

Research Article

Exploring Factors Affecting Museum Experience: A Study on A “Hidden Gem” in Istanbul

Müze Deneyimini Etkileyen Faktörlerin İncelenmesi İstanbul'daki “Gizli Hazine” Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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Abstract

Museum experience has become an important recreational activity in today's society. This study aims to identify the factors influencing service quality and visitor experience at the Great Palace Mosaic Museum. To achieve this objective, the netnographic method was employed. A total of 379 English-language reviews posted on the TripAdvisor website by visitors to the Great Palace Mosaic Museum were examined with content analysis. First, line-by-line coding was performed, and then themes were identified using the resulting codes. The results of the study revealed that visitors' perceptions of service quality were categorized under tangibles, communication, responsiveness, consumables, and empathy, while the factors influencing the visitors experience were grouped under post-experience evaluations, emotions, cognitive, flow, and memorability. Among the service quality components, tangibles was found to be the most prominent, whereas empathy was the least frequently mentioned dimension. In the findings regarding visitor experiences, post-experience evaluations and cognitive dimensions emerged as the most prominent dimensions. Flow and memorability were identified as factors arising within the museum experience. Present study is one of the first studies to examine visitors' perceptions of service quality and their overall experience at a museum that focuses exclusively on mosaics. This study contributes to the understanding of visitor experience and their service quality perception in museums.

Keywords: Service quality, museum, museum experience, visitor experience, mosaic museum,

Öz

Müze deneyimleri günümüz toplumu için önemli bir rekreasyonel faaliyet haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışmada Büyük Saray Mozaikleri Müzesi ziyaretçilerinin hizmet kalitesi algılarını ve ziyaretçi deneyimlerini etkileyen faktörleri ortaya çıkarmak amaçlanmaktadır. Bu amacı gerçekleştirmek için netnografi yöntemine başvurulmuştur. Büyük Saray Mozaikleri Müzesini gezen ziyaretçilerin TripAdvisor web sitesine yükledikleri, İngilizce dilinde yazılan, 379 yorum araştırma kapsamında içerik analizi ile incelenmiştir. Öncelikle, satır satır kodlama ile kodlar elde edilmiş sonrasında ise elde edilen kodlar ile temalar oluşturulmuştur. Araştırma bulgularına göre ziyaretçilerin hizmet kalitesi algılarının fiziksel özellikler, iletişim, heveslilik, tüketilenler ve empati, temaları altında toplandığı, ziyaretçi deneyimini etkileyen faktörlerin ise, deneyim sonrası değerlendirmeler, duygular, bilişsel, akış ve

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hatırlanabilirlik temaları altında toplandığı tespit edilmiştir. Hizmet kalitesi bileşenlerinden en çok fiziksel özelliklerin ön plana çıktığı buna karşılık en az değinilen boyutun ise empati olduğu belirlenmiştir. Ziyaretçi deneyimine ilişkin bulgulara ise deneyim sonrası değerlendirmeler ve bilişsel boyutların ön plana çıktığı tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma bulgularında akış deneyimi ve hatırlanabilir deneyimin müze ziyaretinin temel bileşenleri arasında olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Mevcut çalışma mozaik müzesinde, ziyaretçilerinin hizmet kalitesi algılarını ve ziyaretçi deneyimlerini inceleyen ilk çalışmalardan biridir. Bu çalışma ile, müze ziyaretçilerinin deneyimlerinin ve hizmet kalitesi algılarının anlaşılmasına katkı sağlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hizmet kalitesi, müze, müze deneyimi, ziyaretçi deneyimi, mozaik müzesi

1. Introduction

Museum visits have grown in popularity over the past few decades and have become a recreational activity in contemporary society. It is estimated that more than a billion people visit a museum every year (Falk and Dierking, 2016). The number of museums which was 22.000 in 1975 has increased to approximately 104.000 in 2021 (UNESCO, 2021). The almost fivefold increase in the number of museums demonstrates that supply in this area has grown significantly in order to meet the demand.

The popularity of museum experience could be used to make museums support the creative economy at the local and regional level (UNESCO, 2021). Although museums are not profit-oriented, museum visitors' spendings benefits local communities by increasing tax revenues and improving employment (Piekkola, Suojanen & Vainio, 2014). Museums provide significant economic benefits to the regions they are located in, especially in tourist destinations by creating additional jobs and commercial revenues (Frey & Meier, 2006). According to Sheppard (2013) museums can increase public benefits and improve quality of life. It is suggested that museums can ensure economic sustainability of both their own institutions and the city (Westervelt, 2010). Further, museums can generate greater benefits if they are perceived as contributors to the city's economic health and integrated in the urban development strategies (Westervelt, 2010).

In order to effectively manage the positive effects of museums mentioned above it is necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of service quality and visitors' experience in museums. Several approaches have been adopted in previous literature to examine museum service quality. Several studies applied SERVQUAL (Parasuman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988) to the museum settings (Kowalska & Ostrega, 2020; Nowaski, 2005). Several other studies attempted to study service quality in the museums with the help of HISTQUAL which is an adaptation of SERVEQUAL to the historical places and museums developed by Frochot and Hughes (2000). Also, MUSEQUAL scale was developed by Hsieh (2010) and Hsieh et al., (2015) to be used in museum experience context. These are all valuable quantitative empirical studies to understand visitors service quality perceptions in museum context. However limited number of studies tried to explore service quality perceptions in the context of museum experience with netnographic method. This study aims to fill this gap by examining visitors' evaluations posted on an online platform.

Museums are not merely places where objects are preserved and displayed (UNESCO, 2021). Museum experience does not only cover the time spent entering and exiting the museum. It starts from the first moment an individual has the idea to go to and continues long after the visit with the recollection of the memories (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Museum experiences are reported to enhance psychological well-being of visitors and other stakeholders (Sveb, Dragija & Jelincic, 2022). Museum experiences also have educational aspects. Visitors' understanding and appreciation of cultural, historical, and scientific context are enhanced through museum education (Todino & Campitiello, 2025). The museum experience is even considered to be a factor that can lead individuals to self-actualization (Raajpoot, Koh & Jackson, 2010). From this perspective, museum visits can be said to be not only an economic activity but also a transformative experience. Thus, museum experience is an important activity that affects an individual's personal development.

