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Legal and Illegal Souvenir Shoppers; Identifying and Comparing Factors Affecting Purchasing Behavior between Legal and Illegal Afghan Immigrants

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Abstract

In recent decades, tourism has played a significant role in the economies of many countries. One of the crucial elements in tourism is souvenir shopping. However, there is no research exploring Afghan souvenir shopping behavior. In addition, there is no research analysis of legal and illegal shoppers. The main objective of the present study is to identify the factors influencing Afghan immigrants' selection of souvenirs, as well as to compare and analyze the purchasing behavior of legal and illegal Afghan immigrants. The research method employed in the current study is a qualitative approach with a semi-structured interview technique. Interviews were conducted with 45 individuals, including legal and illegal Afghan immigrants, comprising tourists, traders, students, and workers traveling to Iran. The data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. According to the research findings, the influential factors on souvenir selection by legal immigrants include: "Tourism-Centric Nature of Souvenirs", "Needs and Expectations", "Diverse Shopping Styles", "Cultural and Ethnic Lenses", "Ethical Considerations", and "Real and Virtual Worlds". Additionally, the influential factors of souvenir selection by illegal immigrants include: "Economic Conditions", "Purchase Motivation", "Affordability", "Collective Shopping Style", "Cultural and Ethnic Lenses", "Ethical Considerations", and "Real World Influence". Finally, it offers a comparison of purchasing behavior between legal and illegal societies. This study adds to the current body of knowledge by exploring a novel context.

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Introduction

Given the significance of shopping during travel and leisure, shopping is recognized as one of the important forms of tourism (Timothy, 2005, Olsen & Timothy, 2021). Buying souvenirs is considered an important and growing aspect of modern tourism, as travelers often bring back items as mementos and symbols of their travel experience. These items not only serve as gifts for family, friends, and relatives, but also represent a sense of attachment, a remembrance of the journey, and a means of cultural transmission (Swanson, 2004, Olsen & Timothy, 2021). The recollection of travel memories plays a crucial role in shaping tourists' future behavioral intentions, often influencing their attachment to destinations and their desire to revisit or repurchase related products (Behboodi et al., 2022). Since souvenirs hold cultural and historical significance, they function as tools for conveying the culture and history of a destination, potentially attracting further tourism and contributing to the ongoing development of the tourism industry (Tosun et al., 2007). Spiritual and cultural tourism evokes a unique sense of identity and emotional belonging, where the consumption of travel products, such as souvenirs, is often closely linked to the personal meanings attributed to places and memories” (Behboodi et al., 2022) Additionally, Souvenirs, especially those handcrafted by local artisans, not only preserve cultural identity but also play a critical role in empowering small enterprises. These products serve as a bridge between tourists and the local culture while fostering entrepreneurship, creating employment opportunities, and contributing to inclusive economic development in guest communities. In tourism-dependent regions, such as parts of Iran where Afghan immigrants frequently visit, the production and sale of souvenirs offer a sustainable means of supporting local economies and enhancing community livelihoods (Nainggolan et al., 2022).

Considering that tourists possess diverse mental patterns, one of the most significant challenges for tourism planners is identifying the multifaceted factors that influence tourist shopping behavior. As Swanson and Horridge (2004) note, these determinants are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, emotional, and economic elements, complicating efforts to establish a universal model. Building on this, Oh et al. (2004) highlighted how socio-demographic characteristics and trip typologies can serve as predictors of shopping behavior, offering a foundational understanding of how external factors shape consumer actions. More recently, Wei and Zhang (2025) expanded this perspective by incorporating psychological and emotional drivers, such as attitudes, subjective norms, and nostalgia, into the analysis of tourists' intentions to purchase intangible cultural heritage (ICH) products. Their findings suggest that beyond demographics and trip types, emotional value and social influence play critical roles in shaping consumer behavior. Together, these studies emphasize that effective tourism planning must account for

a broad range of behavioral influences—from economic accessibility to emotional and cultural resonance—in order to better meet the expectations of diverse tourist populations.

This study aims to explore the factors influencing the souvenir purchasing behavior of Afghan immigrants in Iran. It is worth noting that prior to selecting this research topic, through interactions with Afghan immigrants in Iran, the researchers of this study observed significant differences in the shopping behavior between legal and illegal Afghan immigrants. Furthermore, to our best knowledge, there has been no research conducted on the factors influencing Afghans' souvenir purchasing behavior. Approximately five million Afghans live in Iran, with roughly four million of them being illegal Afghan immigrants who have come to Iran for work. The remaining five million Afghans are legal immigrants with valid visas, having traveled to Iran for tourism, education, and business purposes (DW, 2023). Upon returning to their homeland, this significant population brings back brands and products from the host country as souvenirs for their families, friends, and relatives.

In the post-mass tourism phase, a shift toward culturally and environmentally aware travel has emerged, wherein tourists seek authentic and meaningful experiences that align with their cultural identities and values (Delshad et al., 2024). Souvenir purchases among Afghan immigrants are not just influenced by practical or economic considerations but are deeply rooted in cultural identity, nostalgia, and emotional connection. Immigrants tend to favor culturally resonant items—such as traditional crafts or religious artifacts—which serve as symbols of belonging and memory preservation (Swanson, 2004). Memorable souvenir shopping experiences are linked to heightened nostalgia, destination attachment, and revisit intentions. A study by Sthapit et al. (2024) found that factors such as experience co-creation, involvement, and shopping satisfaction contribute to the memorability of souvenir shopping. For Afghan immigrants, engaging souvenir shopping experiences may evoke nostalgia and strengthen their emotional bonds with the host country.

