

## Brand Experience and Intentions to Stay at Hotels in Zimbabwe: An Application of Khan and Rahman's Hotel Brand Experience Scale

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**How to cite this article:** Mutsikiwa, M., Zvavahera, P. & Pasipanodya, S. (2020). Brand Experience and Intentions to Stay at Hotels in Zimbabwe: An Application of Khan and Rahman's Hotel Brand Experience Scale. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 9(3)215-230. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720-14>

### Abstract

The study examines the applicability of Khan and Rahman's (2017) hotel brand experience scale to the hotel context of Zimbabwe. The study employed a cross-sectional design to collect data from hotel guests. Data analysis was done using exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modelling. The results produced four dimensions of the original scale. In trying to establish the hypothesised relationships between the constructs, the results revealed that two dimensions: hotel ambience and hotel staff competence had a significant and positive influence on intention to continue staying at hotels whereas hotel location and guest to guest experience did not have any significant influence on intention to continue staying at hotels. The study offers hotel managers with the relevant dimensions that they should employ in order to design suitable strategies that enhance guests' intention to continue staying at hotels.

**Keywords:** Brand experience, hotel location, hotel ambience, staff competence and guest to guest experience

### Introduction

Branding is quite significant to both brand managers and consumers, for brand managers it is meant to ensure that customers experience unique emotional experiences (Keller, 1993). Consumers make informed decisions on the basis of the experiences they have with every touch point with a brand, service and/or ideas (Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello, 2009). From a brand management perspective, an experience is regarded as the impression that consumers form in their minds after encountering a brand offer (Iglesias Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011). Because of that, every organisation would want consumers to have memorable experiences with their brands. Consequently, brand experience is regarded as a significant concept in brand



management research (Brakus et al., 2009) as it guides consumers on what to buy and not to buy. Marketing practitioners are now emphasising on experiential characteristics of their offers in an effort to create lasting experiences with customers (Ebrahim, Ghoneim, Irani & Fan, 2016).

Brand experience is also important in that it prompts greater branding efficacy more than what traditional advertising concepts like brand personality, attitude, brand value and brand equity do (Roswinanto & Strutton, 2014). Consequently, marketing practitioners have made a concerted effort to ensure that consumers use the brand, talk about the brand and search for brand information (Nadzri, Musa, Muda & Hassan, 2016) with the intention of creating enduring brand experiences that can be stored in consumers' memory. Brand experience forms the foundation upon which consumers' trust is edified (Khan & Fatma, 2017). Trust is crucial in business as it can be leveraged and as long as consumers feel that a given brand fulfils its promise they develop long-run relationships with it (Keiningham, Ball, Benoit, Bruce, Buoye, Dzenkovska, Nasr, Ou & Zaki, 2017). The strength and uniqueness of the experience that is evoked by a brand are crucial to the creation of a sustainable competitive edge (Ong, Salleh & Yusoff, 2015).

Business practitioners should also realise that brand experience is important because when customers purchase products they do not do so solely on the basis of the value endowed in brands but they also consider the experiential value that they have with the brands in question (Mathwick, Malhotra & Rigdon, 2001). Brand experience construct plays crucial roles that range from building long-run relationships between consumers and brands (Khan & Rahman, 2015), positioning brands (Hamzah, Alwi & Othman, 2014), appraising brand personality and influencing brand associations (Ding & Seng, 2015) and influencing overall brand evaluation (Bapat & Thanigan, 2015). More importantly, if customers' experiences are properly managed, they may enhance competitive advantage, loyalty and consumer-brand relationship (Grewal, Levy & Kumar, 2009). Ahn and Back (2017) have indicated that a positive brand experience forms the basis upon which a brand can be differentiated from other brands. A study carried out by Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) has also indicated that brand experience is an important determinant of brand equity. Singh and Mehraj (2018) also indicated that brand experience affects behavioural intention, whereas Mhlanga (2018) indicates that customer experience has a significant effect on patronage.

