

# Comparing local and international tourists' perceptions of service experience dimensions of an attraction and a destination: the case of South Africa

Ms. Phumzile K. Zondo  
School of Tourism and Hospitality  
University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Dr Ikechukwu O. Ezeuduji\*  
Department of Tourism and Events Management  
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa  
PO Box 652, Cape Town, 8000, South Africa  
Email: [ezeuduji@cput.ac.za](mailto:ezeuduji@cput.ac.za); [ezeuduji3@yahoo.com](mailto:ezeuduji3@yahoo.com)  
Tel: +27 21 460 4230

\* Corresponding author

## Abstract

This study aimed to check for relationships of perceptions between service experience dimensions ('*hedonism*', '*interaction*', '*safety*', and '*recognition*') of South Africa as a destination, and Arts on Main as an attraction within South Africa. Also, perceptions of service experience dimensions between domestic and international tourists were compared. A questionnaire survey of 151 tourists' perception of South Africa and Arts on Main was conducted between May and July 2014. Tourists were sampled using non-probabilistic convenience sampling method. Bivariate analyses of the data collected were done. Spearman's correlation test (two-tailed) was used to check for relationships between tourists' perceptions of South Africa's service experience and Arts on Main service experience. Pearson Chi-Square test checked relationships between tourists profile and tourists' perceptions of service experience dimensions. The findings of this study indicate that there is a relationship between tourists' service experience dimensions perceptions of an attraction and the destination in which the attraction situates. Furthermore tourists' profile has been found to relate to tourists' service experience dimensions perceptions of an attraction and destination. Domestic and international tourists differ significantly regarding perceptions of service experience dimension of '*recognition*' ('being taken seriously') in South Africa, but not in other service experience dimensions of '*hedonics*', '*involvement*', and '*peace of mind/safety*'.

**Key words:** Service experience, tourists' experience, tourists' perceptions, Arts on Main, South Africa.



Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/south-africa/activities/guided-tours/johannesburg-walking-tour-carlton-centre-observation-deck-museum-africa-market-theatre>

## Introduction

With the increase in international tourists' numbers in South Africa since the end of Apartheid era in 1994, one has also witnessed a rise in research on crime, political unrest and violence in South Africa's main urban cities (Ferreira, 1999; Rogerson & Visser, 2007; Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2011). These negative perceptions of South African cities have a significant effect on the tourism industry as they affect tourists' decision to travel to South Africa (Palmer, 2000). These fabricated perceptions associated with South Africa, as outlined above, act as a threat for the destination's tourism. Challenges raised by tourists about visiting Johannesburg in South Africa, for example, include poor transportation systems, low levels of customer service and efficiency, crime, lack of entertainment and sightseeing opportunities, and lack of adequate information (Department of Tourism, 2011). Domestic tourism in South Africa has about 60% tourists being intra-provincial tourists. The majority of domestic tourist travel in South Africa is generated from Gauteng province (mostly Johannesburg) travelling mostly on business (Department of Tourism, 2011). Domestic tourists in Johannesburg have identified three tourism constraints in South Africa, namely, the lack of quality leisure products in the inner city, series of inefficiencies in Johannesburg tourism operations and inefficient marketing and packaging (Rogerson & Visser, 2007).

Efforts have been made to change tourists' perceptions of South Africa and its cities. South Africa's cities were a gradual beneficiary from the country's re-integration into the international tourism economy since the end of apartheid era in 1994. Johannesburg, for example is now perceived as a "world-class city" within the global economy (Rogerson & Visser, 2007). Places in Johannesburg such as Newtown, Braamfontein and Maboneng Precinct have been revamped in efforts to dim the perceptions associated with Johannesburg

specifically focusing on safety and physical appeal (Gauteng Tourism Authority, 2012). Maboneng Precinct was previously seen as a "no-go" area by the government due to crime and urban decay. It has now been transformed from an industrial space into being a cultural oasis; the former warehouse from the 90's is now the famous Arts on Main and the construction offices are now home to famous fashion brands, restaurants and art studios. Arts on Main in the Maboneng Precinct, is a market on Main Street held every Sunday from 10am to 3pm with night markets held on the first Thursday evening of the month (excluding January) from 7pm to 11pm (Gauteng Tourism Authority, 2012). Arts on Main is known for its diverse offerings, including rich local foods prepared by Johannesburg vendors in addition to its other commercial spaces, offering tourists unique experience through its products and services.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) have convincingly argued that the world's economy has changed drastically in recent years from service economy (focus on providing a quality service) to experience economy (focus on providing an experience that is memorable). As tourism is a service industry one cannot completely write off the importance of service excellence hence the rise of a new phenomenon "service experience" (the subjective response to service encounter based on psychological aspects, according to Van Doorn and Verhoef, 2008). Otto and Ritchie (1996) reported that service experience has a significant influence on customer's evaluation and satisfaction of a tourism product, an attraction and a destination.

