 2004; Martin, Collado and Del Bosque, 2013; Molina, Frías-Jamilena and Castañeda-García, 2013) or their emotional experiences (Hosany, Ekinici and Gilbert, 2005; Hosany and Gilbert, 2009; Hosany and Prayag, 2010; Prayag, Hosany and Odeh, 2013).

If it would be analyzed more specifically, it is noticed that the areas and spaces where the experience was realized show a great diversity. Nevertheless, application areas and accommodation operations undergoing most frequent measurement (McIntosh and Siggs, 2005; Knutson et al., 2009; Wu and Liang, 2009; Lin et al., 2009; Teng, 2011; Walls et al., 2011; Poria, Reichel and Brandt, 2011; Walls, 2013; Huang, Liu and Hsu, 2014); various festivals with themes such as coffee and music (Morgan, 2006; Morgan, 2007; Yang, 2010; Akyildiz and Argan, 2010a; Akyildiz and Argan, 2010b; Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011); areas allowing ecotourism activities such as rural tourism and wildlife tourism (Smith, 2006; Chan and Baum, 2007; Ballantyne, Packer and Sutherland, 2011; Ballantyne, Packer and Falk, 2011; Loureiro, 2014; Agapito, Valle and Mendes, 2014); historic spaces such as cultural parks and historic neighborhoods (Prentice, Witt and Hamer, 1998; McIntosh, 1999; Hayllar and Griffin, 2005; Hayes and MacLeod, 2007; Wu et al., 2010); places where cultural activities such as art galleries and museums were realized (Goulding, 2000; Packer and Ballantyne, 2002; Chan, 2009; Kent, 2010;

Mehmetoglu and Engen, 2011); special venues offering different restaurants and gastronomic experiences (Kivela and Crofts, 2006; Wu and Liang, 2009; Teng, 2011; Su, 2011; Mkono, 2012; Uygur and Dogan, 2013; Szende, Pang and Yu, 2013); wine tourism routes (Fountain and Charters, 2006; Pikkemaat et al., 2009; Bruwer and Alant, 2009; Charters, Fountain and Fish, 2009); recreational areas such as zoo, aquarium and theme parks or national parks (Packer and Ballantyne, 2002; Tsaur, Chiu and Wang, 2007; Bruni, Fraser and Schultz, 2008; Kao, Huang and Wu, 2008; Powell, Kellert and Ham, 2009; Wang, Weng and Yeh, 2011) can be listed.

In addition to this, the winter playground or snow parks, fields which allows winter sports (Slåtten et al., 2009; Hallmann et al., 2012a; Hogstrom, Rosner and Gustafsson, 2010) and also experimental studies oriented towards adventure tourism – oriented like alpinism (Faullant, Matzler and Mooradian, 2011) are outstanding. In most of the tourism experience researches, quantitative research methods have been used and as the sample, demand-oriented mass namely, tourists have been preferred.

Following the general evaluation of the studies, in the study, use of Jong-Hyeong Kim – proposed memorable tourism experiences scale is deemed appropriate. The scale consists of seven dimensions like hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge and totally 24 variables. Kim has realized his first scale development study (2009) in his doctoral dissertation, with his subsequent studies in quality of continuation; he has tried to strengthen the scale. The activities such as revision of scale in time and new modeling have enhanced the confidence to the scale. Because when unavailability of an established tourism experience scale is taken into consideration, the importance of this situation is clearly noticed.