In addition, brand experience has attracted considerable attention from marketing practitioners and academics who have realised how significant the experiences of consumers are with regard to crafting marketing strategies for both products and services (Nadzri et al., 2016). Studies on brand experience have been carried out in different contexts in order to examine the effect of brand experience on a number of outcomes. Brand experience studies have been carried out in Islamic banking sector (Altaf, Iqbal, Mohd. Mokhtar & Sial, 2017), fashion industry (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016), retail sector (Ishida & Tailor, 2012), place branding (Beckman et al., 2013), sport and tourism (Hemmonsbeay & Knott, 2016; Hemmonsbeay, Tichaawa & Knott, 2018; Hemmonsbeay & Tichaawa, 2019) and in hotel industry (Khan & Rahman, 2017). However, most of the studies were based on Brakus et al. (2009) framework. The present study is based on the work of Khan and Rahman (2017) who propounded a new scale to measure hotel brand experience. The rationale behind adopting this scale to hotel brands of Zimbabwe is meant to substantiate the applicability of the new scale to this context and examine the extent to which it predicts continued stay at hotels by guests. The paper is structured in the following manner. First, the paper reviews the relevant literature related to the key constructs of the study. Second, the theoretical and conceptual framework is discussed – whereby the hypotheses are developed and proposed. Third, the research



methodology is discussed. Fourth, data analyses procedures and results are discussed and finally, the conclusion is discussed.

## **Literature review**

### ***Hotel location***

The location of hotels is an important factor that determines the accessibility of these business entities by visiting tourists. Accessibility is crucial to hotel location because visitors need to be connected (Luo & Yang, 2016) and as such hotels have to be sited in places where there is adequate transport to ferry visitors (Sidorkiewicz & Puciato, 2017). Hotels should be located close to their customers as this may increase demand from prospective customers and more importantly, such hotels outperform their competitors (Barros, 2005). A location that is attractive has the potential to generate income and usually, it may enhance the profitability of the hotel (Gawlik, 2016). The location of hotels has been considered as one of the main factors that determine guest satisfaction. Yang, Wong and Wang (2012) examined the influence of location on visitors' satisfaction and the results revealed that there exist significant positive relationships. According to Jang (2012) hotel location affects hotel patronage and its subsequent performance. One other significant consideration with regard to hotel location is the effect it has on the number of tourists who patronise hotels (Puciato, Łoś & Mrozowicz, 2013).

### ***Hotel ambience***

The ambient conditions of a hotel are crucial to the patronage of hotels. Ambience affects the sensory organs of customers (Zithmal & Bitner, 1990) which in turn affects the behavioural intentions of customers (Marrison, 2011) and customers' satisfaction (Hyun, Park, Ren & Kim, 2018). Ambience is regarded as the physical settings where the delivery of a service takes place (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002). It entails the spatial layout, the décor, the design and aesthetics (Lee & Jeong, 2012) and it also refers to the general outlook of the service provider. It is therefore significant that the ambient conditions are favourable enough to affect the behaviour of customers. As such hotels have realised that it is important to create physical settings that influence the behaviour of customers in a positive way. A number of researchers have indicated that positive ambient conditions create a favourable atmosphere that may elicit favourable responses from clients (Ryu, Lee, & Kim, 2012) especially in cases where they are used to evaluate the quality of service and where they are used as differentiation devices (Pareigis, Edvardsson & Enquist, 2011). Research on ambient conditions has concentrated on the way business practitioners may employ the environment and infrastructure to attract visitors to leisure activities and augment customer satisfaction (Heung & Gu, 2012).

### ***Hotel staff competence***

Competencies are conceptualised as the personality traits, skills or a body of knowledge that lead to greater performance and at the same time enhancing superior levels of motivation (Boyatzis, 1982; White, 1959). Employee competencies refer to the expertise, talent, the quality and experience of employees that are important for firm performance (Kehoe & Wright, 2013). They are also regarded as both tacit and explicit knowledge that is endowed in employees. Competencies are important because they are strongly correlated with successful work performance by organisational employees. There are two types of competencies namely cognitive and behavioural. Cognitive competencies entail the know-how, skills and abilities whereas behavioural competencies refer to the principles, attitude, values and motives of an individual (Miller, Missiuna, Macnab, MalloyMiller & Polatajko, 2001) that are needed to perform jobs in an efficient and successful manner. In the case of the hospitality industry



interpersonal skills and general skills are essential and more importantly, some skills are context or cultural specific to the country. Competence of hotel employees may include among other things their ability to communicate with visitors and customers' expectations. According to Tesone and Ricci (2005), hospitality and tourism employees are expected to be equipped with skills that range from teamwork, communication, customer service, professional image, and the understanding of performance standards.