Research has shown that emotion-based reports are defined by perceptions built by tourists from word of mouth, past experience, expectations and external communication (Kim, 2014: Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2010: Otto & Ritchie, 1996). These reports form the basis of the quality of the service experience in the tourism

industry according to Otto and Ritchie (1996).

### **Study background**

The term service experience has been found to be an important part of consumer evaluation of satisfaction of services experienced. Otto and Ritchie (1996) conducted a research that provided a Service Experience model consisting of four dimensions that are taken into account when one discusses service experience within any industry. The four dimensions (later explained in the literature review) consisting of 'hedonics', 'peace of mind', 'involvement', and 'recognition' were identified as essential elements of customers' overall experience of the service provided (Otto & Ritchie, 1996: 171-172).

The model presents a method to measure the quality of service, within the tourism industry, based on dimensions that are important to tourists. The study revealed that emotion-based feedback reports form the basis of the quality of the tourist's service experience and contributes significantly to tourism service satisfaction, but is often ignored by management, organisations and destinations (Otto and Ritchie, 1996). Olsson, Friman, Pareigis and Edvardsson (2012) conducted similar research to that of Otto and Ritchie to measure service experience. This research focused on measuring service experience based upon customer satisfaction through the Travel Scale (TS). The Travel Scale, according to the authors Olsson et al., (2012), is a hierarchy of important aspects to tourists overall travel experience. The later model (Olsson et al., 2012) applied and validated Satisfaction with Travel Scale (STS) for measuring the service experience in public transport, while the earlier (Otto & Ritchie, 1996) examined three service sectors in the tourism industry, namely, airlines, hotels and tours & attractions. This study therefore prefer Otto & Ritchie's model as it is broader in application as regards tourism services, and will build on

their work to check for significant differences between international and local tourists' service experience perceptions and how they relate to a destination and an attraction.

Based on the study conducted by Mechinda, Serirat and Gulid in 2009, one needs to take into account the differences in tourists' behavioural patterns, especially comparing international and domestic tourists. It is arguable that domestic tourists' perceptions and international tourists' perceptions may differ when taking into account their origin, culture and familiarity with surroundings. Therefore one cannot have generalised international and domestic tourists' perceptions.

Furthermore one can argue based on the tourism industry hierarchy that destinations are often seen on a macro scale while attractions found within a destination can be classified on a micro scale. Taking that into account, generalising tourism perceptions of a destination and an attraction can reduce the value of the results presented as it is suggested that a significant difference may exist between the two. This forms the basis for the significance of this study. The study conducted by Mechinda, Serirat and Gulid (2009) in Chiangmai, Thailand found that in terms of attitude toward destinations, international tourists were more satisfied and perceived travel to Chiangmai as having better value than domestic tourists did. Nonetheless, international tourists scored lower than domestic tourists in terms of their attachment, attitudinal loyalty and intention to revisit other places in Thailand. This study concurs with the findings of Bonn, Joseph and Dai, (2005) which reported the varying perceptions visitors can hold about a destination based on their country of origin.

Furthermore, it is probable that tourists' perception of service experience of a destination (such as South Africa), may impact on service experience perception of tourists visiting an attraction (such as Arts on Main) within South Africa.

This study aimed to check for relationships of perceptions between service experience dimensions of South Africa as a destination, and Arts on Main as an attraction within South Africa. Also, perceptions of service experience dimensions between local and international tourists were compared.

For the purpose of this research, Arts on Main situated in the Maboneng Precinct of Johannesburg, South Africa was chosen as the attraction for this study as it presently offer unique South African service experience to tourists. South Africa as a destination was chosen as it is one of the leading tourist destinations in Africa. Tourism in South Africa is one of the fastest growing industries since the end of the apartheid area in 1994 (Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2011). South African research on tourists' service experience (Bremmer, 2000; Ferreira, 1999; Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2011) has focused on perception of safety issues, while not addressing other service experience dimensions that have been identified by other researchers as having a role in customer overall satisfaction. No research has been conducted on South Africa as a destination or its attraction offering these more holistic dimensions of service experience.

