

Axiology of Tourism Shopping: A Cross-Level Investigation of Value-in-the-Experience (VALEX)

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Abstract

This study draws on the premise of value-in-the-experience (VALEX), axiology, and situated cognition to investigate how value is contextualized within a broader social system that is manifested through the service environment where the shopping experience occurs. A cross-level framework is proposed to examine how shopping value is embedded within the broader setting. Findings reveal that the broader shopping environment is a facilitator of the value-experience process when tourists are seeking hedonic value; while it is a disabler when they are seeking utilitarian value. This inquiry opens a new avenue of research in shopping tourism, with focus on a more complex dynamic of value-in-context based on situated cognition.

Keywords: value in the experience, tourism shopping, multilevel, service environment, travel value

INTRODUCTION

Shopping is known as one of the most enjoyable leisure activities and hence, a great majority of tourists engage in shopping while traveling abroad (Rosenbaum, 2006; Xu & McGehee, 2012). As tourists traverse in a foreign space, shopping becomes a means to fulfill their various travel needs that they may otherwise not be able to accomplish at home (Jin et al., 2017). According to McKinsey (2019), approximately 70% of luxurious shopping exists abroad. In particular, shopping tourists are well known for their extravagant spending power. Yet, although tourists still have a strong affinity for luxury products across the world, they are equally likely to covet lower-end merchandise and souvenirs (Jin et al., 2017; Timothy, 2005).

To date, a large body of tourism shopping literature has presented empirical evidence pinpointing why tourists are motivated to shop overseas as well as the process by which shopping becomes a vital part of the travel experience that brings pleasure, satisfaction, and other favorable consequences (Jin et al., 2020; Tosun et al., 2007; Wong & Wan, 2013). While these research efforts have set the necessary foundation, the relationship between shopping and destination value has been largely neglected, creating a gap in the literature. Along this line, there is also a lack of attention to how and why benefits from shopping are embedded within the broader travel ecosystem that shapes various tourist value perceptions of a destination. This situation poses another research gap.

To understand the dynamics of how value is embedded within a broader social context, this study draws on value theory (Hart, 1971), which is rooted in the philosophy body of knowledge, to highlight the role of the intrinsic (i.e., hedonic) and extrinsic (i.e., utilitarian) value of shopping in the creation of the “final value” of a trip. Here, the final value reflects the “ultimate” worth of a journey as an “end” goal (Tucker, 2019, p. 1) when tourists travel to a destination. This study further rests on the *value-in-the-experience* (VALEX) premise (Helkkula et al., 2012), which extends the work of Sandstrom, Edvardsson, Kristensson, and Magnusson (2008), to highlight a phenomenon in which a person’s value perceptions are juxtaposed with the series of experiences encountered within the service context. This social context gives shape to one’s perceptions of the benefits received, which are altered along with the experience received throughout the customer journey. The situated cognition literature points to the need to take the social setting into account in that “cognitions arise from and are connected to, the interactions that the material body of an agent entertains with its physical environment” (Roth & Jornet, 2013, p. 464). As tourists maneuver through a web of stores within a shopping zone, the overall travel value will be shaped by numerous encounters during the experience of their trips (Lam & Wong, 2020).

This study aims to address the aforementioned research gap by taking the VALEX into consideration. It seeks to answer research questions pertaining to how different stages of value are interlinked with the experience encountered during the course of a journey, as well

as how destination travel value is contextualized within a broader social system that is manifested through the service environment in which the shopping experience is unfolded. The core contribution of this inquiry lies in an advancement of VALEX that takes account of the situated cognition perspective (Wilson, 2002) in understanding value-in-context (or value-in-use) (Helkkula et al., 2012; Sandström et al., 2008; Vargo, 2008) to demonstrate that social influences from the shopping context may not only facilitate the value delivery process, but they can also constrain it depending on the type of shopping value tourists seek. This unique cross-level boundary condition is further elaborated in the proposed model in Figure 1, which highlights the multilevel nature of the tourism shopping phenomenon. To this end, this inquiry fills the void in the literature not only by linking shopping and destination value in a nomological network, but also by taking the social context where shopping takes place into account. From a broader theoretical stance, this research sheds new light on the debate over intrinsic and extrinsic value in axiological research to acknowledge a moderated meditational contingency mechanism that links intrinsic and extrinsic shopping value along with destination travel value. In essence, this investigation identifies how final value is dependent upon shopping value and experiences superimposed on a shopping excursion through a deeper theoretical lens based upon axiology (Bahm, 1993; Hart, 1971) and situated cognition (Jenlink, 2013; Roth & Jornet, 2013).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The logic of the proposed framework in Figure 1 rests on value theory (Hart, 1971) and the value-in-the-experience premise (Helkkula et al., 2012). The value theory inquiry is synonymous with axiology, with theoretical foci germane to the understanding of human valuation of objects and events, as well as a theoretical discourse that gives rise to the debate of intrinsic versus extrinsic value (Bahm, 1993). Intrinsic value refers to a positive quality based upon an object/event's intrinsic appeal, such as pleasure and joy derived from the possession of an object; whereas extrinsic value reflects an object/event's non-intrinsic features that can be observed based on its price or utility (Zimmerman & Bradley, 2019). As objects/events entail intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) goodness or worthiness, it follows that tourism shopping also possesses intrinsic (i.e., hedonic) and extrinsic (i.e., utilitarian) valuation to tourists (Doong et al., 2012; Wei, 2018). Axiology further underpins that these two value beliefs could ultimately shape human perceptions and experiences as well as the pursuit of "end value" (Audi, 2003; Tucker, 2019).

The value-in-the-experience premise points to a phenomenon that articulates how customer perceptions of value are dependent on various experiences encountered in the customer journey. In turn, this journey renders a rather dynamic process in which value perceptions are constantly changing depending on the context and situation – where, when, and how the experience is unfolded (Gallarza et al., 2019). For example, a tourist valuation of merchandise (say, a luxury handbag or an exotic cultural artifact) might be increased during a

shopping excursion if the purchase elevates the travel experience due to improved socialization opportunities with companions or store employees; the experience also can represent an enhanced means to relax and escape from boredom by immersing oneself in the retail esplanade (Babin et al., 1994; Jin et al., 2020; Rosenbaum, 2006).