### ***Hotel website and social media experience***

The website of an organisation acts as the main communication platform that links the customer and the organisation (Casalo, Flavian & Guinaliu, 2008). A website is viewed as an organisation's online store which is likened to a brick and mortar outlet, but unlike offline shop users of internet heavily rely on the attributes of the websites in order to rate the kind of service they expect to get from the organisation (Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky & Vitale, 2000). According to Au Yeung and Law (2004), a hotel website should have the relevant content and it should be user friendly. Above all, the hotel website should be of high quality and should be able to enhance positive user experience. This may motivate guests to buy hotel and tourism products and services (Ip, Law & Lee, 2010).

Social media are internet-based applications that permit users to generate content (for example texts and videos), share, connect, and make comments on the content, and interact with the virtual community (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The significant roles that social media play in the hotel and tourism industry has been confirmed by a number of scholars (Hudson & Thal, 2013; Jung, Ineson, & Green, 2013). For example, social media can be employed to acquire and retain guests (Sigala, 2011). Social media facilitate the sharing of information and content by hotel guests. Social media has brought a new paradigm shift in the way hotels communicate with guests – hotel managers can engage customers in transparent and interactive ways (Leung, Bai & Stahura, 2015). Because of the risk and uncertainty involved in purchasing hotel and tourism products and services, guests usually refer to experiential comments made by previous guests. Guests would read consumer-generated comments on social media. Thus social media is significant to both the hotels and guests as it acts as avenues for the guests to access reviews before they make decisions to book at a given hotel (Taylor et al., 2015). In light of these roles of social media, hotels should ensure that their social media pages are “appealing, informative, interactive, and consumer-centric so that consumers can enjoy their social media experiences” (Leung et al., 2015: 162).

### ***Guest to guest experience***

Martin and Pranter (1989) propounded the concept of customer to customer interaction. They suggested that in hotel and tourism, customers are engaged in conversations where information exchange takes place. Many service encounters in hotels occur in the presence of other customers, as such the behaviour of others affects the satisfaction of customers with regard to the service offer (McGrath & Otnes, 1995). At times guests would ask help from other guests in order to find something in the service setting, thus customer to customer interaction acts as a source of information (Gruen, Osmonbekov & Czaplewski, 2007). Customer to customer interaction is important because it facilitates service delivery in the absence of hotel employees (Parker & Ward, 2000). It is part of the service experience, where for example guests share entertainment activities such as playing games together and holding parties. In most service environments, customer to customer interactions may create memorable experiences (Camelis & Llosa, 2011; Meysam, Sadaf, Mohammad, Mohammad & Leila, 2014). Experienced customers may act as role models for inexperienced customers (Wu, 2008). Because of the role that customer to customer experience plays in hospitality and tourism services, it is important

to manage such contacts since they affect the satisfaction of other customers. More importantly, in service environments, customers receive a service at the same time with other customers and this affects the outcome of the service offer (Grove & Fiske, 1997).

### ***Intention to continue***

Behavioural intention is conceptualised as the extent to which an individual is willing to expend effort in order to perform a given behaviour in future (Ajzen, 1991). Many scholars have substantiated that intention precedes volitional behaviour (De Pelsmaeker, Schouteten, Gellynck, Delbaere, De Clercq, Hegyi, Kuti, Depypere & Dewettinck, 2017; Kiriakidis, 2015). In addition, the theory of planned behaviour also prescribes to the contention that intention determines behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). With regard to the service industry, behavioural intention entails the probability that the customer may rebuy the service offer in future and may disseminate positive information about the organisation (Hutchinson, Wellington, Saad & Cox, 2011). In the context of the hotel industry, when visitors are willing to return it may mean that the service offer is meeting the needs of guests. Han and Ryu (2009) indicate that when intention components are positive customers have a high propensity to revisit the provider of a service. Behavioural intention is crucial to service firms that intend to establish long-run relationships with customers (Amin & Nasharuddin, 2013).