## **Literature review**

### **Service quality as a precursor of service experience**

The tourism service environment is complex, as it is characterized by the service delivery process, interaction, fragmentation, service quality and the experience (Obenour, Patterson, Pedersen & Pearson, 2006). Due to the tourism industry being amalgamated, tourists are not able to separate experiences of non-tourism related services from tourism related services; as a result one general perception is created of the different services encounters experienced during their trip to a destination (Chen & Chen,

2010). Destination attributes are closely associated with the perceptions of tourists built by the supplier through communication, consumer comparisons, knowledge and information (Kim, 2014). The period when a service provider renders a service that meets or exceeds the expectations of a customer, service quality is achieved. Service quality is explained as the comparison of customers' expectations of the service delivery and evaluation of this service delivered (Kim, Ritchie & McCormick, 2010; Chen & Chen, 2010). If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs. Perceived service quality refers to the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence, affecting the overall perception of whether or not the customer considers the service to meet his/her standards of quality (Chen & Chen, 2010).

Perceived quality is built based on a pre-conceived idea the customer has of the service and it varies from one person to another according to understanding, knowledge and media communication. Seth, Deshmukh and Vrat (2005) have suggested that low levels of perceived quality will generate low levels of customer satisfaction, while high levels of perceived quality generate high levels of satisfaction.

Research on service marketing argues that customers and producers are intertwined in co-creation value. The customer can help enhance the overall service experience and at the same time can form a barrier in service delivery. Pine and Gilmore (1999) differentiated experience according to four levels based on customer involvement in business offerings, namely: passive involvement, active involvement, absorption, and immersion. The tourist who passively participates in destination activities has little influence on the performance of the destination, whereas an active participant will affect the performance or event that becomes part of his or her experience (Oh,

Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). The tourist typically “absorbs” entertaining and educational offerings of a destination and “immerses” in the destination environment resulting in aesthetic or escapist experiences. Absorption in this context is defined as “occupying a person’s attention by bringing the experience into the mind” and immersion as “becoming physically (or virtually) a part of the experience itself” (Pine & Gilmore 1999, p. 31).

While Otto and Ritchie (1996) view experience in tourism from the mental state of tourists during or after the service experience; Pine & Gilmore (1999) see experience from the individuality point of view, stating that the service experience felt by one is dependent on the person’s current emotions, personality and knowledge.

Otto and Ritchie (1996) conducted a study on the differences between service quality and experience quality to provide further insight on the movement from service economy to experience economy. They surmised that the service quality gap is a direct result of management misinformed perceptions of service required by tourists.

Pine and Gilmore (1999) mentioned that consumers seek experiences beyond merely consuming products and services and service quality can no longer be used to differentiate choices for consumers. As Oh, Fiore & Jeoung (2007) stated, a customer’s traits and previous life events have a significant role in customer’s experience. Chen and Chen (2010) compared the concepts of service quality and experience quality and concluded that experience quality is often the better approach on a managerial perspective to satisfy tourists as experience quality has to do with tourist’s response to his/her social and physiological benefits of the service experience.

### **Service experience dimensions**

In service industries one refers to experiencescape as the physical environment where the service is rendered. Bitner (1992) explained experiencescape as

the spaces in which experiences are staged and consumed. Experiencescape can be compared to the landscapes that are strategically planned, laid out and designed for the service experience to take place. Landscapes of experience are not only organized by producers but are also actively pursued after by consumers (O’Dell & Billing, 2005). In this regard, experiencescape is a parallel concept to the servicescape (Bitner, 1992), where experiencescape focuses on the outcomes of experiences while servicescape focuses on the service. The term service experience has found interest in research conducted on services within the tourism industry (Chen & Chen, 2010; Otto & Ritchie, 1996; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Service experience can be considered as the ‘psychological environment’ of the subjective personal reactions and feelings experienced by tourists when they consume a service (Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Seth, Deshmukh & Vrat, 2005). Research has found that tailor made service experience becomes fundamental for better service specifically in reference to experimental service. Service experience results in a subjective and internal (psychological) reaction (Meyer & Schwager, 2007; Jüttner, Schaffner, Windler & Maklan, 2013). Hence, the failure to deliver satisfactory tourism service experience lays in the failure to understand and manage the true nature of consumer satisfaction.