Following the examination of destination competitiveness – oriented all conceptual and empirical researches accessible, it has been determined that Ritchie and Crouch (2003) have made referral to the “conceptual model of destination competitiveness “in most of the studies. Being one of the initial studies related to destination competitiveness, (Lee and King, 2006: 183; Assaker et al., 2014: 27; Dwyer et al., 2014: 1) it is uphold that this model was designed by the tourism researchers best known (Omerzel and Mihalic, 2008: 295; Goffi and Cucculelli, 2012: 178). When looked at the literature, it is seen that the researchers have reached a consensus on the most comprehensive (Kim and Dwyer, 2003: 57; Bahar, 2004: 27; Hudson, Ritchie and Timur, 2004: 82; Bahar and Kozak, 2005: 140; Vanhove, 2006: 110, 113; Bahar and Kozak, 2007: 62; Mazanec, Wober and Zins, 2007: 87; Kozak, Baloglu and Bahar, 2009: 59; Botti et al., 2009: 10; Lee and King, 2009: 244; Yuncu, 2010: 46; Croes, 2010: 11; Pike and Mason, 2011: 172; Dimoska and Trimcev, 2012: 282; N. Kim, 2012: 19, 28; Hallmann et al., 2012b: 14; Caber, Albayrak and Matzler, 2012: 44; Hassan and Uşaklı, 2012: 938; Güripek, 2013: 71; Zhu, Zhu and Zhu, 2014: 933; Hallmann et al., 2014: 330; Vila, Darcy and Gonzalez, 2015: 263) and the most detailed (C. Kim, 2000: 26; Dwyer and Kim, 2003: 376; Bahar, 2004: 45; Al-Masroori, 2006: 77; Lee and King, 2006: 183; Chens, Sok and Sok, 2008: 45; Armenski et al., 2011a: 58; Armenski et al., 2011b: 20; Armenski et al., 2012: 487; Goffi and Cucculelli, 2012: 178; Hallmann et al., 2012b: 14; Goffi, 2013: 14, 172; Hallmann et al., 2014: 330) was the study accomplished in the area of tourism competitiveness up to date by Ritchie and Crouch. In addition, being one of the most remarkable destination competitiveness measuring – oriented models, the conceptual model (Benedetti, 2010: 16) is considered to be complete (Botti et al., 2009: 10).

Ritchie and Crouch model has been designed so as to ensure compliance with any destination and tourism market. Instead of getting focused on the narrower aspects of competitiveness such as price competitiveness or attractiveness of destination, potentially all important features have been considered in the model (Crouch, 2010: 4). Therefore, the most powerful aspect of Ritchie and Crouch model stems from the fact that it is designed so as to cover all the important factors defining the competitiveness of tourism destination (Mazanec, Wober and Zins, 2007: 87).

Today, majority of destination competitiveness – related studies are based on this model is talked about in the literature the model is tested during being applied and its results are shared. Because of all of the reasons listed, it has been deemed suitable for this model to be taken as basis.

The destination competitiveness scale to be employed in the research has been taken from the study of Hallman et al (2014) who have adapted the competitiveness model of Ritchie and Crouch to the winter tourism centers. In the study Hallman et al. have carried out, they has found that destination competitiveness model of Ritchie and Crouch has a high compatibility for the winter sports tourists. They have also stated that application of the model to a winter sports destination was a good mechanism in transmission of analysis, diagnosis, planning and competitive strategies and presented valuable information (Hallmann et al., 2014: 330, 345).

In the study, the conceptual competitiveness model of Ritchie and Crouch consists of five dimensions; supporting factors & resources, core resources and attractors, destination management, destination policy, planning & development and qualifying and amplifying determinants and totally 93 variables. However, considering that foreign tourists were preferred as subject in the study and the tourists did not know the region adequately, destination management and destination policy, planning, & development dimensions have been removed from the survey. Some variables incompatible with the region in terms of destination features within the remaining dimensions have been eliminated. Nine variables in supporting factors & resources, 13 variables in dimensions of core resources and attractors and six variables in dimensions of qualifying and amplifying determinants, totally 28 variables have been removed from the scale. Finally, winter tourism destination competitiveness scale consisting of totally 35 variables has been found appropriate to be used in the study.

4.4. Theoretical Model of Research

Following determination of scales, the theoretical model of the study has emerged.

