

# Shining a light on Asian night markets: vendors' and visitors' views

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – *The purpose of this paper is to build on both the theoretical work concerning the co-creation of experiences, and the need for micro-businesses to adopt a consumer-friendly orientation. The researchers examined the compatibility of vendors' views of their visitors' perspectives and the visitors' own assessments of two Hong Kong night markets. Using a large sample survey with over 1,900 tourists and 120 vendors, and examining the data through mean difference testing and factor analysis, the comparability of the views was examined. Key findings were that vendors consistently overestimated the positivity of the visitors' views. Value for money, trustworthiness of the vendors and product variety were items indicating strong differences where vendors assumed visitors perceived night markets more favorably than did the visitors themselves. The work challenges some assumptions of service design logic and speculates that the durability of night markets is at risk without better vendor understanding of the visitors' perspectives.*

**Design/methodology/approach** – *The study builds on both the theoretical work concerning the co-creation of experiences, and the need for micro-businesses to adopt a consumer-friendly orientation. The researchers examined the compatibility of vendors' views of their visitors' perspectives and the visitors' own assessments of two Hong Kong night markets. Using a large sample survey with over 1,900 tourists and 120 vendors and examining the data through mean difference testing and factor analysis, the comparability of the views was examined.*

**Findings** – *Key findings were that vendors consistently overestimated the positivity of the visitors' views. Value for money, trustworthiness of the vendors and product variety were items indicating strong differences where vendors assumed visitors perceived night markets more favorably than did the visitors themselves. The work challenges some assumptions of service design logic and speculates that the durability of night markets is at risk without better vendor understanding of the visitors' perspectives.*

**Research limitations/implications** – *For the present work, it would be desirable to ascertain that the figures reported apply to other night markets in Hong Kong and China. Further, the generalizability of the results for different market types, those that offer food or cater to specific interests needs examination. The possibility exists that the general night market will fold as specific tailored options, such as craft, art, flower and homewares themed spaces replace the basic all-purpose format.*

**Practical implications** – *The implications from this work are that vendors may have to form new group alliances to understand and then deliver the overall atmosphere, quality of goods and service interactions prized by tourists. Vendors need to sustain their appeal and sales through maintenance of these overall night market characteristics. The vendors may be able to escape individual censure and rejection for a while due to the transient customer base, but broader destination and attraction image concerns are likely to be a longer-term force requiring attention.*

**Social implications** – *The implications from this work are that vendors may have to form new group alliances to understand and then deliver the overall atmosphere, quality of goods and service interactions prized by tourists. Vendors need to sustain their appeal and sales through maintenance of these overall night market characteristics. The vendors may be able to escape individual censure and rejection for a while due to the transient customer base, but broader destination and attraction image concerns are likely to be a longer-term force requiring attention.*

**Originality/value** – *The broad aim of the study can be identified as the desire to examine the compatibility of vendor and tourists' views, and the more specific aims of this broad agenda will be articulated after reviewing the core conceptual ideas driving the work.*

**Keywords** Hong Kong, Night markets, Service design challenges, Vendors' views, Visitors' perspectives

**Paper type** Research paper

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## Introduction

Tourist markets, including those held at night, are long-standing tourist attractions in many cities. Some key challenges are faced by those who conduct their business in these settings. Both in Asia and across the world, numerous large shopping complexes and malls have been developed as hybrid consumption and entertainment centers (Bryman, 1999; Murphy *et al.*, 2011; Underhill, 2004). Tourist markets and night markets are therefore locked in a competitive battle with these newer consumption “palaces.” In order to retain their appeal to the contemporary tourist clientele, it can be proposed that the vendors understanding of the needs of the people they serve and entertain should be soundly based. The researchers therefore seek to build a base to add value to discussions about the sustainability of these kinds of city tourist attractions.

More specifically, the researchers explore closely the alignment of the views of vendors and customers in two iconic tourist night markets in Hong Kong. The value of the present paper lies in addressing three issues. Studying night markets is limited and the present work adds to the topic area with a detailed appraisal. A second value of the work lies in its subtlety in asking the vendors to indicate what they think the visitors think. This emphasis provides a more exacting approach to the topic theme than simply attempting to align supply and demand. Instead, the researchers explore the compatibility and co-production possibilities of how night markets are viewed. The third insight of the work lies in appreciating that micro-entrepreneurs, such as street sellers and market vendors, depend on the larger context in which they operate their business. There is though, a potential gap in the vendors' awareness of this larger view since their own activities are focused and localized; they are contributors to the scene the tourists appraise but they are not the entire focus of that appraisal. This restricted vision may not matter if they understand the visitor well, but as an empirical question it is important to assess this sense of perspective.

To avoid the repetition of phraseology – vendors' thoughts about what visitors think – in the presentation of this research, the simpler terminology of visitors' and vendors' views will be frequently employed. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the expression vendors' views are capturing the vendors' views of the visitors' views. The direct comparison is congruent with the ideas to be discussed in the literature review and adds empirical bite to these ideas, thus developing the field of assessing co-creation and customer – vendor alignment. The researchers' approach to understand the vendor- visitor alignment is also consistent with a long tradition in tourism research; one which emphasizes taking an emic approach – that is considering the views of the insider or customer (Cohen, 1979; Pearce and Packer, 2013). Such an emphasis accords well with the recent emphasis on service experience design in tourism (Fesenmaier and Xiang, 2016; Pearce and Zare, 2017). Although the location of the work is specific to one part of modern China, the broader applicability of the ideas of exploring the alignment of vendor–buyer perspectives in shaping the future of tourist markets has a currency across Asia and potentially beyond (Mohtar, 2015). The broad aim of the study can be identified as the desire to examine the compatibility of vendor and tourists' views, and the more specific aims of this broad agenda will be articulated after reviewing the core conceptual ideas driving the work.