### **Theoretical and conceptual framework**

Khan and Rahman (2017) developed and validated a hotel brand experience measurement scale that is made up of 5 dimensions and 17 items. The five dimensions include hotel location, hotel stay and ambience, hotel staff competence, hotel website and social media experience and guest to guest experience. Hotel location refers to the extent to which the site of the hotel brand is captivating to the sensory organs of the individual, hotel stay and ambience refers to the degree to which guests feel that their stay at the hotel is enjoyable and that the hotel environment makes an impression on the sensory organs, hotel staff competence refers to the degree to which guests feel that the hotel staff is efficient, friendly and professional enough to arouse their senses, hotel website and social media experience refers to the extent to which a hotel brand's website provides correct information and the presence of hotel brand on social media induces feelings (Khan & Rahman, 2017). According to Khan and Rahman (2017), the new hotel brand experience scale is a reliable, valid and consistent tool that was tested using different samples. The new hotel brand experience scale can predict the behavioural outcomes of consumers in hotel and tourism settings. Thus, this study intends to apply the new scale to the hotel context of Zimbabwe and examine the extent to which it can predict intention to continue staying at hotels. The research model is a construction made up of the 5 dimensions of Khan and Rahman's (2017) hotel brand experience scale and intention to continue as an outcome.

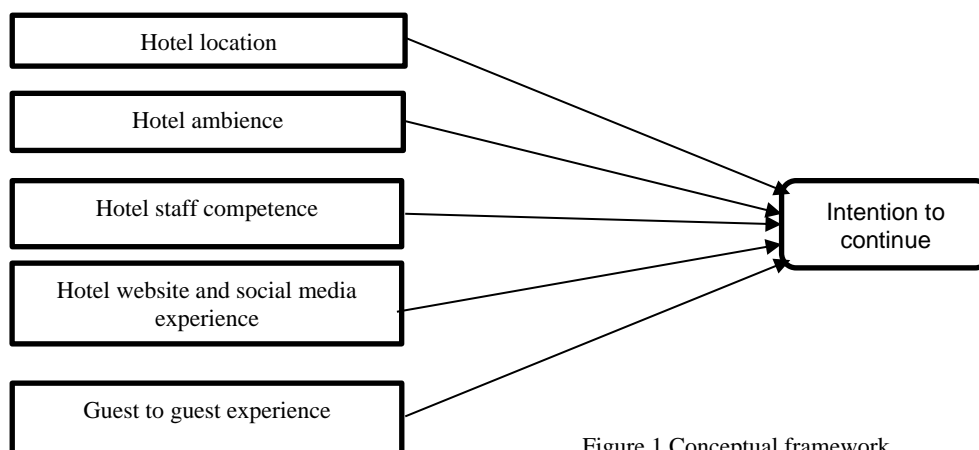


Figure 1 Conceptual framework



## **Hypotheses development**

### ***Hotel location and intention to continue***

Hotel location is regarded as a critical determinant of success in the hotel industry since it strongly affects the choice decisions of guests (Urtasun & Gutierrez, 2006). Hotel location has a significant influence on hotel patronage and its ultimate performance (Chou, Hsu & Chen, 2008; Lee & Jang, 2012; Puciato, 2016). In studies conducted by Lee and Jang (2011) and Xiang and Krawczyk (2016) to examine the effect of location, the results of their studies revealed that location is a driver of guest satisfaction, demand and performance. Therefore the following hypothesis is suggested:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Hotel location positively influences intention to continue.*

### ***Hotel ambience and intention to continue***

There is a general consensus that ambient conditions affect the behavioural intentions of customers (Ruiz, Castro & Diaz, 2012). According to Baker et al. (1988), ambient conditions affect how people perceive and respond to the service settings. In the context of the hotel and tourism industry, comfortable ambient conditions enhance guest satisfaction and determine the behavioural intentions towards the service offer. Ambience influences the behaviour of guests in terms of what to buy or not to buy (Chen, Chen & Lee, 2013). A favourable environment can promote behavioural tendencies like the desire to stay, communicate with other guests where unfavourable environment may promote avoidance behaviour. A study by Soriano (2002) discovered a strong correlation between environment and customer behaviour. Several studies have also confirmed that the atmosphere under which business is conducted has a direct effect on behavioural intentions (Ha & Jang, 2012; Liu & Jang, 2009; Robustin & Hariyana, 2019). Therefore the following hypothesis is suggested:

*H<sub>2</sub>: Hotel ambience positively influences intention to continue.*

### ***Hotel staff competence and intention to continue***

The competence of hotel staff is a function of the knowledge that is acquired from training and experience. Service staff competencies are important in that they help employees accomplish their jobs in efficient and effective ways that build trust and hotel image before guests (Alwi & Da Silva, 2007). In the hotel industry, service delivery is a product of the interaction that takes place between the customers and employees, thus the performance of employees is important as it affects how guests perceive the service offer. The way employees deliver service has a bearing on customer satisfaction (Lovelock & Witz, 2006). As long as customers are happy with the service offered by the firm, they are likely to rebuy the service offer in future. In the context of the hotel and tourism industry when guests have a favourable experience with the products and services offered they are most likely motivated to purchase the service (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009; Yoo, Arnold & Frankwick, 2011). Therefore the following hypothesis is suggested:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Hotel staff competence positively influences intention to continue.*

