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An analysis of the airport experience from an air traveler perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the nature of airport experience (AE) from the perspective of air travelers. This study elaborates experiential components within the airport context and highlights the associations among the components of this experience through text analysis. This study also aims to clarify how air travelers perceive airports in relation to destinations. The analysis of passenger reviews on Skytrax indicates that AE differs from the concepts of customer and tourist experiences, because hedonic and aesthetic consumptions are not primarily associated with the memorable feelings of consumers and tourists, but with aspects of functional experience and service personnel. This study reviews three aspects that air travelers associate airports with a destination. First, an airport is a representative of a destination. Second, an airport exhibits the positive characteristics of a destination. Finally, an airport is perceived as an internal component of tourism experience. This study provides theoretical and managerial implications for airport and tourism industries.

Keywords: airport, service, tourism, experience, destination

1. Introduction

Airports are an essential part of air transport system and an important mode of transfer for air travel; airports enable air travelers to switch from the ground to the air and vice versa (Ashford, Stanton and Moore, 2006). The airline deregulation in the 1970s and the commercialization of the airport industry increased the importance of air travelers to the development of airports because they generate large non-aeronautical revenues and have increased the demand for air services (Brilha, 2008; Graham, 2014; Graham, 2008). This finding demonstrates the significant role of airports for travelers and how airport experience (AE) crucially affects a trip. An airport is regarded as the first and last place visited before travelers leave a destination to travel to by air.

Several existing studies laid the foundation for the concept of AE. For instance, service and operational management theory was used to examine airport efficiency, airport service quality, and passenger satisfaction (Correia and Wirasinghe, 2007; Fodness and Murray, 2007). In sociology, the concept of sense of place was applied to the context of airports to create meanings and enhance one's cultural attachment to a place (Losekoot and Wright, 2011). Airport anxiety is considered a psychological concept primarily related to stress levels and frustration of air travelers (McIntosh, Swanson, Power, Raeside, and Dempster, 1998). The retail shopping experiences of passengers and the effects of airport environment on the psychological aspects of passenger shopping behavior were also explored (Rowley and Slack, 1999).

Nevertheless, existing literature on AE, particularly in the context of tourism, remains limited. From the facts that airports act as the first and last contact points of air travelers who arrive and depart a destination, and the study by Kirk, Harrison, Popovic, and Kraal (2014) revealed that negative AE can potentially influence travel plans for future visits to a destination, these notions imply the association between destinations and airports from the viewpoint of air travelers. Nevertheless, tourism studies did not adequately discuss the experience of air travelers in airports although the potential of travelers' AE contribute to destination experience.

Moreover, existing research on AE *per se* is still in early stages. Harrison, Popovic, Kraal, and Kleinschmidt (2012) and Popovic, Kraal, and Kirk (2009) highlighted that airport authorities and aviation-related organizations, such as International Air Transport Association (IATA), usually approach AE from the viewpoint of management rather than from the perspective of customers. Their claim supports the findings of Yen and Teng (2003) who determined that the time and space of airports and travelers differ, but they are treated as a single entity by airport management or authorities.

These findings address two unexplored yet crucial issues which become the research questions of this study:

1) How is AE understood from the perspective of passengers?
2) How do air travelers view AE in relation to a tourist destination?

These questions are addressed by adapting the literature on service and tourist experiences to investigate AE. The key experiential components are identified and applied in the context of airports. This study focuses on the association between the dimensions of experience and the experiential outcomes derived from the comments of air travelers. The opinions of air travelers about AE in relation to destinations are also investigated.

The rest of this article is divided into four sections, namely, the literature review, which describes the conceptual framework of the study, the methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusions, including implications.