Finally, the level of acculturation plays a vital role in shaping consumer preferences. Immigrants' exposure to and interaction with the host culture can gradually influence their consumption habits and souvenir choices (Üstüner & Holt, 2007). Overall acculturation is thought to be linked to the connection individuals maintain with stores from their native culture, in turn, appears to shape the purchasing behavior of people living in a different cultural context (De-Juan-Vigaray et al., 2021). Acculturation significantly shapes consumer behavior among immigrant populations, influencing not only their brand preferences but also their purchasing impulses. As Afghan immigrants integrate into the host society's consumer environment, their buying behavior may be altered by the acculturation process, similar to patterns observed in other migrant groups (Thomas & Varghese, 2022).

Despite the growing interest in immigrant consumer behavior, there remains limited understanding of how both cultural and non-cultural factors shape the souvenir purchasing decisions of immigrant

populations. This gap in the literature hinders a comprehensive understanding of how and why Afghan immigrants engage in souvenir shopping, both as a means of cultural expression and consumer behavior. Addressing this issue is essential to better inform marketers, cultural preservationists, and policymakers in designing more inclusive and effective strategies. In light of these perspectives, this paper investigates both the cultural and non-cultural factors that shape the souvenir shopping behavior of Afghan immigrants in Iran. It also aims to highlight the differences in motivations and constraints experienced by legal versus illegal Afghan immigrants, contributing to a deeper understanding of how migration status affect consumer behavior.

This study offers two main contributions. It provides a deeper understanding of souvenir shopping, especially by comparing legal and illegal shoppers. On the other hand, it is the first to study Afghans' souvenir purchasing behavior. Prior research has largely treated Afghan shoppers as a homogenous group, ignoring the socio-cultural and legal distinctions that may drive divergent purchasing behaviors. This study addresses this gap by offering a comparative exploration of the factors influencing the souvenir purchasing behaviors of legal and illegal Afghan immigrants in Iran. In view of the above discussion, the purpose of the present study is to identify the factors influencing the purchase of souvenir products by Afghan nationals and to explore the differences and similarities in the influential factors between legal and illegal Afghan shoppers.

Literature Review

Concept of Tourist Souvenir Shopping

Purchasing souvenirs is an integral part of the tourist shopping experience and a fundamental element of tourism. On the other hand, in recent years, tourism, as an emerging industry, has had significant effects on economic, social, and cultural aspects, such as job creation, foreign exchange earnings, regional balance, support for investment in cultural heritage, environmental conservation, and wildlife habitats, all of which are among the benefits of this industry (Timothy, 2011). A unique tourist destination assists customers in fulfilling more of their desires and positively influences their overall experience. According to studies, experiences in such destinations can evoke emotional and cognitive engagement, positively influencing tourists' overall satisfaction and future travel choices. Factors like the uniqueness of the environment, cultural immersion, and personalized services can make these destinations irreplaceable in the minds of tourists, fostering loyalty and increasing the likelihood of return visits. Tourist destinations that offer distinct experiences, including education, entertainment, and escapism, can boost tourist inspiration and motivation. These positive interactions deeply influence their desire to revisit and recommend the destination to others, which is crucial for long-term destination success (Xue et al., 2022; Godovykh & Tasci, 2020). Recent studies indicate a growing interest among

tourists in authentic, locally produced souvenirs, such as handmade textiles, artisanal crafts, and regional food items. These items not only serve as tangible mementos of travel but also reflect the cultural identity and uniqueness of the destination. According to Gao and Wu (2023), place-based souvenirs enhance visitors' cultural experience by representing traditional craftsmanship and the distinctiveness of the location. Moreover, shopping has emerged as a significant travel motivator, with many tourists viewing souvenir shopping as a meaningful part of their experiential consumption. Chen et al. (2022) found that tourists' purchase intentions for food-related souvenirs are closely linked to the perceived authenticity and emotional value of the items. Additionally, Castellanos-Verdugo et al. (2017) emphasize that souvenir shopping contributes to travel satisfaction by reinforcing personal memories and emotional connections with destinations.

Researchers' studies on consumer behavior and influencing factors have considered various factors as influential factors in purchasing souvenirs. According to Fratu (2011), factors influencing tourist behavior encompass psychological, social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors. These factors can be categorized into three groups. The first category includes individual factors such as demographics, personality, self-esteem, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, perceptions, and lifestyle. The second category comprises social factors, including culture, family, social class, and reference groups, among which culture is one of the most important. The third category encompasses situational factors, as well as physical and social-environmental factors. Tourism marketers can formulate effective strategies by understanding these factors that influence behavior (Fratu, 2011). Wang et al. (2024) investigate the role of value perceptions in influencing tourist souvenir purchase decisions. Drawing on multidimensional value theory, the study identifies five core dimensions of perceived value that shape consumer behavior in the tourism context: functional value, monetary value, emotional value, social value, and novelty value. Using structural equation modeling, the authors assess the relative influence of each value dimension on tourists' purchase intentions. The findings reveal that functional value—defined as the practical utility and perceived quality of a souvenir—and social value—the extent to which a souvenir fosters social recognition or interpersonal connection—are the most significant predictors of tourists' intention to purchase. Specifically, functional value was shown to affect preferences related to store features (e.g., location, product presentation), while social value influenced product-related, store-related, and souvenir-specific attributes. In contrast, monetary, emotional, and novelty, value did not exhibit a statistically significant direct effect on purchase intention, although the authors suggest these dimensions may exert indirect effects mediated through functional and social value.