There are several studies focusing on museums in terms of service quality and museum experience using quantitative and qualitative methods (e.g. Yilmaz, 2011; Güneş et al., 2019; İlhan et al., 2020). Several studies have examined museum experience in different museums such as experience museums (Kunt, 2025), museums for children (Bozkurt, 2023), archeology museum (Uzun, 2023) using netnography. However, in depth examination of factors affecting service quality and museum experience through

visitors' own narratives in the context of mosaic museums is limited. The purpose of this study is twofold. First as mentioned above this study aims to explore the factors affecting visitors service quality perceptions. Second, present study explores the factors affecting visitor experience through visitor reviews. Furthermore, this study is also one the first to examine the service quality perceptions and the visitor experience in a museum dedicated solely to mosaics. In light of these views, the following research question has been formulated.

What are the factors affecting service quality perceptions and visitor experience at the Great Palace Mosaic Museum?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Museum Experience

The purposes for which museums were founded reflect a range of reasons. Initially established to display cultural heritage, museums have, over time, come to be used in various fields and for various purposes. An archeological museum exhibits artifacts uncovered during archeological excavations. These artifacts can be tools and objects of life in past civilizations. For instance, among the artifacts from the Urartu civilization, scenes of “funeral feasts” engraved on metal objects provide us with important insights into the cult of the dead, burial customs, and, consequently, the belief system (Ayman, 2005).

The number of the museums in Türkiye was 171 in 2001. By 2025, the number of museums has rapidly increased to a total of 636, comprising 217 museums affiliated to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 18 affiliated with the national palaces, and 401 privately owned museums (TUIK, 2026a). Among these museums just as there are general-purpose museums, there are also museums that focus on a wide variety of fields. While ethnographic museums showcase cultural elements of a society's daily life, culinary museums are spaces where items used in the kitchens in the past are displayed. Science and technology museums are venues that showcase scientific instruments, machines and technological advancements, whereas modern art museums are spaces that feature exhibitions related to art created in recent history. Today, museums are also opened in very specific fields, for example, the Kars Cheese Museum in Kars, famous for its various cheeses, which explains cheese-making, or the Oleatrium Museum, themed around olives and olive oil. Over 61 million visitors have visited museums in Türkiye in 2025 (TUIK, 2026b).

As museum visits have become increasingly popular, studies have been conducted to better understand the museum visitor experiences. Visitor experience is defined as “an individual's immediate or ongoing, subjective and personal response to an activity, setting or event outside of their usual environment.” (Packer & Ballantyne, 2016). The authors also note that the visitor experience is subjective, influenced by environment, limited to time and place, and of primary importance to the visitors. Radder and Han (2015), examined the visitor experiences to three South African museums based on Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four experience realms. They identified three experience dimensions namely edutainment, escapism and aesthetics. Kirchberg and Tröndle (2015), investigated the experience of fine art museum visitors and classified their experience in three kinds of experience which are contemplative, the enthusing, and, the social experience. A multifaceted model for visitor experiences was suggested by Packer and Ballantyne (2016). The suggested model consists of ten facets namely physical, sensory, restorative, introspective, hedonic, emotional, relational, spiritual and cognitive experiences.

2.2. Service Quality

Service quality is defined as “...the overall level of excellence and satisfaction experience by a customer when interacting with a service provider.” (The Marketing Dictionary, n.d.). Parasuraman et al. (1985;1988) developed the SERVQUAL model which is one of the most widely used models for measuring service quality. This approach is based on identifying the difference between customer expectations and performance perceptions. This initial model consisted of five dimensions namely tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. SERVQUAL has been popularly used in different areas such as restaurants (Silwal, 2025), hotels (Sharma & Srivastaya, 2018; Gangananda et al., 2022), and airlines (Aydın & Yıldırım, 2012).

SERVPERF, developed by Cronin and Taylor (1992), is another model to evaluate service quality. While SERVQUAL is based on the gap between expectations and performances SERVEPERF is based

on performances. Jain and Gupta (2004) notes that, in addition to being psychometrically reliable, scales designed to assess service quality must also include features that indicate service deficiencies to management so that they can take actions to address these deficiencies. They recommend using SERVPERF over SERVQUAL while determining a firm's overall service quality and for making quality comparisons between different industries. Brady et al (2002), also studied to compare both models and reported the superiority of performance only approach in measuring service quality.

The studies aimed at measuring service quality in most of the service industry utilized both performance only approach and a gap-based approach. However, it was realized by researchers that service quality is affected by the context. That is when Frochot and Hughes (2000) developed a scale to measure service quality context specific to historical houses. The authors argued that although SERVQUAL is a useful tool to measure service quality it should be adapted to different services. They adapted SERVQUAL and developed HISTQUAL specific to heritage sites to help managers identify service quality issues. HISTQUAL consisted of five dimensions namely empathy, communication, consumables, responsiveness, and tangibles. This scale later was used to measure service quality in several areas including museums. For example, Markovic et al. (2013), used a modified HISTQUAL scale to explore visitor's expectations and perceptions of service quality in Krapina Neanderthal Museum in Croatia. Chae (2026), added attractiveness to the HISTQUAL's dimensions to better capture service quality perceptions of visitors.

MUSEQUAL was adapted from SERVQUAL by Allen (2001, as cited in Hsieh et al., 2015) and consisted of five dimensions namely tangibles, responsiveness, awareness, communication and consumables specifically designed for heritage tourists service experience and satisfaction for museums. Later Hsieh et al. (2015) adapted a new measurement scale to assess service quality perceptions based on HITOQUAL and MUSEQUAL. This scale also consisted of five dimensions namely tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, communication and consumables. This scale was utilized by Sert and Karacaoğlu (2018) to measure service quality perceptions of visitors to Anatolian Civilizations Museum. The five dimensions of MUSEQUAL was confirmed. This scale was also used by Göktaş and Ülkü (2021) to measure service quality in Şanlıurfa Archeology and Mosaic Museum and the five-dimensional structure was confirmed.

