Research Article
BIBLIOMETRIC PROFILE OF MYSTERY SHOPPING LITERATURE FROM 1997 TO 2018[*]

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ABSTRACT

In this study, it is aimed to classify the published academic studies on mystery shopping based on their various characteristics and to determine on which areas these studies concentrate. The study is also important in terms of identifying in which areas mystery shoppers are used and developing their employability in different areas on the basis of the studies in the literature. Within the scope of the study; book chapters, published scientific articles, master's theses and doctoral dissertations in the literature were examined and 74 printed or online-published studies between 1997 and 2018 were accessed. In order to determine their bibliometric profile, the studies were categorized on the basis of years, publication types, research areas, subjects, sample sizes, countries and the number of authors. The results show that the majority of the studies in the literature are scientific articles and written by two or more researchers. Furthermore, subject of service quality has been frequently discussed in the scope of studies carried out widely in the areas of tourism, health and retailing.

Keywords: Mystery Shopping, Bibliometrics, Content Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Mystery shopping is an approach which utilizes people unknown to service providers and aims to ensure that these people measure the services they receive (Harvey, 1998, p. 594; Cook et al., 2002, p. 170). The service providing business or institution receives various degrees of information about the product and service through mystery shopping in accordance with the desired feedback (Cook et al., 2002, p. 170).

This study, in which a bibliometric examination about the development, diversity and current state of the studies on mystery shopping is conducted, aims to classify the body of literature on the subject according to various characteristics and to determine on which areas these studies concentrate. Another aim of the study is to contribute to both marketing and tourism literature and help those who want to study in this area. This study is deemed significant in the sense that it determines the current situation and provides general information for future studies on mystery shopping. At the same time, this study is unique and important since it differs from all other studies related to mystery shopping as it was prepared with a bibliometric point of view. Periodic examination of the scientific studies published in a certain area is important to see the developments of these studies and to gain knowledge in the area (Kozak, 2001; Yaşar and Papatağa, 2015). Also, key words can often point to methodology or fields of study, underlying theories and the main findings

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of the research in academic articles. Because of the scope and richness of bibliometric information, it may be necessary to investigate the meaning of a keyword in a published study (Wu et al., 2012, p. 359). According to Kozak (2001, p. 26-27), many scholars agree that one of the best ways to reveal the developments in any discipline is to study the previous works on that discipline. In this regard, books, articles, reports, postgraduate dissertations and other written documents on said discipline act as the best sources of information about the field.

Bibliometric studies on different subtopics of tourism can contribute to the area by providing a comprehensive view of these areas (Özel and Kozak, 2012, p. 717). Bibliometric research contribute to the dissemination of scientific knowledge and developments, cumulative progress and communication in the scientific area (Arıca, 2014, p. 447).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bibliometrics is defined in the most basic sense as an area of research based on enumeration (Al and Coşar, 2007, p. 144). The concept of bibliometrics is the analysis of scientific information-sharing mediums such as published books, journals and articles via mathematical and statistical techniques (Pritchard, 1969; Diodato, 1994; Evren and Kozak, 2012). According to Yolal (2016, p. 89), bibliometrics is a method of research aiming to determine the characteristics of publications in a given area by quantitative analysis and to find out about the scientific background and current state of publications in this area. Bibliometric research is based on the analysis of specific characteristics of documents or publications and the acquisition of various findings related to scientific communication (Al and Coştur, 2007, p. 144). It is, on the other hand, also described as the quantitative analysis of certain attributes of documents or publications such as the number of authors, published journals, subjects, publication information (Al and Tonta, 2004; Yalçın, 2010; Ulu and Akdağ, 2015) (as cited in Özel and Kozak, 2012, p. 715; Yılmaz, 2017, p. 66). Bibliometric studies allow the evaluation of scientific studies regarding the studied scientific branch, country and / or country groups, institutions or persons and implications on the current situation (Arıca, 2014, p. 448).