Shopping

The presence of all items in tourist retail establishments is essential, but the most attractive and attention grabbing; products in the tourism shopping sector are souvenirs (Timothy, 2011). Examination of how non-natives buy souvenirs is important since souvenir purchases constitute approximately 30 to 33 percent of travel expenses. According to sources such as Zargham and Atrsaai (2006), research shows that for international tourists, souvenirs sometimes account for up to 50 percent of total travel expenses. From the tourists' perspective, a good souvenir should transform the intangible experience of the trip into something tangible. From the retailers' perspective, such a souvenir should satisfy the needs of the target market and bring economic benefits (Swanson & Horridge, 2006).

Synthesizing insights from the literature, multiple theoretical frameworks have been employed to explain immigrant souvenir purchasing behavior. Acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) posits that individuals who maintain a strong orientation toward their heritage culture are more likely to prefer culturally meaningful souvenirs, while those more assimilated into the host culture may opt for mainstream tourist items. Complementing this, cultural value theory suggests that core values embedded in Afghan culture—such as collectivism, tradition, and uncertainty avoidance—may enhance the symbolic importance of souvenirs as expressions of social identity and belonging. Consumer behavior models, particularly the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), have also been applied to souvenir consumption, indicating that positive attitudes toward authenticity, aesthetics, and cultural meaning significantly influence purchase intentions.

Furthermore, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and the concept of symbolic consumption frame souvenirs as identity tools through which immigrants negotiate their sense of self and belonging across cultures. In a similar vein, the theory of diasporic objects, as discussed by Pechurina (2020), emphasizes how migrants imbue everyday items—including souvenirs—with deeply personal meanings that evoke memory, identity, and lived experience in both home and host contexts.

Although no single study comprehensively addresses all of these conceptual dimensions, collectively they illustrate that immigrant souvenir purchasing is shaped by an interplay of cultural identity (including homeland attachment, nostalgia, and ethno cultural pride) and non-cultural or practical factors (such as travel purpose, level of acculturation, socioeconomic status, and availability of ethnic goods). These motivations often manifest in behaviors such as purchasing traditional crafts, symbolic heritage items, or hybrid products that reflect both host and origin cultures. In the context of Afghan immigrants, one might reasonably expect a preference for souvenirs such as handcrafted textiles, calligraphic art, or miniature paintings that serve as tangible reminders of national heritage while simultaneously reinforcing a personal sense of nostalgia and cultural continuity. While empirical studies

specifically focused on Afghan immigrants remain limited, research on other Muslim and Central Asian diasporas suggests a consistent trend toward culturally resonant souvenir preferences.

Factors Influencing the Choice of Souvenirs

Li (2023) provides a comprehensive and systematic review of the literature on souvenirs in tourism, offering valuable insights into the fragmented yet growing body of research in this field. The study identifies four primary thematic areas: souvenir shopping, authenticity, souvenir meanings, and gift giving. The review emphasizes that souvenir shopping behaviors are influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including cultural norms, demographic characteristics, perceived authenticity, and destination image. Authenticity, in particular, is highlighted as a central determinant of tourists' perceived value and behavioral intention, shaping both the emotional and symbolic significance of souvenir purchases. Furthermore, Li underscores the dual role of souvenirs as both commodities and cultural artifacts that help tourists anchor and reconstruct their travel experiences. Despite the increasing scholarly attention, the study reveals a critical gap in theoretical development, with only a minority of studies employing established conceptual frameworks. Li therefore advocates for future research to adopt interdisciplinary approaches, integrate emerging digital and virtual souvenir trends, and consider post-pandemic shifts in tourist behavior to advance the field toward greater theoretical and methodological maturity.

It should be noted that souvenirs play a significant role in destination management, as they are connected to tourism both psychologically and economically. Tourists evaluate souvenirs based on specific characteristics (Li, 2023). They often do not shop while holding a predefined list of items but make their purchase decisions based on various factors. They decide to buy based on the cumulative expected values they will gain from a souvenir (Kim & Littrell, 1999). Kim & Littrell (2001) consider some features of souvenirs, such as ease of transportation, relatively low price, easy cleanliness, and usability in the tourist's home country, among the prioritized characteristics for tourists. According to Kim and Littrell (2001), among the important features considered by tourists when choosing souvenirs are the design of the item, high craftsmanship in its making, and attractive colors. Some tourists prefer their purchased souvenirs to reflect the cultural environment of the destination or can be easily cleaned and are maintainable. They may also seek a symbolic representation of the visited destination, find the souvenir practical, and be aesthetically pleasing, especially if crafted by renowned artists (Swanson & Timothy, 2012). The authenticity of souvenirs is also considered a significant aspect for tourists (Cohen, 1988). The physical attributes of a shop can also affect tourists' evaluation of the store. The ability of salespeople to communicate in the language of tourists is also considered crucial, as it can be an indicator of hospitality and attention to tourists (Yuksel, 2004). Some tourists prefer their purchased souvenirs to be unique and not have multiple copies available (Li, 2023). Characteristics such as reasonable price,