Since museums constitute one of the major components of cultural tourism, they are facing intense competition (Hsieh, 2010). Studies on visitor motivations, perceptions of service quality, and satisfaction help museum administrators identify the museum's weaknesses and develop strategies to address them (Hsieh 2010). That is why a comprehensive understanding of service quality and visitor experience becomes viable.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors affecting service quality and visitors' experiences in museums. The Great Palace Mosaic Museum was chosen as the study site due to its historical importance. The Great Palace Mosaic Museum was established following the excavation of the partially preserved mosaic floor in the northeastern section of the arcaded courtyard of the Great Palace dating back to the Byzantine period (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, n.d.). Dated to the reign of Justinian (525-565), the mosaics of the Great Palace are among the most magnificent landscape depictions to have survived from late antiquity to the present day (Erarslan, 2014).

A netnographic approach was adapted as a research design. Kozinets (2002), positions netnography as online ethnography and defines the term as "... a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the cultures and communities that are emerging through computer-mediated communications." TripAdvisor has been chosen as a data resource since it is one of the most popular online platforms where many tourists gather information and share their experiences. TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel platform, operating in 49 markets and in 28 languages (TripAdvisor, n.d.).

The data required for the research were obtained from the TripAdvisor website in March 2026. The reviews were transferred to a Word document as-is. To ensure linguistic validity in the study only reviews written in English were included in the analysis. There were 381 reviews written in English under the Great Palace Mosaic Museum in the Tripadvisor. Two of these reviews were excluded because

they were posted during a period when the museum was closed and the reviewers did not see the museum. The study included 379 reviews. Since reviews published on Tripadvisor are publicly available, ethics committee approval was not required for this study.

3.1. Thematic Structure

Content analysis was used to reveal the codes from the text. First the researcher read the reviews to perform line by line coding. Then similar codes were grouped under the themes. In determining the themes, present study drew on the conceptualization in the literature (Frochot & Hughes, 2000; Parasuman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Hsieh (2010); Hsieh et al., 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Packer & Ballantyne, 2016); Kim et al., 2012; Dirsehan, 2012; Pekarik et al., 1999). The themes and their conceptualizations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Conceptualizations of the themes

Category	Theme	Conceptualization	Reference
Service Quality	Tangibles	“...the environment of the property.... general upkeep, cleanliness and authenticity of the property...the attractiveness of the grounds, the variety of plants and the interior of the house”	Frochot & Hughes, (2000)
	Communication	“...the quality and detail of the historical information provided.”	Frochot & Hughes, (2000)
	Responsiveness	“the staff efficiency and the properties' ability to recognise customer needs... the availability and willingness of the staff to welcome, help, inform and take time with visitors.”	Frochot & Hughes, (2000)
	Consumables	“the side services provided by the property such as the restaurant and shop.”	Frochot & Hughes, (2000)
	Empathy	“the willingness of the properties to take into consideration the needs of children and less able visitors.	Frochot & Hughes, (2000)
Museum Experience	Post-Experience	“Post experience dimensions include learning acquired in museums, customer satisfaction, repurchase intention, word-of-mouth recommendation and visit intensification.”	Dirsehan, (2012)
	Emotional	The expressions of affection people show toward their immediate environment.	Machleit & Eroglu (2000)
	Cognitive	“Gaining information or knowledge” and enriching understanding	Pekarik et al., (1999)
	Restorative	“Escape, relaxation, revitalization, rest, freedom, liberation, peace and comfort”	Packer & Ballantyne (2016)
	Flow	“The holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement”	Csikszentmihalyi, (1975)
	Memorable	“a tourism experience positively remembered and recalled after the event has occurred.”	Kim et al., (2012)

4. Findings and Discussion

There are 379 English reviews posted on Tripadvisor about the Great Palace Mosaic Museum between 2010 and 2025. Table 2 shows the frequency statistics of the reviews. The most reviews were posted in 2015, while no reviews were posted in 2024. When examining the ratings users gave for their museum

experiences, it is seen that the vast majority (82.3%) rated their experiences as “Excellent” or “Good” while 15 people rated them as “poor” and two as “terrible”. The overall average rating is 4.20, which indicates user overall satisfaction with the museum. It was found that users’ contribution counts on the TripAdvisor site among users ranged between 1 and 56,486.

Table 2. Frequency analysis

Year	n	%	Year	n	%
2010	2	0.5	2022	13	3.4
2011	7	1.8	2023	3	0.8
2012	18	4.7	2025	1	0.3
2013	62	16.4	Rating		
2014	63	16.6	1	2	0.5
2015	87	23.0	2	15	4.0
2016	36	9.5	3	50	13.2
2017	23	6.1	4	150	39.6
2018	26	6.9	5	162	42.7
2019	21	5.5	Number of contributions		
2020	13	3.4	Minimum	1	
2021	4	1.1	Maximum	56,489	

Following the frequency analysis, the researcher read the comments three times from beginning to end. Line-by-line coding was then conducted. During the line-by-line coding process, codes were identified. A total of 83 codes occurred 1073 times. After the coding process similar codes were grouped under themes. The themes identified are presented in Table 3. The resulting themes have been grouped under two main categories: service quality and museum experience.

Table 3. Service quality and visitor experiences

Category	Themes	n
Service Quality	Tangibles	243
	Communication	135
	Responsiveness	73
	Consumables	47
	Empathy	13
Museum Experience	Post-Experience evaluations	210
	Emotional	163
	Cognitive	123
	Restorative	27
	Flow	20
	Memorable	19

4.1. Museum Service Quality

4.1.1. Tangibles

The vast majority of visitors come to the museum specifically to see exhibitions and participate in museum-specific activities such as reading labels, watching videos, listening, observing, and interacting with exhibits (Falk & Dierking, 2016). The most frequently mentioned theme among the English-language reviews of the Great Palace Mosaic Museum was tangibles. Visitors addressed this theme in 243 reviews. Tangibles refer to the environment of the museum (Frochot & Hughes, 2000). This dimension covers the maintenance and cleanliness of the museum, along with the aesthetic appeal of the

grounds and interior of the museum (Frochot & Hughes, 2000). Some example quotations regarding the theme of tangibles are as follows.

