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# The Reality of Encounters with Local Life in Other Cultures

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**Abstract:** Equipped with mobile technologies, travelers increasingly seek opportunities to encounter the real lives of the people residing in the focal destination. With this trend of pursuing local life experience, this study investigated how international visitors recognize the lives of people in the focal destination, and whether this recognition is related to satisfaction. Reviews for Teheran’s Grand Bazaar from an online review site, Tripadvisor, showed that visitors’ local encounters were linked with favorable emotions (good, interesting, and worthwhile). To lend support to the contact hypothesis, which posits that intercultural experiences can lead to more favorable evaluations of the host community; the visitors who recognized direct and indirect encounters with local life indicated higher satisfaction. Even if brief, the experience of local life appeared to create more intimate feelings for the focal destination. Interestingly, the number of past travel experiences, which was captured by the number of reviews written by the reviewer, was found to have a negative association with satisfaction. We draw further implications for the travelers as well as the local community.

**Keywords:** contact hypothesis; intercultural exchange; local encounter

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## 1. Introduction

As reflected in the marketing slogan of Airbnb, “Live like a local” [1], we have seen increasing consumer interest in experiencing destinations in a more local way [2]. Travel, by definition, means leaving one’s home place for another place. Thus, it inevitably entails participating in local experiences in the focal destination. However, many well-known destinations are globally commodified. Popular places are often crowded with other tourists; therefore, it is not always possible to meet and interact with local residents. Local experiences under these circumstances may be superficial at best [3]. Thus, the current trend of pursuing local experiences appears to mean that visitors seek to be involved in authentic real life of the people in the destination [4]. Consistent with this notion, Google Trend, which quantifies the relative popularity by measuring how often a specific term is searched relative to the total search volume on Google [5], indicated that the interest score for the term “authentic” in the context of travel (limiting the context to travel by removing unrelated terms such as the authenticity of certain brands of fashion items) increased to 72.08 as of August 2017 from an annual average of 51.23 in 2013.

In the past, it was difficult to find information for places where local residents engage in their daily lives. Now, thanks to the Internet and mobile technology, visitors can instantly identify the areas where locals go that are “off-the-beaten track neighborhood”, as described by the Singapore Tourism Bureau [6]. Instead of going to restaurants filled with other tourists, visitors can now easily mingle with local residents. In a smart tourism environment [7], even language barriers can be overcome with translation applications. In addition to the technological advances, changes in the economic environment have also played important roles in the trend of pursuing local life. The sharing economy has led tourists, particularly the young and budget-sensitive, to previously residential neighborhoods in communities. The spirit of the local encounter has also affected the hotel industry as

well. For example, a recently launched hotel brand, Zoku, emphasizes the social areas designed to facilitate interactions between the guests, the local community, and the hotel's community managers [8].

While authenticity in the tourism context has a multitude of dimensions, one key aspect, which has been underrepresented in research, is the lives of ordinary local people from the vantage point of a tourist. More than forty years ago, MacCannell [9] (p. 601) pointed out that "tourists often do see routine aspects of life as it is really lived in the places they visit, although few tourists express much interest in this". The current trend of seeking local life experience clearly contrasts with this view. MacCannell [9] (p. 502) further noted that "sightseers are motivated by a desire to see life as it is really lived, even to get in with the natives, and, at the same time, they are deprecated for always failing to achieve these goals". These views raise interesting questions about whether or how international travelers recognize the lives of the local people, and whether this recognition is related to their satisfaction.