This value-in-the-experience (VALEX) phenomenon is also referred to as value-in-context, as Vargo (2008) acknowledges; it emphasizes the “subjective experience in a social context... [and it] is determined by the individual service customer’s context and is constantly changing and will very much depend on the particular service customer’s specific interest and personal lifeworld context” (Helkkula et al., 2012, pp. 61 - 62). This line of logic reflects two important conditions that deserve further consideration. First, value is given shape based on different encounters during a trip (Meng et al., 2019); accordingly, there are different types or stages of tourist value (i.e., shopping value and overall travel value) that are mediated by various travel experiences (Wei, 2018). Second, personal value and experience are conditioned based on the social context that one is embedded within (Lam & Wong, 2020; Patrício et al., 2011). In this study, this boundary condition is articulated as the surrounding physical shopping environment that shapes a tourist’s value perceptions. The second proposition is also in line with situated cognition theory, which points to how behaviors are given shape within a confined social context (Jenlink, 2013; Wilson, 2002).

Taking the above arguments together, this study posited a model that delineates a travel-experience mediation between shopping value and overall destination travel value, while this process is conditioned on the physical environment of the shopping area that gives shape to tourists' VALEX during their trips. Thus, VALEX supplements value theory, offering greater precision in the proposed model to acknowledge the role of experience and context in contemporary tourism settings (Conduit et al., 2019; Helkkula et al., 2012). Yet, it is important to acknowledge that prior research on VALEX and related inquiries has been primarily conceptual and qualitative (Helkkula et al., 2012; Sakao et al., 2019; Vargo, 2008). Therefore, the caveats derived from these studies often portray a rather complex mechanism of situated value perceptions that are not only influenced by experiences received at the service encounter; they could also be stimulated by experiences “constructed based on previous and imaginary future [instances]” (Helkkula et al., 2012, p. 62). This study takes a different approach, through a post-positivism paradigm. It also focuses on en route encounters with experiences germane to escapism and socialization that are essential to fulfill the shopping needs. The present work also takes account of the value-in-context framework proposed by Sandstrom et al. (2008) to highlight the role of functional (i.e., utilitarian) and emotional (i.e., hedonic) value drivers in service experience manifestation (i.e., escape and socialization experiences), which ultimately help “develop unique customer value propositions through opportunities for favorable service experiences” (p. 121). By

synthesizing Helkkula et al.'s value-in-the-experience and Sandstrom et al.'s value-in-context paradigms through the lens of value theory (Rescher, 1969; Tucker, 2019) and situated cognition (Jenlink, 2013), the current study postulated a multilevel model along with development of the corresponding hypotheses that are detailed in the sections that follow (see Figure 1 for a conceptual delineation).

Insert Figure 1 here

Hypothesis Development

Shopping Tourism and Perceived Value

Shopping tourism is often defined as a form of travel service that enables tourists to acquire goods and services not commonly available in their common habitat (Timothy, 2005). Businesses and revenues generated from such a tourism product can help to expand local economies with better job opportunities. This phenomenon is attributed to the fact that tourists often acquire a constellation of merchandises ranging from high-end luxury designer labels to low-end daily necessities (Choi et al., 2008; Li & Cai, 2008; Rosenbaum & Spears, 2006). A review study conducted by Choi et al. (2016) further identified that tourist shopping patterns were quite distinct, as shopping tourists spent three to four times more, tended to extend their vacation stay, and were more likely to make return visits than their leisure travel counterparts.

More recent development of the shopping tourism literature has shifted the focus to depict rationales and nomological networks germane to how and why various destination and shopping situational factors could cultivate a higher level of satisfaction and loyalty (Lam & Wong, 2020; Lee & Choi, 2020; Wong & Lam, 2016). This line of inquiry opens up a new research avenue to better understand the underling mechanism of shopping tourism and better cultivate tourist interest and appreciation of the value embedded within the shopping process that is beyond the mere functional appeal of the shopping goods. To better understand tourist valuation in the shopping process, this study identifies two major traits of value as reflected from axiology (Zimmerman & Bradley, 2019) – functional/utilitarian (i.e., extrinsic value) and emotional/hedonic (i.e., intrinsic value) – with benefits that can commonly be reaped through acquisition of goods, as the following sections explain.

From a functional perspective, value represents a tradeoff between the price paid and the benefits received (Zeithaml, 1988). Tourists often indulge in practical buying and shopping for enjoyment (Kim & Littrell, 2001). They are likely to purchase items not only for utilitarian use, however; souvenirs, for example, carry cultural and relational significance (Swanson, 2004; Wei, 2018). Tourists can also be influenced by the pursuit of pleasant memories through joyful shopping encounters (Anderson & Littrell, 1995; Kim & Littrell, 2001). On some occasions, window shopping may even bring satisfaction to the shopping experience, as browsing and searching for exotic items and objects in a foreign place may

help tourists to become acquainted with the local culture, resulting in a greater sense of appreciation of the craftsmanship and cultural value of the destination offerings (Yu & Littrell, 2005).

The basic premise of shopping rests on the utilitarian benefits that possession of merchandise entails. Low price as well as product durability and reliability are some of the qualities tourists enjoy (Sharma et al., 2018; Sheth et al., 1991). Price favorability along with greater assortment and authenticity of products available in other markets could explain why tourists flock to shopping destinations, such as Hong Kong, Paris, and Milan, to reap better value (Jin et al., 2017). Yet, tourists' valuation of shopping often goes beyond its functional appeals, as this tourism activity also encompasses hedonic value such as emotional valence and pleasure during the shopping process (Sandström et al., 2008).

In essence, shopping in a foreign place can be identified as a fulfillment of functional needs, as merchandise possesses utilitarian benefits that outweigh its costs. Hence, shopping satisfaction can be attributed to product categories, varieties, and attributes germane to a wide array of items (Tosun et al., 2007; Wong, 2013; Yüksel, 2007). On the other hand, shopping is a leisure activity that often induces joy and thrills. These feelings about shopping could also render as hedonic value imbued with meanings that touch the heart of shoppers (Wei, 2018; Yüksel, 2007).