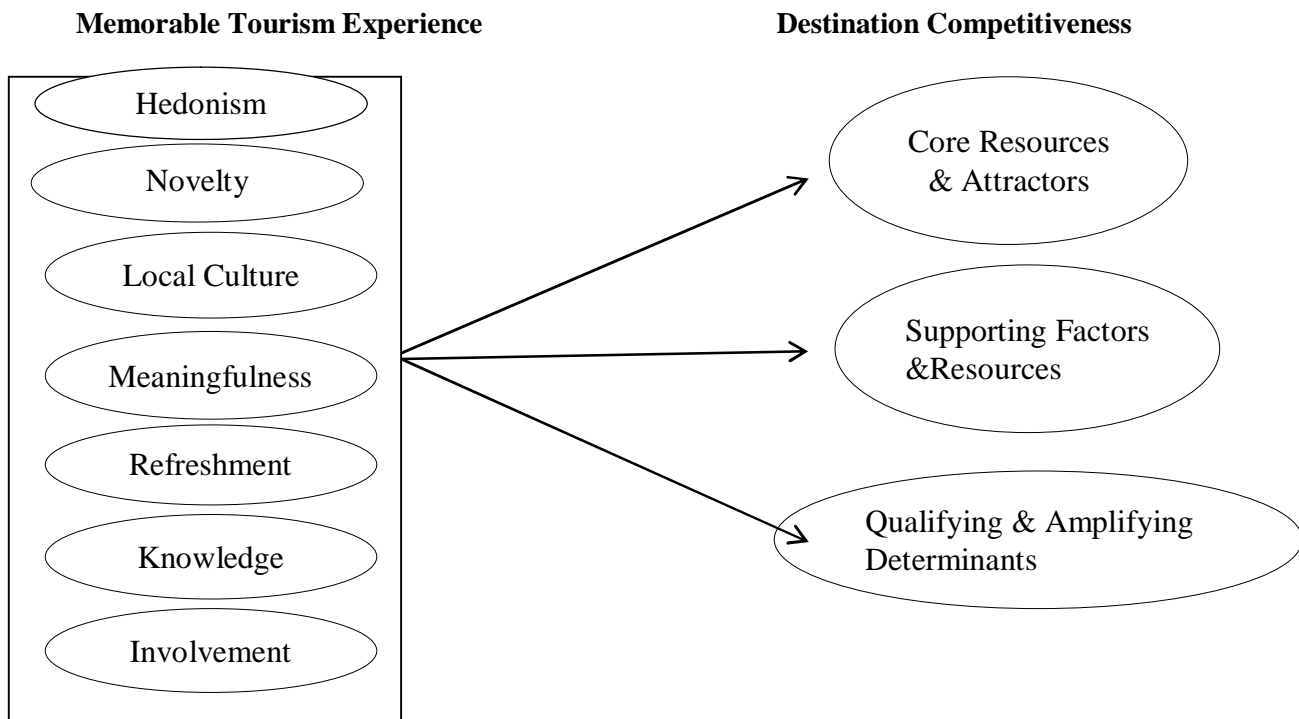


Figure 1: Theoretical Model of Research

4.5. Universe and Sample

Foreign tourists coming to Erzurum for the purpose of winter and sports tourism constitute the universe of the study. Convenience sampling of non-random sampling method has been preferred in the study. It has been deemed suitable that the survey is performed within 95% confidence interval at .05 significance level totally on 384 persons (Altunisik et al., 2012: 137). Considering answering errors which might occur, 400 questionnaires have been distributed. The survey study was conducted at international flights departing passenger section of Erzurum airport between dates 1 January and 15 February 2015. As a result of the elimination of incomplete questionnaires, totally 366 questionnaires have been considered for evaluation.

4.6. Pilot Study

Prior to proceeding to data collection following development of final survey form, a pilot study has been carried out with 20 foreign tourists in December 2014 to represent subjects of survey. However, the opinions of some teaching members have been taken in order to utilize their experiences. Tourism experience and destination competitiveness scales were given to the participants and academicians and they were requested to state appropriateness and comprehensibility of tourism experiences and destination competitiveness scales. Considering the comments, some phrases were modified in order to improve its clarity and following an intensive study, the questionnaire form has been put into final state.

4.7. Data Collection Method

In the study, data was collected using the questionnaire method. In line with the permits taken from Erzurum Governorate and Security Management, execution of the survey has been decided to be carried out at Erzurum Airport, International Flights, and Departing Passengers Section on certain days between dates of 1 January and 15 February. In distribution of survey forms, two pollster students possessing high-level foreign language have been employed. Survey-oriented necessary information has been presented to the students prior to data collection process. Besides the students from time to time, the researchers have accompanied the data collection process and made necessary guidance.

In 2014, from what nationality foreign tourists have come to Erzurum most was investigated (Iran: 7580, Poland: 3495, Azerbaijan: 2839, Russia: 1697) and in the name of evaluation of all potential interviews, it has been deemed appropriate for the survey forms in Turkish, English, Russian and Polish languages. Nevertheless, it has not been gone to any restrictions on the nationalities of the tourists because English is now seen as one of the common languages, relevance of which is recognized across the world. The survey forms have been distributed to the tourist and collected within one hour leisure time segment after passing the passport check point prior to boarding the plane. Polls have been fully applied on the voluntary basis, to all the respondents for the survey wanted any assistance necessary explanations have been made to all respondents who needed survey-oriented assistance.

