Atmospherics, Servicescape and Attractiveness of a Macro Holiday Resort

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Abstract

Holiday resorts over South Africa strive to create pleasurable experiences for all types of tourists. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct research on how certain variables of a holiday resort influence tourists' perceptions. This document focuses on the impact that atmospherics, servicescape and attractiveness of the Forever Resorts Loskopdam, situated in the Mpumalanga area in South Africa, have on tourists' perceptions. The findings of this study will hopefully assist the resort's management in improving on the variables found to be the least appealing. A population sample of 200 respondents, aged 18 years and older, was used. A self-completion questionnaire was distributed to 200 randomly chosen visitors to the holiday resort. Results of the research conducted show a positive correlation between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape, atmospherics and attractiveness of the Forever Resorts' Loskop Dam. Previous research focused more on tourists' overall satisfaction with the servicescape, attractiveness and atmospherics of holiday resorts.

Keywords: atmospherics, servicescape, resort attractiveness, Forever Resorts Loskopdam

Introduction

It was widely believed that the cost of a holiday vacation is the key factor that people consider when planning a holiday. However, Goossens (2000:301-321) found that tourists firstly evaluate the "affective choice mode" followed by the "information processing mode". The "affective choice mode" focuses on the attributes offered by the holiday resort while the "information processing mode" focuses on factors such as price. Formica (2002:418-430) developed a framework that focused on elements such as attractions, infrastructure, and services, as these were postulated to be the key factors that draw tourists to a specific holiday resort. Recent literature indicates an increase in understanding how atmospherics, servicescape and resort attractiveness create actual tourist experiences at different types of resorts (Dong & Siu, 2013; ; Romli, Rosyidah; Albattat; Arfah; Razali, 2015 - theme parks; Ali & Amin, 2014, and Ali, Amin & Ryu, 2016 – both at Chinese resort hotels; Chua, Lee, Huffman & Choi, 2015 – ski resort; and Durna, Dedeoglu & Sevgi Balikçioglu, 2015 – hotel industry).

This article is a replication of a study done by Van Heerden, Botha, and Durieux in 2009 at the Forever Resorts in Bela Bela, which is situated in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. The current study carried out at Forever Resorts Loskopdam, which is situated in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa, had a similar aim of evaluating relationships between the attractiveness of a holiday resort and servicescape and the attractiveness of a holiday resort and atmospherics. The choice of a macro South African holiday resort such as Forever Resorts is based on its service offereing, namely that it offers "a variety of accommodation, ranging from self-catering chalets to caravan sites" (Van Heerden, in Prideaux and Carson (Editors), 2011:72). A wide variety of

entertainment and leisure activities is also offered. Another reason is that such a macro resort serves as a final tourist destination, as guests may stay for an extended time such as long weekends, mid-week breaks or school holidays.

Literature review

Measuring the perceptions that tourists have of a holiday resort, as a result of atmospherics, servicescape and resort attractiveness, will prove whether these factors should be considered when a holiday resort formulates a marketing strategy.

Newman (2007:15) states that due to the intangible nature of services, services can be seen as 'experience' products. Therefore the tangible components, such as appearance, layout, and signage, are an indication of service quality to consumers. For this reason, it is important to determine what effect servicescape, atmospherics and resort attractiveness have on consumers' perceived quality of a holiday resort.

The significance of the servicescape of a holiday resort

Servicescape can be defined as the "totality of the service setting", including the ambient conditions, and spatial layout and functionality, in which a service is offered (Johnson, Mayer & Champaner, 2004:1). According to Wakefield & Blodgett (1994:67), the spatial layout and functionality refer to the ways in which the furniture, hallways, walkways and entrances are arranged. The ambient conditions comprise the aesthetic factors, such as architectural design, signage, symbols and cleanliness. According to Dong and Siu (2013:542), servicescape are sites for commercial exchanges and are produced with attention to both substantive and communicative staging.

Servicescape can thus be defined as all the physical elements of a holiday resort, which create ambience and add to the attractiveness of a holiday resort, on which visitors base their perceptions. Newman (2007:16) explains that customers gather cues based on their first glimpse of the physical surroundings of a service setting. These cues form the foundation on which customers' perceptions of the rest of their experience are formed. In relation to the service setting of a holiday resort, pleasant cues will result in customers having positive attitudes towards the rest of the holiday resort, as opposed to having negative attitudes.