quality, the behavior of store staff, and the credibility of the store are also perceived as important for tourists (Li, 2023). According to Hu and Yu (2007), when choosing handicrafts, tourists consider various criteria, including the cultural connection between handicrafts and the destination, ease of transportation, ease of use, maintenance, and the skill employed in their creation. In their article titled 'Souvenir shopping attitudes and behavior among Chinese domestic tourists,' Li and Cai (2008) examined the patterns of souvenir purchasing by domestic tourists in China. According to the results of this research, five factors, including collectability, display characteristics, store attributes, value, and functionality, are considered important for souvenir buying. They found that the level of satisfaction among tourists varies based on gender, age, income, and the type of companions during the trip.

Boudlaie et al. (2021), in their research titled "Identifying factors influencing the selection of souvenir products in the Kish Free Zone", stated that when a tourist is meeting their needs at the destination, souvenir shopping is one of the topics for friends and acquaintances. On the other hand, they also buy products and items for themselves to evoke a sense of nostalgia in the future. Undoubtedly, purchasing souvenirs can create additional perceived value for tourists at a travel destination. This value can be examined in two important areas: hedonic and functional. Rastgar & Shahriari (2018) stated that creating a desirable mental image of the shopping center in a customer's mind is one of the essential factors in attracting new customers and retaining previous ones. It increases the willingness to purchase by influencing perceived value, customer satisfaction, and customer preferences. In this study, the importance of the tourism destination was also emphasized as one of the consequences of identifying factors influencing souvenir selection.

Meitiana et al. (2019) identify several key factors influencing tourists' souvenir purchasing behavior, providing valuable insights for tourism marketers. First, cultural significance plays a crucial role, as tourists are more likely to purchase souvenirs that reflect a destination's local traditions and heritage. Such items serve as meaningful reminders of their travel experiences. Second, product quality is a significant consideration, with tourists favoring high quality, well-crafted items perceived as authentic and durable. Finally, emotional attachment strongly affects purchasing decisions, as tourists often buy souvenirs to maintain a personal connection to their trip, preserving memories of specific experiences or moments.

A study by Su et al. (2023) provides valuable insights into the factors that influence tourists' purchasing decisions regarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH) creative products. The researchers found that tourists are particularly attracted to products that are visually appealing, culturally significant, emotionally resonant, and reasonably priced. These attributes contribute to the perceived value of the items, which in turn strongly influences purchase intentions. Uniqueness and authenticity emerged as especially important, as tourists often seek souvenirs that meaningfully represent the identity and

traditions of the destination. By highlighting the importance of combining aesthetic quality, cultural symbolism, emotional appeal, and affordability, this study offers clear guidance for artisans and tourism marketers aiming to design and promote handicrafts that resonate with diverse consumer preferences. Kamal et al. (2013) investigated the relationship between materialism, attitudes, and social media usage, and their impacts on the purchase intention of luxury fashion goods among young generations in America and the Arab world. The study found that materialism significantly influences purchase intentions, with individuals who exhibit higher levels of materialistic values being more inclined to buy luxury items. Additionally, attitudes toward luxury fashion were shown to mediate this relationship, highlighting that positive attitudes can enhance the likelihood of purchase. The authors also emphasized the role of social media usage, noting that active engagement with social media platforms can amplify purchase intentions by fostering brand awareness and facilitating social comparisons. These findings suggest that marketers targeting young consumers should consider the interplay between materialistic values, positive brand attitudes, and effective social media strategies to enhance their influence on luxury fashion purchases.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, utilizing interviews as the primary data collection method. The qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis approach (Sadeghvaziri, 2020; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model, the authors followed the steps below. 1) Familiarization: All interviews were transcribed and read multiple times by the researchers. 2) Generating initial codes: The coding was inductive and data-driven. Meaningful segments were coded manually and grouped based on recurring ideas. 3) Searching for themes: Codes were categorized under preliminary themes reflecting participant narratives. 4) Reviewing themes: Themes were compared and refined to ensure they accurately captured the coded data. 5) Defining and naming themes: The themes were clearly labeled and defined to reflect their underlying patterns. 6) Producing the report: Themes were supported by representative quotations and integrated into findings.

This study's target population comprises Afghan individuals immigrating to Iran for accommodation, business, employment, and education. These individuals are divided into two legal groups: the first group consists of those with residency documents and commercial or tourist visas traveling to Iran, and the second group comprises individuals without legal documents, specifically workers traveling to Iran for employment. The first group, consisting of legal Afghan citizens, holds educational qualifications at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. The frequency of souvenir-purchasing experiences in this group is such that they typically return to their home country every four

or five months and engage in souvenir shopping during these visits. The second group comprises illegal immigrants, some of whom have basic educational qualifications, while others lack formal credentials. This group generally stays in the country for approximately two years or more during each trip and purchases souvenir products before returning to their home country.

