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Does sense of place matter? Investigating the role of airport atmospherics on destination revisit

Introduction

Airports tend to have unique contributions on destinations since they form the travellers' first and last impression (Bezerra & Gomes, 2019; Figueiredo & Castro, 2019). To prevail in the fierce competition, attention is given on airport atmospherics as they enhance experiences and "make tourists feel out of place" (Geuens et al., 2004, p. 621). However, the limited research on atmospherics and their role on experience and destination revisit, gave rise to the need for further examination. More interestingly, airports' designs today are supported to be "myopic without respect to places" (Volgger, 2020, p. 143). Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the use of atmospherics in airports and their influence on tourists' experiences and intention to revisit the destination, having as moderator sense of place.

Methodology

Measurement Development

Initially, a focus group was conducted with industry professionals in Larnaca's airport to gather information upon their thoughts on the influence of airport atmospherics on tourists' behaviour. Subsequently, a structured survey was developed. The atmospherics' measure was adapted from Ali et al., (2016), Moon et al. (2016) and Bitner (1992). Sense of place variable scale mirrored those of Ariffin & Yahaya (2013) and the scale developed by Singh and Söderlund (2020) was used to measure experience. Furthermore, the scale of Prentice and Kadan (2019) was used for destination revisit. All the scales were measured according to the seven-point Likert scale.

Sample and Data Collection

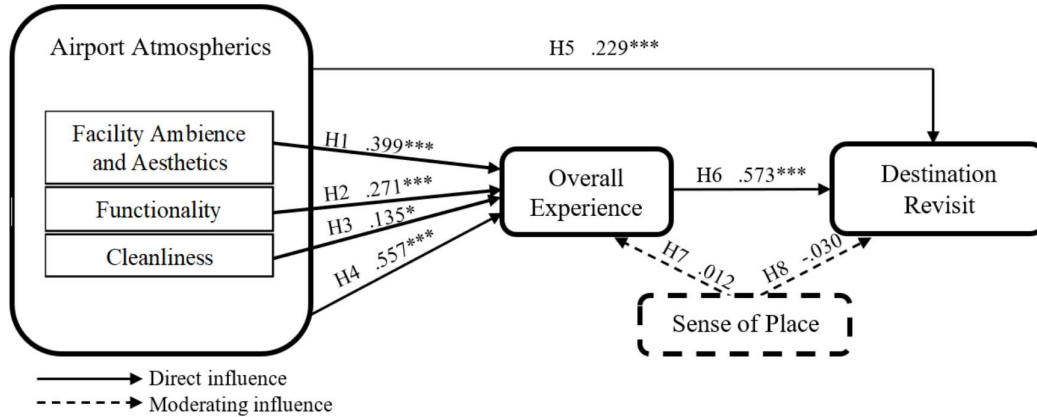
Data was collected through the Prolific Academic platform with gender, age and travel activity within the last month being the main screening criteria both for participant relevance and demographic consistency. Approximately, 686 participants were approached, out of which 82 provided incomplete responses thus dropped providing a final sample of 604 (n=604). The average time to complete the survey was 15 minutes and respondents were distributed almost equally with 49.3% males and 50.7% females. The majority of those were in the age group of 26-35 (41.6%), mostly Europeans (85.8%).

Results

Prior the hypotheses testing exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were performed with SPSS Statistics 25 and SPSS Amos 26 respectively, to ensure validity and reliability. All the variables met the threshold values (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) except those of temperature, music, aroma, brightness, WiFi power sockets and mobility services. Since they were discarded, the model fit indices values were found satisfactory and within the acceptable values ($\chi^2/df= 3.51$, GFI= .926, CFI= .945, RMSEA= .065, AGFI= .894, NFI= .926, SRMR= .049). Discriminant validity was determined through average variance extracted (AVE) with values being $>.50$ (Civelek, 2018). Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's α values met the threshold, with the values of the square root of AVE being also accepted.

Through Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) the proposed framework was tested. Four regression models were run to test the hypotheses. As shown in Figure 1, there are significant relationships among the constructs. However, sense of place seemed not to significantly influence the overall experience evaluations nor the intentions to revisit the country.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model Results



Discussion

Contributing to the extension of the tourism literature, this research offers new quantitative insights. Firstly, results highlighted the unique contribution of atmospherics on the overall experience, with the sub-construct of facility ambience and aesthetics having a greater influence. More interestingly, it was shown that holistic atmospherics have a significant influence on destination revisit, thus enriching the literature since there is scarce evidence for this link (Prentice et al., 2021). Findings also reinforce academics and practitioners upon the importance of experience as a mediator of the aforementioned relationship. Airport and destination authorities can take advantage of the outcomes and tailor their marketing strategies. Since sense of place was found insignificant, the study offers new insights on the role of this variable (Varley et al., 2020; Ali et al., 2016; Ariffin et al., 2015).

Keywords: airport atmospherics; experience; destination revisit; sense of place

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