## Literature review

The foundations of the present work lie in considering the contemporary views of the co-creation of experience as well as drawing out some specific highlights from the studies of tourist shopping and previous work on night markets. In the contemporary world of tourism marketing, a strong awareness of the quality and centrality of tourists' experiences has developed (Morrison, 2013). This emphasis applies at many levels within a destination and extends to the interactions of vendors and tourists within shopping environments (Wu *et al.*, 2014). In the experience economy framework, not only do guests and customers co-create

their experiences but also small operators such as street vendors must know how their customers think and what they want. Academic work can contribute to an understanding of the vendor and buyer perspectives because it is unlikely that small-scale operators can easily access the wider views of multiple others.

### *Creating experiences*

Co-creation is at the heart of the new ways of enhancing the guest experience (Fesenmaier and Xiang, 2016; Sundbo and Darmer, 2008). The term refers directly to the quality, clarity and success of the interactions between service personnel and tourists on all those critical occasions where people are influencing one another. Knowing about one's customers is a long-held cliché for doing good business (Peters, 2005; Schmitt, 2010). Contemporary developments in marketing have expanded on this idea by directing suppliers to create value to the purchase experience by knowing more about the customers and building occasions for add on sales. The gap is that we do not know very much at all about the accuracy of vendors' views of the visitors' night markets views. If such insights are lacking, vendors may be misdirecting their efforts to engage customers. According to Grönroos (2008), service logic suggests that the firm (vendor) is involved in making value propositions, and creating opportunities through co-creation during interactions with the customers. In the immediate night market context, actions that support value creation includes working hard at identifying suitable and desirable items, managing the tension of the bargaining and creating an enjoyable interchange. Such skills build value creation and value fulfillment.

The realization of the importance of co-creation in tourism was developed in Europe through focusing on what consumers experience. The approach is often referred to as service design in tourism (Stickdorn and Schwarzenberger, 2016). In both Europe and North America, the emphasis on co-creation in tourism has been written about extensively in tourist attractions and theme parks as well as in other business settings (Bryman, 1999; Pine *et al.*, 1999; Prebensen *et al.*, 2013). In the work of Underhill and Goldsmith (2000) and Underhill (2004) and others, customer shopping behavior has been considered in detail by observing interactions in malls and big department stores. In these settings, the essence of the approach has resulted in the redesign of aisles and store layouts. In the present work, it is possible to enhance work on shopping at night markets by stressing the need for the parties to understand one another's point of view. From such an understanding, good communication can flow, necessary design features identified and seller–vendor interaction can potentially improve to achieve mutual goals (Argyle *et al.*, 1981). In the present study, this backdrop of the experience economy, allied to service design and the theme of co-creation, all direct the researchers to consider how well the values and views of vendors and shoppers are aligned. The work to be done demands that the details of what is valued by each party are closely assessed.

### *Markets*

As Timothy (2005) observed, tourists shop for many reasons and in multiple locations. Tourists spend not only money but also considerable discretionary holiday time in seeking bargains, hunting for authentic gifts, and simply 'window shopping'. Quite often, the process of purchasing goods and regional products provides an important social context where tourists engage with residents (Murphy *et al.*, 2011). Many of these markets operate at night, thus serving as an evening entertainment option for many visitors. The dominant research emphases about tourist markets has been on tourists' behavior, experience and satisfaction (Fowler *et al.*, 2012; Kuo *et al.*, 2012; Law and Cheung 2010; Tsang *et al.*, 2011). Studying tourists alone, however, provides an incomplete view of the dynamics of shopping interactions, services and experiences.

On a country specific scale, several types of tourism markets have been explored: street markets in New Zealand (Kikuchi and Ryan, 2007), craft markets in South Africa (Küsel and Ras, 2010), and the day time open air Pike Fish Market in the USA (Aiello and Gendelman, 2008). Researchers have also analyzed markets in Singapore (Henderson, 2000; Ibrahim and Leng, 2003) and Thailand (Bishop and Robinson, 1999). The studies have examined the multiple benefits to tourists of visiting local markets: first, the markets provide the opportunity to purchase locally-made goods (Henderson, 2000); and second, markets of this type offer authentic experiences in terms of novelty, socialization and better appreciation of the region's unique cultural differences (Chang *et al.*, 2007; Kikuchi and Ryan, 2007; Ooi, 2002). As a third point of appeal, local markets may offer bargain deals (Cox *et al.*, 2005; Henderson, 2000; Hsieh and Chang, 2006). A fourth and final attribute is that the shopping markets boost the destination's image (Chang and Hsieh, 2006; Henderson, 2000; Ryan and Cave, 2005; Tsang *et al.*, 2011), and enhances competitiveness by distinguishing one location from others (Timothy, 2005). Wu *et al.* (2014), studying international tourists' views of Beijing's Silk Market, confirmed that tourism markets can be more than an auxiliary feature and instead serve as a major attraction delivering key tourism experiences.