This research utilized snowball sampling as the sampling method and semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with subsequent thematic analysis. Before the interviews, individuals were invited, and arrangements concerning the interview method, timing, and execution were coordinated both in-person and virtually. Interview times were predominantly determined by the interviewees, with interview locations commonly being their homes, libraries, cafes, or parks. The interviews typically lasted from half an hour to one hour. All individuals interviewed had experience-purchasing souvenirs for their families and relatives. The interviews were conducted with both legal and illegal immigrants from various ethnic groups in Afghanistan, including Tajiks (Persian Dari speakers), Pashtuns (Pashto speakers), Uzbeks and Turkmens (Uzbek speakers), and Hazaras (Persian speakers). Although the sampled individuals resided in different cities in Iran, most of the interviews were conducted in person in several cities across Iran, and a small number of interviews were conducted remotely through telephone calls or online platforms due to the significant geographical distance. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached, ultimately conducting interviews with 45 participants, including 25 legal and 20 illegal immigrants. The demographic characteristics of the sample population are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Legal Immigrant Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Marital status	Frequency	Locations of interviews	Frequency	Education	Frequency	Length of stay in Iran	Frequency
Male	15	Single	18	Tehran	10	Bachelor degree	10	(2-10) years	12
Female	10	Married	7	Mashhad	15	Master degree	13	(10-15) years	8
				Isfahan	3	Doctoral degree	2	(15-20) years	5
				Golestan	2				
				Yazd	4				
				Qazvin	1				

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Illegal Immigrant Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Marital status	Frequency	Location of interviews	Frequency
Male	20	Single	5	Tehran	10
Female	0	Married	15	Mashhad	3
Education	Frequency	Length of stay in Iran	Frequency	Isfahan	3
Illiterate	9	(2-10) years	5	Shiraz	2
School	8	(10-15) years	6	Yazd	2
Bachelor	3	(15-20) years	9		

Findings

After each interview, the analysis of that interview was carried out. In the open coding process, numerous themes emerged, and through an iterative process of data analysis, this initial set of qualitative data was reduced to fewer themes. Subsequently, each of the generated themes is defined. This research was designed to identify, analyze, and compare inflectional factors affecting legal and illegal immigrants. In the open coding stage, the interview text was transcribed, and after a line-by-line review, points related to tourists' behavior in the selection of souvenirs were extracted. The sample quotations, codes, sub-themes, and main themes influencing the selection of souvenirs by legal citizens in Table 3 and illegal citizens in Table 4 are displayed.

Table 3. Sample Quotations, Codes, Subthemes, and Main Themes of Legal Subjects

Main Theme	Subtheme	Code	Key Points/ Sample Quotation
Tourism Oriented Souvenirs	Product	Product Quality	Products with better quality and reasonable price
	Quality	Product Price	
	The Impact of Tourism	Accessibility	In tourist locations, access to goods is greater, influencing our purchases.
		Providing a Suitable Image	In tourist spots, because the space is suitable for the entry of domestic and foreign tourists, a greater variety of products from different brands is seen, leading tourists to choose products as souvenirs. By seeing a suitable image of product brands on social networks, I am inclined to choose that brand as a souvenir.
Needs and Expectations	Meeting the Needs of Belonging	Friendly Relationships	Bringing souvenirs for a person makes them feel happy and joyful. Souvenir-giving, apart from its material value, has many spiritual values that create friendly relations between both parties.

	Expectation	Expectancy	According to local customs, when we travel away from our home, our compatriots expect us to bring back a gift.
	Travel Experience	Travel Memory	Seeing the products purchased during my stay abroad reminds me of the memories I had there.
Cultural and National Glasses	Impact of Cultural, National, and Religious Influences	National Cultures	Every ethnic group has its customs, and souvenir-giving and buying are related to their ethnic culture. We should buy souvenirs according to our customs; for example, we buy more handicrafts according to our customs.
		Religious Beliefs	I prefer to make my purchases in the clothing sector according to my religious instructions.
Real and Virtual World	Online Advertising	People's Recommendation	Comments related to products published on virtual media have their own impacts because they mostly talk about product usage experiences.
	In-Person Advertising	Friends' Suggestions	Friends' recommendations, based on their awareness of products, play a significant role in purchases and lead to a kind of word-of-mouth advertising among friends and others. I mostly try to buy based on my friends' experiences.
Diverse Shopping Styles	Shopping Method	Different	I make my purchases individually, in groups, and online.
Moral Magnet	Seller's Behavior	Proper Behavior	I prefer to buy from a seller who has a better attitude and behavior towards their clients.
		Improper Behavior	I prefer not to buy, even at a lower price, if the seller does not behave properly.

Table 4. Sample Quotations, Codes, Subthemes, and Main Themes of Illegal Migrants

Main Theme	Subtheme	Code	Key Points/ Sample Quotation
Affordability	Product Quality	Product Price	I buy products that have a lower price.
			I try to buy products at a reasonable price as souvenirs.
		Product Quality	I buy products that have better quality.
			I try to buy better quality products as souvenirs.
Buying Motivation	Expectations and Demands	Collective Expectation	Relatives and kin naturally have the most expectations from us, and this expectation comes from our relatives and kin.
		Family Expectation	I buy souvenirs for my family and relatives to reduce their pressure.
	Travel Experience	Travel Memory	Seeing the products purchased during my stay abroad reminds me of my memories.