2. Literature

2.1 Experience as a concept

An experience involves an individual's personal interpretations and responses to stimuli as he/she participates in or perceives the flow of a series of touch points (Gentile, Spiller, and Noci, 2007; Johnston and Kong, 2011; Meyer and Schwager, 2007; Schmitt, 1999, 2003). Experience is a subject of human perception (Cutler and Carmichael, 2010; Dube and Helkkula, 2015), and can be interpreted by the reflection of individuals who experience specific settings (Cutler and Carmichael, 2010). According to Volo (2009), experience consists of all events that occur between sensation and perception, which can be modified and conditioned by subsequent occurrences. Apart from being subjective and holistic in nature (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982; Otto and Ritchie, 1996), an experience is inherently personal for each individual (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982; Pine and Gilmore 1999; Vargo and Lusch, 2004). Thus, two people may have different experiences of the same phenomenon (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). The last point is demonstrated in the seminal work by Arnold and Price (1993) on the river rafting experience, in which an experience combines a multitude of feelings and emotions that differ, depending on a person's likes, dislikes, and even their fears.

Contemporary management literature emphasizes the importance of experience consumption since Holbrook and Hirshman (1982) invoked the idea of hedonic elements and noted the importance of fantasies, feelings, and fun, which are the aspects customers seek during consumption. Further ramification of experience is also observed in service experience and marketing literature (Addis and Holbrook, 2001; Dube and Helkkula, 2015; Helkkula, Kelleher, and Pihlstrom, 2012). According to Helkkula (2011), experience in the service context based on different ontological and epistemological backgrounds is categorized in service literature into three, namely, process, phenomenon, and outcome. Experience as a process entails the understanding of service as different phases of process elements that include interactions with employees, technology, and facilities (Edvardsson, Tronvoll, and Gruber, 2011). Experience as a phenomenon implies that experience is "internal, subjective, event-specific, and context-specific" (Helkkula, 2011, p. 375). This finding incorporates imagined experience to reflect on service phenomenon and identifies the importance of value that a person perceives (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The phenomenology of service experience

perceives service consumption as highly related to hedonic experiences (Caru and Cova, 2007; Dube and Helkkula, 2015; Holbrook and Hirshman, 1982), emotions, and senses; these aspects are immersed and highly emphasized in service experience (Caru and Cova, 2007). Experience as an outcome is composed of functional and emotional outcomes (Berry, Carbone, and Haeckel, 2002), which reflect total service experience. According to Helkkula (2011), outcome-based service experience literature generally measures experience as different variables, such as pleasure, satisfaction, value, and relationships; quantitative approach is normally adopted to serve the nature of this category.

On the other hand, the study of tourist experience, which connects the concept of experience to travelers and tourists, has been extensively discussed and has been part of tourism literature for more than 50 years (Boorstin, 1964; MacCannell, 1973; Quan and Wang, 2004; Uriely, 2005; Jennings, Lee, Ayling, Lunny, Cater, and Ollenburg, 2009). Similar to experience literature, tourism scholars attempted to classify the different dimensions of experience (Table 1). Cutler and Carmichael (2010) conceptualized tourist experience in terms of phases, influences, and outcomes through a review of extant literature. In these categories, the realm of experience includes physical, social, and product aspects that serve as influential factors in the different phases of tourist experience. The phases of tourist experience extend from anticipation to memory recollection after the trip. Five outcomes occur after a trip experience. Aside from the customer experience outcomes identified by Berry et al. (2002), tourist experience outcomes include knowledge, memory, perception, emotion, and self-identity. These factors affect the personal self, which becomes the factor for future motivations and expectations.

Table 1
Categorization and field of discipline of literature related to experience

Existing literature suggests that certain aspects of service and tourist experiences can be integrated to investigate AE. The categorizations of experience as a process, phenomenon, and outcome as proposed in service experience literature can be adopted in airport experiential phenomenon. The authors extend the categorization of service experience of Helkkula (2011) and incorporate the outcomes of tourist experience by Cutler and Carmichael (2010); this approach further clarifies the occurrence of experiential outcomes. In the following section, AE literature is investigated to determine the current situation of experiential study within the airport context and to identify research gaps that will be investigated.