### *Night markets*

A night market or night bazaar refers to a street market that operates from at least late in the afternoon and remains active until around 10 p.m. (Aziz and Sapindal, 2012; Mazlan *et al.*, 2017). All night markets tend to have three common features: convenient and appealing locations – often near residential neighborhoods, regular operations – at least one to a few evenings per week, and a wide variety of products – toys and games, ornaments, smartphone accessories, fashion accessories, household items and food and beverage items. Typically, products sold at night markets do not have fixed prices and customers can negotiate for bargain deals (Chin and Harun, 2015). Detailed studies exist for Europe and North America (Hou, 2010; Pottie-Sherman and Hiebert, 2015) and Asia including Taiwan, India and South Korea (Pottie-Sherman and Hiebert, 2015), Singapore (Henderson, 2000; Ibrahim and Leng, 2003), Malaysia (Aziz and Yeng, 2011), Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia (Welman, 2011). Night markets are known as *pasar malam* in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Taiwan has been one of the Asian locations where a set of studies have been closely conducted. Night markets in Taiwan originated from being sales centers for cut-price products in the 1970s to their present role as an established cluster of shops operating between 6 p.m. and 2 a.m. (Tsai, 2013; Wang, 2007). According to the Tourism Bureau (2011), night markets were the top tourist attraction for both leisure tourists and business travelers. The two most popular visited night markets this decade have been the Shih-Lin night market (Taipei) and Liuhe night market (Kaohsiung). The four most popular activities for tourists in Taiwan were – taste Chinese cuisine (81.9 percent), shopping (68.4 percent), window shopping (41.5 percent), and attending cultural performances (37.1 percent). Taiwan night markets are popular with visitors for three reasons: first, they represent the local culture, customs and traditions, second, there is good variety in the product choices and affordable prices for diversified consumers, and thirdly, consumers can interact with vendors while negotiating prices and bargaining. From the vendors' point of view, this interaction fosters an exchange with consumers and may build an awareness of what sells and where profits can be made (Zhan and Huang, 2002).

Several studies have highlighted issues which need attention for the future of these Taiwanese night markets. For example, tourists from Hong Kong enjoyed eating out (88.5 percent), shopping (56 percent) and novelty seeking (32 percent), but they also listed three main concerns – high theft rates, parking problems and traffic jams (Chang and Hsieh, 2006). A study by Kuo, Chung and Kuo (2012) who investigated three popular night

markets – Garden Night Market (Tainan) famous for its snacks, Fong-Chia Night Market (Taichung) famous for its creative products and special stalls, and Shih-Lin Night Market (Taipei) – suggested the importance of addressing the issues of accessibility and environmental context to enhance the appeal for tourists. To improve accessibility, there should be more public transportation to encourage consumers to commute by public transport and to reduce traffic congestion. To provide a pleasant shopping experience for consumers, more amenities such as sitting areas, public restrooms, trash cans, recycle bins, garbage signs and more cleaning staff are needed to manage litter and improve hygiene (Kuo, Chung and Kuo, 2012). In a similar vein, Fowler *et al.* (2012) suggested that the physical characteristics of the marketplaces such as having many vendors, ample gathering spaces for shoppers to congregate and single shoppers to linger, have a strong influence on the quality of shoppers' experience at the Pao Bu night market. Sun *et al.* (2012) suggested vendors should adhere to good hygienic food practices to enhance the image of Taiwanese night markets.

In China, Johnson (2001) reported that 'night markets' originated in the late Tang dynasty (AD 618-907) when outdoor night shopping districts were found on the streets, canals and bridges of the cities. In particular, night markets were popular in Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Yangzhou. The concept in China, like elsewhere, refers to open-air shopping where vendors are regularly operating their small businesses along a clearly designated street. The venues are also referred to as "Tanfan" (street vendor) Concentration Areas, "where retailers and street vendors form "unique urban spaces and streetscapes" (Deguchi, 2005). These Chinese night markets usually operate until close to or after midnight (Telfer and Wall, 2000). The night markets typically have removable stalls, and the vendors make use of roads, parks or walkways (Ibrahim and Leng, 2003). According to Salleh, Yaakub, Yunus, Ghani and Sulong (2012), Chinese night markets typically provide multiple product choices (daily necessities, clothing, fruits, food, drinks) for local consumers and novelties, arts and crafts for tourists. A study by Huang *et al.* (2009) found that night markets offer a variety of product choices and cooked food at lower prices. This study focuses on night markets in Hong Kong that offer products for consumers except for cooked food.

A few select studies have focused on the open-air markets in Hong Kong. For instance, Tsang *et al.* (2011) analyzed the quality of experience and the bargaining behavior of tourists when shopping at the open-air markets. It was observed that tourists like visiting open-air Chinese markets as they can interact with local vendors (Ooi, 2002, cited in Tsang *et al.*, 2011). Law and Cheung (2010) examined travel blogs as a manifestation of the travel experience of Mainland Chinese tourists in Hong Kong and identified The Stanley Market and Ladies Market as leading tourism attractions. However, Leung *et al.* (2011) analyzed 2,247 travel blog entries of Ctrip.com and found that some Mainland Chinese tourists were quite dissatisfied when shopping at the Ladies Market. In the Leung *et al.* study, the vendors were seen as not very engaging and rather inclined to be unfriendly, and even rude. To date, many studies in varying methodologies have been conducted related to examining visitors and night markets in Asian destinations. Aziz and Sapindal (2012) conducted observations and interviewed consumers in Selangor, Malaysia. Another study surveyed the 203 sellers in the Malaysian states of Pahang, Kelantan and Trengganu (Chin and Harun, 2015). Others focused on Taiwanese night markets (Huang *et al.*, 2009; Kuo *et al.*, 2012; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Tsai, 2013). Hsieh and Chang (2006) conducted a visitor survey and identified three key motives of Hong Kong tourists for shopping at Taiwanese night markets were novelty-seeking, exercising and experiencing local culture and customs. It is useful to advance this work from both sides of the cash register.