The survey form developed consists of three parts. In the first part, 24 expressions in 7-Likert scale (1 = "I did not experience enough"; 7 = "I have experienced quite a lot") have been contained. In the second part, taking into account Erzurum-oriented destination competitive strategies and actions, 35 expression was used in 5-Likert scale (1 = "I completely disagree"; 5 = "I totally agree") have been used. In this part, 0 = "I have no idea" choice has been offered too. Even though this choice is open for the cases when there is lack of topic-oriented information or interest of the participants are considered, it is stated that the omission of option would lead people to offer a comment or to be forced to make a choice among options (Ravi and Simonson, 2003: 158) and give the answer they think it is reasonably stable and logical as well (Krosnick, 2002: 95). Therefore, considering that the tourist might not have any destination features-oriented opinions (Bahar and Kozak, 2007: 64; Kozak, Baloglu and Bahar, 2009: 61), the opportunity of leaving the option blank has been offered especially, in absence of sufficient information in their hands to evaluate certain market segments such as "facilities offered for the aged and / or children" or "night life", leave gaps opportunity is presented (Taberner, 2007: 67). In the third part, gender, age and nationality have been asked in order to determine the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

4.8. Data Analysis

The impact of memorable tourism experiences on the destination competitiveness has been examined in the study. In order to evaluate whether or not the research data supports the model, two-stage method being the most common method in the literature in the structural equation modeling has been adopted (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988: 411). First of all, the measurement models composed by the variables were tested with the confirmatory factor analysis and whether or not it has accurately measured the relevant dimension of measurements, pertaining to the variables contained in the model has been checked. In addition, at the second stage, in order to determine whether or not the relations between these were theoretically as predicted, the structural model has been examined (Simsek, 2007: 12; Dursun and Kocagoz, 2010: 3).

In order to check whether or not every each structure was reliable, Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values have been calculated. The convergent validity and the discriminated validity of the model were also tested using AVE. AVE value is smaller than CR and the AVE value should exceed .50 in order to ensure convergent validity (Hair et al., 2009: 687).

Goodness of Fit Indices shows the compliance degree of data to the proposed model. There are various indices oriented towards this and Chi-square / freedom degree, goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), root mean square residual (RMR) and normed fit index (NFI) have been used in the study (Hair et al., 2009: 649-651). Acceptable limits of goodness of fit indices have been provided in the following table.

Table 2: Acceptable Indeces Values in Model Compatibility

Goodness of Fit Indices	Acceptable Indeces Values
χ^2/df	1-3
GFI	$\geq .90$
AGFI	$\geq .85$
CFI	$\geq .90$
RMSEA	$.03 \leq RMSEA \leq .08$
RMR	$0 \leq RMR \leq 1$
NFI	$\leq NFI \leq 1$

4.8.1. Conclusions

4.8.1.1. Demographic Characteristics

51.1% of totally 366 respondents participated in the survey are consisted of men and 48.9% women. When the range of age is considered, it has been determined that the greater density was in the range of 25-34 with 37.7%. Followed by this, it has been discovered that the persons between 35-44 age group have come most for the purpose of winter tourism. When the nationality of incoming foreign tourists is taken into account, the largest rate is formed by Polishes with a rate of 34.15% which is followed by Iranians with 20.22%. In addition, it can be said that the Russian, Ukrainian, and German tourists possess a significant rate as well.

4.8.1.2. Measuring Model of Memorable Tourism Experiences to Be Tested

In order to test the suitability of memorable tourism experiences scale, confirmatory factor analysis has been made. According to the program output, 4th variable of the measurement model novelty dimension and 1st variable of the refreshment dimension were removed. Thus, the model explaining the latent variables best has been identified.

Table 3: Measuring Model of Memorable Tourism Experiences

Factors	Standardized factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Hedonism		.90	.90	.79
I was thrilled about having a new experience.	.93			
I indulged in the activities during this tourism experience.	.92			
I really enjoyed this tourism experience.	.71			
It was exciting.	.75			
Involvement		.93	.94	.88
I visited a place where I really wanted to go.	.89			
I enjoyed tourism activities that I really wanted to do.	.95			
I participated in tourism activities that I have been interested in.	.90			
Novelty		.87	.88	.79
It was once-in-a-lifetime experience.	.92			
It was a unique experience.	.71			
It was quite different from my previous tourism experiences.	.88			
Local Culture		.89	.89	.82
I had a good impression about the local people.	.88			
I had a chance to closely experience the local culture of a destination area.	.89			
Local people in a destination area were friendly.	.79			
Refreshment		.85	.86	.74
I enjoyed a sense of freedom.	.75			
It was refreshing.	.89			
I was revitalized through this tourism experience.	.80			
Meaningfulness		.86	.86	.80
I did something meaningful during this tourism experience.	.82			
I did something important during this tourism experience.	.84			
I learned something about myself from this tourism experience.	.80			
Knowledge		.85	.85	.78
It was exploratory.	.73			
I gained knowledge or information	.83			
I learned new skills/games/activities.	.86			