2.2 Experience in an airport context

Literature that explains the experience of air travelers began to appear over a decade ago when Caves and Pickard (2000) discussed the navigation of experience in airport terminals from an ergonomic perspective. McIntosh et al. (1998) debated the negative psychological and physical effects of airport anxiety on passengers, whereas Rowley and Slack (1999) analyzed passenger retail experience, which is influenced by the emotional state of passengers. Adey (2007, p. 525) perceives airports as "destinations for the spectatorial

experience of aircraft […], focusing people's attention towards the airfield while charging money to access these spaces and positioning them within close proximity to cafe's, restaurants, and other concessionaries".

AE, which emerged recently, identified new issues of this complex phenomenon. A group of researchers (Harrison, Popovic, and Kraal, 2015; Harrison et al., 2012) studied AE and proposed passenger segmentation based on AE, which is classified by time and engagement (Harrison et al., 2015). Popovic et al. (2009) described AE as the activities and interactions that passengers undergo in an airport; these key activities are classified as necessary (compulsory processes in the airport terminal) and discretionary activities (any activities other than the necessary activities, affectively controlled by calculative architecture and terminal engineering as Adey (2008) finds). Harrison et al. (2012) also proposed a conceptual framework for AE from the three key perspectives of airport management, passenger, and public. These authors identified differences between these three perspectives by arguing that the perspective of airport management considers AE from the objective viewpoint and applies numerical measurement to ensure performance. The passenger perspective is more subjective in nature than the former and depends on personal expectations. The public perspective represents the collective subset of passenger experience, which can be represented in survey feedbacks, such as Skytrax or social media channels that highlights past experiences and influences future AE of air travelers.

The proposed framework by Harrison et al. (2012) clarified how AE is viewed from different perspectives, but this framework only broadly conceptualizes the idea and indicates key components. Gap continues to exist on how passengers perceive AE, particularly when AE involves different activities during airport journeys. Wattanacharoensil, Schuckert, and Graham (2016) argued that airports can contribute to tourism destinations by applying a sense of place, which enhances the feeling of being related to a place and destination. They also obtained preliminary evidence from two airports and determined that air travelers relate airport performance to a destination image. Nevertheless, the sense of place aspect is also addressed from the management's points of view.

Despite the contributions, Harrison et al. (2012) and Wattanacharoensil et al. (2016) still include limitations. The former mainly provides the conceptualization of AE, whereas the findings of the other latter are limited to two airports. Gaps in AE literature, particularly from a detailed passenger perspective, and the perception of passengers to destinations remain limited.

2.3 Theoretical framework underlying the study

The current study aims to elaborate the AE of passenger by examining the various aspects of experience, which include emotional- and perceptional-based activities. The nature of AE is investigated by combining the aspects of the service experience (process, phenomenon, and outcome) and tourist experience (outcome) as a broad framework. AE as a "process" indicates the phases or stages of service process that includes various service settings (Helkkula, 2011). This concept is primarily based on the necessary activities of air

travelers described by Popovic et al. (2010), which involve the compulsory interactions of fundamental processes of passengers at the airport.

In the present study, AE as a "phenomenon" refers to hedonic and aesthetic aspects in relation to discretionary activities. Helkkula (2011) explained phenomenological service experience as the elaborated individual experience; this concept is usually subjective, internal, event-specific, and context-specific, and is described by individuals toward different kinds of service settings. The current study presents the specific aspects of phenomenological service experience by referring to hedonic and aesthetic aspects as discussed by Caru and Cova (2007) and Holbrook and Hirshman (1982).

AE as an "outcome" is the result a person obtains from experiences. In this study, the conceptual model of tourist experience by Cutler and Carmichael (2010) is adapted to represent the broad framework of outcomes. However, the researchers note that the AE of a traveler may not reflect the characteristics proposed by Cutler and Carmichael. For example, self-identity outcome may not be observed because of the limitations of self-revelation derived from the airport context. Thus, the components of tourist experience outcomes (knowledge, memory, perception, emotion, and self-identity) are only used broadly. Figure 1 shows the framework adapted in this study.