Shopping Value and Experience

“Value is now centered in the experiences of consumers” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 137). Frow and Payne (2007) support this notion that value resides in the experience of consumption rather than in the object involved. In the past, evaluating the perceived value of goods was a measure proposed by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) to assess how customers perceived value in the tangible goods domain. The value-in-the-experience (VALEX) premise accentuated by Helkkula (2012) focuses instead on imaginary and experienced worth. The benefit of traveling is engendered by the value (e.g., utilitarian and hedonic) in specific tourism encounters (e.g., shopping), which strongly influences tourists’ travel experiences (Gursoy et al., 2006; Liu et al., 2021; Timothy, 2005). More specifically, the VALEX’s phenomenological lens points to “individual service customers’ lived experiences of value that extend beyond the current context of service... [to include] past and future experiences and service customers’ broader lifeworld contexts” (Helkkula et al., 2012, p. 59). This value-in-context perspective can reflect how tourists’ valuation of a given tourism product (e.g., shopping) is bounded within the broader tourism destination context. As a result, an elevated level of shopping valuation should ultimately influence tourists’ travel experience of a given place (Wong & Wan, 2013; Xu & McGehee, 2012).

The propositions presented in this study focus on how utilitarian and hedonic shopping value could influence one’s escape and socialization experience during a trip, in subsequent discussions that follow. In particular, shopping has been acknowledged to offer people a

sense of escape and an avenue to socialize with others (Hu & Jasper, 2018; Wei, 2018). Here escape experience refers to feelings of getting away from one's mundane environment to enjoy liberty and relaxation (Ji et al., 2018; Snepenger et al., 2006). It reflects the fulfillment of one's need to seek opportunities for leisure and to break out from stressful responsibilities. Socialization experience, on the other hand, describes the feelings of developing a harmonious connection with people who share similar interests (e.g., friends and family members) (Kim et al., 2012; Pearce & Lee, 2005). It corresponds to attainment of one's need for improved affiliation and social bonds with significant others (Lee et al., 2004). In particular, escape and socialization trip experiences are induced by shopping; the extant literature commonly points to how this leisure activity could help people fulfill their needs for escape, relaxation, and affiliation during an excursion (Turner & Reisinger, 2001; Wei, 2018).

Choi et al. (2016) explain that tourists are prone to splurge buying as a means to seek escapism. Thus, shopping entails an escape experience from their mundane daily lives, while offering opportunities to relax and restore from stress (Hu & Jasper, 2018; Jin et al., 2017). In an attempt to improve their travel experience, tourists tend to indulge in shopping to induce a higher level of sensation (Kong & Chang, 2012). Souvenirs, for example, often possess both hedonic and utilitarian shopping value; hence, possession of memorabilia could serve as memory aids that could prompt escapism as well as facilitate social bonding (Kim & Littrell,

2001). More importantly, benefits received from the shopping process go beyond the activity itself. Rather, value realized from this leisure activity often entails connotative meanings about the quality and significance of the overall travel experience (Tosun et al., 2007; Wong & Wan, 2013). The fun, joy, pleasure, and pleasant social interactions in shopping constitute the very essence that puts shopping atop many other touristic alternatives (Rosenbaum, 2006). It also renders as a means for socialization and opportunities to build affiliation with strengthened social bonds with friends and family members (Hu & Jasper, 2018). Such elevated social togetherness is often attributed to shopping's ability to promote harmonious interactions and communication among shoppers, leading to a better socialization experience during vacations (Lam & Wong, 2020; Timothy, 2005). This prior knowledge could further support the notion of Helkkula (2012, p. 59) to "characterize value as an experience" through the VALEX paradigm. Given the important role of shopping value on one's trip experience, the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Hedonic shopping value is positively related to (a) escape experience and (b) socialization experience of a trip.

Hypothesis 2: Utilitarian shopping value is positively related to (a) escape experience and (b) socialization experience of a trip.

Travel Experience and Value

The concept of travel value resonates closely with the customer valuation of products and services, and it puts emphasis on the importance of benefits received during a trip from

the tourist perspective (Bajs, 2015). To better understand this proposed relationship between travel value and destination value, we rest on value theory to accentuate that value “appraisal is the result of learning from experience” (Hart, 1971, p. 38). Accordingly, the end value of a trip (e.g., travel value) reflects learned experiences from travel encounters such as shopping. In fact, many axiologists rationalize how value is internalized through personal encounters of certain experiences. Audi’s (2006, p. 45) axiological work on value and reasons for action may better explain such a relation:

It is apparently experiences in the internal sense that are the basic bearers of intrinsic value. This does not imply that enjoying a symphony cannot have intrinsic value. It surely does; the proposal is only that it has that value in virtue of its internal, experiential qualities, hence what might be called basic intrinsic value is wholly experiential.

In the same vein, this research argues that tourists’ valuations of their trips are a consequence of favorable travel experiences. To this end, the present study also draws on VALEX, which posits “value in the experience as an ongoing, interactive circular process of [the] individual” (Helkkula et al., 2012, p. 59). In sum, “current value in the experience can affect how a customer makes sense of past and future experiences” (p. 62). In other words, one’s evaluation of an object is often based upon their direct or indirect experiential encounters of the object. Given the dynamic and circular nature of VALEX, this research

posits that tourists' destination travel value is a direct outcome of their en route experiences during a trip.

The relationship between travel experience and value is also supported with empirics from recent literature. Stienmetz and Fesenmaier (2019) contend that destination value is determined by the interaction of the supply and demand sides of the destination network. The aggregate evaluation of travelers' activities has a substantial impact on their value gained within a destination. Destination value is often an outcome of bundled services garnered from various experiential appeals (Xu et al., 2016). Accordingly, favorable shopping experiences derived from a journey should add greater nuance to the overall destination valuation (Wong & Wan, 2013). In a meta-analysis study, Tanford and Jung (2017) argue that socialization and escape are intangible experiences that may trigger a desire to value a festival more. In other words, escape and socialization experiences are the key to unlocking favorable emotional responses, such that attendees later remember feelings of excitement and the enjoyment of being with families and friends. Realization of these very experiences has commonly pointed to greater tourist appreciation of the hosting place and favorable evaluations of their trips (Bajs, 2015; Loureiro et al., 2020), leading to greater value of a destination. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Escape experience is positively related to destination travel value.

Hypothesis 4: Socialization experience is positively related to destination travel value.