In fact, while "being local" has become a buzzword in the travel industry, it is still unclear how visitors actually perceive the real lives of people in the focal destination. By entering the "back regions" of the host society, where real life resides, travelers may feel a more intimate connection to the host society [9] (p. 592). According to this claim, encounters with local life may positively affect the visitors' evaluation of the travel experience. On the other hand, the reality of life in the local setting may not always be comfortable, convenient, or clean, because it is not designed to serve overseas visitors. In general, the properties of comfort, convenience, and cleanliness are among the key attributes for visitor satisfaction at the destination (e.g., Qu and Li [10]). Thus, visitors may not feel satisfied in their encounters with the local life. Still, there has been little empirical research about this relationship.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the local experience of international visitors, focusing on their encounters with real life of people at the focal destination. In doing so, we utilized the smart tourism system, specifically an online review platform. Online reviews may be less prone to recall bias because they are voluntary descriptions of the actual experience [11]. In particular, this study used a bazaar in Iran as a study site and analyzed the review texts through qualitative and quantitative approaches. The selected study site is primarily designated for local residents, while simultaneously being one of the major tourist attractions in the city.

In this study, first, we explored how the local life was described by reviewers through the text analysis. In particular, we explored how the local experience was recalled or specified in the visitors' mindset using the association rule learning method, which is concerned with finding associations between variables [12]. In doing so, this study tried to uncover how visitors linked their encounters with local people and life to their emotions. Second, this study further investigated the relationship between the local life experience and visitor satisfaction. Tourism has been known to promote intercultural and racial understanding while reducing possible prejudice [13]. The contact hypothesis claims that contact with people from other cultures have the potential to change the attitudes and behavior of individuals towards one another more favorably [14]. Thus, this study empirically verified the relationship between the encounters with local life and satisfaction.

By examining local life experience as provided in the consumers' reviews and investigating its usage context and the association with satisfaction, this study fills the gap in the literature, which lacks empirical analysis into the visitors' perceptions of the real lives of others and its relationship with satisfaction. From the findings of the analysis, we provide the practical implications. We also discuss issues of sustainability arising from the trend of pursuing local life experiences in the travel industry.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

This study was motivated by the stylized fact of increasing public interest in local experience [2]. However, "local experience" is not an academically established term. It is not among the research keywords in tourism literature [15], either. This is perhaps because locality is instilled in every aspect of travel. Any travel entails local experience. Then, the issue in research is the authenticity of the local experience within the tourism context. For example, Taylor [16] pointed out the importance

of authenticity in the tourism context as a value driver. However, he also stated that a structured framework for delivering authenticity in a short encounter may fail to provide visitors with sufficient opportunity to make sincere contact with local communities. Investigating the issue of authenticity and commercialization in a long-term study, Cole [17] claimed that the commercialization of local identities led to negative consequences.

While authenticity has attracted scholarly attention, there has also been criticism for the lack of consensus on what the concept represents [18]. Past research has mostly explored the authenticity of staged toured objects, for example, historical or heritage theme parks. There has been little empirical research investigating the relationship between authenticity and satisfaction. Among the few, Pearce and Moscardo [19] examined a historic theme park experience and reported that perceived authenticity was an important factor in visitor satisfaction.

As for the daily life of local residents, tourism research has investigated, for example, the impact of tourism development on the life of local residents [20] or the implications of indigenous communities in rare cultural forms in tourism [21]. Visitors' involvement in the lives of local people have been examined in the specific tourism context such as volunteer tourism [22,23]. Urry [24] proposed the concept of the "tourist gaze", which refers to the way tourists see the surroundings and the locals in the destination. Maoz [25] posited the concept of mutual gaze, i.e., while the tourist gaze is directed towards the locals, locals also gaze at the visitors simultaneously. In particular, the tourist gaze is associated with the power, which is usually constructed by Western society upon the locals in Third World countries [25].

So far, however, there has been little empirical research about the daily lives of local people as a tourism subject in the general tourism context without assuming any specific types of tourism or asymmetry in the power between the host and guest relationship. Nonetheless, such a motivation has been recognized in literature. MacCannell [9,26] noted that travelers have desire to observe and experience the routine life as it is really lived in the host community although they find it difficult to achieve this goal. In his view, people are alienated from their own inauthentic and shallow world. Thus, they have a fascination for the real life of others and therefore seek authenticity elsewhere, in other times and places. From this perspective, travel is a quest for the true self.