In addition to this, tourists also formulate approach or avoidance decisions based on the servicescape (Rosenbaum, 2005:257). If tourists experience negativity due to the servicescape, for example an unattractive layout, they are likely to avoid any other offerings of the holiday resort. However, if tourists are pleased with the servicescape they will approach and embrace the rest of the holiday resort, as shown in figure one below.

Furthermore, all the physical dimensions of a holiday resort serve as the resort's external image. This, if maintained properly, can serve as an important differentiator amongst competitors (Mossberg, 2007:66). Based on the abovementioned discussion, it is clear that holiday resorts should strive to create a servicescape that positively influences visitors' perceptions, as this can distinguish a resort from competition and create a pleasant and welcoming ambiance.

Measuring tourists' perceptions of the servicescape

Atmospherics is the deliberate designing of controllable factors, such as music, to create certain moods; it is the effort used to design service environments in a way that will enhance the

probability of having a positive experience (Johnson et al., 2004:2). According to Heide, Laerdal and Gronhaug (2007:1315-1325), atmospherics include elements such as temperature, scent, noise, music and lighting, which form the background conditions of a service environment. It can be considered as those factors that contribute to the ambient conditions of an environment, and which in turn have an effect on the perceived physical servicescape, as indicated in figure one above.

According to Johnson et al. (2004:2), customer satisfaction is linked to atmospherics. Customers either visit a holiday resort for emotional reasons such as relaxation, or for functional reasons, for example conferences or other work-related reasons. Customers, who focus purely on emotional reasons, are likely to rely on atmospherics as an indication of the quality of the holiday resort. As a result of this, these customers will have greater perceived satisfaction if the atmospherics meet and exceed their expectations (Johnson et al., 2004:2). In addition to this, atmospherics play an important marketing role as it can be manipulated to create lasting impressions in consumers' minds. Factors such as music, lighting and scent can be manipulated to create a positive holiday experience for tourists, which can lead to repeat visits (Bonn, Joseph-Mathews, Dai, Hayes & Cave, 2007: 347).

It is clear that atmospherics is an integral component in attracting visitors to a holiday resort. Therefore, holiday resorts need to ensure that the atmospherics create the mood and feel expected by visitors. Hightower, Brady and Baker (2002) made use of a multi-item scale to investigate the effect that the physical elements of a service environment have on customers' perceptions. The constructs used were measured with 7-point response scales, labelled from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly disagree. The scales included statements such as "The physical environment pleases me" and "The physical environment has more than enough space for me to be comfortable" (Hightower, Brady & Baker, 2002:702). Another method, as used by Newman (2007), is that of a classic survey instrument containing a semantic differential scale in which respondents were asked to rate different variables. Some of these variables included items such as "The shops are clearly marked" and "The food and drink areas were crowded". A few of the response statements contained in the semantic differential scale included bored – relaxed, unhappy – happy, and unsatisfied – satisfied (Newman, 2007:20). Bonn et al. (2007:350-351) made use of a 7-point Likert scale to measure a number of elements relating to atmospherics. The scale included items such as "The facility has good lighting" and "The facility has a good colour scheme". The response options ranged from (1) strongly agree to (7) strongly disagree. Kozak and Rimmington (2000:262) measured atmospherics by using a 7-point Likert scale, in which 38 questions all relating to atmospherics were posed, and to which respondents had to choose from (1) delighted to (7) terrible.

The significance of the attractiveness of a holiday resort

A resort's attractiveness can be described as tourism supply, which consists of attractions, infrastructures and services, including both manmade and natural characteristics (Formica, 2002:418-430). It can be defined as anything that a holiday resort offers which makes visitors' stay at the resort more pleasurable. As consumers gain value and benefits from visiting a specific holiday resort, it can be argued that the attractiveness of the resort has great impact on the overall travel experience (Formica & Uysal, 2006:418-430). The overall attractiveness of a service environment, which is generated by specific attractions and offerings, is often seen as the drawing force of that service environment. (Formica & Uysal, 2006:418-430). Thus, the attractiveness of a holiday resort assists in inviting visitors.