The use of bibliometrics in the area of tourism, which is a research method that examines the characteristics of studies on a given area with quantitative analysis, is becoming a popular approach (Özel and Kozak, 2012, p. 715). Özel and Kozak (2012) examine the bibliometric properties of Turkish articles published in the field of tourism marketing and conducted an analysis of the citations to the articles in these studies. Furthermore, in Yılmaz's research (2017, p. 68), the bibliographic studies within Turkish tourism literature are also conceptually presented, with the parameters used in the studies mostly including the subjects of studies, the year they were published and the research methods. Sünnetçioğlu et al. (2017, pp. 346-347) and İnce et al. (2017, pp. 117-119) included the conceptual part of the study by giving more general information about the bibliometric studies related to the tourism area in comparison with Yılmaz (2017, p. 68). Different from other researchers, Yolal (2016) has taken a bibliometric approach to sampling in tourism studies and presented the related scientific research process to the literature as a book.

Mystery shopping studies, which are frequently encountered in tourism literature (Beck and Miao, 2003; Huang et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2015; Güllü and Karasakal, 2016), may also be conducted in other sectors such as banking and retail (Calvert, 2005; Fin, 2011)and in many different areas in addition to tourism. Moreover, studies that include the core information to serve as a basis for mystery shopping applications are also frequently available in the literature (Morrison et al., 1997; Wilson, 1998a, et al., 2015, pp. 379-393). It is seen that the studies conducted within the scope of the mystery shopping mainly focus on services and performance evaluation in various forms, comparisons with competitor companies, process development (Özdemir and Eroğlu, 2009, p. 357 - 368), and various evaluations by mystery shopping participants (Fin, 2011), business employees and managers (Yıldız, 2017; Yıldız and Kılıç, 2017, pp. 322 - 332). However, evaluations via/through mystery shopping can also be conducted to determine the businesses' compliance with laws and regulations (Gosselt et al., 2007).

Mystery shopper is the person who observes the service delivery procedure from the customer's perspective (Liu et al., 2014, pp. 55-56). The mystery shopper's acts as a real customer in order to observe whether the quality process and rules determined during the delivery of the service are followed (Tükeltürk, 2008, p. 55). Businesses take measures to meet the problems faced by the customer during the service delivery by using mystery shopping method. In this process; employee performance, product information, sales performance, service quality, environment and space layout are evaluated (Yıldırgan et al., 2016, p. 60).

Mystery shopping provides businesses with serious data about service processes supervision and performance evaluation. Erstad (1998, p. 34) stated that mystery shopping can be used as a tool to evaluate and improve customer service in service enterprises.

3. METHOD

Qualitative research methods and techniques were used in the scope of the study. The data of the study were collected by a document review and content analysis was conducted. Document analysis is accepted as a qualitative research design in which published materials are examined (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). Content analysis is based on the determination of the content of a certain communication instrument such as written and visual advertisements, written texts, radio, internet to verify the meaning of a study result. (Gegez, 2010, p. 148). Content analysis is a research method that carries more than one technique in accordance with the systematic method that uses and allows all of them to be used together (Koçak and Arun, 2006, p. 26). Content analysis can serve as a unique perspective to understand the subject "encoded" by authors to help capture the theme or essence of a research piece in relation to the topic (Wu et al., 2012, p. 359).

While searching for the literature studies within the scope of mystery shopping, the related databases (printed materials, theses, electronic journals, national academic databases, Scopus, TUBITAK ULAKBİM, EBSCO etc. national and international databases) were scanned for "mystery shopper" and "mystery shopping" in Turkish and English keywords. The universe of the research consists of academic studies which use mystery shopping and those dealing with mystery shopping from different angles. Within the scope of this study, master and doctoral theses, book chapters and published scientific articles in the literature were taken into consideration. However, 107 published or electronically published studies were found in the relevant databases between 1997 and 2018. 33 studies were eliminated because that the findings were not clear and that they were published in languages other than English and Turkish. After the elimination, 74 studies were deemed appropriate and taken into consideration. The data of the study were gathered between 01.12.2017 and 15.06.2018.