On the other hand, the contact hypothesis [14] asserts that intercultural contact changes the attitudes and behavior of groups and individuals more favorably. However, the hypothesis also points out that contact itself may not guarantee positive changes and that there are essential conditions for favorable changes, i.e., (i) equal status between the groups within the contact situation; (ii) the shared pursuit of common goals; (iii) the perception of common interests; and (iv) institutional support for the contact. Pettigrew [27] added the friendship potential as an additional condition. Despite expectations regarding the role of tourism in promoting contacts and thereby enhancing intercultural understanding, Amir and Ben-Ari [28] argued that intergroup contact between the host and tourists was not likely to bring about positive changes in attitude due to the commercial, contrived, or even exploitative nature of tourism [29]. Superficial contact experiences that are personally unimportant (i.e., that have no value in themselves and are not instrumental in reaching a valued goal) will not lead to an improvement in intergroup relations [27,30].

In this study, we chose a bazaar with strong cultural and local identities. As a marketplace, buyers and sellers meet in order to carry out mutually beneficial transactions. Furthermore, the sellers in the focal sites have been reported as not being pushy towards tourists. Thus, under this environment, adopting the contact hypothesis, we expected that the recognition of real life at the focal destination was positively associated with a favorable evaluation of the site. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis: that the recognition of the lives of local residents is positively associated with visitor satisfaction.

### 3. Sample and Data

For the study site, the Grand Bazaar in Tehran was selected for the following considerations. First, as it is currently ranked in seventh place out of over 150 attractions in Tehran on Tripadvisor,

the Bazaar is known among tourists. Thus, reviews written by international visitors are available for analysis. Second, more importantly, the Bazaar is primarily a market for local citizens rather than as a tourist-oriented shopping attraction. Thus, visitors can observe the daily lives of the local people.

In addition, the Bazaar has strong cultural characteristics. For example, haggling is a common practice at the Bazaar. While this traditional way of price negotiation between the buyer and the seller is not rare in Middle Eastern bazaars, merchants at the Tehran Bazaar are described as not pushy in general [31]. Thus, when visitors interact with the sellers, the relationship between the buyer and the seller is expected to be more equal. In the contact hypothesis, an equal status between the groups involved in the contact situation is one of the conditions underlying positive changes. Other conditions, such as the shared pursuit of a common goal, the perception of common interests, and institutional support for the contact is well-suited for the market mechanism of the Bazaar. Thus, overall, the site is expected to serve as a suitable spot where visitors can experience local culture. For these reasons, the Grand Bazaar was chosen for this study.

One of the purposes of this study was to investigate whether the visitors recognized the real life of the local people. Instead of the survey method, we chose to use the travelers' voluntary review texts. As local encounters cannot be ruled out in any travel, it is possible that respondents, when asked in a retrospective questionnaire, may over-report their encounters with the local people. To avoid possible recall bias, this study utilized online reviews to investigate whether and how people recalled their experience in a more natural setting.

Thus, the data for this study was collected from Tripadvisor, a consumer review site, in May 2017. We collected the overall evaluation scores, the reviewers' nationalities, the number of Tripadvisor reviews contributed by the reviewer, and the review text. Since this study focuses on the perspectives of international visitors, the reviewers' countries were checked and the reviews written by Iranian nationals were excluded from the sample. The final sample included 229 reviews.

Table 1 provides a description of the sample. The majority of reviewers were from Europe, followed by the Asia Pacific. Although Iran has a rich historical and cultural heritage, the tourism industry has been limited due to economic sanctions. Since those sanctions were lifted in 2015, the country has been striving to boost its tourism industry. For the sample, reviews were selected from 2015 onwards. In the final sample, 24% of the reviews were written in 2015, 46.3% in 2016, and 14.8% in 2017 (up to May). Tripadvisor also reports the number of reviews by each reviewer. On average, the reviewers in our sample contributed 110 reviews to Tripadvisor, suggesting that they are quite experienced travelers. For this sample, the average evaluation score for the Tehran Bazaar was 4.09.