Note: CR = composite reliabilities; AVE = average variance extracted

$\chi^2 = 409,385$ $df = 186$, GFI = .91, AGFI = .88, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .057, RMR = .127, NFI = .93

The values belonging to the scale of memorable tourism experiences have been offered in the Table 3. It is observed that post-analysis revealed values are satisfactory. The Cronbach's alphas of scale-oriented dimensions are above .85. As for the CR values are above .8 recognized to be a good reliability value and this situation shows that measurement model is reliable. Also the memorable tourism experiences-oriented scale dimensions of all AVE values being greater than .7 indicates a good conformity level. Once looked at the conformance goodness values showing the harmony of data to the model, it is seen that all are within acceptable limit. Thus, the measurement model related to the memorable tourism experiences scale has been justified.

4.8.1.3. Measuring Model of Destination Competitiveness to Be Tested

As a result of confirmatory factor analysis applied to the destination competitiveness scale, two items in dimension of supporting factors & resources dimension according to the AMOS program output, four items in dimension of core resources & attractors and four items in dimension of qualifying & amplifying determinants have been excluded from the survey. In this way, the model that best describes the latent variables has been specified. In consequence of the analysis, the destination competitiveness scale has consisted of 25 items and 5 factors. In line with the meanings expressed by the items in the factors have been names as; Factor 1: Support; Factor 2: Climate; Culture, Activities; Factor 3: Image and Location; Factor 4: Entertainment and Factor 5: Price.

Table 4: Measuring Model of Destination Competitiveness

Factors	Standardized factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Support		.84	.84	.51
The infrastructure within the destination is adequate.	.64			
The signals and sign-postings within the destination are operating well.	.70			
The functionality of the facilities in the destination is adequate.	.59			
Accessibility to the destination is easily obtainable.	.72			
The availability of health facilities/medical care for tourists is adequate.	.67			
The atmosphere in the destination is inviting and appealing.	.65			
The hospitality of the locals is very welcoming.	.61			
Climate, Culture, Activities		.84	.85	.56
The destination offers a lot in terms of natural scenic beauty.	.71			
The destination has a varied and unique alpine plant and wildlife habitat.	.63			
Snow is a guarantee in winter.	.69			
The destination offers interesting historical attractions.	.81			
The destination offers special traditions.	.74			
The destination offers numerous sport and recreational activities.	.59			
Image and Location		.71	.79	.63
I have chosen the destination because of its geographical location.	.70			
The image of the destination is very good.	.69			
The destination is well known for hosting sport events.	.62			
Entertainment		.82	.71	.55
The destination offers good international shopping opportunities.	.78			
The destination offers exciting nightlife and entertainment.	.60			
The destination has a wide range of local restaurants.	.71			
The destination has a wide range of fast food restaurants.	.54			
The destination stands for elaborate wellness and spa activities.	.54			
The destination offers accommodations at various price levels.	.53			
Price		.70	.69	.62
The price for a lift ticket in the destination is adequate.	.59			
Prices for eating out in the destination are adequate.	.76			
Prices for renting skis or snowboards in the destination are adequate.	.61			

Note: CR = composite reliabilities; AVE = average variance extracted

$\chi^2 = 511$, $157df = 260$, GFI = .91, AGFI = .88, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .051, RMR = .054, NFI = .90

The values obtained in relation to destination's competitiveness scale together with said corrections have been presented in the table. It is observed that the post-analysis revealed values are satisfactory. When looked at Cronbach's alpha values, while the reliability of only two dimensions is above .7, the reliability of other three dimensions is above .8. While overall value of CR is above .7, only a very low value is available in the price dimension in comparison to others. In addition, all of the AVE values are above .5 and it is seen that all has a lower value than CR. However, when looked at the goodness of fit indices showing the compliance to the model given, it is observed that all are within acceptable limit. In this case, the measurement model related to destination competitiveness scale has been verified.

4.8.1.4. Structural Model to Be Tested

As a result of confirmatory factor analysis-related to the measurement model performed, some changes have occurred in the proposed conceptual model. Destination competitiveness scale has been divided into five factors and the hypotheses developed in conjunction with the structural model revised accordingly have been presented below.