According to Otto and Ritchie (1996) service experience has a significant influence on customer’s evaluation and satisfaction of a tourism product, destination or attraction. As mentioned earlier, Otto and Ritchie’s (1996: 171 - 172) study identified the four dimensions of ‘hedonics’, ‘peace of mind’, ‘involvement’, and ‘recognition’ as essential elements of customers’ overall experience of the service provided. ‘Hedonics’ has to do with the need of tourists to escape from everyday life associated with the motivation to travel. Other variables that can be used to describe hedonics are excitement, enjoyment and memorability. ‘Involvement’

describes tourists' need to interact with local cultures and service providers, meet people, be part of the process, have choice and be educated and informed. 'Peace of mind' has to do with the physical and psychological safety of tourists in terms of comfort, security and assured privacy. Recognition describes tourists' need to be seen as important, acknowledged during the overall service experience and taken seriously.

For the purpose of this study in South Africa, the researchers adapted the terms used by Otto and Ritchie (1996), but used the same explanatory variables, as '**hedonism**' (replacing 'hedonics'), '**safety**' (to substitute for 'peace of mind'), '**interaction**' (replacing 'involvement') and '**recognition**', to make the understanding of concepts more related to South Africa's urban tourism context.

*Hedonism* and the related concept of perceived novelty have been found to be the driving force for the need for memorable experience and to experience something new. Tourism literature states that novelty is an important factor related to tourist satisfaction (Sthapit, 2013; Woodside & Martin, 2008) and plays an important role in tourists' decision making process (Kim et al., 2010). Individual motivation forces the tourists to actively seek out novel information, involving the willingness to take physical, psychological and social risks for the sake of novel sensations (Sthapit, 2013). Kim, et al., (2010) identified *hedonism* as a major determinant of perceived value, and Sthapit (2013) reported that consumer researchers have identified tourism services as hedonic purchases due to the need to 'escape' that is associated with the motivation to travel. Sthapit also stated that the tourism hedonic consumption paradigm suggests that in many situations consumers seek fun, amusement, fantasy, arousal, sensory stimulation and enjoyment in the service experience.

It has also been found that customers tend to remember an experience that they are

personally involved in as it reinforces the customer's affective feelings during post evaluation phase (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Tourism experiences (Oh et. al., 2007) create a platform for tourist to interact before, during and after the service experience. Travellers who interact with local culture create a unique and memorable holiday experience. Kim et al., (2010) found that respondents who interacted with local community during their travel experience were found to have high levels of recollection of their past experiences, adding to their existing knowledge.

*Safety* refers to the tourist desire for both physical and psychological safety in terms of comfort, security and assured privacy (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). This (safety) helps tourism providers to understand the motivation and essential needs required by the tourists to reach overall customer service experience satisfaction (Kendra, 2010).

The tourists seek a sense of personal recognition from the individual or overall service experience in order to gain assurance that they are taken seriously or are important (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Tourists' recognition need drives tourism service providers to ensure service experience satisfaction of tourists.

## Research method and design

Mass phenomena such as contemporary leisure and tourism require much involvement from governmental, not-for-profit and for-profit organisations, as well as tourists, which rely on quantified information for significant aspects of their decision-making (Ezeuduji, 2013; Veal, 2011). Questionnaire survey is an ideal way of getting some of this information (Veal, 2011); especially what tourists think of the service experience they had in a destination. A respondent-completed structured questionnaire method was used to gather information from 170 domestic and international tourists visiting Arts on Main,

situated in Maboneng Precinct, Johannesburg, South Africa. This study aimed to check for relationships of perceptions between service experience dimensions ('*hedonism*', '*interaction*', '*safety*', and '*recognition*') of South Africa as a destination, and Arts on Main as an attraction within South Africa. Also, perceptions of service experience dimensions between local and international tourists were compared. Out of the 170 questionnaires administered, 151 completed questionnaires were suitable for analysis. The survey was done between May and July 2014. Tourists were sampled using non-probabilistic convenience sampling method, in which only tourists who were willing to take part in the survey, and were available during this period, were randomly selected. Respondents were approached between 13:00 and 15:00 hours, as the attraction operates on Sundays between 10:00 and 16:00 hours. The time period chosen was to ensure that many tourists must have had their experiences at Arts on Main before they are approached to take part in the survey. Tourists were actually asked if they have spent at least one hour at Arts on Main, and only those who replied in affirmative were selected for the survey.

The respondents, who were visiting Arts on Main in South Africa, were given an opportunity to relate their experiences in South Africa with their experiences at Arts on Main. Dimensions of the service experience found in the literature consisting of '*hedonism*', '*interaction*', '*safety*', and '*recognition*' (Otto & Ritchie, 1996) were introduced into the questionnaire as variables. A total of 16 variables explaining the 4 service experience dimensions were introduced in the questionnaire. Variables used in the questionnaire emanated from the literature review of service experience dimensions (Kim, 2014; Kim et al., 2010; Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Tourists were asked how they perceived South Africa generally, offering these dimensions of service experience and how they perceived Arts on Main offering these experience dimensions.