The Moderating Role of Shopping Area Environment

Contextual influence in human valuation was first documented in value theory, with axiologists asserting that “an alternative view to account for the appearance of the organicity of intrinsic value would be that in different contexts the same kinds of things can have different (intrinsic) values” (Audi, 1998, p. 371). Yet, discourses on axiology only offer a rather superficial abstraction of how context could make an impact on our value system, as it fails to account for how a physical setting could moderate the role of value. The VALEX (Helkkula et al., 2012) and situated cognition (Roth & Jornet, 2013) literature could fill the void as follows.

The central tenet of VALEX rests on the concept of value-in-context, which posits that one’s subjective experience is a subsequent outcome of value received from various encounters within a broader social system (Helkkula et al., 2012). In other words, a tourist’s travel experiences are not only a result of their subjective feelings about the benefits reaped from acquisition of goods, which could endow utilitarian and hedonic value, but are also a consequence of benefits received from the broader shopping social context (e.g., shopping environment and the encompassing destination) (Wong & Wan, 2013; Xu & McGehee, 2012).

The value-in-context logic resonates closely with the premise of situated cognition (Roth & Jornet, 2013), which points to the salient role of the social environment in giving shape to human perceptions and behaviors (Liu et al., 2019). The current study focuses on the shopping area environment, which is defined as the geographic location (e.g., shopping mall or street) and broader social situation where shopping takes place. More specifically, this study defines the term at the macro level rather than at the individual/micro level to reflect the common value that is shared among tourists who are situated within the same environment. This logic is clearly different from that of prior shopping tourism literature, which primarily views the shopping area/destination and its environment as subjective individual perceptions (Kemperman et al., 2009; Lau et al., 2005; Murphy et al., 2011). Because the environment of a shopping area can differ sharply from other areas, as situated cognition (Roth & Jornet, 2013) posits, it poses a boundary condition that could ultimately moderate the relationship between tourists' shopping value and travel experience. In particular, situated cognition theory points out that "human thought is situated, adapted to the environment – what people perceive, how they conceive of their experience in an activity, and what they physically do all develop together... the actions of individuals and the context in which they operate are inseparable – there is a dialectical ontology" (Jenlink, 2013, p. 187).

In essence, a shopping area is defined as a locale, such as a mall, a shopping street, or a night market, that hosts a constellation of retail stores. Such a location often presents rich environmental cues, such as air quality, noise, space, equipment, architectural design, signage, and symbols, which not only could signify quality and hospitality of the hosting destination, but also could induce favorable or negative feelings about one's shopping excursion (Tosun et al., 2007; Wong & Wan, 2013). This assertion is closely reflected by the premise of situated cognition, which acknowledges how human cognitions are bounded by specific contexts that embody human feelings and conduct (Wilson, 2002) as described above.

VALEX further alludes to the notion of the additive nature of value, in that the value creation process is a dynamic mechanism in which individuals continue to accumulate experience through various positive encounters (Helkkula et al., 2012). Given the addictive nature of value, a favorable physical setting (e.g., grandiose interior design, luxurious furnishing, sophisticated artifacts, and comfortable air quality) available within the encompassing shopping space should add greater value to one's shopping excursion, with emotional benefits reaped from the trip (Yüksel, 2007). We believe that the facilitation of the shopping environment is only effective in increasing hedonic shopping value because of its ability to arouse pleasure through elevated emotional benefits, hence resulting in a better travel experience (Ou et al., 2020; Rosenbaum, 2009). However, its conditioning role on the

utilitarian shopping value effect could be weakened given that the physical setting may not offer additional utility to tourists. In other words, a physical environment may not provide tourists with added functional benefit on their shopping excursion. Our contention is consistent with the premise of situated cognition in that having a better (or worse) experience is dependent upon the extent to which one interprets that the encompassing environment is relevant and beneficial in fulfilling their needs (Jenlink, 2013; Roth & Jornet, 2013). While positive feelings from relevant environmental cues could improve people's evaluation and decision, "feelings that are due to an unrelated influence can lead us astray" (Schwarz, 2012, p. 289). This logic further pinpoints the relevancy of the service environment to notion how it could facilitate tourists' shopping experience on one hand, but it could also detract tourists from gaining the right experience on the other hand. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 5: The relationships between shopping value (i.e., hedonic and utilitarian) and travel experience (i.e., escape and socialization) are moderated by the shopping area environment in that the relationships are stronger for a higher level of (i.e., favorable) environment.

METHODS

Sample

The population of interest was outbound shopping tourists. Data for this study was collected from Macau. The city is not only renowned for gambling and casinos, but it is also

a popular shopping locale with a wide range of shopping areas featuring a large assortment of brands and merchandise ranging from luxury brands such as Gucci, Chanel, Brioni, Cartier, Rolex, and Ferragamo to high-street labels such as Moïselle, Triumph, Citizen, Adidas, North Face, and more (Lam & Wong, 2020). These brands along with thousands of others are situated within both themed shopping malls (such as Grand Cannel Shops at the Venetian or the deluxe shopping plaza at Wynn) and street markets featuring exquisite labels and souvenirs located around major attractions. These shopping locales also vary among physical size, product assortment, location, and service environment – ranging from a grand, crafted extravaganza within a premier retail outlet, to crowded, tiny pathways situated within a vibrant local atmosphere. In essence, Macau resembles other popular shopping destinations (such as Hong Kong, Bangkok, Tokyo, and more) that feature a constellation of shopping options that suffice to fulfill the needs of tourists.

Data were collected by means of person-administered face-to-face survey through convenience sampling. In particular, 14 major shopping areas were first selected based on their popularity, which is commonly retrievable from social media such as TripAdvisor. Then a group of trained field investigators were instructed to intercept tourist shoppers right at the exit of major shopping areas in the city. To reduce response bias, a systematic sampling approach was employed, where the investigators intercepted every third shopper. An unavailable respondent was replaced by the next available respondent. Filter questions were

raised to ensure that respondents had shopped at the corresponding shopping area. The questionnaire was first developed in English and then translated into Chinese by two bilinguals. Another round of refinement was carried out to improve the consistency of the questionnaire in both languages. A pilot test was conducted to ensure that respondents understood the questions.