Figure 1
Theoretical framework of air traveler experience applied to the airport context, which were adapted from Helkkula (2011) and Cutler and Carmichael (2010)

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample selection

Passenger review comments from 15 international airports were collected from the Skytrax airport review website. User reviews were employed in other studies related to experience (Craig, 2007; Wang, Park, and Fesenmaier, 2012); Craig (2007) noted that human experience is "a narrative phenomenon" (p. 173) and narrative views are "the most likely medium to capture the contingencies of human experience, as lived in context and over time" (Craig, 2007, p. 174).

Using purposeful sampling, the primary data were mainly in text form, whose contents were directly obtained from the feedback included in the 2014 ranking of the 100 best airports worldwide. Using data from 15 airports, Skytrax rankings of the top five (1st–5th) , the middle five (48th–52nd), and last five airports (96th–100th) were selected to represent the overall nature of the AE. Five airports were considered appropriate for each ranking group, because their top rank (or middle rank/bottom rank) could represent other airports in the similar group range with their rich experience. Moreover, feedback from the three ranges identified additional aspects of experience, because some types of experience that existed in lower-ranked airports may not be observed nor addressed in the top-ranked airports. By applying the qualitative approach for the sample size selection and data saturation (under the

criteria of type of experience and dimension of feedbacks), the authors kept reading comments further into the next airports in each group (e.g., 6th–7th for top ranking, 47th and 53th for the middle ranking, and 95th for the low ranking), where five airports yielded a decent number. This total number (15 airports) is the same as that considered acceptable by Bertaux (1981) for qualitative research.

The current study used the Skytrax survey data for the following reasons:

1) Skytrax is a worldwide survey with a verification system that requires passengers to provide their email addresses before they enter their comments. This system ensures the validity of the comments provided by passengers and indicates their willingness to share their experiences in the airports they visited.
2) Skytrax also enables researchers to more comprehensively analyze the experiences of passengers than the interviews of passengers as it allows extreme views to be represented in larger portions, in contrast to the interview technique with the limited resources (number of interviewees, time and cost), which can deter the opportunity to gather comprehensive views of passenger experiences.
3) Responses are given unobtrusively. The researcher does not influence the travelers and the travelers also voluntarily express their opinions, reducing the risk of bias from the researcher and the environment.
4) Feedback is provided after the experience; thus, travelers should recall their AE before providing comments.
5) The Skytrax comments allow the researchers to acquire perspectives from a wider range of airports, enhancing the diversity of the data and allowing for the opportunity to make results become more generic. In comparison, using survey data has generalizability but is limited in terms of diversity of airports, resulting in the least input of experiences.

Skytrax passenger feedback provides different types of data, namely, passenger rating and content feedback. Given that the aim of the study is to investigate AE through analysis of human experience via the "narrative phenomenon," the rating data from Skytrax website can be omitted.

3.2 Research method and analysis

The study uses two steps of analysis to answer research Question (1). First, the content analysis was used to analyze the passenger feedback and investigate the AE components that could elucidate details on combined experience framework. Passenger reviews were screened by examining reviewer comments from January 2013 to June 2015, with a total of 732 comments were retrieved from the website. The second screening eliminated the reviews with 50 words or less, because many of the comments provided limited information on the experience. A total of 647 reviews were obtained, accounting for 88% of the comments; 3,267 coding frequencies were derived from the 647 comments. Details of the selected 15 international airports and the number of passenger comments are shown in Table 2. The researchers noted that there were some heterogeneity in the of number of comments (ranging

from very low to very high); nevertheless these contents still provided meaningful data for unit analysis, which can be simply pooled and analyzed based on the content analysis method. The data were then transferred from Skytrax to the Excel spreadsheets, and the contents were entered using the Nvivo 10 software. The units of analysis were in the forms of texts, words, phrases, and sentences.