The Questionnaire consisted of three sections: tourist profile (visit patterns and the socio-demographic characteristics of tourists), perceptions of the destination (South Africa), and perceptions of the attraction (Arts on Main). Perception questions were based on the four service experience dimensions mentioned earlier, and were measured along a 5-point Likert scale (ordinal or ranked variables). The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Tourist profile questions were sorted into categorical variables.

SPSS version 22 software was used for statistical analysis (IBM Corporation, 2013). The first stage of analysis used descriptive statistics to derive frequency of all responses (in percentages). Bivariate analyses of the data collected were done at the second stage of data analysis, to reveal relationships between tourist profiles and responses to the other questionnaire items (perception questions), on the one hand, and between perception questions of South Africa and Arts on Main, on the other hand. Spearman's correlation test (two-tailed) was used to check for relationships between tourists' perceptions of South Africa service experience and Arts on Main service experience. Pearson Chi-Square test checked relationships between tourists profile and tourists' perceptions of service experience dimensions.

Cressford (2003) and Veal (2011) supported the use of the Chi-square test to check for relationships between nominal and/or categorical variables, and the use of Correlation test to check for relationships between ordinal or ranked variables. In this study, ordinal variables, after Correlations tests, were subsequently recoded into nominal variables, for the Chi-square tests. Spearman's correlation test (two-tailed) was used between South Africa service experience dimensions' variables and Arts on Main service experience dimensions' variables. Pearson Chi-square test aimed to test relationships between tourist profile and variables of South Africa and Arts on Main

service experience dimensions. All statistical tests were done at a 95% confidence interval.

**Results and discussions**  
**Tourists’ profile**

Table 1 depicts the socio-demographic characteristics of local and international tourists visiting Arts on Main during the survey period. Tourists consisted of more females than males, and mostly young tourists between the ages of 16 and 34. International tourists dominate the sample population, and almost half of the

international tourists are coming from the European continent. Leisure and visiting friends and relatives dominate visit purpose. These results are not surprising as the main offerings at Arts on Main are food and beverage, clothing, and art works; mostly demand for leisure activities that can be done with friends and families. The most important primary results for South African Tourism managers were those related to the size of the tourists on a return visit. More than half of the sample population has visited South Africa before, reinforcing tourists’ patronage of South Africa as a tourism destination (Ezeuduji, 2013).

**Table 1:** Profile of the respondents (n=151).

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	40.4
	Female	59.6
Age group	16-24	38.4
	25-34	39.7
	35-44	11.3
	45 and above	10.6
Visited South Africa before	No	44.4
	Yes	55.6
Have visited Arts on Main before	No	58.9
	Yes	41.1
Purpose of visit	Visiting friends and relatives	29.1
	Leisure	29.8
	Business travel	10.6
	Education	11.3
	Other	19.2
South African citizen	No	62.3
	Yes	37.7
Continent of Origin (if not South African)	Africa	12.4
	Europe	45.4
	Americas	22.7
	Asia	13.3
	Oceania	6.2

**Tourists’ perceptions of service experience dimensions of South Africa and Arts on Main**

This study found using Spearman’s correlation test (two-tailed) that, comparing how tourists perceive the service experience dimensions in South Africa and Arts on Main, ‘*hedonism*’ and ‘*recognition*’ dimensions were more strongly correlated (three very strong correlations) than the service experience dimensions of

‘*interaction*’ and ‘*safety*’ (Table 2). However, with regard to ‘*hedonism*’, there was no significant correlation between tourists feeling that they were engaging in activities that are thrilling in South Africa compared to Arts on Main. It can be suggested that this could be due to the variance in services offered within Arts on Main as an attraction, and in the wider South Africa, as a destination. Buhalis and Costa (2006) had mentioned that the difference in variety of services a destination offers that capture the

need to do something thrilling as opposed to a single attraction can impact on service experience. Generally speaking, tourists feel the same high sense of having

memorable experience and 'escape'; as well as self-importance and well-liked in South Africa and in Arts on Main.

**Table 2:** Correlations between tourists' perceptions of service experience dimensions in South Africa and in Arts on Main (n=151).