“But those who choose to visit are treated to a stunning display of mosaics in the Grand Palace of Constantinople and other rulers of this fabulous city.” (R81)

“Once you find the museum, you will be rewarded with a splendid collection of mosaics, most in situ.” (R95)

“My wife and I weren't expecting much, but the museum is very well curated and the the very large mosaic floor from a Roman villa is in surprisingly good condition. There are lovely images of a young boy driving two geese, as well as a number of scenes of wild animals devouring other wild animals, plus some magical creatures like Gryphons.” (R165)

4.1.2. Communication

The quality of information about the objects presented in a museum is an important factor affecting service quality. The second most frequently mentioned theme was communication. The communication dimension covers written leaflets, adequacy of the information available, and foreign-language leaflets (Frochot & Hughes, 2000). Effectively conveying the historical context of the objects on display in a museum depends on the ability to engage and entertain visitors (Rentschler & Gilmore, 2002). This can be achieved in two ways: either through staff-visitor interaction or, more traditionally, by conveying information through text or visual aids that contextualize the exhibits (Rentschler & Gilmore, 2002). In the case of the Great Palace Mosaic Museum, it is evident from the reviews that communication is effectively conveyed through written and visual means. Staff are not mentioned as contributing to quality communication in the museum. Two reviewers even mentioned that no guide was needed to express the quality of information provided by text and visual means.

“ Extensive information is provided by a great number of posters attached to the walls: they specify the location where the mosaic were found, describe the work done for reclaiming and restoring them, and explain the contents of the mosaics; this information is provided in Turkish, German and English.” (R77)

“The history of this place is interesting and it's elaborated very well inside the museum so don't worry, you don't need a guide. But do spend some time to read what this place was once upon a time.” (R78)

“A part from the mosaics itself that are wonderful the museum explain to you everything in wonderful detail about where the mosaics come from, how they arrived here and, best of all, all the passages necessary for the restoration and conservation. An absolute gem and therefore unmissable.” (R177)

“The museum does an excellent job of describing and analyzing each surviving mosaic, with copious information posted in English throughout.” (R344)

4.1.3. Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the readiness of the staff and the property (Frochot & Hughes, 2001). According to HISTQUAL, staff should be helpful, willing to spend time with visitors, make them feel welcome, and be available when needed. In addition, the number of visitors in the museum at any given time should be low enough not to cause discomfort to visitors. The property should be organized in such a way that visitors can explore comfortably without any restrictions (Frochot & Hughes, 2001). Responsiveness is also evident in the reviews as it has been mentioned frequently (n=73). Essentially, very few comments regarding staff were found among the codes under the responsiveness theme. Instead, visitors primarily provided feedback about the crowds at the museum. Surprisingly, it was noted that despite being in a good location, the Great Palace Mosaic Museum is somewhat off the beaten path which results in low number of visitors at any given time. Below are some quoted texts from the reviews.

“The staff is composed of young and welcoming people. Enough English is spoken.” (R77)

“I was one of only two or three other people in the museum at the time, so it is definitely not crowded.” (R8)

"What is great is that it is not generally crowded so you are not battling with others to view the displays." (R142)

4.1.4. Consumables

In today's museology, in addition to the museum's primary purpose of exhibiting historical artifacts, works of art, etc., space is also allocated for various facilities and activities that visitors can enjoy, such as museum shops and cafeterias. These spaces also emerge as a factor in museum service quality and are referred to as consumables (Frochot & Hughes, 2000). Consumables emerged as a main theme in this study, encompassing not only museum shops but the museum admission fee. Consumables are mentioned in 47 reviews.

"There's an admission charge but you'll feel that you got good value for money and that you're helping to preserve these treasures for the future." (R350)

"The entrance fee is minimal, but the excavation work is superb." (RP317)

"The gift shop is worth exploring and there is an attractive illustrated book on sale for those that wish to augment their photos." (R179)

"Also i may to say, very nice souvenirs shop in exit of Museum. I bought some magnets with mosaics pictures...." (R285)

"It contains old mosaics from the Byzantine era, the museum itself is empty because it is almost hidden inside the arasta bazaar which is worth a visit as well." (R256)

4.1.5. Empathy

The least mentioned service quality factor was empathy. The empathy factor encompasses two aspects (Frochot and Hughes, 2000). The first concerns whether the museum is appropriately organized for visitors with disabilities. The second concerns whether the museum offers facilities tailored to young visitors. Below are selected quotes that reflect the theme of empathy.

"Small two-level museum showing some detailed mosaics which children with an artistic leaning would like." (R64)

"Be aware there is a ground floor and no elevator." (R137)

"...there is some stairs but nothing to laborious" (R310)

4.2. Museum Experience

4.2.1. Emotional experiences

Emotions are considered to be an important part of the museum experience (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Bastiaansen et al. (2019) sought to break down the experience into its core components in the field of hospitality, tourism, and leisure and proposed that emotions are the fundamental components of the experiences. In reality, visitors do not describe their museum experiences in a cold and emotionless way, instead, they incorporate their feelings, attitudes, and beliefs into their accounts (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Therefore, it can be said that experiences become vivid in memory with the help of emotions. In their study, Chiappa et al. (2014), found that visitors who have positive emotions perceive higher levels of attractiveness in the museum experience and are more satisfied. It was revealed that emotional experiences were one of the most frequently mentioned theme. Visitors often expressed admiration and gratitude.