Second, crosstab analysis is used to investigate the associations between the experiences, especially on "experience as an outcome" and the "experience as a process and phenomenon." The authors argue that the "narrative form of textual explanation" by passengers can naturally elucidate how passengers view their airport experiences and how these experiences relate to their perception of outcomes without being forced. The authors are aware that the textual data pose limitations on association validity, but the result of crosstab analysis can provide preliminary suppositions of those associations, which reflect the honest points of view of travelers about their AEs.

Data are coded by identifying sentences or phrases that addressed the cause and effect of traveler's experience and the deconstructed sentences (Figure 2). Units that matched the themes and sub-themes of "AE as a process" and "AE as a phenomenon" were coded accordingly. However, when the themes of the experience outcomes were further coded, both the units of analysis, which indicate the experience (as a process and as a phenomenon) and respective outcomes, were coded and undertaken. This process ensures the emergence of joint contents, which indicate the association between AE as "a process, a phenomenon, and an outcome."

For example, the unit of analysis in an excerpt of Comment A in Figure 2 is "efficient as ever during my stopovers to and from Australia, the only airport I actually look forward to visit, cannot find fault with it in anyway." This comment was coded as a functional experience coding theme under the AE as a process category because the comment indicates the "efficiency" of the process. To associate this unit with AE as an outcome, the same unit was also coded as comparable to past experience theme because of the term "as ever," which indicates the process of mental comparison based on past memory. This term was also coded as the intention to return and the passenger will "look forward to visit" a destination on his or her next trip. Both sub-themes were categorized under the memory outcome. The crosstab coding results in the excerpt from Comment A shows one joint coding. This comment exists based on functional experience and is compared with past experience and other joint coding between functional experience and intention to return. This approach results in two associations between functional experience and memory outcome.

To answer research Question (2), content analysis was conducted to investigate the AE perceptions of air travelers in relation to a destination. The units of analysis were in the form of words, phrases, and sentences. Contents were coded by a researcher and cross-checked by the other two researchers to ensure coding reliability before categorizations were finalized.

Table 2

Airport sample

Figure 2

Data coding examples

4. Airport experience from the perspective of travelers

4.1 Categorization of airport experience in accordance with the framework

To elaborate categorization in the framework based on passenger comments, "AE as a process" is used to refer to processes that include primary activities that air travelers undertake. These activities include transportation and out-of-airport terminal activities, particularly in-town check in (if available) because this factor contributes to primary activities that explain why a traveler visits the airport. Five sub-categories of AE as a process are established (Table 3). Among these sub-categories, functional experience is the most common (15%) followed by service personnel (10%).

"AE as a phenomenon" refers to experiences that are perceived to be subjective and highly dependent on the judgment of individuals. This type of experience shows two broad aspects, namely, aesthetic experience, which primarily concerns with the views of passengers toward the airport environment, and hedonic experience, which concerns leisure activities in an airport terminal and elements of pleasant sensations. Aesthetic experience is identified in 4% of the codes and hedonic experience at 6%.

"AE as an outcome" refers to the cognitive and affective outcomes of air travelers after they underwent the two previous experiences. AE outcomes in 57% of the codes are categorized into four sub-categories, namely, general perception, emotion, memory, and fairness perception. Emotional outcomes obtain the highest coding frequency (33%), followed by memory outcomes (10%), general perception (9%), and fairness perception (5%).

Table 3
Dimensions of AE categorization with frequencies

4.2 Association of AE as a process and a phenomenon with AE outcomes

The results of cross-tabulation analysis are shown in Table 4 and in Figures 3 and 4.