Another important factor to reflect upon is that a tourist destination, such as a holiday resort, promotes itself through its attractiveness, as explained by Elliot and Papadopoulos (2005:2). A tourist destination's attractiveness adds to the "tourism destination image", or the TDI. A positive TDI increases the likelihood that a specific destination will be chosen, and one way to ensure a positive TDI is through an attractive tourist destination.

Formica and Uysal (2006:418-430) make use of a nine-step procedure in measuring the attractiveness of a service environment. In short, the process involves conducting a content analysis to determine the variables that are associated with attractiveness, after which data about these variables are collected. Each of these variables is weighted with the aim of determining those variables that contribute most to a service environment's attractiveness. This will assist management in focusing on the most valued variables.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it can be hypothesised that:

H1: There is a relationship between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of a holiday resort.
H2: There is a relationship between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the servicescape of a holiday resort.
H3: There is a relationship between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of a holiday resort.

Figure 1: Hypotheses
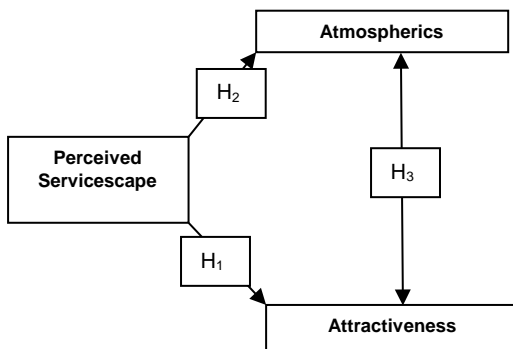
Methodology

Sampling

The target population for this study consisted of both male and female visitors, aged 18 years and older, to Forever Resorts Loskopdam. The proposed sampling method of the study was convenience sampling, a form of non probability sampling. According to Cooper and Schindler (2006:423), convenience sampling is unlimited and respondents are chosen based on being "in the right place at the right time". The convenience sampling method was chosen as it is cost-effective and easy to conduct. However, the disadvantages of this particular sampling method should also be kept in mind. The disadvantages of convenience sampling include researchers having no control over the accuracy of the chosen sample, and it can be unreliable at times (Cooper & Schindler, 2006:423). The minimum sample size set for this study was 200 respondents. Responses were obtained from 100 males and 100 females.

Data collection

The survey instrument intended for this study was pre-tested via a peer evaluation process amongst other research teams in a post-graduate course in research methodology. The aim of the peer evaluation was to identify ambiguity or any other survey design errors. Errors indicated by these research teams were corrected to improve the quality of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was further pre-tested by using a collaborative pre-testing method, in which a convenience sample of 10 males and 10 females, who have all visited Forever Resorts Loskopdam on a previous occasion, had to complete the survey. All ambiguities identified by the respondents were discussed and corrected in the final data collection instrument.

Data collection method

The method of data collection used in this study was a self-completion questionnaire. The self-completion questionnaire was given to visitors to Forever Resorts Loskopdam. A structured questionnaire was used as it contained predetermined questions which served as a guide for completing the survey. Permission was granted from the resort's management to conduct a research project in which both male and female visitors, aged 18 years and older, were randomly picked and asked to complete the questionnaire. No incentives were offered to participants for their responses and the data was collected over the duration of a weekend.

Measures

The focus of this study was based on three constructs, namely the measurement of the relationships between servicescape, atmospherics and resort attractiveness at a macro holiday resort.

Perceptions of servicescape, resort attractiveness, and atmospherics were measured through a 7-point Likert scale (Bonn et al., 2007:350-351). The scale consisted of seven labels, with (1) being strongly disagree, (2) slightly disagree, (3) disagree, (4) neutral, (5) slightly agree, (6) agree, (7) strongly agree, and the last response option "don't know". The scale was used to measure eleven items, all relevant to the three constructs.