"What a great little place, well worth a visit. The work and dedication involved in rescuing, conserving and then displaying these lovely mosaics is astonishing. Some beautiful and historically important mosaics." (R5)

"We were the only visitors early in the morning and loved the museum. The mosaics are brilliant. One of our favorite museum in Istanbul" (R376)

"I did like the detailed pictures shown of the restoration process. It makes one really appreciative of the hard work the archaeologists had to go through to preserve the mosaics." (R41)

4.2.2. Cognitive experiences

While emotions are important determinants of the museum experience, tourists' emotions are shaped by their cognitive evaluations of the environments they observe during their trips (Yang et al., 2023). Cognitive experiences, which cover acquiring new information and expanding one's understanding, are also important aspects of the experience museum visitors have during their visit (Pekarik et al., 1999). Museum visitors engage in a learning experience different from traditional methods, such as memorizing text from a book (Jeffery-Clay, 1998). There are several reasons why museums are ideal settings for providing a constructivist learning environment (Jeffery-Clay, 1998). First, museums allow visitors to move and explore freely, adapting to their own pace. Second, museums encourage visitors to interact and share with the group. Third, museums involve personal experiences with real objects, rather than simply memorizing text from a book. Finally, museums provide opportunities for visitors to explore and expand their cognition. That is why each visitor needs a different amount of time in museums. This theme is exemplified by the following quotes.

"Because both the technique used is very successful and there are important descriptions about daily life. It has been understood that the mosaics, which were unearthed in an area of approximately 200m2, were made of terracotta, limestone and various colored stones of different structures." (R23)

"We very much enjoyed this site because of the well presented examples of the Byzantine mosaic art and the glimpse it gave to the size and sophistication of the buildings. The museum is a set of elevated walkways 10-15 feet above what was once the floor of the palace. The mosaic floors were established not only to walk on but also as glittering works of art, with scenes of nature as well as gladiators and every day men and women in over 150 different depictions. I especially liked the scenes from mythology. Quite extraordinary and highly recommended!" (R126)

"As you walk through this museum, you can imagine how these mosaics appeared throughout the walkways and walls of the Palace. How splendid the Palace must have been! The many multilingual explanation blurbs throughout the museum will definitely guide your imagination and explain the archaeological process to recover these wonders." (R85)

4.2.3. Restorative experience

According to Attention Restoration Theory, prolonged mental effort leads to a condition known as directed attention fatigue (Kaplan et al., 1993). It has been suggested that museums may be one of the environments needed to alleviate this mental fatigue (Kaplan et al., 1993). Research conducted on visitors of a history museum, an art museum, an aquarium, and a botanic garden revealed that museums are restorative environments, much like natural environments (Packer & Bond, 2010). Restorative environments share five factors, namely being away, extent, fascination, compatibility, and esthetic (Chryslee, 1995). The following comments capture the essence of this theme.

"Beautiful pieces that you can enjoy in peace and quiet, well worth it if you are interested in archaeological sites ... A great place to escape from the throngs." (R272)

"I was really pleased not to have missed out on such a stunning sight from antiquity, but astonished by how quiet the place was (only one other person was wandering around when I visited)." (R231)

"The museum was quiet and provided a respite from the crowds we encountered at the Blue Mosque." (R208)

4.2.4. Flow experience

Flow experience is considered to be an important aspect of museum experiences. Aykol and Aksatan (2013), state that flow experience can be acquired during museum visits. Flow is defined as a mental state in which a person is completely focused on a single task at hand and does not think about anything unrelated to that task including life's problems (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Flow is "a state of consciousness that is experienced by individuals who are deeply involved in an enjoyable activity." (Kanagasapathy, 2017). According to Harvey et al. (1998), immersive design techniques in museums influence visitors' experiences, including their sense of immersion and psychological flow. Managers utilize flow experience when designing museum exhibits (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). The term flow experience is used since interviewees described their feeling using a metaphor as "a current that carried

them along effortlessly” (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2005). Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2009) noted that the principles of flow experience are being utilized while designing museum exhibits and museum buildings by some museums such as Los Angeles' Getty Museum. Flow experience emerged as one of themes in the reviews and is exemplified in following quotes.

“Thought we were just popping in for a brief half hour, but 2 hours later had to be evicted due to closing time.....:) Must go back again.” (R187)

“But a great opportunity to step away from the lines and be carried away by simple, almost innocent representations of life many centuries ago.” (R268)

“There is something fascinating about mosaics. I don't know what it is but I could stare at them for hours.” (R336)

4.2.5. Memorable experience

A memorable experience which is one of the core components of tourism experiences is a tourism experience that individuals recall positively (Kim et al., 2012). Yang and Zhang (2022) found that museum visitors have memorable tourism experiences. Falk and Dierking (2016), suggested that the memories derived from museum experiences are vivid and lasting and that these memories are affected by specific characteristics of both visitors and museums.

“Istanbul has many attractions for those interested in history. While the famous buildings are undoubtedly significant, do not miss the Mosaic Museum. It has gems which you will enjoy looking at and remember for a long time. Despite thousands of years having passed, the mosaics have maintained their color and charm. They tell stories of hunting, feasts, love and nature.” (R142)

“As a museum it is rather simple, just a roof over the flooring, but it will be one of the most peaceful places you will find in Istanbul.” (R178)

“so much to see in Istanbul, but this should be a must. Roman Mosaics from the 6th century Palace. Not just pretty patterns the size of a carpet...huge animal and human scenes showing the level of art the emperors lived with. Close tot he Blue Mosque, cheap, takes no more than an hour...but will live with you.” (R325)

4.2.6. Post-experience evaluations

Visitors to the museum engage in various behaviors following their visit, such as learning, expressing satisfaction, recommending the museum, and increasing the frequency of their visits (Dirsehan, 2012). In the current study, the evaluations made by visitors following their museum experience at the mosaic museum have been grouped under the theme of post-experience evaluations. This theme includes the codes of recommendation, revisit, satisfaction, comparison and perceived value. Some example quotes are provided below.

“If you're interested in Byzantine culture, art or archaeology, you should definitely set aside at least an hour to visit this magnificent museum, particularly as the entry fee is only €10, which is practically nothing compared to the ticket costs for some of Istanbul's prime attractions.” (R1)

“I have visited a number of Roman palaces in the UK but have never seen as many ancient mosaics as in this museum.” (R28)

“I went to this museum because others in my party wanted to go so my expectations were not high. However, I enjoyed the mosaics more than the more spectacular examples in the Kariye Museum. They are charming depictions of daily life rather than religious scenes.” (R167)

“This museum is rather small but the exhibited items are none the less worth a visit.” (R141)

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The number of museums dedicated to specific fields has increased in recent decades, in parallel with growing popularity of museums. The Great Palace Mosaic Museum is one of the important museums in Türkiye, as it displays in situ mosaics from the floor of the Byzantine Great Palace. Previous studies have examined service quality and the visitor experience in museums. However, to the best of authors'

knowledge, no study has examined the factors influencing visitors' experiences in a museum dedicated solely to mosaics. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by exploring the factors affecting visitors' experiences at the Great Palace Mosaic Museum in Istanbul. To this end, a netnographic research design was adopted, and comments posted on the TripAdvisor by visitors to the museum were analyzed.