H₁ = Having positive effect on support from the destination competitiveness factors of memorable tourism experiences.

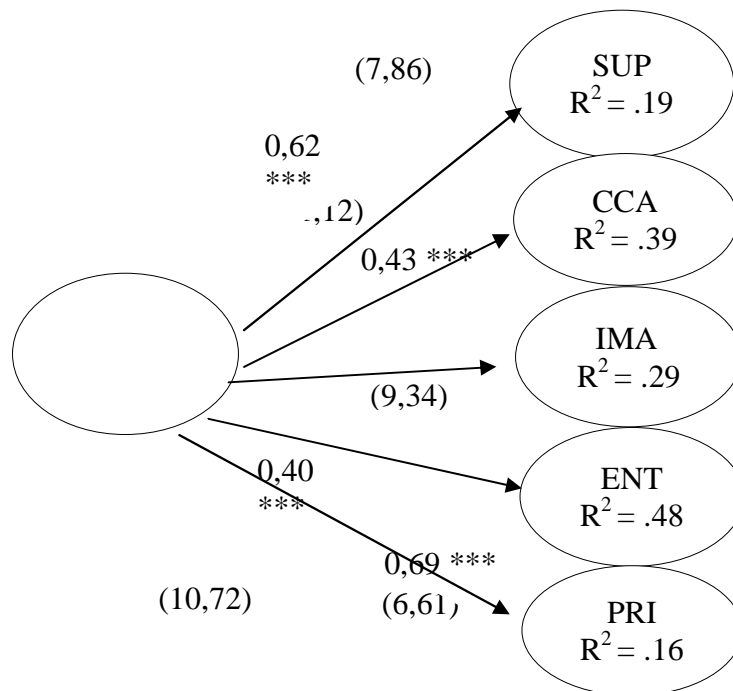
H₂ = Having positive effect on climate, culture and activities from destination competitiveness factors of memorable tourism experiences.

H₃ = Having positive effect on image and location from destination competitiveness factors of memorable tourism experiences.

H₄ = Having positive effect on entertainment from destination competitiveness factors of memorable tourism experiences.

H₅ = Having positive effect on price from destination competitiveness factors of memorable tourism experiences.

In order to put forth the compliance of the model with the available data set prior to the hypotheses statistics to be tested, goodness of fit indices has been evaluated. The values of model χ^2/df 2.794, GFI and CFI are equal to .90 or above it (GFI = .90, CFI = .95). While AGFI value is .87, RMSEA value is .07. In addition to this, it has seen that the values of RMR and the NFI were between 0-1 (RMR = .078, NFI = .93). After determining that the structural model had acceptable values, the relationship between dimensions contained in the models has been tested within the framework of presented hypotheses.



MTE = memorable tourism experience, SUP = support, CCA = climate, culture and activities, IMA = image and location, ENT = entertainment, PRI = price

Figure 2: Structural Model Path Analysis

In the model, while the exogenous (external) variable was (the variable unpredictable by none of other variables) MTE, if the endogenous (internal) variables were (the variables that are predicted by another variable or variables in the model) those constituting the competitiveness of the destination are SUP, CCA, IMA, ENT, PRI variables (Simsek, 2007: 16-17). The correlations between the dimensions representing the research hypotheses are being expressed in one-way arrows. While the figures within parentheses found on the arrows are t values, the numbers below it represent standard estimate, and the stars represent p values. In addition, the regression coefficients of the endogenous variables have been given as well. Table 5 has been developed in the light of path analysis results of model.

Table 5: Path Analysis Estimates for Proposed Model

H	Path	Way	Unstd. Estimate	Std. Error	t Value	Std. Estimate	p Value	Result
H ₁	MTESUP	Positive	.512	.065	7.862	.438	***	Accept
H ₂	MTECCA	Positive	.630	.057	11.125	.624	***	Accept
H ₃	MTE IMA	Positive	.533	.057	9.342	.543	***	Accept
H ₄	MTEENT	Positive	.597	.056	10.727	.694	***	Accept
H ₅	MTEPRI	Positive	.294	.044	6.616	.401	***	Accept

*** p<.001

As a result of path analysis, it has been determined that the structural correlation estimate representing H₁ hypothesis was supported by existing data set. It has been determined that memorable tourism experiences have a significant and positive impact on the support from the destination competitiveness factors. That is to say that a 1 – unit increase has promoted the support factor by .19 units. Moving from here, it may be said that the touristic experience the tourists have experienced in Erzurum have affirmatively influenced the infrastructure, transportation, facilities and etc. – oriented destination comprehension Erzurum possesses.