In order to test the reliability and validity of the abovementioned measurement scales used in the questionnaire, the Cronbach's Alpha of the scales had to be calculated. An acceptable reliability coefficient would be larger than 0.7. The reliability test of the measurement scales used in this survey was 0.921, 0.914 and 0.920 respectively for servicescape, resort attractiveness and atmospherics. This indicates that there was a high inter-correlation between the items in each rating scale. Therefore, it can be concluded that they all measured the same underlying abstract construct.

Results

Descriptive statistics

Table one below demonstrates the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of the main constructs, servicescape, resort attractiveness and atmospherics, measured in this study.

Two labels became apparent in the results. The scale's labels are (5) slightly agree and (6) agree. The labels most evident in the attractiveness scale were (5) mostly satisfied and (6) happy.

Table 1: The mean for Servicescape, Resort Attractiveness and Atmospherics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Servicescape	200	6.0976	0.92087
restaurant cleanliness	170	6.20	1.012
convenience of location of restaurants	184	5.91	1.166
difficulty finding the bathrooms	199	6.15	1.442
sufficient number of bathrooms	198	6.06	1.398
convenience of location of bathrooms	199	6.18	1.180
ease of finding the resort	199	6.46	1.067
the practicality of the resort layout	200	6.05	1.153
the attractiveness of the resort architecture	200	6.15	1.251
the attractiveness of the resort decoration	200	5.98	1.303
attractiveness of the resort	198	6.14	1.197
attractiveness of the colour schemes used in the resort	197	5.88	1.391
Valid N (listwise)	165		
Total Attractiveness	199	6.0387	0.84988
quality standard of accommodation	194	6.00	1.063
feelings towards hygienic aspects of the resort	196	5.94	1.156
overall cleanliness of the resort	199	6.10	1.119
level of service of accommodation	193	6.10	0.987
attitude of staff	198	6.11	1.124
maintenance of the natural environment	197	6.26	1.070
overall value for money	197	5.93	1.256
overall atmosphere in the resort	197	6.29	1.117
quality of food	161	5.89	1.268
variety of food	161	5.80	1.256
Valid N (listwise)	156		
Total Atmospherics	200	6.0574	0.94992
lighting at the resort	188	5.91	1.207
availability of information at resort	194	6.01	1.152
functionality of the resort layout	195	6.11	1.116
use of open space at resort	198	6.08	1.270
visitor flow at the resort	198	6.10	1.093
level of knowledge of the personnel at the resort	195	6.07	1.167
overall service at the resort	197	6.20	1.054
level of courteousness of personnel at the resort	196	6.19	1.138
Valid N (listwise)	180		

Servicescape

Analysis suggests that participants (M = 6.0976, SD = 0.92087) were pleased with the servicescape. The highest rated item was the ease of finding the resort (M = 6.46, SD = 1.067), and the lowest rated item was the attractiveness of the colour schemes used in the resort (M = 5.88, SD = 1.391).

Resort Attractiveness

Participants reacted positively to the attractiveness of the resort (M = 6.0387, SD = 0.84988), which suggests that participants were happy with the resort's attractiveness. The highest rated item was the overall atmosphere in the resort (M = 6.29, SD = 1.117), and the lowest rated item was the variety of food (M = 5.80, SD = 1.256).

Atmospherics

Analysis suggests that participants (M = 6.0574, SD = 0.94992) were positive towards the atmospherics of the resort. The item rated the highest was the overall service at the resort (M = 6.20, SD = 1.054), and the item rated the lowest was the lighting at the resort (M = 5.91, SD = 1.207).

Hypotheses Tests

Analysis of hypothesis one, two and three

H1, H2 and H3 deal with the relationship between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape, attractiveness and atmospherics of Forever Resorts Loskopdam. The null and alternative hypotheses of H1, H2 and H3 are stated below:

H1(null): There is no relationship between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of a holiday resort.
H1(alt): There is a relationship between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of a holiday resort.

H2(null): There is no relationship between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the servicescape of a holiday resort.
H2(alt): There is a relationship between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the servicescape of a holiday resort.

H3(null): There is no relationship between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of a holiday resort.
H3(alt): There is a relationship between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of a holiday resort.

All of the above hypotheses are two-tailed (non-directional) and were tested at a 5% level of significance (i.e. = 0.05).