The sample included 1,396 complete responses, which corresponds to a response rate of 76.3%. Of the respondents, 59.3% were females, 43.8% were between the age of 25 and 34, and 27.9% were between the age of 35 and 44; 23.4% visited the sites 2–3 times, while 22.9% traveled to the city 4–5 times; 31.2% had an individual income over 10,000 RMB,¹ while 18.6% had an individual income between 6,000 and 8,000 RMB. The great majority (93.8%) of the respondents were from mainland China, given that the city is one of the most popular outbound destinations for mainlanders. They were fairly evenly distributed among the 31 provinces and special administration regions. The rest of the sample came from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The dataset represents 14 dyads (i.e., 14 different shopping areas), each containing an average of about 100 subjects.

Measures

The questionnaire contained multiple scales of interest. They were primarily adopted from the literature and included a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7

¹ 1 USD = 6.6 RMB.

(strongly agree) unless otherwise specified. Each scale and its corresponding items are presented in Table 1. *Hedonic shopping value* was a three-item scale adopted from Babin and Darden (1995). It assessed tourist emotional appeals regarding the benefits received from shopping. The scale was adequately reliable, with Cronbach's alpha (α) = .82. *Utilitarian shopping value* was a three-item scale adopted from Babin and Darden (1995). It evaluated tourists' perceived functional benefits from shopping. The scale was fairly reliable with α = .87.

Escape travel experience (or escape experience for short) was a three-item scale adopted from Pearce and Lee (2005). It was refined to focus on a tourist's encounter with escape and relaxation experience during their trip. The scale was reasonably reliable with α = .81. *Socialization travel experience* (or socialization experience) was a three-item scale adopted from Pearce and Lee (2005). It was refined to focus on a tourist's experience in social interactions during their excursion. *Destination travel value* was operationalized as the overall benefit a tourist received during their trip. The three-item scale was adopted from Boo, Busser, and Baloglu (2009). The scale was fairly consistent with α = .85.

Shopping area environment was operationalized as a macro-level variable representing the environment of a shopping zone or district. The scale was evaluated via a two-item scale adopted from Cronin, Brady, and Hult (2000). The scale has an α of .74. The variable at the macro level was aggregated based on the mean of the summated score of the

construct for each shopping area. This study further diagnosed the intermember reliability indexes with intraclass correlation: $ICC_{(1)} = .17$; $ICC_{(2)} = .95$; $F_{(13, 1382)} = 19.57$ ($p < .001$) along with the median inter-rater agreement ($r_{wg[ij]} = .88$). These results warrant aggregation of the variable at a higher level.

This study performed confirmatory factor analysis to assess the overall measurement model fit. Results show that the model fits the data well, with goodness of fit index (GFI) = .96, comparative fit index (CFI) = .98, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .03. Convergent validity is supported with t values ≥ 19.07 ($p < .001$) and average variance extracted (AVEs) $\geq .59$. Discriminant validity is warranted with the square root of AVE $>$ correlations of the corresponding constructs. Composite reliable measures $\geq .75$, further supporting reliability of the variables of interest.

Data Diagnostics

This study assessed common method variance (CMV) based on two approaches. First, a multilevel method was utilized by separating the data into individual- and shopping area-level variables. Second, the Harman's single-factor analysis was performed. Results indicate that CMV is not an issue, with $\chi^2_{(170)} = 4,964.32$ ($\chi^2/df = 29.20$), while the factor solution explains 30.11% of the variance. Multicollinearity was diagnosed based on variance inflation factor (VIF), with results showing that none of the VIFs is greater than 2.0. We also assessed

normality assumptions for individual items. Results reveal that skewness values are within $[-.619]$, while kurtosis values are within $[-.27]$; they are well below the 2.0 threshold, suggesting that the variables of interest are normally distributed.

FINDINGS

Table 2 presents zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics of the variables of interest. The control variables selected in the model included demographic characteristics such as gender and age that are acknowledged to influence tourist shopping behaviors. We also controlled for brand type (luxury = 1, non-luxury = 0) at the individual level as well as location of the shopping area² (Macau peninsula = 1, Coati = 2) at the macro level given that different brands and shopping location could have an impact on tourist experience and valuation (Wong & Wan, 2013; Yüksel, 2007). Likewise, frequency of visit (FOV) to a city is a behavioral indication of tourist attachment and loyalty to a destination and hence, it was also controlled in the study.

The proposed model in Figure 1 suggests that individuals are nested within a higher level hierarchy (i.e., shopping area) and hence, hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) with HLM 6.60 was employed to test the proposed relationships. To diagnose whether HLM is appropriate, this study first tested whether the variance in individual-level intercepts of the

² Shopping areas are clustered among two major districts: the Macau peninsular and Coati.

endogenous variables is significant across groups through analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Results reveal that all F values are significant at the .001 level ($F_{[13, 1382]} \geq 8.40$). Intraclass correlations ($ICC_{[1]}$) for these variables range between .08 and .18 (greater than the .05 threshold), suggesting that 8% to 18% of the total variance of these variables exists between groups ($\chi^2_{(13)} > 110.74, p < .001$) and hence, HLM is deemed appropriate.

Hypothesis 1 postulates a relationship between hedonic value and escape and socialization experiences; results in Model 1 reveal that the relationship is significant ($b = .38, p < .001$) and ($b = .16, p < .001$) for both variables, respectively, hence supporting the hypothesis (see Table 3). Hypothesis 2 proposes a relationship between utilitarian value and escape and socialization experience; results show that the relationship is also significant ($b = .28, p < .001$) and ($b = .17, p < .001$), respectively, supporting the hypothesis. This study further tested the relationship between escape/socialization experiences and destination travel value. Results indicate that both the escape–travel value ($b = .36, p < .001$) and socialization–travel value ($b = .24, p < .001$) estimates are significant, supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4. This study then examined the mediating effects of escape and socialization experiences through the Sobel test. Results indicate that the mediation is significant ($Z_{Escape} \geq 6.17, p < .001$ and $Z_{Socialization} \geq 5.47, p < .001$); hence, a full mediation is warranted.

Next, the moderation hypothesis through cross-level moderation in Model 2 was tested. Results reveal that shopping area environment (SAE) is a significant direct predictor

for both escape and socialization experiences ($\gamma \geq .40, p < .05$). However, its moderating effect is rather divergent for hedonic value and utilitarian value. For example, the hedonic value \times SAE interaction is positive and significant on socialization experience ($\gamma = .28, p < .01$). However, the utilitarian value \times SAE interactions on escape experience ($\gamma = -.17, p < .001$) and on socialization experience ($\gamma = -.20, p < .001$) are both significant but negative. These results partially support Hypothesis 5.