Service experience dimensions in South Africa	Correlation	Service experience dimensions in Arts on Main
Doing something I like in South Africa (H)	***	Doing something I like in Arts on Main
Doing something memorable in South Africa (H)	***	Doing something memorable in Arts on Main
Doing something thrilling in South Africa(H)	N.S	Doing something thrilling in Arts on Main
Felt a sense of 'escape' during service experience in South Africa(H)	***	Felt a sense of 'escape' during service experience in Arts on Main
During the service experience I felt educated and informed in South Africa (I)	*	During the service experience I felt educated and informed in Arts on Main
Felt involved in the process of service experience delivery in South Africa(I)	*	Felt involved in the process of service experience delivery in Arts on Main
Had an opportunity to interact/ meet new people in South Africa(I)	**	Had an opportunity to interact/ meet new people in Arts on Main
Had a choice in products/ services delivered in South Africa(I)	***	Had a choice in products/ services delivered in Arts on Main
Had some control over the service experience in South Africa(I)	***	Had some control over the service experience in Arts on Main
Felt comfortable in South Africa (S)	***	Felt comfortable in Arts on Main
Felt a sense of security in South Africa (S)	*	Felt a sense of security in Arts on Main
Felt relaxed during the service experience in South Africa(S)	***	Felt relaxed during the service experience in Arts on Main
Felt welcomed and 'at home' in South Africa(S)	**	Felt welcomed and 'at home' in Arts on Main
Felt important in South Africa (R)	***	Felt important in Arts on Main
Felt that I was taken serious in South Africa(R)	***	Felt that I was taken serious in Arts on Main
Felt well-liked in South Africa (R)	***	Felt well-liked in Arts on Main

Notes: Spearman's correlation test, two-tailed significance.

N.S., no significant results. \*,  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*,  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*,  $p < 0.000$ .

(H) = Hedonism, (I) = Interaction, (S) = Safety, (R) = Recognition

*Safety* as a service experience dimension recorded two very strong correlations however there exist a weak correlation between tourists feeling secured in South Africa and Arts on Main. This can be due to the environments in which the service experience took place, as some authors (Bitner,1992; Dong & Siu, 2013) suggested that the environment in which the service is experienced plays a role in tourists overall service experience.

Tourists generally agreed more to feeling safe and more recognised in Arts on Main than in wider South Africa as a destination. Taking into consideration that Arts on Main

is located within a secluded place in the Central Business District (CBD), this may reinforce the sense of security within the tourists mindset that they may feel within the wider South Africa destination. Furthermore, McKercher & du Cros (2002) suggested that the level of strangeness with an environment affects tourists' overall service experience. One needs to take into consideration that majority of respondents originate from Europe (45.4%). Therefore it can be suggested that the European elements found in Arts on Main may reduce the strangeness and increase the sense of security in tourists' mindset, resulting in a more positive tourists' experience visiting

Arts on Main (McKercher & du Cros 2002). Again, because many of these tourists are from similar regions (Europe and Americas – about 68%), visiting an attraction together can give rise to the ‘flocking together’ effect that can increase sense of security.

*Interaction* as a service experience dimension recorded two very strong correlations: tourists feeling that they had a choice in products and service delivered, and tourists feeling a sense of control over service experience. However, this study recorded two weak correlations between tourists feeling educated and informed during service experience and tourists feeling involved in the service experience in South Africa and Arts on Main. Chen & Chen (2010) stated that tourists feel more involved in service experience when they are given a present during the production of the service and are informed or educated about the service.

#### **Service experience dimensions in South Africa compared to tourists’ profile**

This study also has good news for South African tourism managers, as most tourists strongly agreed or tended to agree that they had positive service experience in South Africa based on the four experience dimensions used in this study (Table 3). Chi-square test results however revealed some socio-demographic relationships with these experiences. For example, results showed that youth travellers agreed more than the older travellers that they did

something memorable in South Africa. Buhalis & Costa (2006) stated that youth travellers engaged in tourism to explore in order to create a memorable experience. European tourists agreed the most to the feeling of doing something they liked and something thrilling in South Africa while Oceania tourists agreed the least. It is suggested that the national culture of tourists influences tourists’ expectations and perceptions of service experience and the differences in the national cultural background influence service quality evaluation of tourists (Reisinger 2009).

In terms of doing ‘something thrilling’, Oceania is more related to African continent in terms of resident cultures and can also offer thrilling experiences which tourists from Oceania are already more used to, than European tourists. International tourists agreed the more to perceptions of being taken seriously in South Africa as opposed to domestic tourists that agreed less. It is very likely that international tourists are given more attention by service providers than domestic tourists due to their mostly higher spending power owing to the strength of their currency.