Main Theme	Subtheme	Code	Key Points/ Sample Quotation
Cultural and Ethnic Glasses	Impact of Religion and Culture	Ethnic Cultures	The dominant ethnic customs and culture cause us to bring back souvenirs when returning from abroad. Not buying souvenirs creates a feeling of deficiency in us.
		Religious	In purchases like clothing and other items, we follow our religious guidelines.
Real World	In-Person Advertising	Friends' Suggestions	Friends' recommendations, based on their awareness of products, play a significant role and lead to a kind of word-of-mouth advertising among friends and others. I try to buy based on my friends' experiences.
Collective Shopping Styles	Shopping Method	Shared	I prefer to make my purchases more collectively.
Moral Magnet	Ethical Aspect	Proper Behavior	I try to make my purchases from a seller who behaves friendly towards me as their customers.
		Improper Behavior	If they behave inappropriately and act harshly, I prefer not to buy from such a store at all.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study provided a better understanding of souvenir shopping, especially by comparing legal and illegal shoppers. It also added empirically to the current body of knowledge through new evidence from Afghanistan-Iran. More importantly, it has made an important contribution to tourism literature by comparing and analyzing legal and illegal souvenir shopping behavior, which is a novel context. Thus, the present findings have implications for both researchers and practitioners. This study enriches the theoretical understanding of souvenir shopping behavior by introducing legal status as a critical differentiating factor among immigrant consumers. It broadens the literature by framing legality not only as a political or economic identity but also as a driver of distinct consumer logics and behaviors. From a managerial perspective, vendors and tourism marketers should tailor their offerings and outreach strategies to account for the contrasting behaviors and preferences of legal versus illegal immigrant shoppers. For instance, online promotions may be more effective for legal immigrants, while direct, in-person communication may resonate more with illegal immigrants. Ethical selling practices, including respectful treatment and transparency, are crucial for gaining trust across both segments.

Overall, our findings align with Fratu (2011), who emphasized the influence of economic and psychological factors in tourist behavior, particularly among low-income groups. The role of affordability among illegal immigrants echoes the conclusions of Meitiana et al. (2019), who also noted emotional attachment as a significant purchase motivator. Furthermore, the reliance of legal immigrants on virtual platforms for product selection is consistent with the findings of Kamal et al. (2013) emphasizing the role of social media in shaping purchase intentions in digitally literate populations. The

rest of the paper is organized as follows: First, legal and illegal Afghan immigrants' buying behaviors are explained. Next, the differences between the two societies are discussed in detail.

Legal Immigrants

A) Tourism-oriented souvenirs. The tourism industry has a substantial impact on the contemporary economy. It also stimulates the purchase of products and brands from the host country, which tourists acquire as souvenirs. Thus, the tourism-oriented souvenirs significantly influence tourist purchases. Respondents indicated that they buy products that are of better quality and more affordable. Additionally, respondents viewed the shopping location as an important factor and relied on information from the virtual space.

B) Needs and Expectations: Gift-giving involves needs and expectations, especially in the sense that the recipient feels happiness and intimacy by receiving gifts, and because the giver believes that they are important and valued by their friends or relatives who traveled outside their home country. Furthermore, it fosters intimate and friendly relationships among relatives and gift recipients. Additionally, the recipient feels valuable and important or feels they have a special place in the eyes of the person bringing the gift. Moreover, upon returning to their place of residence, after a considerable amount of time has passed, individuals often experience a nostalgic feeling when they see the souvenirs brought back from their travels. These souvenirs evoke memories of the places visited, keeping those travel experiences alive.

C) Cultural and National Glasses: Souvenirs are considered one of the most important tangible symbols and keepsakes of travel experiences and memories, thus preserving the memories of the journey. Purchases of cultural souvenirs are discussed from two perspectives: religious and ethnic-cultural factors, and differences and lack of contradictions. From a religious and ethnic-cultural perspective, Afghanistan is a country with a rich historical heritage, with about ninety-nine percent of its population being Muslims. The people of this country have different languages, cultures, clothing styles, and ways of life; therefore, in their souvenir purchases, they act according to their regional and religious customs and are influenced by their regional customs. In other words, being a Tajik or Hazara tourist affects their purchases of clothing brands, handicrafts, foods, etc.

For example, an Afghan woman preparing to return to her homeland, Afghanistan, is excited to bring back souvenirs from Iran for her relatives. She carefully selects items that are not only useful but also reflect the artistry of Iranian women. She decides on a Turkmen carpet, admiring its intricate patterns woven with silk threads dyed in natural colors, symbolizing the rich civilization and nomadic heritage of its makers. These carpets, adorned with motifs of goats and birds, serve as a tangible connection to the cultural legacy of Iranian Turkmen women. Additionally, she opts for 'kachi' or felt

carpets, crafted by Turkmen women from sheep's wool, known for their therapeutic benefits in alleviating back and joint pain. Recognizing the harsh climates of Afghanistan, she believes these felt carpets, with their insulating properties, will offer comfort and relief to her fellow countrymen. Alongside these traditional items, she also purchases herbal shampoos and creams produced in Iran, intending to introduce the craftsmanship of Iranian women and provide practical beauty solutions for the women back home. Through her thoughtful selection of souvenirs, she aims to bridge cultural connections between neighboring countries and empower the women of her homeland to care for themselves while celebrating their shared heritage.