Night market vendors Street vendors and their businesses represent one of the major components of the informal economy (Cukier and Wall, 1994). Davis (2008) noted that the number of street vendors and hawkers in many Asian communities has grown due to economic development plans that have not created enough jobs to reduce unemployment.

In the last decade, this unemployment trend has continued and is predicted to grow with technology taking over more menial jobs (Gore, 2013). The informal economy offers flexible working hours, and this enables many women to contribute to the family's earnings by operating hawker stalls or taking up part-time sales jobs (Inside Retail Hong Kong, 2017). Given the implications of the informal economy and street vendors to tourism development, it is surprising there has been somewhat limited research on these kinds of small tourism entrepreneurs (STEs) (Timothy and Wall, 1997; Murphy *et al.*, 2011). The Hong Kong government has been implementing policies in phasing out street hawkers/vendors and launched food truck entrepreneurs in an attempt to curb hygiene and sanitation practices (Lee, 2017). Only Chuang *et al.* (2014), working in the context of Taipei's Shilin Night Market, have investigated market attractiveness from a supply-side perspective. Additionally, and when contemplating further studies, it is desirable in this kind of research to consider not just one-night market as local variability may distort the results. The present study seeks to examine and compare tourists' and vendors' views across two leading Hong Kong night markets. A further rationale for selecting these locations as applicable to the broader Asian context is provided in the method section of the paper.

## Aims

This study has three specific aims: first, to understand the perspectives of visitors (tourists and local residents) towards night markets; second, to understand the vendors' views of visitors' perspectives; and third, to identify similarities and differences between these sets of views to enlighten stakeholders who seek to sustain the future of these tourist attractions. The larger value of the work lies in appreciating that micro-entrepreneurs, such as street sellers and market vendors, depend on the larger context in which they operate their business. Further, the sustainability of these tourist spaces needs quality information for decision making and this study offers a beginning to that systematic appraisal.

## Methodology

### *Study context*

In Hong Kong, tourists can visit the unique open-air markets or street bazaars such as Ladies' Market (Mongkok area), Stanley Market and Temple Street Night Market (Yau Ma Tei area). The study focused on the Ladies Market and Temple Street Night Market as these two markets operate from 1 p.m. to 11 p.m. daily. The Temple Street Night Market or "Men's Market" is the largest night market, while the Ladies' Market is well known for selling ladies' clothing at bargain prices. Both night markets do offer visitors a variety of products beyond clothing; notably, both markets offer accessories and souvenirs (HKTB, 2018a). Another decision was made to focus on the retail style of night markets rather than those that effectively serve as low cost dining spaces. Our assessment of the literature suggested that there is a relationship between tourism and food in a number of Asian night markets. The study focused on identifying the appealing features of Hong Kong night markets without culinary tourism as the vendors in the cases selected do not sell food. Empirical studies investigating dining at markets and specialised eating streets involves a range of other factors not considered in full in the present work (cf. Kim, 2017). By covering two markets, which together offer appeal for both genders, and which represent the traditional rather than highly specialised products of say an antique or specialised dining market, the researchers anticipated that the findings could be applied quite broadly.

A survey instrument was employed for data collection. The convenience sampling method was adopted by distributing the surveys to tourists and vendors located at the two night markets in Hong Kong (Aziz and Sapindal, 2012; Chang and Hsieh, 2006; Chin and Harun, 2015; Hsieh and Chang, 2006). This kind of sampling approach is commonly used by researchers where the target population is easily accessible, and reasonably likely to be

willing to participate (Dörnyei and Csizér, 2012; Etikan *et al.*, 2016). The visitor questionnaire was designed in English but translated to accommodate visitors fluent in Traditional Chinese (Macau) or Simplified Chinese (Mandarin speaking). The vendor questionnaire was designed in English and translated to traditional Chinese to avoid language barriers for Cantonese-speaking street vendors. The researchers engaged a journalist (Chinese national) based in Hong Kong to translate the English to the Simplified Chinese. An academic staff member from a public university in Hong Kong translated the questionnaire from the English language to Traditional Chinese. A back-translation process was applied to avoid any miscommunication due to language barriers. The investigator engaged a Chinese national PhD candidate from a public university in Hong Kong and confirmed the accuracy for both versions. The measurement items used in the visitor questionnaire were developed based on several notable studies in tourism markets (Lee, 2000; Mak *et al.*, 1999; Cox *et al.*, 2005; cited in Tsang *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, the measurement items used in the vendor questionnaire were adopted from literature on tourism and hospitality entrepreneurs (Ahmad, 2015; Salleh, Yaakub, Yunus, Ghani and Sulong, 2012; Salleh, Yaakub, Mohamad, Ghani and Sulong, 2012) and a research study in 2011 by the Hong Kong Importers & Exporters Association on the sustainable development of SMEs (Plate 1).