To illustrate the cross-level interactions graphically, this study employed the simple slope approach (Aiken & West, 1991) to partition the exogenous variables and the moderator into plus and minus one standard deviation from the mean. The results were then plotted in Excel to better depict the moderating effects. **Figure 2(a)** shows that the impact of hedonic shopping value is more acute on one's socialization experience when the shopping environment is superior. In other words, tourists who perceived hedonic value in the shopping excursion would enjoy a great deal of experience from socialization particularly in shopping districts that focus on delivering to their clientele an oasis environment with unparalleled atmosphere.

Following the procedure discussed above, **Figure 2(b) and 2(c)** show that the impact of utilitarian value is more acute in the low shopping environment condition. In other words, the impact of utilitarian shopping value on one's escape and socialization experiences is particularly salient in shopping areas that have a relatively inferior environment. That is,

tourists who are seeking utilitarian value during the shopping excursions would put more emphasis on the functional benefits (e.g., price, product quality and assortment, brand value, etc.) rather than the physical setting to enhance their trip experiences. Nevertheless, the environment of a shopping area still plays a salient role in shaping tourists' experiences, but only for those who are seeking low utilitarian value.

Insert Figure 2 here

In summary, the model explains between 16% to 27% variance of the endogenous variables. All demographic control variables are significant. In particular, female ($b = -.11, p < .05$), older ($b = .09, p < .001$), and more frequent visitors ($b = .04, p < .01$) perceived greater value during their shopping excursion. However, brand type and location are not significant at the .05 level.

DISCUSSION

This research points to a need to further investigate how tourism shopping could better be understood in the broader tourism ecosystem. To this end, this present study raised two major questions: (1) how different stages of trip value are interlinked with the experience encountered during the course of a journey; and (2) how value is contextualized within a broader social system that is manifested through the service environment in which the shopping experience is unfolded. Based on data collected from various shopping areas located within a popular shopping locale in Asia, this study undertook a series of multilevel

analyses to examine the proposed framework presented in Figure 1. Results demonstrate patterns that support all hypotheses pertaining to the individual level relationships. The moderating hypotheses were partially supported in that the cross-level moderations point to a rather divergent role of the environment of a shopping area. Implications are detailed in the sections that follow.

Theoretical Implications

For years, tourism shopping has been at the center stage of academic research, as it is a major travel activity that not only helps to enhance tourist experience, but also bears lucrative financial implications to industry operators. Yet, the state of the literature has yet to explore how value is embedded within the broader tourism context that shapes tourist experience. Drawing on the premise of value-in-the-experience (VALEX) (Helkkula et al., 2012), this study unpacks the notion of shopping-destination VALEX in the tourism experience chain of relationships. By disentangling value and experience into distinct stages of the travel process, it allows scholars to better understand relationships between these two aspects of VALEX from this conflated concept. In other words, this study articulates the VALEX phenomenon in the shopping research domain through a post-positivism paradigm to highlight the unique relationships pertaining to how different values and experiences are juxtaposed. To this end, this study has provided a needed update to the literature by going beyond the commonly acknowledged research paradigms such as shopping categories

(Rosenbaum & Spears, 2005; Wong, 2013), souvenir shopping and authenticity (Li & Cai, 2008; Swanson & Horridge, 2004; Wei, 2018; Yu & Littrell, 2005), shopping satisfaction and experience (Tosun et al., 2007; Wong & Wan, 2013), and more. The study thus opens a new avenue of research with a focus on a more complex dynamic of shopping in a foreign space.

This study adds to the contemporary discourse around value-in-context (e.g., Akaka & Parry, 2019; Edvardsson et al., 2011) in the tourism body of knowledge to illuminate how shopping benefits are embedded within the broader tourism social context that gives shape to tourist shopping excursions. The value-in-context logic also points to the importance of social construction in which value is interactive and meaning-laden. As Edvardsson et al. (2011, p. 333) contend, “Value-in-context thus refers to a multifaceted phenomenon that is uniquely and socially constructed between particular actors... the existence of social structures and systems means that individual customers have many things in common, and they are often guided by similar social forces.” In the present inquiry, this study models this social system based on a multilevel design to identify the nested nature of shopping and tourism. As a tourist traverses a specific shopping area, their travel experience is thus given shape by the various encounters within the focal tourism area. In other words, a tourist’s value and experience perceptions are nested within the geographic dispersion of a tourism system whereby tourist gazes are shaped by the meanings attached within the geographic area.

This view is consistent with situated cognition theory in which people's perceptions are swayed based on the social setting that gives shape to individual cognitions and behaviors (Wilson, 2002). Although research on situated cognition is on the rise in the social psychology discipline (Roth & Jornet, 2013), it has received little attention in the tourism field (Lui & Goel, 2022). In addition, while prior studies often take an experimental design approach to prime individuals' discrepancies in cognitive reasoning and learning under different conditions (Min & Schwarz, 2021), this research takes a multilevel design to model the impact of the social environment at the macro level. In sum, this inquiry unpacks the notion of shopping area environment from a situated cognition perspective to highlight the uniqueness of tourism product evaluations that are contingent upon different touristic encounters as aggregated at a higher social echelon. Thus, our investigation sheds light on Roth and Jornet's (2013, p. 464) call for "a reorganization of our ways of understanding cognition as such, and not just the addition of the 'situated' modifier to commonly held conceptions of mind and thinking."

Another important contribution to the literature lies in the cross-level moderations emanating from the value–experience relationship. As this research has moved into the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998), where value inherited in service settings is uniquely differentiable from one another, a salient question is whether the physical environment is an enabler or an inhibitor of the value–experience creation process. Noting the

fact that the service environment is an organizational asset or resource that is pertinent at the macro level, the multilevel investigation in this study carefully incorporated this cross-level nature into the research design. On one hand, the broader shopping environment is a facilitator of the value–experience process when tourists are seeking hedonic value; while it is a disabler when they are seeking utilitarian value.