### ***Guest to guest experience and intention to continue***

Guest to guest interaction plays a significant role in determining the consumers' future behaviour (Imankhan, 2012). For example, in a study by Zgolli and Zaiem (2017), where they examined the association between customer to customer interaction and behaviour of tourists, the results of the study indicated that as long as there is a smooth interaction among customers there is room to create favourable behaviours that range from the willingness to stay, satisfaction and loyalty to hotels. Research has also shown that the quality of customer to



customer interaction has an influence on guests’ future patronage or return to the hotel (Martin & Pranter, 1989). Therefore the following hypothesis is suggested:

*H4: Guest to guest experience positively influences intention to continue.*

## Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design – wherein a cross-sectional design was used to collect data from the research participants using an offline survey. Though the scale was developed to examine hotel brand experience, it had not been tested in similar contexts by several authors. Therefore the researchers decided to adapt the scale to examine hotel brand experience of the four to five-star hotels in Zimbabwe. The researchers acknowledge that the context under which the scale was developed is different from the Zimbabwean hotel context, therefore this study explores the applicability of the scale to a new socio-economic context.

The measurement scales that were adapted were employed to measure the research constructs and the demographic information of the respondents. The constructs that were measured in this study include hotel location, hotel ambience, staff competence, hotel website and social media experience, and guest to guest experience. All these constructs were adapted from Khan and Rahman (2017). Intention to continue was adapted from Liaw and Huang (2003) and Venkatesh, Morris, Davis and Davis (2003). In order to collect data, hotel guests were required to complete a questionnaire that required them to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed to the item statements in the questionnaire on five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. The data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire from a total of 190 participants. The variables that were measured in this study are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Research constructs, item statements and sources

Construct/ Items		Adapted from
Hotel location		Khan and Rahman, (2017)
HL1	The location of this hotel brand stimulates my senses.	
HL2	I find the location of this hotel brand appealing.	
HL3	The location of this hotel brand is convenient and makes me feel relaxed.	
Hotel ambience		
HA1	Staying at this hotel brand is memorable to me.	
HA2	This hotel brand has attractive architectural design.	
HA3	The ambience of this hotel brand is very relaxing to me.	
HA4	The cleanliness of this hotel brand is pleasing.	
Hotel staff competence		
HSC1	Staff of this hotel brand is helpful and friendly and that brings out emotion.	
HSC2	Appearance of this hotel brand staff is impressive.	
HSC3	The way in which the staff of this hotel brand serves is admirable.	
HSC4	I feel good at this hotel brand because of the staff personnel’s attentiveness.	
Hotel website and social media experience		
HWSM1	The website of this hotel brand provides accurate result.	
HWSM2	I find online reviews of this hotel brand informative.	
HWSM3	The presence of this hotel brand on social media appeals to my visual.	
Guest to guest experience		
GGE1	Conduct of guests at this hotel brand is gentle.	
GGE2	Guests at this hotel brand make me feel comfortable.	
GGE3	Guests at this hotel brand value the privacy of other guests.	
Intention to continue		Liaw and Huang, (2003) and Venkatesh et al. (2003)
IC1	I intend to continue staying at this hotel in the future.	
IC2	I believe it is worthwhile to stay at this hotel in future.	
IC3	I will stay at this hotel in the next few months.	
IC4	It is necessary to stay at this hotel in the future.	



In order to collect data from the respondents, a self-administered questionnaire was employed and the researchers sought the assistance from front office personnel who would give the questionnaire to guests as they entered their booked rooms. The researchers confined the study to four to five-star hotels which had similar environments to the ones where the hotel brand experience scale was developed. The researchers anticipated that these hotels would make it possible to measure the five dimensions propounded by Khan and Rahman (2017). The researchers targeted four to five-star hotels in Bulawayo, Harare and Victoria Falls and data collection was done from November 2019 to January 2020. A decision was made to collect data during this period because this is when hotels have a high level of patronage. Most importantly, only those guests who were willing to participate in the survey would be given the questionnaire to complete and out of 260 questionnaires that were distributed, 190 were fully completed and were then employed to do data analysis. Thus, the response rate was 73%.