**Table 1.** Sample description.

Total Number of Reviews	N = 229	Reviewers' Countries of Origin	Proportion
Review Years	Proportion	Europe	45.4%
2015	24%	Asia Pacific	16.6%
2016	46.3%	North America	8.7%
2017	14.8%	Others	29.3%
Reviewers' average number of reviews	110	Average evaluation score	4.09

#### 4. Analyses

This study utilized the text analysis technique and regression analysis. For the text analysis, first, content analysis was performed. The purpose of the content analysis was to investigate how local experiences, especially encounters with local life, were recognized and perceived by international visitors. In order to uncover the relationship between the local encounter and the emotive expressions of the visitors, this study used the association rule learning technique [32]. The association rule is

an expression of  $X \Rightarrow Y$ , where  $X$  and  $Y$  are sets of items, which means that when the items in  $X$  have value true, also the items in  $Y$  tend to have value true [33].

The technical details of the association rule learning method are available in Versichele et al. [12]. The quantitative analysis was concerned with the relationship between visitor satisfaction and the expression of local experiences in the review. An ordered logit model was employed given that the satisfaction score is an ordered discrete variable.

#### 4.1. Text Analysis

The purpose of text analysis was to uncover how international visitors recognized lives of local people in the host community. In the sample, 26% of the reviews commented on how they observed local life. For example, reviewers described the site as a place where people could see the “real” “life of everyday people in Tehran”. Reviewers reported that they “enjoyed” just watching “a genuine slice of life”, or focused on “the thousands of porters” and the trolleys at the Bazaar. These reviews suggest that the local life experience encompassed not only direct interactions with local people, but also included indirect encounters through observation.

With respect to more direct involvement with the local residents, bargaining or haggling was most frequently found in the reviews. Comments such as “If you want to buy something do not forget to bargain”; “Yes, definitely bargain”; or “Make sure you know how to negotiate and compare prices in multiple places” imply that the reviewers experienced the practice of haggling. Direct encounters also occurred in the restaurants. Someone wrote that s/he loved sitting with lots of strangers at the same table in a restaurant. A reviewer strongly recommended the Bazaar, saying that “it’s a must-see to experience an integral part of Middle Eastern life”.

As for the positive affective feelings, those towards the local people, e.g., kindness, friendliness, warmth, and welcome, were found in 19 reviews. Of the adjectives used for people and place alike, “good”, “great”, and “nice” were found in 55 reviews collectively (24%). The most frequently found single adjective, however, was “crowded” (31 reviews, 13.5%), reflecting the characteristics of the Bazaar. As for nouns, given that the site is a market, the “variety” (20 reviews, 8.7%) of goods available, “shops” (30 reviews, 13.1%), and “labyrinth”, “alleys”, and “streets” collectively (29 reviews, 12.7%) were among the most commonly found terms.

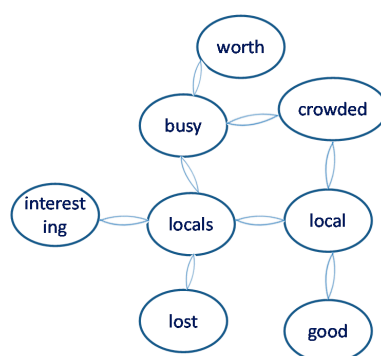
Several reviewers compared this bazaar to other bazaars in Iran or in other Middle East regions. Not all of the reviews were positive regarding the study site. Although few in number, there were reviews commenting that the area was dirty and visitors should be careful regarding pickpockets. The review texts also revealed interesting myths that international visitors may have had about the local culture. Several reviewers expressed their disappointment about the cheap Chinese goods found in the Bazaar. In a globalized economy, Chinese goods are likely to be found in any marketplace in the world. However, visitors may have a priori images of the destination and people [25]. The comments about Chinese goods provide important clues about how visitors perceive a certain experience as being local, namely, it should be specifically unique to the focal destination. “Local experience” from a tourist’s perspective may not mean the actual way of life in the host community. For instance, consider a McDonald’s restaurant in Europe or a Starbucks café in Asia. As these brands did not originate in the host region, the sites per se may not be perceived as local. Nonetheless, these places may actually be closely attached to the life of the local people. Sitting in one of these chain restaurants surrounded by local people is likely to be perceived as a local experience. Furthermore, if these global chain restaurants serve a specific menu that is only available in the focal area, we contend that visitors will perceive it as a local experience. This point is in contrast to the experience at cultural heritage sites. While some sites are visited by both locals and visitors, others are mostly filled with tourists. In the latter case, although the heritage site itself is unique, genuine, and non-replicable, it will be difficult for a tourist to observe or be involved with local life.