This dichotomy renders a paradox in the VALEX phenomenon that could be explained by the axiology debate in value theory, to disentangle how hedonic (vs. utilitarian) value appeal could be bounded by the utility of the shopping environment in the minds of the beholders. Given that the shopping atmosphere is particularly acute and influential on hedonic shopping value due to its ability to arouse pleasure and hence, result in a better travel experience (Ou et al., 2020; Rosenbaum, 2009), it follows that such a social setting possesses utility for tourists who seek the value of pleasure and more intrinsic appeals in the shopping excursion. However, the shopping environment may have little extrinsic value to tourists who are merely looking for functional benefits from the mere acquisition of merchandise, as such a social atmosphere does not contribute to the overall utility. This discovery, however, is in line with the premise of situated cognition theory, which views feeling as information based on environmental cues (Jenlink, 2013; Roth & Jornet, 2013). As Schwarz (2012, p. 289) rightly points out, “Inferences from feelings are context sensitive and malleable,” while feelings from irrelevant contextual information could bewilder people, leading to confusion

and deteriorated evaluation. This study thus adds two key nuances to the tourism literature.

First, it points to the substantive articulation of the shopping–destination value in the tourism experience chain of relationships that are driven by the VALEX and axiology theoretical lens.

Second, it highlights the unique cross-level inquiry of the physical setting in the context of shopping areas based upon the situated cognition perspective. The present inquiry builds a bridge that links axiology (from philosophy) and situated cognition (from social psychology) to synthesize new knowledge in the tourism body of literature.

Managerial Implications

Shopping is often considered as one of the most important motives that impel tourists to partake in trips. To many people, it is fun and amusing; while for many others, it is a must-do activity for vacationing, given that merchandise acquired from a foreign place may embody personal meaning and cultural significance. Souvenirs are memorabilia that serve as aide-mémoires. Although these factors remain true, as prior literature acknowledges, it is perhaps time to shift attention to the broader tourism context that encompasses the shopping process. The findings in this study point to an important but often neglected aspect of shopping tourism: the location where shopping takes place. Accordingly, location or situational attributes that manifest an authentic localness of a community could be utilized as a conduit to attract tourist shoppers. This approach also opens the window for local merchants to work with city planners to codevelop better touristic encounters and value

propositions (e.g., product assortment and uniqueness as well as authentic shopping atmosphere).

Importantly, tourists' favorable travel experience is no longer restricted merely to personal feelings about functional and emotional benefits received from the exchange of goods; it goes beyond the individualistic approach as to how such a travel experience is situated within the tourism area where travel activities are given shape. To this end, destination management organizations (DMOs) and industry practitioners should collaborate to design or renovate conventional shopping areas into premier destinations while making shopping a form of retail therapy, with unparalleled shopping atmosphere that can induce comfort, thrills, and pleasure. The Venetian Grand Canal Shoppes is a case in point. This shopping mall turns an ordinary shopping outing into a retail attraction. Not only is the mall as carefully crafted as the piazza in Venice with blue sky, cobblestone walkways, and painted ceilings; it also improvises an indoor voyage featuring a gondola ride with live music and entertainment along the customer journey. As the Venetian attracts tourists in the millions annually, this case hints at how contemporary shopping areas can turn what might be a mundane travel encounter into an exotic odyssey.

It is essential to understand that not every tourist would appreciate such a shopping outing equally. These findings reveal that tourists who look for hedonic value are keener on indulging in an oasis of the encompassing shopping atmosphere in order to cultivate a higher

level of travel experience. Glitzy shopping areas are thus rendered as leisure entertainment centers for hedonic shoppers, who are offered an array of choices for relaxation and socialization during their excursions. Accommodation and transportation facilities surrounding the area also play a role in enticing tourist needs for comfort and accessibility. These very attributes are some of the reasons why renowned shopping areas such as Myeongdong Market and Dondaemu Market in Seoul, South Korea, Ginza and Shinjuku in Tokyo, Japan, and Time Square in Hong Kong, China are often awash with tourists. Importantly, these shopping locales do not merely help to provide the necessary high-street brands and designer labels for shoppers, they are excellent tourism service pavilions that offer tourists inimitable travel experience and hence, staggering benefits from the hosting destination.

However, not everyone appreciates an extravagant shopping environment. Some shoppers may prefer a more ordinary and plain establishment that offers merchandise that merely fulfills their buying needs. Given that these tourists crave utilitarian value from their journeys, DMOs and retail merchants should join forces to develop mobile apps, for example, to allow these shoppers to conveniently browse and locate information about goods they seek. Such a shopping app should offer personalization options and a price comparison functionality in order to offer these patrons product and place recommendations. It should also be able to link with major social media platforms to supply tourists with a better online

socialization experience; doing so could also help promote retailers, the encompassing shopping area, and the hosting destination to build a stronger destination image and better travel valuation.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The findings of the study should be viewed in light of its limitations. First, the study is cross-sectional in nature and hence, the proposed linkages among constructs are relationship-based rather than causal. As such, the VALEX process delineated in Figure 1 deserves further research that is based on a longitudinal design, with efforts pointing to different stages of the en route experience throughout a trip. Although such a design is ideal, it nevertheless calls for reservations about its feasibility. An alternative approach could be a series of experiments mapping out possible shopping encounters during a journey. Although such a design is encouraged, it may suffer biases and limitations pertinent to a lack of realistic research context, as the VALEX emphasizes. Second, although Macau is an international shopping destination, it attracts mostly Chinese tourists, who may have different shopping preferences than other tourists. Although this study has carefully chosen 14 different research sites with a rather large, systematically selected sample, the dataset and hence its generalizability is limited to a specific destination. We encourage future studies to extend the present inquiry to account for geographic discrepancies by comparing the proposed model in different locales. There could be cross-cultural discrepancies that could be

accounted for in future research, and scholars might make a deeper investigation of the inter- and intracultural dynamics in international tourism shopping research.