## Data analysis

### *Demographic profile of respondents*

The participants of this study consisted of 49.5 per cent males and 50.5 per cent females. The age profile of the respondents indicated that the majority of the respondents were in the age groups between 20-29 (33.7 percent) and 30-39 (34.2 percent). Both groups had a total of 67.9 percent. In terms of level of education, the majority of the respondents were graduates and they constituted 54.2 percent of the total respondents.

Table 2 Profile of the sample (N = 190)

Gender	Frequencies	Percentage
Male	94	49.5
Female	96	50.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
20–29	64	33.7
30-39	65	34.2
40-49	37	19.5
50-59	20	10.5
60-69	4	2.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Level of education</b>		
'O' Level	3	1.6
'A' Level	23	12.1
Undergraduate	35	18.4
Graduate	103	54.2
Honours graduate	10	5.3
Masters' graduate	4	2.1
Doctorate	1	.5
Unclassified	11	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>100</b>

### *Reliability and validity of constructs*

Before testing the proposed conceptual framework, the reliability and validity of the scales were tested and the results are depicted in Table 2. All the Cronbach's alpha coefficient values exceeded the minimum cut-off value of 0.70 for all the constructs. According to Hair, Sarstedt, Ringle and Mena (2012), the average variance extracted and composite reliability should be at least .5 and .7 respectively. Accordingly, all the values were acceptable as they at least met the minimum threshold values.





Table 3 Reliability and validity of constructs

Construct	Cronbach's alpha ≥ .70	Average extracted variance ≥ .50	Composite reliability ≥ .70
Hotel location	.82	.61	.82
Hotel ambience	.74	.50	.77
Hotel staff competence	.79	.52	.76
Guest to guest experience	.72	.50	.74
Intention to continue	.91	.58	.85

### ***Discriminant validity***

In order to assess the discriminant validity of the scales, the researchers were guided by Fornell and Larcker (1981) who indicated that the square root of the average variance extracted must be greater than the latent variables' correlation coefficients between two constructs. Accordingly, Table 4 depicts that the outcomes of the square root of the AVE were greater than the correlation coefficients of the constructs. Therefore, the discriminant validity of the scales is supported.

Table 4 Discriminant validity of the constructs

	Hotel location	Hotel ambience	Hotel staff	Guest to guest	Intention to continue
Hotel location	<b>0.781</b>				
Hotel ambience	0.706	<b>0.710</b>			
Hotel staff competence	0.531	0.689	<b>0.721</b>		
Guest to guest	0.620	0.633	0.589	<b>0.720</b>	
Intention to continue	0.600	0.576	0.657	0.627	<b>0.760</b>

### ***Exploratory Factor analysis***

Though the scale was developed to measure hotel brand experience a decision was reached to run an exploratory factor analysis because it was the first time this scale was applied to measure a hotel brand experience in a new context. Before running a principal component analysis, the suitability of the data to run a factor analysis was examined. The Kaiser-Meyer Olkin value was .91 exceeding the minimum value of .6 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ( $p = .000$ ). Thereafter an exploratory factor analysis was run and the results are depicted in Table 2. The principal component analysis produced four factors instead of the original five factors. All the items loaded on their specified factors, with values exceeding a specified threshold of .5, save for hotel website and social media experience which had all the items loading below the minimum value of .5. Because of this, the construct was excluded when the structural equation modelling was run.

Table 5 Exploratory factor analysis results

Construct/items	Factor loadings				
	1	2	3	4	5
Hotel location					
UL1	.814				
UL2	.772				
UL3	.713				
Hotel ambience					
UA1		.676			
UA2		.588			
UA3		.633			
UA4		.592			
Hotel staff competence					
USC1			.706		



USC2			.635		
USC3			.559		
USC4			.587		
Guest to guest experience					
SSE1				.581	
SSE2				.610	
SSE3				.567	
SSE4				.633	
Intention to continue					
IC1					.859
IC2					.844
IC3					.821
IC4					.782
Eigen values	5.630	1.401	1.110	1.074	3.154
Total variance explained	40.217	10.007	7.930	7.875	78.645
Cumulative variance explained	40.217	50.224	58.154	<b>*65.828</b>	<b>**78.645</b>