The visitor questionnaire consisted of three parts: Part (A), “General perception of night markets in Hong Kong,” where respondents were asked to indicate their views when they visited the night markets. A total of 16 items were listed including product quality (trendiness and variety) and prices (value for money), sellers’ attitude towards consumers (in terms of friendliness, helpfulness, honesty and ease of communication), night markets as a tourism attraction (must-see attraction, hunting for bargains, good locations, and clean surroundings) and as an experience of mixing and interacting with local residents. The two items that were different from the vendor questionnaire were “easy to exchange/refund products” and “unique attraction in Hong Kong.” Part (B), “My Favourite Night market,” required respondents to choose between the Ladies’ Market or Temple Street as their favourite night market. Additional information was sought on the frequency of visits (if appropriate) and also the most appealing product category. “Food and drink” was included as a category for the purpose of considering required product offerings. Respondents were asked to indicate the ideal attributes of their favorite night market such as product quality, customer service, communication, location, and shopping experience and if they would recommend others to visit their favorite night market. A five-point Likert scale from disagree to strongly agree was employed. In part (C), “Demographic profile,” respondents indicated their age group, if they visited the night market alone or with companion(s), occupation, educational background, monthly household income and nationality. The nationalities of tourists were categorized into five main segments; Mainland China, Short-Haul Markets

**Plate 1** Views of the Ladies’ Night Market (left) and Temple Street night market (right) where visitors and vendors were studied



**Source:** Photos by the authors

(including Singapore, South Korea, Macau, Taiwan, Japan), Long Haul Markets (such as USA, UK, Germany, Australia, Canada), New Markets and others. These categories were adopted from visitor arrival statistics of Hong Kong (HKTB, 2018b).

The vendor questionnaire consisted of three parts: Part (A), "Consumers' Favourite Night Market," where respondents were asked to indicate what they thought would be the visitors' favourite night market, their visitors' likely shopping expenditure, and attributes in choosing their favourite night market. It is important to stress that the questions asked here are about the vendors' views of what the visitors want and how these visitors see the world, not the vendors' own views of the markets. A list of 15 items were included and were linked to those items in the visitors' survey except "browse products rather than actual purchase" was included in this section. Again, a five-point Likert scale from disagree to strongly agree was used. In Part (B), "Vendor's satisfaction of operating at the night market," respondents indicated their years of operating the business at the night market, the perceived profile of their customers, products on offer, and their views of being a tourism entrepreneur. Part (C), "Demographic profile," requested information on the vendors' gender, age group, position, mode of operation, prior work experience, sources of capital, educational background and monthly sales turnover. A pilot study of the visitor questionnaire was conducted prior to the actual survey to gather feedback and familiarize the research assistants. An academic staff member at a Hong Kong University teaching the subject of "Entrepreneurship" vetted and gave feedback on the vendor questionnaire.

### Samples and profiles

The respondents for this study included international tourists as well as Mainland Chinese and local residents who visited the Ladies' Market and/or the Temple Street Night Market. University research students distributed questionnaires to both visitors and vendors at the night markets between February and March 2016. A sample size of 1,918 respondents completed the visitor questionnaire, comprised of 1,073 respondents at the Ladies' Market and 845 respondents at the Temple Street Night Market. The majority of the Mainland Chinese tourists preferred the research assistants to help in completing the survey questionnaire. The Chinese tourists were given the Chinese version and informed the research assistants verbally of their responses. Most of the tourists were English speaking and hence, ninety percent of the respondents completed the English-based questionnaire, 8.3 percent preferred the simplified Chinese version questionnaire while the remaining 1.7 percent respondents opted for the traditional Chinese version. A total of 122 Cantonese-speaking vendors consisting of 107 vendors at Ladies' Market and 15 vendors at Temple Street Night Market completed the traditional Chinese version of the questionnaire. The data were analyzed using SPSS Version 21. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and means, were calculated. Factor analysis was also conducted for both visitors – to identify the general perceptions of visitors about night markets, and to highlight the attributes of visitors' favorite night market, and vendors – to identify vendors' perceptions of visitors' views. Correlations and cross tabulations were employed to determine the relationship between demographic characteristics of vendors and their sales performance.

The total of 1,918 respondents at the two night markets was made up of inbound tourists ( $n = 962$ , 50.2 percent) and local visitors ( $n = 956$ , 49.8 percent). The inbound tourists were principally from Mainland China ( $n = 260$ , 13.5 percent), Singapore ( $n = 179$ , 9.3 percent), United States ( $n = 103$  5.4 percent), the United Kingdom ( $n = 89$ , 4.6 percent) and Australia ( $n = 71$ , 3.7 percent). In total, 55 percent of the inbound tourists were female, 22 percent aged 26–30, and 27 percent were students. In total, 44 percent of the tourists visited the night markets with 2–4 companions. Nearly 23 percent of tourists had a monthly income between HKD15,000–24,999. Over half of the local visitors were female (57.6 percent), young people aged 21–25 (23.5 percent) and students (38.8 percent). Nearly 40 percent of



locals visited the night markets on individual basis. Nearly 30 percent of locals had a monthly household income between HKD15,000–24,999.

Most of the 122 street vendors were sole owners (54.1 percent) and operated their stall as individuals (64.5 percent). Typically, vendors had been operating for three to five years. The vendors' main source of capital for the small tourism businesses was either personal or family savings (82.8 percent). The vendors had a minimum of two years of work experience (78.7 percent) prior to running their own business, and had attained at least a secondary/college education qualification (81.2 percent). Vendors earned a monthly sales turnover of between HKD10, 000–19,999 (25.4 percent) and HKD20, 000–29,999 (24.6 percent). Other vendors earned smaller amounts.