Furthermore repeat visit tourists felt more welcomed, ‘at home’ and important than those who never visited before. Tourists’ familiar with the South African environment could feel more ‘at home’ and recognised than those who are not quite familiar with the environment.

**Table 3:** Relationships between tourists' perceptions of service experience dimensions in South Africa and tourists' profile (n = 151).

Service experience dimensions	Strongly disagree or tend to disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree or tend to agree (%)	Compared by tourists' profile
Doing something I like in South Africa?(H)	7.3	18.5	74.2	** Tourist from Europe agreed the most; Tourists from Oceania agreed the least.
Doing something memorable in South Africa?(H)	7.9	19.9	72.2	**Age 25- 34 agreed the most; age 45 and above agreed the least.
Doing something thrilling in South Africa?(H)	9.3	34.7	56.0	*Tourists from Europe agreed the most; tourists from Oceania agreed the least.
Felt a sense of 'escape' during service experience in South Africa?(H)	18.8	30.9	50.3	N.S
During the service experience I felt educated and informed in South Africa?(I)	11.4	34.2	54.4	N.S
Felt involved in the process of service experience delivery in South Africa?(I)	20.0	32.7	47.3	N.S
Had an opportunity to interact/ meet new people in South Africa?(I)	7.9	21.9	70.2	N.S
Had a choice in products/ services delivered in South Africa?(I)	6.0	22.5	71.5	*Tourists from Europe agreed the most; tourists from Oceania agreed the least.
Had some control over the service experience in South Africa?(I)	11.9	39.7	48.3	N.S
Felt comfortable in South Africa?(S)	12.1	29.5	58.4	** Tourists that have visited South Africa before agreed the most; tourists that have not visited South Africa before agreed the least.
Felt a sense of security in South Africa?(S)	28.0	26.7	45.3	N.S
Felt relaxed during the service experience in South Africa?(S)	10.6	27.2	62.3	N.S
Felt welcomed and 'at home' in South Africa?(R)	9.9	29.8	60.3	*Tourists that have visited South Africa before agreed the most; tourists that have not visited South Africa agree the least.
Felt important in South Africa?(R)	16.1	32.9	51.0	* Tourists that have visited South Africa before agreed the most; tourists that have not visited South Africa before agree the least.
Felt that I was taken serious in South Africa?(R)	15.3	26.7	58.0	*International tourists agreed more than domestic tourists.
Felt well-liked in South Africa?(R)	11.3	25.2	63.6	* Tourist from Europe agreed the most; tourists from Oceania and Asia agree the least.

Notes: Pearson Chi-Square test significance. N.S., no significant results. \*, p < 0.05; \*\*, p < 0.01; \*\*\*, p < 0.000.

(H) = Hedonism, (I) = Interaction, (S) = Safety, (R) = Recognition

### Service experience dimensions in Arts on Main compared to tourists' profile

This study again has good news for Arts on Main attraction managers, as most tourists strongly agreed or tended to agree that they had positive service experience in Arts on Main based on the four experience dimensions used in this study (Table 4). Chi-square test results however revealed some socio-demographic relationships with these experiences. One found more variances between tourists' profile and service experience dimensions in South Africa compared to Arts on Main as an attraction. Tourists generally agreed more to

feeling safe and more recognised in Arts on Main than in wider South Africa as a destination. Assumptions have been made to explain this behavior in the earlier part of the discussion. Compared to tourists' perceptions of service experience dimensions in South Africa, repeat visit tourists also felt more 'at home' in Arts on Main than first time visitors. Repeat visit tourists also felt they had more choice in products and services delivered in Arts on Main than first time visitors. Tourists' familiar with the South African environment could feel more 'at home' and a sense of choice making than those who are not quite familiar with the environment, agreeing with

the findings of Ezeuduji (2013) regarding Nigerian tourists to South Africa.

**Table 4:** Relationships between tourists' perceptions of service experience dimensions in Arts on Main and tourists' profile (n = 151).