It is seen that the memorable tourism experiences have a significant positive impact on the climate, culture and activities from the destination competitiveness factors at a .001 – importance level. The memorable tourism experience – oriented 1 unit increase has increased CCA factor by .39 units. It may be uphold that the touristic experiences experienced in Erzurum has positively affected and enhanced the matchless mountain plants and the wildlife of destination together with the natural beauty – oriented perception, however, it reminds that together with the activities such as the historical and cultural attractions, however, traditional activities, sports and recreational activities it might be more competitive.

With H₃ hypothesis established in order to see whether or not the memorable tourism experience has an impact on the image of Erzurum, it has been identified that the memorable tourism experience – oriented 1 unit increase had enhanced the image of the destination competitiveness factors by .29 units. It can be said that the experiential tourism perception Erzurum has created in tourists has ensured a rise in the competitiveness perception of city comprising geographical location, recognition, and image.

It has been determined that the structural relationship established in order to represent the H₄ hypothesis is backed up by available data set and the memorable tourism experiences have a significant positive impact on the entertainment from of destination competitiveness factors. The memorable tourism experience – oriented 1 unit increases the entertainment factor by .48 units. It can said that this situation has positively supported and affected the experiences, diversity of the town's restaurants, shopping opportunity, wellness and SPA activities-oriented competitiveness structure caused to be lived by the tourists. In addition, being a wide variety of accommodation and favorable accommodation in every price level desired also makes a positive contribution to the competitiveness of city and it is influenced from the tourism experiences.

It has been determined that the memorable tourism experiences have a significant and positive impact on the price being from the destination competitiveness factors. Therefore, it is observed that the memorable tourism experiences have affected the price factors in .16 units or 1 unit rise in the memorable tourism experiences has augmented the price in .16 units. Therefore, it can be said that the positive tourism experiences has affected also the winter and sports tourism-oriented price competitiveness of the city.

In addition to this, it can be uphold that the ski rental and lift ticket prices were influenced from the experiential tourism activities and every positive experience in these activities by reducing the price competitiveness would bring in income advantage for the operations. In consequence of the research model-oriented path analysis, all of the relationship estimates has been supported by the available data set. It has been seen that the memorable tourism experiences has a significant and positive impact on all destination competitiveness factors. It has been observed that particularly the entertainment dimension has been affected at a high level by the memorable tourism experiences (.694; $p < .001$). The memorable tourism experiences affect climate, culture and activities dimension at a high level, also (.624; $p < .001$). In addition to this, the memorable tourism experiences has a significant and positive effect on the price dimension of destination competitiveness factors possessing the lowest influence level among other dimensions (.401; $p < .001$). Thus, all the hypotheses suggested have been accepted. Moving from these results, it may say that development of the activities offered or the ambiance created with a memorable tourism experiences-oriented perspective shall increase the competitiveness of Erzurum in terms of entertainment. Because the entertainment factor is the destination factor affected from the experiential tourism at the highest level.

The price has been least affected competitiveness factor from the memorable tourism experiences. This situation shows that the tourist has paid less importance to the price in comparison to other factors according to the experience incoming tourists have lived. In direction of these outcomes, even though a considerable impact of tourism experiences on the competitiveness, it is visible that the experiences lived failed to fully eliminate the price sensitivity of the consumers. Namely, the memo ability of experience has failed to fully take the rationality of consumers from their hands in terms of price and they keep on considering this factor in terms of competitiveness.

4.9. Discussion

From the perspective of tourists, Erzurum province maintains its competitive position with winter tourism-oriented experimental activities it offers especially, in terms of international shopping, entertainment, local and fast food restaurants, facilities of wellness and spa activities. In order to be able to maintain this position, it should develop experiential tourism by expanding the entertainment supply. Potential experience presentation catalogs should be developed and mostly local supporters should join the innovation process. Despite it has less effect in comparison to these, possession of a multi-level accommodation facility also supports its competitive advantage. The biggest effect of price advantage is particularly quite proximity of Palandoken locality to downtown and ability of incoming tourist to comfortably accommodate also at the city hotels if so desired.