\*Total variance explained for the four dimensions and \*\* for intention to continue

### Structural model

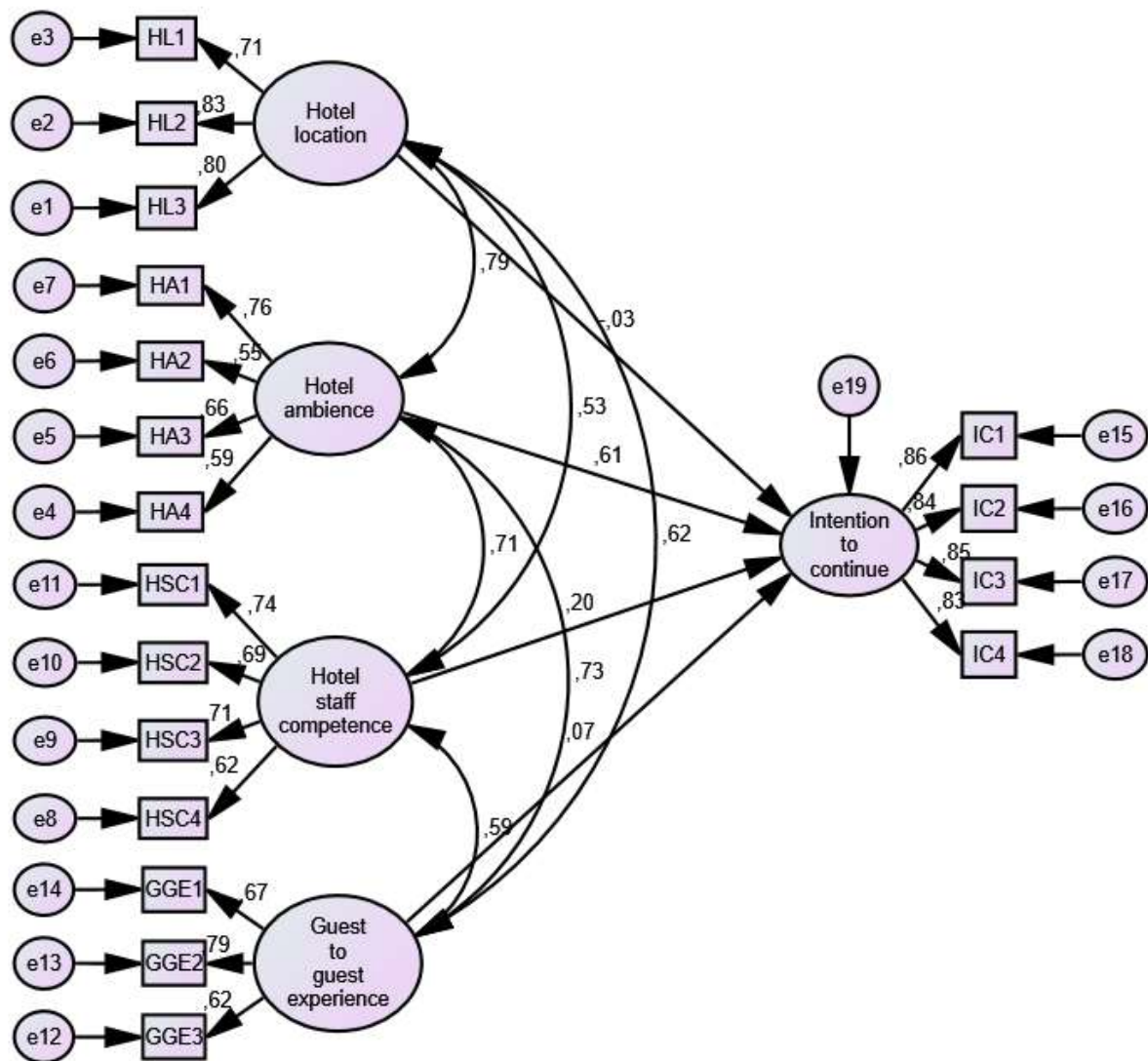
The researchers ran a confirmatory factor analysis before testing the structural model. Thereafter, the proposed model was tested using SPSS version 24 and Amos software version 24. A structural equation modelling was run in order to see if the collected data were fitting to the model. To examine the goodness-of-fit of the model, the researchers used recommendations by Hair et al. (2006) who suggested the minimum acceptable values of the fit indices. The authors indicated that the estimates for the chi-square ( $X^2/df$ ) should be smaller than 3, whereas the minimum values for incremental fit index (IFI), Tucker Lewis index (TLI) and comparative fit indices have to be greater than 0.9. Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was assessed using a limit of equal to or less than ( $\leq 0.08$ ) suggested by MacCallum et al. (1996) and the normed fit index (NFI) was assessed using values that range from 0.8 to 0.9 as recommended by Shimizutani (2008). On the basis of the recommended values, results of the test indicated a very good measurement model fit. The general model fit indices for both the CFA and SEM models are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Model fit statistics