Since respondents' scores were measured at an interval level of measurement, the appropriate parametric significant test is Pearson's product moment correlation. This test assumes that the individual variables to be correlated will all have normal (bell-shaped) distributions, and that there is a linear relationship between the two variables to be correlated. If these assumptions cannot be satisfied, the Spearman's rank order correlation should be used as an alternative (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:203-205). The assumption of normality was assessed through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, as well as visual inspection of histograms and normal probability plots. The assumption of linearity was assessed through visual inspection of a scatter plot. After assessment it was concluded that not one of the assumptions were satisfied. For this reason, Spearman's rank order correlation was used to test these hypotheses.

The following table indicates the p-value, coefficient determination, the percentage of common variance as well as the degree of correlation for H_1, H_2 and H_3, as derived from Spearman's rank order correlation.

Table 2: Analysis of hypotheses one, two and three

Hypothesis	N	P-value	(r_s)	Coefficient determination (r^2)	Common variance (%)	Correlation
H_1	199	0.000	0.742	0.551	55%	Strong
H_2	200	0.000	0.679	0.461	46%	Strong
H_3	200	0.000	0.767	0.588	59%	Strong

As indicated by the above table, the p-values of all the hypotheses are smaller than the significance value of 0.05. As a result of this, the null hypotheses can be rejected and the alternative hypotheses can be accepted, thus concluding the following:

- There is a positive correlation between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of Forever Resorts Loskopdam.

- There is a positive correlation between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the servicescape of Forever Resorts Loskopdam.

- There is a positive correlation between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness of Forever Resorts Loskopdam.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the relationship between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics, servicescape and attractiveness of a macro resort namely Forever Resorts Loskopdam.

The study included four objectives which are discussed below in relation to the findings of the hypotheses tests. The first objective was to determine whether a relationship exists between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape and the attractiveness of a holiday resort. The second objective dealt with identifying whether a positive relationship exists between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape and tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics of a holiday resort. Thirdly, this study was also aimed at determining whether a relationship exists between tourists' perceptions of the attractiveness and the atmospherics of a holiday resort. As indicated by the hypotheses tests, there is a strong correlation within all these hypotheses, thus the null hypotheses can be rejected and the alternative hypotheses can be accepted. This concludes that there is a relationship between tourists' perceptions of the servicescape and the attractiveness; between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and the servicescape; and between tourists' perceptions of the atmospherics and the attractiveness of a holiday resort.

The last objective was to determine whether there are differences between the perceptions that male and female tourists have towards the servicescape, atmospherics and attractiveness of a holiday resort. Interestingly, the hypotheses test results indicate that males and females do not differ significantly in their perceptions towards these variables.

Managerial implications

The study indicates that servicescape and atmospherics are strong drivers for the level of attractiveness that visitors experience when visiting Forever Resorts Loskopdam. There are countless numbers of resorts that have similar offerings and the tourism industry keeps growing. This means that every resort should make an effort to identify factors that could differentiate them from the masses. Consequently, it is important that the Forever Resorts' management team focus their attention on the activities and factors that influence the attractiveness of the resorts for their visitors from both the local and foreign markets.

Furthermore, managers should consider focusing on the items that scored the lowest in each of the descriptive statistics analyses for the three main constructs. These items were the attractiveness of the resort's architecture, the variety of food, and the lighting at the resort. Managers ought to do further research on these items in order to enhance customer satisfaction and improve their performance on these items.

Recommendations for future research

This study confirms the findings of the Van Heerden et al (2009)-study that there are positive relationships between servicescape, atmospherics and the attractiveness of a macro resort. Management might therefore also consider conducting further research to identify other factors, beyond that of servicescape and atmospherics, which influence the attractiveness of their resorts to their visitors. Identifying these various factors might assist management in comprehending which factors they should improve on in order to make their resort even more attractive. These factors could include costs of the resort, the diversity of activities offered and preservation of nature (green-positioning) by the resort. Furthermore, future research could focus on grouping variables such as gender and culture. It is also recommended that a visitor profile to macro resorts should be constructed. The research ought to also be extended to other Forever Resorts and the ATKV Resorts. This could assist senior key decision-makers at Forever Resorts and the ATKV to compare the overall attractiveness of the various resorts.

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