In order to determine the bibliometric profile of the studies, they were analyzed based on years, research types, research areas, subjects, sample volumes, countries and number of authors. Analyzes were made via Excel and SPSS statistical software and frequency distributions of the data were calculated by percentage distribution. Some previous studies has been examined on the criteria by the study (Pritchard, 1969; Diodato, 1994; Kozak, 2001; Al and Coşur, 2007; Yalçın, 2010; Evren and Kozak, 2012; Göktaş et al., 2012; Özel and Kozak, 2012; Arıca, 2014; Ulu and Akdağ, 2015; Yolal, 2016; İnce et al., 2017; Sünnetçioğlu et al., 2017; Yılmaz, 2017).

The results obtained were interpreted and a general picture was tried to be presented. Accordingly, the sub-questions of the research were formed as follows:

1. How are the distributions of the studies according to years?
2. How are the distributions of the studies according to the publication types?
3. How are the distributions of the studies according to the research areas?
4. How are the distributions of the studies according to the subjects?
5. How are the distributions of the studies according to sample volumes?
6. How are the distributions according to the countries where 74 studies are conducted?
7. How are the distributions of the studies according to the number of authors?

4. FINDINGS

In this part of the study, 74 studies published between 1997 and 2018 on mystery shopping were examined within the frame of various parameters. Findings are included to classify the studies dealing with mystery shopping based on years, research types, research areas, subjects, sample volumes, countries and number of authors . For the analysis of the data, the content was coded using content analysis method and the results were grouped. The frequency distributions obtained from the results are different from 100% due to the total rounding error.

Table 1. Distributions of Studies by Years

Years	n	%	Years	n	%	Years	n	%
1997	1	1,35	2004	1	1,35	2011	3	4,05
1998	3	4,05	2005	2	2,71	2012	3	4,05
1999	1	1,35	2006	2	2,71	2013	3	4,05
2000	-	-	2007	2	2,71	2014	6	8,11
2001	2	2,71	2008	1	1,35	2015	5	6,76
2002	1	1,35	2009	2	2,71	2016	4	5,40
2003	3	4,05	2010	5	6,76	2017	10	13,50
						2018	14	18,92
Total							**74**	**100**

Table 1 shows the distribution of years of studies on mystery shopping. There is a significant increase in the number of published studies in 2010, 2014, 2017 and 2018 respectively. When the distributions of the studies according to the years are examined, it is seen that the most studies have been made in 2018 with 14 studies (18.92%). This number is followed by 2017 with 10 studies (13.50%) and 2014 with 6 studies (8.11%). In 2000, there are no studies found about mystery shopping. According to Table 1, it was determined that the first accessible study on mystery shopping was published in 1997.

Table 2. Distributions of Studies by Type

Type	n	%
Doctoral dissertation	1	1,35
Conference proceedings	2	2,71
Master's Thesis	4	5,40
Book chapters	4	5,40
Articles	63	85,14
Total	**74**	**100**

Table 2 shows the distribution of studies by type. According to Table 2, the majority of the studies on mystery shopping are articles (85.14%). Master's theses and book chapters constitute 5.40 percent each of the related body of studies.

Table 3. Distribution of Studies by Sectors/ Industries/ Work- study field?

Area	n	%
Consulting company	1	1,20
Communication	1	1,20
Post office	1	1,20
Coffee shop	2	2,41
Public	2	2,41
Car gallery	2	2,41
Market research company	3	3,62
Travel agency	3	3,62
Transportation agency	3	3,62
Education	4	4,82
Banking	5	6,02
Librarianship	5	6,02
Unspecified or predominantly literature based studies (Human resources management, service design, performance management, customer satisfaction)	8	9,64
Restaurant	8	9,64
Hotel	9	10,84
Retail (Supermarkets, clothing stores, ticket sales offices, public sales offices)	12	14,46
Health	14	16,87
Total	**83[1]**	**100**

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[1] The total number has exceeded 74 since some of the studies have been carried out jointly on several areas.

Table 3 analyzes the distribution of studies on mystery shopping according to their areas. The distribution of the study areas is determined as 83 in accordance with simultaneous surveys on several different areas. Since the studies were simultaneously carried out in different areas such as market research companies, travel agencies, transportation agencies, retailing and banking services, they have been separately stated in the table.