Correlation analysis investigated the association among some key demographic variables describing the vendors. The results indicated that the years of business experience, gender, age group, work experience, and education level had little or no impact on vendors' sales performance. The findings are different from previous studies where the characteristics of entrepreneurs such as education (Ucbasaran *et al.*, 2008; Backes-Gellner and Werner, 2007; Almus and Nerlinger, 1999) age (Mondragon-Velez, 2009) affected the sales performance and success of vendors. These issues are not pursued in detail in this paper because they lie outside the study aims but they do provide information about the limited role of the vendors' background on business performance.

## Results

### *Comparing perceptions of night markets in Hong Kong; an attribute analysis*

The first two aims of the study were to build an understanding of visitors' perspectives and vendors' perceptions of the visitors' views of the characteristics of night markets. The basic information documenting the information about the item-by-item perceptions are included in Table I. The information presented in Table I also addresses the second aim of the study, which was to compare the responses of the two groups to look for alignments and differences.

The visitors rated the night markets favorably in terms of good locations (3.97); a must-see attraction (3.82); a venue offering a wide variety of product choices (3.78); and a place for mixing with local people (3.71). Findings were consistent with research on night markets in Taiwan (Tourism Bureau, 2011; Wang, 2007) but differ with novelty-seeking and exercising

**Table I** Visitors' versus Vendors' perceptions of night markets

Characteristics	Visitors (n=1198)		Vendors (n=122)		t-value	Sig. (two-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1. Night markets have good locations	3.97	0.84	4.34	0.78	-4.724	0.000
2. A must-see attraction in Hong Kong	3.82	0.93	4.29	0.80	-5.371	0.000
3. Wide variety of product choices	3.78	0.91	4.30	0.78	-6.182	0.000
4. Experience mixing with local people	3.71	0.90	3.69	0.97	0.224	0.823
5. Browsing cultural products in Asia	3.60	0.92	4.04	0.90	-5.168	0.000
6. Ease of communication with seller	3.59	1.06	3.57	0.86	0.160	0.873
7. Enjoy hunting for bargains	3.47	1.01	4.10	0.85	-6.726	0.000
8. Sellers are friendly and helpful	3.34	0.97	3.97	0.89	-6.981	0.000
9. Products are trendy/up-to-date	3.19	0.97	3.63	0.98	-4.882	0.000
10. Sellers have good product knowledge	3.22	0.91	3.83	0.90	-7.148	0.000
11. Products are value for money	3.16	1.00	4.21	0.89	-11.322	0.000
12. Night markets surrounding are clean	3.04	1.04	3.55	0.92	-5.263	0.000
13. Sellers are trustworthy and honest	2.97	0.96	3.78	0.90	-9.146	0.000
14. Products are of high quality	2.87	0.89	3.38	0.98	-6.091	0.000

motives among Hong Kong visitors in Taiwan (Hsieh and Chang, 2006). Visitors perceived night markets in Hong Kong favorably as they offered tourists the opportunities to experience local cultural traditions, interact with local vendors (Ooi, 2002) and choose from a variety of product choices. However, visitors indicated shopping at night markets can be negative as products were of low quality (2.87) and they may not trust vendors to be honest sellers (2.97). The vendors assumed the five most important attributes when visitors evaluated their favorite night markets were; good locations (4.34); wide variety of product choices (4.30); a must-visit tourism attraction (4.29); value-for-money products (4.21); and enjoy hunting for bargains (4.10). The three least important attributes assumed to apply were; ease of communication with sellers (3.57); clean and hygienic environment (3.55); and products are of high quality (3.38).

The second study aim was addressed through the *t*-tests reported in Table I. Overall, the alignment between the two groups is limited. It is apparent from the mean scores in Table I that the vendors consistently perceive the buyers as more positive towards the night markets than do the buyers themselves. All of the significant differences in the Table are in the direction where the vendor's ratings of what the visitors think about the night markets are more favorable than the actual ratings. There were only two items – the experience of mixing with the seller and ease of communication with the seller – that were not rated significantly differently, and both had mid positive range scores of being somewhat important. Two items – products are value for money and sellers are trustworthy and honest – were items where vendors and buyers disagreed the most.

Table II compares the differences in perspectives between inbound visitors to local visitors. Local visitors rated the night markets favorably in terms of good locations (3.95), wide variety of product choices (3.64) and a must-see attraction (3.61). They also have ease of communication with vendors as they communicate in Cantonese language and sellers were seen as having good product knowledge. Both inbound tourists and local visitors rated night markets less favorably in terms of clean surroundings, honest and trustworthy sellers, and high product quality. Results indicated that inbound visitors generally viewed the night markets more favorably than local visitors. The two items – products are trendy/up-to-date and products are value for money – were items where inbound visitors and local visitors disagreed the most with the locals being less favorable. For the item – ease of communication with seller – is not a fair comparison as local visitors and vendors communicate on their mother-tongue language.