The results indicate that visitors are generally satisfied with the service quality. An examination of visitors' perceptions of service quality reveals that the most frequently mentioned theme is tangibles. The next most prominent themes were communication and responsiveness followed by consumables. It was found that empathy was the least frequently mentioned dimension of service quality. Previous studies have typically been conducted empirically and have aimed to measure visitors' perceptions of museum service quality through surveys. A netnographic research design based on online reviews was employed in this study. Participants are free to upload the key points they wish to emphasize to the online platform without adherence to a specific format. Consequently, it is not feasible to quantify participants' perceptions of service quality in this study. However, an analysis of the frequency of themes reveals that the subjects deemed most worthy of written discourse by the participants are of particular significance. For instance, the empathy theme is present in only 13 comments. This factor is treated as a dimension of service quality in the scale developed by Frochot and Hughes (2000) and has been used in many studies. This dimension of service quality concerns the opportunities for people with disabilities to visit the museum and the activities the museum offers for children (Frochot & Hughes, 2000). It has been found that the empathy dimension was not addressed extensively. This may be because families with children do not visit frequently or do not prefer this museum. On the other hand, the most frequently cited themes were tangibles and communication. At the mosaic museum, the physical characteristics of the museum and communication within the museum are among the top priorities for visitors. Conversely, themes such as responsiveness and consumables have been mentioned less frequently.

The results reveal that visitors place a high value on the artistic and historical importance of the mosaics on display. Furthermore, the role of communication in conveying the museum's importance is recognized by visitors. It is notable that there is a paucity of comments mentioning staff. It can be posited that the information leaflets prepared for the mosaics and their restoration process are sufficient for visitors, thereby reducing the necessity for staff. In fact, there were comments stating explicitly that there was no need for a guide.

Museum visits are not merely simple activities in which visitors are informed about displayed objects, but rather a more complex experience (Falk & Dierking, 2016). The study results revealed that museum experiences at the Great Palace Mosaic Museum consists of six main themes, namely post experience evaluations, emotional, cognitive, restorative, flow, and memorable experiences. The most frequently mentioned theme in the museum experience category was post-experience evaluations. Museum experience does not only encompass the time between entry and exit. It is a process that begins the moment visitors consider visiting a museum and continues long after the visit (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Therefore, visitors' experiences include post-experience evaluations. Post-experience evaluations such as perceived value, satisfaction, recommendation, and repeat visits were frequently mentioned in visitors' comments. Furthermore, online platforms are used by visitors to communicate with other visitors who have real experiences of the place they are visiting. From this perspective, expressing post-experience evaluations is considered natural and provides clues about the structure of their experiences. This study further revealed that emotions are one of the key components of museum experiences. Museums emerge as spaces that evoke visitors' emotions (Chieppa et al., 2014). One of the topics most frequently mentioned in the comments of visitors touring the Great Palace Mosaic Museum was the emotions they felt. Among these emotions, admiration stood out. In the current study, alongside admiration for the objects on display in the museum, admiration for the effort expended during the restoration process that made these objects suitable for display was also frequently expressed. Lastly it is worth mentioning that both flow experience and memorable experiences are two important components of museum experiences. Overall, this study contributes to the growing literature on museum experience by examining the comments visitors made after their experience at the museum.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Frochot and Hughes (2000) reported that the tangibles and communication dimensions were the most important, while the empathy dimension was the least emphasized. The current study supports this finding. At the Great Palace Mosaic Museum, visitors particularly value the tangibles and communications dimensions, while empathy is the least mentioned dimension. Similarly, museum experiences can vary. At the Great Palace Mosaic Museum, the most prominent experience dimensions are post-experience evaluations, emotions and cognitive experience. The current study found evidence of participants' flow and memorable tourism experiences. Based on this, it was concluded that flow experience and memorable experiences should also be examined in the context of museum visits.

5.2. Practical Implications

Considering visitors' perceptions of museum's service quality, it is thought that working on the less-discussed dimensions would be beneficial. For example, it can be said that the theme of consumables is given very little attention. Various methods are employed by museums to both improve the experience and increase the time spent in the museum. A workshop could be organized where visitors can create their own mosaics after their visit. Since this would also be an activity that attracts the attention of children, it can be said that visitors would mention it more in their reviews, and therefore more families with children would be motivated to visit this museum. In addition, one of the most frequently mentioned shortcomings in the category of communication is the difficulty in finding the museum. This issue could be improved through better signage and online maps.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

A limitation of this study is its focus solely on reviews of the Great Palace Mosaic Museum and solely reviews written in English. Future studies could similarly examine other museums that focus solely on mosaics (e.g., the Haleplibahçe Mosaic Museum, the Zeugma Mosaic Museum) and analyze reviews in other languages as well. This would provide a better understanding of visitor experiences and service quality at mosaic museums. Furthermore, the study's reliance on online visitor reviews is another limitation. Future studies could utilize interviews, focus group discussions, and quantitative data collection techniques.