Considering the areas on which the related studies are based, it can be said that 14 of the studies (16.87%) have been made in the health sector/industry. This is followed by the 12 studies (14.46%) in the area of retailing. In the hospitality (hotel) area, nine studies (10,84%) were identified, followed by eight studies in restaurants (9.64%) and five studies each in libraries (6.02%) and banks (6.02%). Studies that are unspecified or predominantly on literature based (9,64%) have addressed several mystery shopping subjects such as human resources, service design, performance management and customer satisfaction.

Table 4 shows the distribution of studies by subjects. According to Table 4, 28 of the studies conducted to date on mystery shopping are related to service quality (37.85%). When we look at the sub-items considered within service quality, it is possible to say that they are gathered under the topics of libraries (21,43%), restaurants (14,29%), health institutions (10,72%), pharmacies (10,72%), accommodation institutions (7,14%) and general (7,14%). The service quality studies under the "general" title consist of studies evaluating the effects of mystery shoppers on the service quality.

Table 4. Distribution of Studies by Subjects

Subject	n	%
Branding in the banking sector	1	1,35
Emotional labor and behavior evaluation	1	1,35
Pharmacy product quality as medication quality	1	1,35
Access to patient information in pharmacies and clinics	1	1,35
Mystery shoppers' motivations	1	1,35
Service performance	1	1,35
Service design	1	1,35
Service and profit chain in restaurants	1	1,35
Business model and globalization	1	1,35
Public service measurement	1	1,35
Accommodation management	1	1,35
Loan application process	1	1,35
Determining the availability of abortion at national level	1	1,35
Brand positioning strategies	1	1,35
Cigarette sales supervision	1	1,35
Consumer behavior	1	1,35
Alcohol sales supervision	2	2,71
Employee competence	2	2,71
Customer satisfaction	4	5,40
Health care in pharmacists	5	6,76
Employee performance	6	8,11
Mystery shopping practices	11	14,86
Service quality	28	37,85
Banking	*1*	*3,57*
Education	*1*	*3,57*
Clothing	*1*	*3,57*
Retail	*1*	*3,57*
Post office	*1*	*3,57*
Telecommunications	*1*	*3,57*
University	*1*	*3,57*
Local government	*1*	*3,57*
General	*2*	*7,14*
Accommodation	*2*	*7,14*
Pharmacy	*3*	*10,72*
Health	*3*	*10,72*
Restaurant	*4*	*14,29*
Library	*6*	*21,43*
	28	*100*
Total	**74**	**100**

According to Table 4, there are 11 studies (14.86%) that directly address the subject of mystery shopping practices after the subject of quality of service. According to the findings, employee performance (8,11%), health care (6,76%), customer satisfaction (5,40%), employee competence (2,71%) and alcohol sales audit (2,71%) are also encountered most.

Table 5. Distribution of Studies by Sample size[2]

Sample Volume (Business or Person)	n	%
0[3]	13	17,57
1 to 10	16	21,63
11 to 50	13	17,57
51 to 100	8	10,81
101 to 200	8	10,81
201 to 400	7	9,46
401 to 500	2	2,70
501 to 750	2	2,70
751 to 1000	3	4,05
1001 and above	2	2,70
Total	**74**	**100**

Table 5 shows the distribution of studies on mystery shopping by sample size. Tables in the section of "Determining the sample size" from Yolal (2016, pp. 64-70) were employed when forming the table of sample volumes. Table 5 shows that there is a maximum range of "1 to 10" samples in the studies. This is followed by "11 to 50" and "0" sample volumes. The fact that the following sample volume is not seen in some studies or is indicated as "0" referring that said studies only consist of literature reviews.