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Figure 1: Research Framework

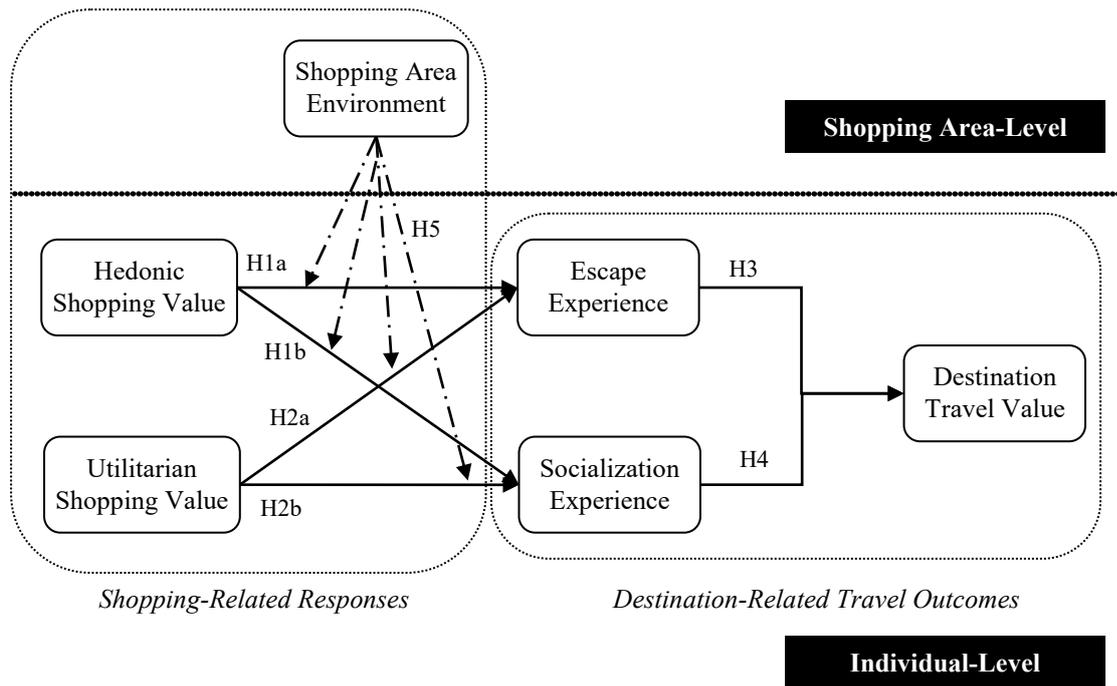


Figure 2. Cross-level Interactions on Socialization Experience and Escape Experience

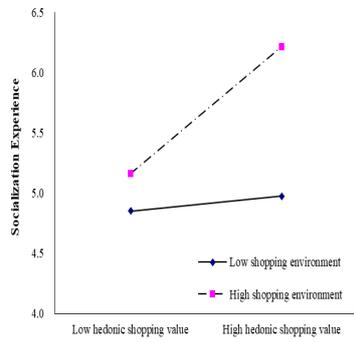


Fig.2(a) Hedonic Shopping Value × Shopping Environment

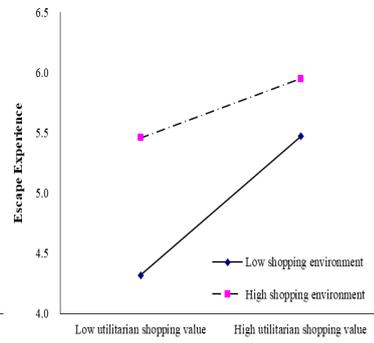


Fig.2(b) Utilitarian Shopping Value × Shopping Environment

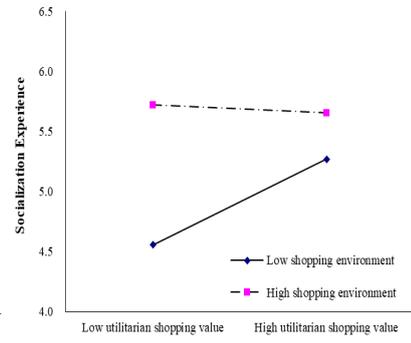


Fig.2(c) Utilitarian Shopping Value × Shopping Environment

Table 1. Scale Items

Scale items	Factor loading	AVE	Composite reliability
Shopping Area Environment		.59	.75
Overall quality of the shopping environment (Poor – Excellent)	.74		
Overall quality of the shopping environment (Low standard – High standard)	.80		
Hedonic Shopping Value		.62	.83
The shopping trip was truly a joy	.80		
I continue to shop because I wanted to	.82		
The shopping trip truly felt like an escape	.73		
Utilitarian Shopping Value		.70	.83
I accomplished just what I wanted to on this shopping trip	.81		
I could buy what I really needed	.90		
While shopping, I found just the items(s) I was looking for	.80		
Escape Travel Experience		.59	.81
This trip helps me to relax	.76		
This trip helps me to escape from ordinary life (routine)	.82		
This trip helps me to escape from pressure	.73		
Socialization Travel Experience		.62	.83
This trip helps me to develop better relationship with friends or family members	.85		
This trip helps me to socialize with friends or family members	.82		
This trip helps me to be with friends or family members	.69		
Destination Travel Value		.65	.85
I get more than the worthy of my money by visiting this destination	.81		
The cost of visiting this destination is a bargain relative to the benefits I received	.85		
Visiting this destination is a good deal	.78		

Note: Overall measurement model fit: CFI = .98, GFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .03.
AVE = Average variance extracted

Table 2. Correlations, Descriptive Statistics, and Cronbach's Alphas

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Shopping area environment	5.37	.90	(.74)					
2. Hedonic shopping value	5.24	.92	.47	(.82)				
3. Utilitarian shopping value	5.13	1.08	.34	.54	(.87)			
4. Escape travel experience	5.27	.90	.39	.51	.42	(.81)		
5. Socialization travel experience	5.23	.92	.36	.42	.38	.56	(.83)	
6. Destination travel value	4.98	1.02	.18	.32	.39	.42	.37	(.85)

Note: Pearson correlations are all significant at the .001 level.

Values at the diagonal are Cronbach's alphas.

Table 3. Estimates of Hierarchical Linear Model

	Model 1			Model 2	
	Escape-relax experience	Socialization experience	Destination travel value	Escape experience	Socialization experience
<i>Control variable</i>					
Gender			-.11*		
Age			.09***		
Frequency of visit			.04**		
Brand type	-.01	.04	.08	.00	.05
Location (shopping-area level)	.22	.25	-.01	.19	.20
<i>Main effect</i>					
Hedonic shopping value	.38***	.28***		.38***	.32***
Utilitarian shopping value	.16***	.17***		.15***	.15***
Escape experience			.36***		
Socialization experience			.24***		
<i>Cross-level effect</i>					
Shopping area environment (SAE)				.42*	.40*
Hedonic shopping value × SAE				.06	.28***
Utilitarian shopping value × SAE				-.17*	-.20**
R ²	.25	.16	.26	.27	.18
Note: * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.					