Tourists think that the tourism experiences offered provide also a competition advantage in terms of climate, culture, and activity to Erzurum. It is uphold that the variables such as destination-offered natural beauties, climate, interesting historical and cultural attractions, special traditional activities, outdoor activities, sports and recreational activities make contribution to competitiveness of Erzurum in positive direction. This situation offers a great advantage to Erzurum. The winter months and skiing periods being quite long and being one of the scarce winter tourism centers with natural beauty not marred among near destinations neighboring many countries has been affecting particularly foreign tourists significantly. In addition to this, the traditional and cultural attractions promote the authenticity of Erzurum and with the activities offered, this advantage is being backed up. Therefore, the resources Erzurum enjoys are required to be utilized in such a way to provide benefit to tourism but without reckoning its sustainability.

Moreover, it is emphasized that the geographical location of destination and the fact that its image and recognition enhanced with the sporting activities previously hosted are also the substantial competitiveness strategies affected by the tourism experiences. Particularly-followed by Universiade Winter Games accomplished in 2011, the winter tourism potential of the city has been announced across the globe and many facilities and fields built later on and being used national or international competitions have affirmatively influenced the image of city.

With the touristic experiences the tourists have lived in Erzurum, they think that the suitability of Erzurum for winter and sports tourism in terms of infrastructure and superstructure positively affect the competitiveness of Erzurum. Therefore, the investments made to easy-to-access Palandokenski resort may be encouraged to be applied to other centers staying a bit away but possessing advantageous positions as well. Hereabouts may be considered for the athletes-oriented investments.

In addition to this, determination of prices in exchange of products and services offered in a better way and consideration of tourist as a permanent guest and appropriate prices to be demanded are quite crucial. In this way, the competitive potential of Erzurum shall have been strengthened.

4.9.1. Future Researches-Oriented Proposals

There is a need for a constant effort for the re-evaluation of perception of current tourism experience and discovery of new things; therefore, it is required to be investigated. While the suggestions offered provide a snapshot of just for the current situation, doubtlessly many questions remain unanswered and it is suggested that a lot more researches are accomplished to understand experiment creation-oriented future developments (Neuhofer and Buhalis, 2014: 124, 136). In particular, it is separately stated that tourism marketing getting focused on tourist experiments (Bosangit, 2014: 529).

Once the literature is scrutinized, it is observed that the emotional processes-oriented researches are needed to be carried out particularly in process tourism experience. The current situation in the literature, both service quality and experiential point of view show presence of some major improvements, but particularly in tourism context, more interesting research projects which would ensure benefit to the comprehension of experimental consumption are to be put forth (Batat and Frochot, 2014: 121).

In this study, the perspective of foreign tourists coming to Erzurum to the memorable experiences has been evaluated as the application area. However, application area can be diversified and adapted to many different destinations. Nevertheless, also the experiential tourism efforts oriented towards museums, zoos, historical and cultural places and so on may be carried out. In particular, in museology, when thought that the experiential tourism demand is met with the Eco-museums being a new configuration and generally having interactional structure (Salazar and Zhu, 2015: 242), it may be said that this area-oriented activities would carry originality. Moreover, the application performed in order to measure the memorable tourism experiences cover post-travel period. In future researches, in order to assess multiple levels of memorable tourism experiences, pre-travel, during travel and post-travel differences may be evaluated.

Sharing the experiences through personal narratives or stories, pictures and so on is the supplementary part of the tourism experiences. Personal experience accounts of others, vacation planning, or a future vacation serve as inputs in becoming the source of inspiration. Therefore, the social media has turned into being a frequently used environment by the travelers to share mainly their experiences and communicating their decisions (Gretzel and Yoo, 2014: 500). For this reason, it may be said that the website and social media tools can provide a good customer experience to all visitors (Stockdale, 2014: 391). Starting from this proposition, it maybe said next studies to be carried out to be particularly web based studies would be appropriate to our current conditions and shall constitute a good alternative.

Although being rarely discussed, the transformations being the fifth economic presentation of the experience economy has not been yet added into its conceptual sense in context of tourism (Gelter, 2010: 48). Therefore, the need felt for the tourism studies targeting particularly transformation should not be ignored.

In this study, the influence of memorable tourism experiences on the destination competitiveness has been evaluated from the perspective of tourists. Even for this reason, some sections in the destination competitiveness scale have been removed. Things subsequent studies research to stakeholders that make up the supply direction of the tourism sector may be applied to the entirety of scale in the studies to be made hereafter. In this way, addressing the destination competitiveness from the perspective of both tourists and also stakeholders, the similarities in the issues evaluated and the differences can be discussed. Doing so, contribution can be provided by making a more objective, destination-oriented assessment.

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