**Table II** Local visitors' versus inbound visitors' perceptions of night markets

Characteristics	Local visitors (n=956)		Inbound visitors (n=962)		t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1. Night markets have good locations	3.95	0.812	4.11	0.787	-4.422	0.000
2. A must-see attraction in Hong Kong	3.61	0.916	4.04	0.893	-10.278	0.000
3. Wide variety of product choices	3.64	0.919	3.93	0.880	-7.063	0.000
4. Experience mixing with local people	3.56	0.876	3.85	0.908	-7.184	0.000
5. Browsing cultural products in Asia	3.42	0.871	3.78	0.923	-8.917	0.000
6. Ease of communication with seller	3.92	0.975	3.26	1.044	14.173	0.000
7. Enjoy hunting for bargains	3.33	1.000	3.61	0.999	-6.103	0.000
8. Sellers are friendly and helpful	3.13	0.934	3.55	0.952	-9.703	0.000
9. Products are trendy/up-to-date	2.95	0.981	3.42	0.904	-11.014	0.000
10. Sellers have good product knowledge	3.10	0.895	3.34	0.901	-5.787	0.000
11. Products are value for money	2.90	0.996	3.43	0.927	-12.083	0.000
12. Night markets surrounding are clean	2.87	1.02	3.21	1.034	-7.312	0.000
13. Sellers are trustworthy and honest	2.78	0.926	3.16	0.948	-8.879	0.000
14. Products are of high quality	2.63	0.861	3.10	0.855	-11.972	0.000

## *Comparing integrative perceptions of night markets in Hong Kong*

Attention to individual night market characteristics provides an initial description about the views of the two groups. A more holistic way to understand the different views lies in addressing how the items are seen together as organized themes. These results are pursued in this study by conducting factor analysis for each data set. The sample sizes for both the visitor data and the vendor data indicated that it was appropriate to use exploratory data analysis. For the visitor data and the 14 attributes the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy had a value = 0.976 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $df = 1,916$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) while for the vendor data the KMO measure of sampling adequacy had a value = 0.840 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ( $df = 121$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). These results confirm the appropriateness of using factor analysis.

Exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted to analyze the visitors' integrated perceptions of the night markets. The purpose of this analysis is conceived at a broad rather than a micro-scale. The results of the exploratory factor analyses inform the broad patterns of how the visitors and vendors conceptualize the themes underlying the night market characteristics. Based on Kaiser's criterion, only factors with an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more were retained for further analysis (Pallant and Manual, 2007). A cut-off point for factor loadings was set at 0.40 in the interpretation of the final rotated factor pattern (Stevens, 2002). For the visitors, the original 16 items formed three factors: attraction/culture, products, and seller/environment. The "Attraction/Culture" factor comprises – must-see attraction, unique attraction, good location, browse Asian cultural products, variety of product choices, enjoy hunting for bargain, and mixing with local people. The "Product" factor includes – high-quality products, value-for-money products, variety of product choices, and trendy products. The "Seller/Environment" factor was defined by the following items – sellers have good product knowledge, sellers are trustworthy and honest, sellers are friendly and helpful, ease of communication with sellers, exchange/refund products with sellers and clean surroundings. The reliability of the identified factors resulted in a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.799 (attraction/culture), 0.708 (seller/environment) – above 0.70 is desirable – confirming the reliability and dependability of the identified constructs. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  is 0.691 for quality of product, a marginal result. The data from the analysis are presented in Table III.

For the vendors, exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was again applied to analyze their perceptions of visitors' views. The original 15 views were condensed into five core factors labeled as seller/environment, products, attraction, culture, and shopping. The "seller/environment" factor consisted of – trustworthy and honest seller, friendly and helpful seller, knowledgeable seller, clean and hygienic environment. The "Products" factor included trendy products, high-quality products, and wide variety of product choices. The "Attraction" factor was made up of a must-visit attraction and good location. The "Culture" factor was defined by mixing with local people, browsing Asia culture products, and ease of communication with seller. The "Shopping" factor consisted of value-for-money products, hunting for bargains, and browse products than purchase. The reliability of the identified factors resulted in a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.733 (seller/environment), 0.746 (products) well above 0.70 confirmed the internal validity of the identified factors. Other factors have less than 0.70 for Cronbach's  $\alpha$  – 0.60 (attraction), 0.613 (culture) and shopping (0.568) and are therefore not considered in more detail in the following appraisals. The broad pattern of the results is the researchers' central concern in this study and emphasis is placed on the overall alignment of the items rather than individual factors. The results of the analysis are reported in Table IV.

## **Discussion**

The aims of the study, which were to present and then compare the views of the visitors to Hong Kong night markets with the perception by vendors of how visitors would see the

**Table III** Factors describing visitors' perceptions of night markets

<i>Factor labels and items</i>	<i>Factor 1</i>	<i>Factor 2</i>	<i>Factor 3</i>
<i>Attraction/culture</i>			
A must-see attraction in Hong Kong	0.765		
Unique attraction in Hong Kong	0.736		
Experience mixing with local people	0.702		
Browsing cultural products in Asia	0.687		
Night markets have good locations	0.634		
Wide variety of product choices	0.484		
Enjoy hunting for bargains	0.457		
<i>Seller/environment</i>			
Sellers have good product knowledge		0.666	
Sellers are trustworthy and honest		0.659	
Easy to exchange/refund products		0.609	
Sellers are friendly & helpful		0.604	
Ease of communication with sellers		0.590	
Night markets surrounding are clean		0.543	
<i>Products</i>			
Products are of high quality			0.669
Products are value for money			0.624
Products are trendy/up-to-date			0.607
% of variance explained	14.48	14.18	5.06
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.799	0.708	0.691