Furthermore, the review texts suggest that visitors may have a broadly defined sense of culture. For instance, haggling, which is a practice not unique to Iran and some visitors actually compared the

Iranian practice with practices in Egypt or Turkey, was not associated with any negative connotation of inauthenticity. We presume that this was because haggling is a shared tradition in Middle Eastern culture.

To investigate how local encounters related to the feelings of the reviewers, we applied the association analysis to a subsample of 72 reviews that contained descriptions of the local encounters. Prior to running the analysis, data cleaning was performed. For example, “Iranians”, “Iranian people”, and “local people” were transformed into “locals”. Similarly, “Iranian”, in the context of the Iranian way, Iranian food, and so on, was transformed into “local”.

Using the text analysis package of R, we analyzed how locals were associated with other adjectives. As stated by Versichele et al. [12], a 0.05 threshold level was used for both the support and confidence. Figure 1 shows the results where the locals were linked most closely with the terms lost, interesting, busy, and local. The association between lost and locals was drawn in the context where many reviewers denoted that “when you get lost, then you should ask local people who will guide your way”. The adjective local was found to be linked with locals, crowded, and good. Overall, for the focal site, the local and locals were directly and indirectly associated with favorable emotions, such as good, interesting, and worthwhile.



**Figure 1.** Association of locals.

#### 4.2. Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis investigated the relationship between local life encounters and satisfaction. From the qualitative analysis, we found that the local life encounter encompassed both direct and indirect involvements with the local people. Specifically, a variable, Life, was constructed by the number of comments that described the local people and life (e.g., local people being friendly and helpful, and the local way of life) in each review.

For satisfaction, which was the dependent variable, an overall evaluation score was used as a proxy variable. In the online review platform, the overall evaluation rating score is regarded as a comprehensive metric of customer satisfaction [34].

Since there are other factors that are known to influence customer satisfaction, additional control variables were included in the model. First, the study site is primarily a marketplace. It has been reported that tourist shopping behaviors are motivated by utilitarian and hedonic values [35], both of which are found to affect satisfaction [36]. The utilitarian value represents whether the consumer acquired the intended goods and services purposefully and efficiently, while the hedonic value refers to the enjoyment and pleasure that consumers may receive from shopping [37]. Utilitarian values are related to the variety of items in the marketplace and competitive prices, which are among the known features of the Bazaar. The visitors who recognized these transaction-related utilitarian values were also likely to comment on them in their reviews. Thus, we constructed the variable Transaction by measuring the number of transaction-related comments such as price, variety of items (e.g., listing the items sold in the market such as carpets, nuts, spices, and jewelry, or mentioning that “everything or anything is available in the market”), and haggling in the review. Compared to the utilitarian value,

the hedonic value of visiting the market is abstract and subjective [38]. Thus, hedonic values were evaluated by emotional criterion, i.e., whether the shopping experience was enjoyable, exciting, fun, interesting, or adventurous [35]. As such, another variable, *Feelings*, was constructed by counting the emotive expressions in the review.

Second, travelers also visit places to consume the atmosphere provided by the destination [39]. In our sample reviews, the Bazaar was described as vibrant, colorful, crowded, chaotic, and busy. In addition to shopping activities, a unique on-site atmosphere plays an important role in attracting tourists into the market [40]. Thus, another control variable, *Atmosphere*, measured the number of atmosphere-related descriptions (vibrant, chaotic, colorful, busy, crowded, noisy, and unique) in each review.