Table 6. Distribution of Studies by Country of Origin

Country	n	%
Germany	1	1,35
America[4] Poland	1	1,35
Brazil	1	1,35
Indonesia	1	1,35
Republic of Ghana	1	1,35
Georgia	1	1,35
Croatia	1	1,35
Scotland	1	1,35
Sweden	1	1,35
Canada	1	1,35
Mexico	1	1,35
Russia	1	1,35
Slovenia	1	1,35
Greece	1	1,35
China	2	2,70
Democratic Republic of Congo	2	2,70
Hungary	2	2,70
Slovakia	2	2,70
New Zeland	2	2,70
Australia	3	4,06
Taiwan	3	4,06
Netherlands	5	6,76
England	7	9,46
Turkey	12	16,22
United States	17	22,98
Unspecified	3	4,06
Total	**74**	**100**

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[2] The sampling ranges in the table are arranged according to Yolal's study titled "Sampling in Tourism Studies, A Bibliometric Research".

[3] The number of samples designated as "0"; means that the relevant studies were literature reviews or conceptual studies?.

[4] A joint study with the United States and Poland is not presented in the table of studies in the United States. It is explained by adding the relevant percentage in the description of the findings.

Table 6 shows the current situation of the countries where the studies on mystery shopping are conducted. According to Table 6, mystery shopping studies have been conducted in a total of 25 countries. Two countries (US and Poland) are found to have conducted an international study. Furthermore, three studies contain no information regarding countries.

In this regard, the first place among the countries where the studies are conducted is United States with 17 + 1 studies (24.33%). In addition to studies in the US, a joint study with the US and Poland has also been added to the relevant percentage. US is followed by Turkey with 12 studies (16.22%) and England with 7 studies (9,46%). A total of 14 countries each is found to have one study related to the subject. In three studies however, the countries where the data are collected are not specified. Although Australia is a continent, it has been categorized as a country because it is mentioned as the study site in relevant studies.

Table 7. Distributions of Studies by the Number of Authors

Number of Author	n	%
1 Author	14	18,94
2 Authors	20	27,02
3 Authors	20	27,02
4 and more authors	20	27,02
Total	**74**	**100**

Table 7 shows the distribution of studies by the number of authors. According to Table 7, 20 studies with two, three, four and more authors respectively constitute 27,02 % of the total number each. It is seen that 18,94% of the studies are published by single author.

4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study as a bibliographic review of the development, diversity and current state of the studies conducted within the scope of mystery shopping is to classify the published academic studies related to the mystery shopping according to various factors/variables and to determine on which areas the studies concentrate. The main goal is to contribute to the body of literature on marketing and tourism and also help other people in different areas aiming to study on mystery shopping. The study is thought to contribute to future studies on mystery shopping by presenting the current situation and providing general information. On the other hand, it differs from all previous studies on mystery shopping as it reaches results that determine the bibliometric characteristics of the Turkish and English studies published on mystery shopping over a period of 22 years.

When the distributions of the studies are analyzed according to the years, the earliest accesible study on the subject is found to be from 1997. However, when references sections of the earliest studies (Morrison, et al., 1997; Erstad, 1998; Wilson, 1998a; Wilson, 1998b) on mystery are examined with the key word of mystery shopping, it is found in the references of Erstad (1998, p. 38) that related studies have been made since 1985. A search of "mystery shopping" keyword (in Turkish and English) via Scopus (www.scopus.com) reveals two earlier studies on mystery shopping (Czepiec, 1983, pp. 33-36; Moore, 1984, pp. 73-76), earlier than Erstad's reference (1998, p. 38), though their contents could not be accessed. On the other hand, it is deduced that there has been a significant annual increase in the studies conducted under the scope of mystery shopping since 2017. When the findings are evaluated, 14 studies identified in 2018 were published until the first half of June of 2018. It is thought that the number of related studies will increase until the end of 2018. The reason that the number of studies has increased over the years may be due to the fact that the published studies have become more accessible in the electronic platforms in recent years.

When the distribution of the publication types is examined, it is noted that 85,14% are articles. When the number of authors is taken into account, 74 studies are completed by a total of 198 different authors The majority of the studies (81.06%) have two or more authors. The reason underlying the tendency to study mystery shopping with more than one author/ researcher is thought to be that it is necessary for an in-depth, comprehensive and detailed research.