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Araştırma Makalesi

Exploring factors affecting museum experience: A study on a “Hidden gem” in Istanbul

Müze Deneyimini Etkileyen Faktörlerin İncelenmesi İstanbul'daki “Gizli Hazine” Üzerine Bir Araştırma

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Müze ziyaretleri son zamanlarda popülaritesi artmış, rekreasyonel bir aktivite haline gelmiştir. 1975'te dünyada 22.000 olan müze sayısının hızlı bir şekilde artış göstererek yaklaşık olarak beş katına çıktığı belirtilmiştir (UNESCO, 2021). Benzer şekilde, Türkiye'de müze sayıları hızla artmış ve günümüzde 18 tanesi millî saraylara bağlı, 217 tanesi kültür ve turizm bakanlığına bağlı 401'i özel olmak üzere toplamda 636 kayıtlı müze bulunmaktadır (TUIK, 2026a). Bu müzeleri 2025 yılında 61 milyondan fazla ziyaretçinin gezdiği belirtilmiştir (TUIK, 2026b). Bu müzeler arasında arkeoloji ve etnografya gibi klasik müzelerin yanı sıra, peynirleriyle ünlü olan Kars'ta bulunan Kars Peynir Müzesi veya Kuşadası'nda bulunan zeytin ve zeytinyağına odaklanan Oleatrium Müzesi gibi niş alanlara odaklanan müzeler de yer almaktadır.

Müze deneyiminin bu şekilde rağbet görmeye başlaması, müzelerin yerel ve bölgesel düzeyde yaratıcı ekonominin geliştirilmesine katkı sunacak bir enstrüman olarak kullanılabileceğini göstermektedir (UNESCO, 2021). Müzeler özellikle turistik destinasyonlarda ek istihdam ve ticari gelir yaratarak, bulundukları bölgelere önemli ekonomik faydalar sağlamaktadır (Frey & Meier, 2006). Müzeler bulundukları kentin ekonomisine katkıda bulunan kurumlar olarak değerlendirilip, kentsel gelişim stratejilerine dâhil edilmeleri halinde hem kendi kurumlarının hem de kentin ekonomik sürdürülebilirliğini sağlayabileceği ve daha fazla fayda yaratabileceği belirtilmiştir (Wstervelt, 2010).

Müzelerin bulundukları kente yönelik olumlu etkilerinden etkin şekilde faydalanabilmek için ziyaretçilerin hizmet kalitesi ve müze deneyimlerinin iyi bir şekilde anlaşılması ve düzenli olarak iyileştirilmesi gerekmektedir. Literatüre bakıldığında müzelerde hizmet kalitesi ve ziyaretçi deneyimi üzerine odaklanan nicel yöntemlerle yapılmış birçok çalışma bulunmaktadır (Yılmaz, 2011; Güneş et al., 2019; İlhan et al., 2020). Yapılan çalışmalar incelendiğinde çeşitli müzelerde müze deneyimlerini netnografi yöntemiyle inceleyen araştırmalara rastlanmaktadır (Kunt, 2025; Bozkurt, 2023; Uzun, 2023). Ancak mozaik müzelerinde, ziyaretçilerin kendi anlatımlarında bu iki kavramı etkileyen faktörlerin derinlemesine incelendiği çalışma sayısının sınırlı olduğu görülmüştür. Bu çalışmada müzeyi gezen ziyaretçilerinin hizmet kalitesi algılarını ve ziyaretçi deneyimlerini etkileyen faktörlerin ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmaktadır. Mevcut çalışma mozaik müzelerinde hizmet kalitesi algılarını ve ziyaretçi deneyimleri inceleyen ilk çalışmalardan biridir.

Araştırma tasarımı olarak netnografik bir yaklaşım benimsenmiştir. Netnografi çevrimiçi etnografi olarak konumlandırılmakta ve “Bilgisayar aracılığıyla yapılan iletişim yoluyla ortaya çıkan kültürleri ve toplulukları incelemek için etnografik araştırma tekniklerini uyarlayan yeni bir araştırma yöntemi”

olarak tanımlanmaktadır (Kozinets, 2002:62). Araştırma için gerekli veriler, 2026 yılı mart ayında TripAdvisor web sitesinden alınmıştır. TripAdvisor platformunda Büyük Saray Mozaikleri müzesi başlığı altında İngilizce yazılmış 381 yorum bulunmaktadır. Bu yorumlardan ikisi, müzenin kapalı olduğu bir dönemde yazıldığı ve yorum yapanlar müzeyi görmediği için çalışma dışında tutulmuştur. Araştırmaya 379 yorum dahil edilmiştir. TripAdvisor platformunda yayınlanan yorumlar halka açık yorumlar, olduğu için, bu çalışma etik kurul onayı gerektirmemektedir.

TripAdvisor platformunda 2010 ile 2025 yılları arasında Büyük saray Mozaikleri Müzesi başlığı altında yazılan 379 yorum bu çalışmanın verisini oluşturmaktadır. Yapılan frekans analizinde en fazla yorumun 2015 yılında yapıldığı 2024 yılında ise hiç yorum yapılmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Kullanıcıların müze deneyimi için verdiği puanlar incelendiğinde büyük çoğunluğun (%82,3) deneyimlerini mükemmel veya iyi, 15 kişinin kötü ve iki kişinin ise berbat olarak derecelendirdiği tespit edilmiştir. Müzeye yapılan genel değerlendirme puanının 4,2 olduğu göz önünde bulundurulduğunda ziyaretçilerin genel anlamda müze deneyiminden memnun oldukları söylenebilir.

Frekans analizinden sonra sıra sıra kodlamaya geçilmiştir. Yapılan kodlamada 83 kod 1073 kez tekrar etmiştir. Bu kodlar ortak özelliklerine göre temalar altında gruplandırılmıştır. Ortaya çıkan temalar hizmet kalitesi ve ziyaretçi deneyimi olmak üzere iki ana kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Temalara karar verirken literatürden faydalanılmıştır (Frochot & Hughes, 2000; Parasuman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Hsieh 2010); Hsieh vd., 2015; Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Packer & Ballantyne 2016; Kim vd., 2012; Dirsehan, 2012).

Ziyaretçilerin hizmet kalitesine ilişkin algılarının incelenmesinde en sık tekrar edilen temanın fiziksel özellikler olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Fiziksel özellikler temasını iletişim ve heveslilik takip ederken en az tekrar edilen temanın ise empati olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Empati teması Frochot ve Hughes (2000) çalışmasında bir hizmet kalitesi boyutu olarak ele alınmış ve birçok çalışmada kullanılmıştır. Hizmet kalitesinin empati bileşeni, engelli bireylerin müzeyi ziyaret etme imkanları ve müzenin çocuklara sunduğu etkinliklerle ilgidir (Frochot & Hughes, 2000). Araştırma bulgularına göre yorumlarda empati teması nadiren görülmektedir. Bu durum çocuklu ailelerin bu müzeyi sık ziyaret etmemesi veya tercih etmemesinden kaynaklanıyor olabilir. Öte yandan fiziksel özellikler ve iletişim temaları en sık tekrar edilen temalar olduğu görülmüştür. Mozaik müzesinde müzenin fiziksel özellikleri ve müze içindeki iletişim ziyaretçiler için en önemli konular arasındadır.