Third, cultural heritage is an important factor that shapes many tourist experiences [41]. Although our study site is primarily a marketplace, there were reviews that commented on mosques and palaces in the vicinity. The architectural characteristics of the Bazaar were also mentioned. The reviewers' recognition of cultural heritage meant that the visitors appreciated the cultural heritage value. Thus, the comments on the cultural heritage were expected to be positively associated with the visitors' satisfaction for the focal site.

Fourth, the physical environment where the encounter takes place plays a significant role in the consumer's experience [42]. Since the Bazaar is the largest in Iran, its physical attributes were described with terms such as huge, labyrinth, alleys, and streets. Thus, the number of expressions relating to the physical attributes was measured and labeled as a variable, *Environment*.

Fifth, the number of comments related to the risks at the focal destination was included in the model as an additional control variable. In previous studies, risk factors considered in travel decision-making process have been identified as diseases, crime, natural disasters, accidents, lack of hygiene, danger related to transportation, culture/language barriers, and uncertainty about the destination-specific regulation of laws [43]. Not all of these factors were related to the current study site, and these factors were investigated in the context of the decision-making stage rather than the actual visiting stage. In this study, we constructed a variable *Risk* by identifying the risk-related expressions relevant to the focal site, specifically regarding crime (e.g., pickpockets) and hygiene (e.g., the place being dirty). Considering the site characteristics, we also included the negative emotional expressions. "Too crowded" and "too noisy" were among the examples. While the site being crowded or noisy was counted toward *Atmosphere*, "too crowded" and "too noisy" were separately counted for *Risk*. Specific to the traditional market, we constructed transaction-related variables in terms of value properties, i.e., utilitarian (*Transaction*) and hedonic (*Feeling*) values. However, the possibility of purchasing fake goods or non-authentic items can also be perceived as a risk. Thus, these expressions were also counted toward the *Risk* variable.

Finally, we included past travel experience in the model by including the number of reviews. A visitor's past travel experience can affect the normative standard on the focal destination, which can affect the post-visit evaluation [44]. In order to mitigate the scale problem, we used the natural log of the number of reviews. Table 2 summarizes the list of variables and their description. The final ordered logit model is described in Equation (1) as below:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Satisfaction} = & \alpha + \beta_1 \times \text{Life} + \beta_2 \times \text{Transaction} + \beta_3 \times \text{Feeling} + \beta_4 \times \text{Atmosphere} \\ & + \beta_5 \times \text{Culture} + \beta_7 \times \text{Environment} + \beta_8 \times \text{Risk} + \beta_9 \times \text{Experience}, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

In Tripadvisor, the overall satisfaction is reported in the five-point Likert scale of excellent, very good, average, poor, and terrible. Thus, the dependent variable in Equation (1) is discrete and ordinal. The traditional linear regression model assumes that the variables are measured on a continuous scale. Thus, it is not appropriate for discrete ordinal choice modeling. Therefore, an ordered logit model was employed for the quantitative analysis [45]. An ordered logistic regression model estimates the probability of a random variable falling within the ranges determined by cutting points, which are represented by the five discrete satisfaction score in the present analysis [46].

**Table 2.** Variables.

Variable Name	Description	Literature
Satisfaction	Customer's overall rating score for the focal destination	Radojevic et al. [34]
Life	Number of comments that describe the direct and indirect encounters with local life (e.g., comments about the local way of life, haggling, no pressure to buy, encounters with local people, and local people being friendly, welcoming, nice, and so on) in each review	Allport [14]
Transaction	Number of expressions related to the transaction features of the Bazaar (e.g., price, variety of items, list of items, and haggling)	Yüksel [35]
Feeling	Number of emotive expressions in the review	Yüksel [35]
Atmosphere	Number of expressions that describe the atmosphere of the place (e.g., vibrant, colorful, crowded, unique, busy) in each review	Echtner and Ritchie [39]
Culture	Number of expressions related to the cultural heritage aspects (e.g., mosque, palace, history, architecture, traditional, and old) in each review	Prentice [41]
Environment	Number of expressions that describe the place's physical attributes (e.g., huge, labyrinth, and alleys) in each review	Bitner [42]
Risk	Number of expressions related to risk of visiting the Bazaar (e.g., pickpockets, too crowded, dirty, not authentic products, and so on) in each review data	Maser and Weiermair [43]
Experience	Natural log of the number of reviews written by the reviewer	Mazursky [44]