**Table IV** Factors describing vendors' perceptions of night markets

<i>Factor labels and items</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Seller/environment</i>					
Sellers are trustworthy and honest	0.804				
Sellers are friendly and helpful	0.664				
Sellers have good product knowledge	0.661				
Night markets are clean and hygienic	0.639				
<i>Products</i>					
Products are trendy/up-to-date		0.845			
Products are of high quality		0.759			
Wide variety of product choices		0.693			
<i>Attraction</i>					
A must-visit attraction in Hong Kong			0.795		
Night markets have good locations			0.666		
<i>Culture</i>					
Experience mixing with local people				0.808	
Browsing cultural products in Asia				0.769	
Ease of communication with seller				0.399	
<i>Shopping</i>					
Products are value for money					0.737
Enjoy hunting for bargains					0.655
Browse products than purchase					0.623
% of variance explained	7.20	5.04	1.77	4.23	3.99
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.733	0.746	0.60	0.613	0.568

issues, were met in two ways. The detailed responses on a set of systematically selected items were shown to be consistently different. The vendors repeatedly overestimated how positive the visitors were about the night markets. A brief analogy can be drawn here to emphasize the actual substantive meanings of these differences. If the five-item Likert scale is likened to a 5 star rating system, the vendors usually assumed that the visitors were giving 3.5 to 4 star evaluations. By way of contrast, the visitors gave some ratings as two

stars and their most common evaluations were in the three star range. The largest differences were with some of the lowest rated items – the poor quality of the products, products as value for money and the trustworthiness of the sellers.

The comparisons of the views were also shown to have a different overall pattern. The factor analysis results suggested that the vendors believe that visitors have a more differentiated pattern of themes underlining their views than was actually the case. While the visitors' dominant themes and highest loading themes were about the attraction of shopping, followed by social contact with and the qualities of the sellers, the vendors believed that products would be the dominant theme and the interaction with themselves of substantial thematic importance.

Street vendors are often characterized as being shrewd micro-entrepreneurs. They are sometimes depicted as “street smart” with implicit knowledge about their customers derived from years of interacting with them. The present study contradicts these assertions. Not only do the street vendors in this study overestimate the positivity of the visitors' views, but they also believe that the visitors are giving priority to thematic aspects of the night market experience about which they are, in fact, only somewhat concerned. The researchers have built these findings on a solid, diverse visitor sample of nearly 2,000 visitors and a large number of the available vendors, so the results can be considered as robust.

There are several issues to review from these findings. The logic of contemporary academic ideas arising from service design logic and attentiveness to the views of customers for good business outcomes may be sound in many contexts (Stickdorn and Schwarzenberger, 2016). In the present study of night markets, these academic and analytical ideals seem to be at odds with everyday realities. It is important to observe that the writing about understanding the customer derives from many non-tourism situations (Pine *et al.*, 1999). The approach is rooted in multiple and repeat purchases of a service and experience by a stable market base. There are implications from the present study that question the universality of the service design logic, at least for shorter-term success. The challenges can be summarized as follows.

First, it is unclear how much of a difference in vendor and visitor views really matters. The degree of alignment or the adequacy of the insights about visitors was shown to be rather poor in the present study in the sense that the differences were statistically significant. Using a simple calculation of the values on the five-point scale with the visitors' views as the denominator and the vendors' assessments as the numerator, the percentage differences in the significantly different item scores varied between 9.3 and 33.2 percent. This additional information suggests that the significance reflects a substantive difference in the scores. It is possible to speculate that this difference might be enough to matter for the longer-term viability of the vendors.

A second issue, however, may, undercut the importance of these recorded differences. Unlike the business models on which some of the service design logic points were built, the street markets have many transient customers. In fact, over 50 percent of the sample (the international visitors) are quite unlikely to return. It can be argued that potentially the vendors can exploit the visitors for some time because the feedback and consequences of selling low quality goods, and not being very trustworthy, matter less if new customers keep appearing. A third issue is that the calculations and reasoning that has led to these points is based on the means (or average perceptions of their customers) reported by the vendors. It can be argued that the vendors may have a more refined street-smart awareness of the different markets – local visitors, mainland Chinese, and those from western nationalities (Lloyd *et al.*, 2011; Wu *et al.*, 2014). Potentially their average views do not reflect this variability. For those following the service design logic, the question then becomes how refined or specific do analyses need to be to capture the diversity in the

market? This potential source of confusion may be partly addressed by examining the variability of the scores. While the argument may have some merit, the standard deviations around the scores are no greater than those of the visitors and do not tend to indicate that the means are built on a wide distribution.

All studies exist within a framework of limitations and restrictions. For the present work, it would be desirable to ascertain that the figures reported apply to other night markets in Hong Kong and China. Further, the generalizability of the results for different market types, those that offer food or cater to specific interests' needs examination. The possibility exists that the general night market will fold as specific tailored options, such as craft, art, flower and homewares themed spaces replace the basic all-purpose format.

## Conclusion

It was suggested at the start of this paper that street markets and night markets face competition from other shopping styles and spaces. It can be further suggested that the sustainability of night markets must be at risk without better vendor understanding of the visitors' perspectives. Indeed, in the multiple perspectives on sustainability, the ability of businesses to continue to trade is a defining component of contemporary economic views. The vendors in the specific kinds of markets examined in this study, and arguably others like them in Asia and beyond, did not accurately appraise the visitors' views. Both in the individual features they rated as important and in the factors that characterized the larger clusters of items, the vendors missed some of the key visitor views. The implications from this work are that vendors may have to form new group alliances to understand and then deliver the overall atmosphere, quality of goods and service interactions prized by tourists. Vendors need to sustain their appeal and sales through maintenance of these overall night market characteristics. The vendors may be able to escape individual censure and rejection for a while due to the transient customer base, but broader destination and attraction image concerns are likely to be a longer-term force requiring attention. It would be a pity if tourist night markets slowly closed down because at their best, they provide contact with local settings and communities unparalleled by other shopping spaces.

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