Service experience dimensions	Strongly disagree or tend to disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly agree or tend to agree (%)	Compared by tourists' profile
Doing something I like in Arts on Main? (H)	3.3	10.6	86.1	N.S
Doing something memorable in Arts on Main?(H)	2.7	18.1	79.2	N.S
Doing something thrilling in Arts on Main?(H)	12.6	39.7	47.7	N.S
Felt a sense of 'escape' during service experience in Arts on Main?(H)	13.5	25.0	61.5	N.S
During the service experience I felt educated and informed in Arts on Main During?(I)	12.6	35.1	52.3	N.S
Felt involved in the process of service experience delivery in Arts on Main?(I)	8.0	32.7	59.3	N.S
Had an opportunity to interact/ meet new people in Arts on Main? (I)	6.6	17.2	76.2	N.S
Had a choice in products/ services delivered in Arts on Main?(I)	4.7	19.3	76.0	**Tourists that have visited South Africa before agreed more; tourists that have not visited South Africa before agreed less.
Had some control over the service experience in Arts on Main?(I)	6.6	30.5	62.9	N.S
Felt comfortable in Arts on Main? (S)	3.3	11.3	85.3	N.S
Felt a sense of security in Arts on Main? (S)	4.0	11.3	84.8	*Females agreed more than males
Felt relaxed during the service experience in Arts on Main?(S)	3.3	11.3	85.4	N.S
Felt welcomed and 'at home' in Arts on Main?(R)	3.3	15.9	80.8	**Tourists that have visited South Africa before agreed more than those who never visited.
Felt important in Arts on Main? (R)	10.0	40.7	49.3	* Tourist visiting friends and family (VFR) and leisure tourists agreed the most, Business tourists agreed the least.
Felt that I was taken serious in Arts on Main? (R)	6.0	31.1	62.9	N.S
Felt well-liked in Arts on Main? (R)	4.6	23.8	71.5	* Tourist from Europe agreed the most; tourists from Oceania agreed the least.

Notes: Pearson Chi-Square test significance. N.S., no significant results. \*, p < 0.05; \*\*, p < 0.01; \*\*\*, p < 0.000. (H) = Hedonism, (I) = Interaction, (S) = Safety, (R) = Recognition

## Conclusions and recommendations

This study used Otto & Ritchie's (1996) service experience dimensions framework to check for relationships of perceptions between service experience dimensions ('hedonism', 'interaction', 'safety', and 'recognition') of South Africa as a destination, and Arts on Main as an attraction. Domestic and international

tourists' service experience dimensions perceptions were also compared. Research findings indicate that there is a relationship between tourists' service experience dimensions perceptions of an attraction and the destination within which the attraction is situated. Attractions within a destination will offer part of the experience package of a destination and the critical mass of experiences in a destination will reflect the

destination's brand essence. In this study, tourists' profile also relate to tourists' service experience dimensions perceptions of an attraction and destination. Domestic and international tourists differ significantly as regards perceptions of service experience dimension of 'recognition' (being taken seriously) in South Africa, but not in other dimensions.

International tourists agreed the more to perceptions of being taken seriously in South Africa than domestic tourists. This could be due to the international tourists' ability to spend higher in a destination, especially European and American tourists who came in with much stronger currency. Repeat visit tourists felt more welcomed and 'at home' in South Africa and in Arts on Main, than first time tourists, throwing light on how familiarity with an environment correlates positively with the sense of 'feeling at home'. Tourists' perceptions of the service experience dimensions of 'hedonism' and 'recognition' were more strongly correlated than the dimensions of 'interaction' and 'safety' for South Africa and Arts on Main. Tourists generally strongly agreed or tended to agree that they had positive service experience in South Africa and Arts on Main based on all four experience dimensions used in this study. This is good news for South African tourism managers as these results provided evidence that tourists are having rich experience in South Africa. This statement is further validated by the proportion of tourists (about 56%) who are on repeat visit in South Africa. Tourists generally agreed more to feeling 'safe' and 'recognised' in Arts on Main than in wider South Africa as a destination. More international than domestic tourists were sampled at Arts on Main, so the 'flocking together' effect of international tourists could lead to this perception of increased security. Douglas *et al* (2012), Ferreira (1999) and Rogerson (2006) mentioned that the fear of crime was a major cause of foreign tourists feeling disappointed with their experiences in South Africa. However this study found that about

45% of respondents felt a sense of security in South Africa, while about 27% of them remained neutral. It is therefore evident that international tourists' perceptions of South Africa on safety issues are shifting in recent times.

The limitation of this study is that it was conducted over a three-month period. Tourists could be sampled over the whole year (a period of 12 months) in order to obtain more convincing results. However, the latter strategy has high costs and the findings over a three-month period could possibly be extrapolated to yield similar results to that obtainable over a 12-month period (Ezeuduji, 2013).

These research results should not be generalised to the whole of South Africa. The results are only applicable to an attraction (Arts on Main) in Johannesburg, South Africa. We recommend that future research compare the tourists' service experience of different urban attractions in South Africa (for example Pretoria, Durban, Cape Town) in order to establish this study's scale of relevance.

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