From the perspective of male interviewees, examples of souvenir brands have been expressed as follows: One of the Pashto-speaking respondents expressed the following: I am more interested in cosmetic products, jewelry, clothing, scarves, bags, shoes, watches, etc. One of the respondents, who was from Uzbekistan, mentioned scarves, hijabs, fabric, silver rings, necklaces, other jewelry, notebooks, shampoo, and for their family, carpets, refrigerators, electrical appliances, etc. One of the respondents, who was Hazara, mentioned that they mostly purchase gifts such as scarves, hijabs, prayer shawls, handmade bags, etc.

D) Real and Virtual World: The real and virtual worlds are also influential factors in tourist purchases. Nowadays, brands are competing with each other in both the real and virtual world. Intense advertising is felt necessary for every business to be recognized through its activities. To be recognized and stay up-to-date, brands need advertising that keeps the business at its peak with precise and effective planning. Individuals traveling to Iran for business, tourism, or education are influenced by both online and offline advertising when purchasing souvenirs. Online advertising through social media attracts the attention of buyers by providing high-quality information about their products. Additionally, word-of-mouth advertising creates a network effect. An important point to note is that legal Afghan citizens generally have higher levels of education and knowledge, so they read and consider the comments posted on social media when evaluating and making decisions about souvenir purchases.

E) Diverse Shopping Styles: Legal Afghans' purchasing methods are different. Some tourists prefer to go shopping alone and believe that they can better make their purchases and bring back what they like as souvenirs. Some even stated that they prefer online shopping, claiming less deception involved. Another group prefers to shop collectively or with friends.

F) Moral Magnet: Legal citizens strive to make the most of their purchases from stores whose sellers have good ethics. In interviews conducted with legal citizens in Iran, these individuals place great importance on the seller's ethics and believe that ethical sellers behave fairly and justly toward them. They believe that ethical sellers are trustworthy and adhere to their commitments. One of the respondents shared an experience where they visited a store and were met with disrespectful treatment from the

shopkeeper. Despite intending to purchase an item they liked, the shopkeeper's conduct was disruptive, causing them to leave the store and decide against future purchases. They emphasized the importance of ethical conduct, not only for enhancing the seller's earnings, but also as a fundamental aspect of both religious and human values, suggesting that treating others with respect and integrity should be a universal practice.

Illegal Immigrants

As mentioned earlier, this group of individuals, due to prevailing economic conditions and lack of suitable employment in their own countries, have been forced to reside in various countries around the world, especially in Iran, for a period of one to three years or more. When they want to return to their home country, their families, relatives, and acquaintances expect them to bring a souvenir. This section discusses this topic in six areas.

A) Affordability: Illegal immigrants residing in Iran try to please everyone with the souvenirs they bring back. According to Afghan culture, there are higher expectations from these individuals than legal immigrants. Therefore, they aim to purchase items of relatively better quality at a lower price to give as souvenirs.

One interviewee expressed this viewpoint: "Since many of my friends, relatives, and acquaintances have high expectations from me, I try to get more souvenirs of good quality and at a lower price." However, when it comes to cost-effective quality, they aim to ensure that the souvenirs they bring are of reasonable price and higher quality. In other words, these individuals try not to buy expensive souvenirs but do not compromise on quality for the sake of price.

B) Buying Motivation: Illegal immigrants usually come from less developed, more traditional areas of Afghanistan, where ethnic relations are close-knit. Accordingly, the collective and family expectations of them are higher. Illegal immigrants typically travel to Iran for work, and their stay is usually longer compared to legal immigrants. When they return to Afghanistan, their relatives and family members have relatively high expectations for receiving souvenirs. On the other hand, respondents mentioned the factor of travel experience and the emotions and memories of living and working in Iran. When they bring items for themselves or their families, after some time, looking at those items again reminds them of their memories and life in Iran, giving them a nostalgic feeling.

C) Cultural and Ethnic Glasses. Cultural perspective also plays an important role in souvenir purchasing, affecting the buyers in several ways, including religious views and ethnic norms. From a religious standpoint, their beliefs are highly valuable, and they strive to act in ways that do not contradict their religious convictions. Therefore, in most of their purchases, such as clothing and other items, illegal immigrants ensure their choices align with their religious guidelines. For instance, one respondent

mentioned: "We avoid buying women's clothing that might cause discussions among people or our acquaintances, such as ripped jeans, blouses (short clothing), and so on. However, we do purchase other items that are not in conflict with our beliefs, such as scarves, Iranian hijabs, jewelry, Isfahan Gaz (a type of sweet), pistachios, etc."

D) Real World. Among unauthorized immigrants residing in Iran, there is a greater reliance on the experiences of others. In other words, unlike legal immigrants, this community does not have much inclination toward the virtual world or using it in their souvenir-related decisions. Instead, verbal recommendations from their fellow countrymen in Iran play a key role.

E) Collective Shopping Styles. For unauthorized immigrants, shopping is often done collectively with groups of friends. As mentioned in the previous theme, these individuals place greater importance on their friends' opinions. Therefore, in souvenir shopping, collective views and opinions hold significant importance.