Another result obtained from this study is related to the preferred sample volumes in the studies. When the distributions of the studies according to the sample sizes are evaluated, it is considered that the sample

volumes reflect their research method. According to this, 67.57% of the studies have a sample volume of below 100. This is because, studies in which qualitative methods are used have been conducted with smaller numbers of sample volumes than those in which quantitative methods are used. For this reason, it might be said that the majority of the studies evaluated within the scope of the research are designed with qualitative methods. As Karasar (2005, p. 110-111) states, since the sample is a small cluster chosen according to certain rules, from a certain universe and should be deemed suitable for representing the chosen population, the studies are mostly conducted on sample clusters and the results obtained are generalized to the related populations. Accordingly, another reason why the sample sizes are below a certain number can be that it is a sign that the studies represent a small group. The primary purpose of the sampling is to reduce the size of an entire database at a manageable level for the researcher. However, it should not be overlooked that the sampling cannot just be described as a data reduction process (Koçak and Arun, 2006, p. 27). So, moving on from this point, we can reach the conclusion that the populations of the relevant studies represents smaller groups .

When countries in which the studies on mystery shopping are conducted, it is concluded that the total number of counties is found as 25. Of these 25 countries, only America and Poland have a joint study and only three out of 74 studies do not give information about country. Of the accessed studies on mystery shopping, 18 are from the US (24.33%) followed by 12 studies (16.22%) in Turkey and 7 studies (9.46%) in England. According to Özdemir and Eroğlu (2009, p. 358), mystery shopping is one of the ignored subjects in the Turkish literature. However, according to the results obtained and taking into consideration the passage of time, the rate of studies in Turkish literature appears to be higher compared to the other countries.

When the areas in which the relevant studies have been conducted are examined, a total of 17 different areas are found. The majority of the studies shows high rates in health (16.87%) and retailing (14.46%) sectors respectively. It is also possible to say that hotels, restaurants, travel agencies and transportation agencies are generally considered to be within the tourism area that a total of 23 studies (27.72%) were done within the said field. The high rate of studies on mystery shopping in tourism is a result expected by the authors. On the other hand, the considerable amount of studies in the area of health also indicates that mystery shoppers are used at a significant rate in the health sector. Further, it was revealed that studies are conducted in areas such as consulting companies, communication, post offices, coffee shops, public sector, car galleries, market research companies, travel agencies, transportation agencies, education institutions, banks and libraries.

Service quality (37.85%) is found to be the most common subject. The sub-items of service quality are determined as library, restaurant, health, pharmacy, accommodation, general, local government, university, telecommunication, post office, retail, clothing, education and banking.

Other subjects that follow the service quality issue are identified as mystery shopping practices, employee performance, healthcare in pharmacies, customer satisfaction, employee competence, alcohol sales supervision, consumer behavior, cigarette sales supervision, brand positioning strategies, determining the availability of abortion at national level, loan application processes, accommodation management, public service measurement, business model and globalization, service and profit chain in restaurants, service design, service performance, mystery shoppers' motivations, access to patient information in pharmacies and clinics, pharmacy product quality as medication quality, emotional labor and behavior evaluation, branding in the banking sector. There appears to be more than one topic under the term "service". For example, different subjects such as service design, service performance, service quality can be found in the results. The main reason for this is that the different features of the service are seperately treated in the relevant studies.

In summary, it can be stated that the scope of studies on mystery shopping are quite comprehensive. It is believed that this research can be used as a source that can lead researchers in future studies on mystery shopping and that the results obtained here can be utilized in many areas. Researchers will be able to see the areas and topics of mystery shopping and use these as examples or references which they may deem appropriate for their own studies.

It should not be forgotten that this research has various limitations. Studies in languages such as Russian, French, and German, which could not be translated by the authors, have not been included in this study. There are also some studies, though visible, in accessed sources that researchers could not have access. For this reason, it can be considered that future studies may benefit from previously inaccessible resources, which may offer a wider perspective.

As a result, the use of only the words "mystery shopping" as keywords in this study constitutes a limitation for this research. In future studies, the use of multiple keyword combinations such as "shadow customer" or "mystery guests" together might increase the accessibility of the relevant studies.

Factors/variables related to sampling such as sample sizes, can be examined in more detail in accordance with the methods of the studies.

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