Table 3 illustrates the results of the ordered logit regression. The table shows both the estimated coefficients and the odds ratios. The main independent variable, Life, indicated a significantly positive coefficient at a 5% significance level. The odd ratio of 1.72 meant that for a one unit increase in Life, the odds of satisfaction score of five versus the rest of the satisfaction scores combined were 1.72 times greater, given that the other variables were held constant. Supporting the contact hypothesis, while other known factors were controlled, the recognition of local life did enhance visitor satisfaction.

**Table 3.** Results of ordered logit regression model.

Variables	Coefficient	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
Life	0.54 **	1.72	0.24
Transaction	0.12	1.13	0.27
Feeling	0.26	1.30	0.28
Culture	0.88 ***	2.41	0.24
Environment	0.37 **	1.44	0.18
Atmosphere	−0.17	0.84	0.21
Risk	−0.86 ***	0.42	0.33
Experience	−0.41 ***	0.67	0.10

Chi-squared (8) = 47.57 \*\*\*; Pseudo R-squared = 0.0842

\*\*\*, \*\*, \* refer to significance at 1%, 5%, and 10%, respectively.

Although the site is a marketplace, both Transaction and Feeling, which capture the utilitarian and hedonic values of shopping, showed insignificant results. According to the three-stage model of service consumption [47], consumers go through the pre-purchase stage, the service encounter stage, and the post-encounter stage; and at each stage, different factors may be at play. The transaction-related factors may affect the consumers' decision to visit the Bazaar. However, once the decision is made and while visitors experience the Bazaar, the utilitarian and hedonic attributes may not directly increase satisfaction. Combining the result of Risk, which was significantly negative, the findings in this study may be consistent with the two-factor theory of satisfaction [48]. After the decision is made, in the experience phase, the transaction-related factors may not increase satisfaction while a lack of such factors, which are partly captured by Risk in this study (i.e., fake or non-authentic local items), can cause dissatisfaction. The same argument goes to Atmosphere, which was also insignificant.

On the other hand, Culture displayed the largest significant coefficient. Another control variable, Environment, also showed a significant positive association with satisfaction. Unexpectedly, past travel experience (Experience) displayed a negative significant relationship with the overall satisfaction score.



This result suggests that accumulated and potentially diverse past experiences does not mean a more positive overall evaluation toward the focal destination.

## 5. Discussion

The purpose of this paper was twofold: to explore how visitors recognize and perceive the life of the local people; and to investigate the relationship between the recognition of local life and satisfaction. To achieve this goal, text analysis and ordered logit regression were performed. From the text analysis, we found that the perception of local life included both direct and indirect encounters with the local people. The text analysis revealed the further complexity of visitor perception on the authenticity of the life of others. Visitors may have a pre-defined image about the locality, which may not coincide with the true local identity. Local experience appeared to be affected by multiple factors: physical environment and social interaction, both separately and combined.

The quantitative analysis confirmed the positive impact of recognizing the local way of life on the visitor satisfaction. As long as the site was safe to navigate, it appears that travelers are willing to participate in the life of the local people. It is true that the time spent in the Bazaar was limited and the experience may have been shallow, as overseas travel experiences are often described with a negative insinuation. However, given the distinctively extraordinary nature of travel, which is distinguished from one's daily routine, even a short encounter with local life may lead to deeper and more lasting impacts than presumed. Furthermore, technological advances have greatly facilitated the storage and retrieval of travel experiences. People can now record their experiences visually and narratively on their blogs, Instagram, Facebook, or review websites like Tripadvisor.com. Many people use their mobile devices for taking pictures, which can be retrieved at any time. Thus, this so-called experience extension [49] may help visitors extend their memory and more fully appreciate their experiences including their local encounters. It should also be noted that any perceived risk factors, which should accompany a visitor's local experience to a certain degree, from a minor form of inconvenience to a more serious danger, do negatively affect visitor satisfaction.