Araştırmanın bulgularına göre ziyaretçiler müzede sergilenen mozaiklerin sanatsal ve tarihi değerine büyük önem vermektedirler. Ayrıca, müzenin önemini aktarırken iletişimin rolünü de kabul etmektedirler. İletişim teması altında personel kodunun çok az geçmesi dikkat çekicidir. Mozaikler ve restorasyon süreci için hazırlanan bilgilendirme panolarının ziyaretçiler için yeterli olduğu ve dolayısıyla bu konuda personele ihtiyaç duyulmadığı söylenebilir. Müze ziyaretleri, ziyaretçilerin sergilenen eserler hakkında bilgilendirildiği basit etkinlikler olarak değil, daha karmaşık bir deneyim olarak ele alınması gerektiği belirtilmiştir (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Çalışma sonuçlarında, Büyük Saray Mozaikleri Müzesindeki deneyim sonrası değerlendirmeleri duygusal, bilişsel, restoratif akış ve hatırlanabilir deneyimler olmak üzere müze deneyimlerinin altı boyutu ortaya çıkarılmıştır.

Müze deneyimi kategorisinde en sık tekrar eden temanın deneyim sonrası değerlendirmeler olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Müze deneyimi, yalnızca giriş ile çıkış arasındaki süreyi kapsamamakta, ziyaretçilerin bir müzeyi ziyaret etmeyi düşündükleri anda başlayan ve ziyaretten çok sonra devam eden bir süreç olduğu belirtilmiştir (Falk & Dierking, 2016). Bu nedenle ziyaretçilerin deneyimleri, deneyim sonrası değerlendirmeleri de kapsamaktadır. Ziyaretçiler, yorumlarında algılanan değer, memnuniyet, tavsiye etme ve tekrar ziyaret gibi deneyim sonrası değerlendirmelerde bulunmuşlardır. Çalışmada ayrıca duygulanımların müze deneyiminin temel bileşenlerinden biri olduğunu ortaya konulmuştur. Müzeler ziyaretçilerin duygularını harekete geçiren mekanlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır (Chieppa vd., 2014). Büyük Saray Mozaik Müzesini gezen ziyaretçilerin yorumlarında en sık tekrar edilen konulardan biri, deneyim sırasında hissedilen duygulardır. Bu duygular arasında hayranlık öne çıkmıştır. Bu çalışmada, müzede sergilenen nesnelere (mozaiklere) duyulan hayranlığın yanı sıra, bu nesnelerin sergilenmeye uygun hale gelmesindeki restorasyon sürecine harcanan çabaya duyulan hayranlık da ön plana çıktığı görülmüştür. Son olarak, akış deneyimi ve hatırlanabilir deneyiminin müze deneyiminin iki önemli bileşenini

oluşturduğu değerlendirilmektedir. Genel olarak bu çalışma ziyaretçilerin müze deneyimlerinden sonra yaptıkları yorumları inceleyerek, müze deneyimi literatürüne katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Çalışma kapsamında teorik ve pratik çıkarımlar yapılabilir. Tarihi binalarda hizmet kalitesi açısından fiziksel özellikler ve iletişim boyutlarının en önemli boyutlar olduğu, buna karşılık empati boyutunun ise en az vurgulanan boyut olduğu belirtilmiştir (Frochot ve Hughes, 2000). Mevcut çalışmada bu bulguyu desteklenmektedir. Büyük Saray Mozaikleri Müzesi ziyaretçileri hizmet kalitesi bileşenlerinin arasında en fazla fiziksel özellikler ve iletişime önem verdiği görülürken, en az değindikleri temanın ise empati olduğu gözlemlenmiştir. Büyük Saray Mozaikleri Müzesinde ziyaret sonrası değerlendirmeler, duygulanımlar ve bilişsel deneyim ziyaretçi deneyiminin en sık tekrar edilen bileşenlerini oluşturmaktadır. Mevcut çalışmada akış deneyimi ve hatırlanabilir turizm deneyiminin müze ziyaretleri bağlamında incelenmesi gerektiği sonucuna varılmıştır.

Ziyaretçilerin müze hizmet kalitesine ilişkin algıları göz önüne alındığında daha az tekrar edilen boyutlar üzerinde odaklanılması gerektiği söylenebilir. Örneğin, tüketilenler bileşenine çok az ilgi gösterildiği tespit edilmiştir. Müzelerde hem ziyaret deneyimini iyileştirmek hem de müzede geçirilen süreyi uzatmak için çeşitli etkinlikleri kullanılmaktadır. Ziyaretçilerin müze gezisinin ardından kendi mozaiklerini oluşturabilecekleri bir atölye çalışması ziyaretçilerin deneyimlerine katkıda bulunabileceği söylenebilir. Akış deneyiminin ve hatırlanabilir turizm deneyimlerinin boyutları göz önünde alındığında bu şekilde düzenlenecek olan bir etkinliğin katkısı olacağı ve deneyimi zenginleştireceği değerlendirilmektedir. Atölye çalışması çocukların da ilgisini çeken bir etkinlik olabileceğinden, ziyaretçilerin yorumlarında konuyu daha fazla dile getirecekleri ve dolayısıyla çocuklu ailelerin müzeyi ziyaretlerinde daha çok motive olacağı söylenebilir. Öte yandan iletişim boyutu altında en sık tekrar edilen eksikliklerden bir tanesi müzeyi bulmanın zorluğudur. Bu, daha iyi yönlendirme tabelaları ve çevrimiçi haritalar aracılığıyla çözülebileceği değerlendirilmektedir.