Fit indices	Acceptable fit indices	CFA (measurement model)	SEM (Structural model)
Chi-square/degree of freedom	< 3.0	1.478	1.495
Incremental fit index (IFI)	> 0.90	0.956	0.962
Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)	> 0.90	0.946	0.953
Comparative fit index (CFI)	> 0.90	0.955	0.961
Normative fit index (NFI)	> 0.90	0.875	0.90
Root mean error of approximation (RMSEA)	< 0.08	0.050	0.051

CFA = confirmatory analysis; SEM = structural equation modelling

The outcome of the structural model test is shown on in Figure 1. The results of the analysis showed that hotel location had no significant influence on intention to continue ( $p = .834$ ), thus the results fail to support *H1*. Hotel ambience showed a significant influence on intention to continue ( $\beta = .614$ ;  $p < .05$ ). This supports *H2*. Guest to guest experience had no influence upon intention to continue ( $p = .553$ ), thus *H3* is not supported. Hotel staff competence has a significant positive influence on intention to continue ( $\beta = .197$ ;  $p = .05$ ). This supports *H4*.



### Discussion and implications

The main objective of this study was to examine if Khan and Rahman’s (2017) hotel brand experience scale is applicable to the four to five star hotels in Zimbabwe. The results of the study have indicated that instead of producing the original five dimensions as suggested by the authors only four dimensions were produced. The dimensions include hotel location, hotel ambience, hotel staff competence and guest to guest interaction. Thus, the hotel brand experience is applicable to the hotel context as suggested.

Structural equation modelling was also run to establish the hypothesised relationships between hotel brand experience dimensions and intention to continue. Only two dimensions namely: hotel ambience and hotel staff competence had significant positive relationships, whereas hotel location and guest to guest experience did not have any significant relationship with intention to continue staying at the hotels. The results that hotel ambience had a significant effect on intention to continue staying at the hotels is consistent with previous researchers who also indicate that ambient conditions determine behavioural conditions towards hotel service offer (Ha and Jang, 2012; Ruiz et al., 2012). The significant positive relationship between hotel staff competence and intention to continue staying at the hotels also agrees to previous findings by Alwi and Da Silva (2007) and Yoo et al. (2011). However, the results that hotel location had no significant relationship with intention to continue staying at the hotels contradicts



previous studies that indicated that the two constructs had a significant positive relationship (Lee & Jang, 2012; Puciato, 2016). And the results that guest to guest experience did not have a significant relationship with intention to continue staying at the hotels is contrary to the findings which indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between the two constructs (Martin & Pratih, 1989; Zgolli & Zaiem, 2017).

### Conclusions and recommendations

Though the study did not produce all the dimensions of hotel brand experience scale as proposed by Khan and Rahman in 2017, the results have at least shown that the scale is applicable to the hotel context of Zimbabwe, maybe the failure by the study to produce the full scale is attributed to a different context which is set apart from the socio-economic context where the original hotel brand experience scale was originated. This study also offers significant insights for hotel managers. The findings depict that hotel managers have to focus more on hotel ambience and hotel staff competence in order to enhance intention to stay at hotels. According to these findings, hotels managers should make sure that as they develop their business processes they have to allocate more resources to the creation of a conducive hotel environment and training and development of hotel staff since the two determine the intention to continue staying at hotels. As an exploratory study within the hotel context of Zimbabwe, this study has some limitations. The researchers focused on four to five-star hotels, there is also room to concentrate on hotels that have the same number of stars, such as five star hotels alone. One of the limitations that this study has is that of a small sample size, future studies may need to conduct studies with large samples. Future research has to be conducted to further substantiate the applicability of the hotel brand experience scale to the hotel context of developing world. Future studies may also employ a longitudinal design as opposed to cross-sectional design.

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