These results provide practical implications for local communities who want to invite overseas visitors to come. Given that the real-life encounter increases visitor satisfaction, it is likely that the pursuit of real life may continue and expand. For tourism development, it will be important to maintain authentic local characteristics and avoid too much commodification. Instead of focusing on tourist-specific attractions, places that are balanced to serve both tourists and the local residents can provide a greater appeal to visitors. Additionally, the analysis showed that cultural heritage is a major factor for satisfaction. Thus, the local life encounter can be combined and supplemented by the cultural heritage sites or any historical story-telling.

Perhaps one of the most interesting additional findings from the ordered logit regression was the negative and significant coefficient of past experience on satisfaction. Theories such as the information integration theory and the protection motivation theory predict that travelers choose or avoid specific destinations by evaluating the types of risks associated with their past travel experiences to similar regions [50]. Thus, the results suggest that experienced reviewers had information on the known risks and still chose a certain destination, but more experience tended to be associated with less satisfaction. This result raises a very critical point about travel that pursues local experience. As many tourists want to explore the previously non-tourist-specific areas, their experiences at one location may lead to another local experience on their next trip. However, as their experiences accumulate, travelers may become more critical about the local culture. For instance, instead of accepting the localities as they are, they may compare a certain local practice to another. From the local residents' perspective, over-tourism is becoming a social issue in many places. That is, too many visitors degrade the quality of life in the area to an unacceptable degree [51]. As many visitors go to the residential areas, it may push real estate prices up and cause additional social costs. Local residents may feel annoyed if they find a group of tourists suddenly coming and going or having parties in their quiet neighborhood. Thus, the findings of this study suggest a potential for conflict between the visitors

and local residents. Without proper resolutions for this issue, the sustainability of the tourism model of living like a local is questionable. While it is a virtue in any society to be hospitable to visitors, too many visitors who may disturb the residents' lives will certainly not be welcomed. The policy makers should also seriously consider how to balance the quality of life of both the local residents as well as the tourists in terms of providing local experiences.

## 6. Limitations and Future Research

Although this research was carefully designed, there are limitations as well. This paper was exploratory in nature and investigated only one sample site. Thus, the results may have suffered from the selection bias. Extant literature has categorized travelers into five groups: the recreational, the diversionary, the experiential, the experimental, and the existential [52]. Specific types of visitors among these categories may be more inclined to visit the marketplace. Then, it is possible that the findings of this study may be specific only for the focal site and not for others. For future research, more reviews from diverse sites will verify the generalizability of the results found in this study.

In spite of the benefits, the online review data have their own shortcomings. Not all visitors use Tripadvisor; there have been issues of fake reviews on the online platform [53]. Thus, we cannot completely rule out the possible bias.

For future research, more formal qualitative research can be conducted. There are various qualitative approaches that consider travel experience as lived experience. For example, phenomenological approach, which is designed to discover the common meanings underlying a given phenomenon, can be applied [54].

This study investigated how travelers perceive local life. One related research question is: Why do people feel more satisfied when they recognize how local people live their lives? This issue is related to the motivations underlying a traveler's interests in the local way of life. The local experience may fit into novelty-seeking behavior [55] in tourism. In addition to popular and known sites, travelers may want to have an adventure in more hidden and the less explored spots. Alternatively, there may be other deeper ontological perspectives. In this regard, the extant literature is limited, but MacCannell [9,24] did touch on this issue, claiming that travel is a means for people to recover or discover the authentic self. Is this claim valid to, for instance, the Millennials, who are known to be hyper-individual yet digitally inter-connected [56]? Another direction for research is a longitudinal study for the sample site. Re-tests of the model over time will verify whether seeking for local life is more fundamental than fad. Future research will provide additional insights regarding these points.

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