F) Moral Magnet. Ethical behavior is considered one of the most important factors by consumers. In any society, people prefer to shop at stores where the staff demonstrate appropriate behavior and ethics. Interviews with undocumented immigrants in Iran revealed that their main focus was on the seller's behavior. One respondent mentioned leaving a store after being treated poorly by a seller who complained about the mess caused by browsing. This experience led them to never return to that store. The respondents viewed ethical conduct as both a means for sellers to increase their income and an important religious and human principle, emphasizing the need to treat every person with respect and morality.

Comparison of the perspectives of Afghan citizens on legal and illegal matters

The comparison of these two groups of immigrants is expressed in six topics:

First. Individuals tend to have lower expectations from legal immigrants but they strive to buy higher-quality products. Conversely, the acquaintances of illegal immigrants have higher expectations. To ensure their relatives and acquaintances are satisfied, they need to bring more souvenirs as they are often closely observed upon their return from travel. Consequently, they do not purchase low quality or very cheap souvenirs but aim for items of necessary quality. Additionally, the tourist environment plays a significant role in souvenir shopping for legal immigrants, as it not only brings joy and excitement to the individual but also provides the necessary motivation to buy various items for souvenirs. This factor is not observed among illegal immigrants. Furthermore, legal immigrants rely more on information disseminated in the virtual space, which is not the case for illegal immigrants.

Second. From the perspective of buying motivation, the satisfaction of belonging needs is more evident in legal immigrants. The important point is that the expectation of receiving souvenirs in legal

immigrants is mostly limited to close relatives or family members, whereas, in illegal immigrants, distant relatives and acquaintances also expect souvenirs. It is worth mentioning that psychological pressure has a significant impact on illegal immigrants. It should be further noted that if they return to their homeland without souvenirs, they feel a sense of deprivation and humiliation, which stems from the perceptions and expectations of the local people and their relatives. The experience of traveling for legal and illegal citizens is somewhat similar, meaning that both groups, when bringing back items such as watches, rings, etc., from their stay in Iran, reminisce about their memories in that country.

Third. Religious, cultural, and regional glasses have similar influences on both legal and illegal immigrants regarding obedience and adherence to religious directives. However, there are differences in the national cultural perspective between the two groups because there are higher national expectations for souvenirs among illegal immigrants. Many of their relatives and acquaintances expect souvenirs from them, and if they fail to bring them, the gossip and conversations from others make them feel inadequate. As mentioned, the cultural society of illegal immigrants is more traditional, and there is a greater expectation for adherence to norms.

Fourth. In the realm of the real world and virtual, although both legal and illegal citizens are similar in utilizing word-of-mouth recommendations and learning from others' experiences regarding products, legal immigrants tend to use online advertising and social media more. However, illegal immigrants have less inclination toward consumer opinions in the virtual world.

Fifth. The shopping style among legal citizens is both individual and collective, as well as online. However, illegal citizens more commonly purchase souvenirs collectively. As mentioned earlier, the primary reason for this difference can be attributed to illegal citizens relying on the opinions of others.

Sixth. The discussion revolves around the ethical dimension of commerce, where both legal and illegal citizens agree. Therefore, ethical selling is of paramount importance. Good ethics among sellers lead to attracting more customer attention. Therefore, according to the interviews conducted in this study, the findings indicate that the seller's ethics contribute to gaining the trust of buyers. In more explicit terms, the ethics of sellers constitute an intangible advantage.

Limitations and future research

Although the present research has been beneficial from both theoretical and practical perspectives, like any other study, it has its limitations. The most significant limitation of this research is its focus on identifying the factors influencing the selection of souvenir products in Iran by legal and illegal Afghan citizens. In other words, factors affecting the choice of souvenir products in other countries by other nationalities, which were not examined in this research, could be the subject of future research.

Another limitation stems from the qualitative research method used in this study. Although the output of the current research had appropriate depth due to the high level of insight in qualitative methods, it is necessary to conduct quantitative research with a much larger sample size and more extensive inferential analysis to enhance the generalizability of the results. Comparative studies in different host countries would help assess the generalizability of these insights beyond the Iran-Afghanistan context. Researchers may also examine the impact of digital platforms and social media in shaping souvenir-related preferences and identities among immigrant consumers. Additionally, exploring the influence of second-generation immigrants or women-only samples may uncover further nuances in souvenir shopping behavior within immigrant communities.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical research standards, with particular sensitivity to the legal status and personal circumstances of the participants. Given the involvement of both legal and undocumented Afghan immigrants, extra care was taken to ensure that all participants felt safe, respected, and fully informed. Participation was entirely voluntary, and individuals were invited through polite outreach via social media platforms and in-person interactions. The purpose and scope of the research were clearly explained in simple terms, emphasizing that the conversation would be brief, non-intrusive, and would not involve any questions that could compromise their privacy.

Participants were assured that their anonymity and confidentiality would be strictly preserved, with no identifiable information being collected or disclosed. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All responses were handled with the utmost discretion and stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. The research was conducted with cultural sensitivity and respect, and there were no conflicts of interest involved. Every effort was made to create a trusting environment where participants could share their experiences comfortably and safely.

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