Table 4

Cross-tabulation of service experience as a phenomenon and a process in relation to
as an outcome

Figure 3

Frequency graph of service experience as a process in relation to as an outcome

Figure 4

Frequency graph of service experience as a phenomenon in relation to as an outcome

In order to investigate the associations between the categorical variables, the Chi-square test was conducted using a statistical programme. The association between the 'AE as a process and a phenomenon' and 'AE as an outcome' was found with $\chi(90) = 1174.307$, p-value < 0.05 with Phi and Cramer's V values of more than 0.5 and 0.3 respectively, p-value < 0.05. This indicates middle to strong association between variables.

The results of AE "as a process" associated with outcome suggests that functional experience has the highest frequency and extensively influences the dimensions of experience outcomes followed by experience with service personnel. Functional and service personnel experiences are most associated with emotional, followed by memory, general perception, and fairness perception outcomes. The efficiency of airport processes and personnel, including service mindset, are mostly affected by the feeling of passengers in an airport (B-2 and B-3) and are associated with the level of stress and anxiety (B-1). Functional experience and service personnel are crucial concerns of the passengers that caused them to avoid a particular airport in the future (C-3) and compare that airport with other similar experiences (C-2).

These preliminary findings echo the study of Kirk et al. (2014) on the nature of functional experience, which included the basic and fundamental processes in airports and service personnel experience as the crucial aspects in the AE of passenger; these factors are associated with broad ranges of negative outcomes in the four dimensions, namely, emotion, perception, memory, and fairness. A large number of passengers underwent a negative experience during their airport journey primarily because of poor cooperation among related parties, such as airline ground staff, security personnel, and immigration officers. Different service agents, such as security versus airline ground staff, may not have the same goals in offering desirable customer outcomes because they have different roles and responsibilities. Service flows in several airports are mishandled and undistributed among parties, particularly when constraints exist on airport resources and capabilities to handle a large number of passengers affect functional and service personnel experiences.

Functional and service personnel experiences are highly associated with destinations because air travelers relate AE to its destination. When air travelers pass through an airport, they mentally compare their airport journey to how they pre-perceived the destination. The following excerpts show examples of how air travelers connect their airport journey to the destination.

"A simple testimony of what this society is all about."

"There is a video in the immigration hall that proudly claims *ICN (Incheon International Airport - authors)* as the 'best in the world.' Well, I had 1.5 h in a queue to ponder the reality of that claim."

"Travelled through *Hong Kong International Airport* and experienced the renowned Hong Kong efficiency."

Servicescape and navigation are more highly associated with emotional outcomes than other dimensions, and most feedback are associated with negative feelings (B-2). Similar to self-service technology (SST), which is highly associated with frustration/unpleasant feelings (B-2), passengers could develop strong negative feelings toward SST because of their high expectations on its enhanced efficiency, speed improvement, and queue time reduction; these aspects are the main purposes of SST (Oh, Jeong, Lee, and Warnick, 2016). However, when SST appeared not to deliver as its purpose, the passengers felt disappointed and they expressed their dissatisfaction through negative words or sarcasm (e.g., "What a joke!"). Transportation and related out-of-airport terminal activities are also slightly associated with emotional outcomes, followed by fairness perception outcome. Most comments were positively related to transportation projects because they came from satisfaction/pleasant feelings (B-3), particularly with airports that provide direct transportation linkages to and from the city and with in-town check-in services.

Aesthetic experience in "AE as a phenomenon" is highly associated with emotional outcomes across all four factors. This factor was also associated with memory outcomes, particularly with travelers' intention to return (C-3) and less significantly with the comparison with other airports (C-2). Hedonic experience had strong influence on all outcome dimensions, namely, general perceptual outcomes, which mainly pertain to perception of choice (A-1), and emotional outcomes, which indicate frustration/unpleasant feelings (B-2) and feelings related to well-being (B-4). These negative aspects of experience outcomes emerged when air travelers felt that the number of areas that offer duty-free shopping is higher than the number of areas where they could rest, relax, and rejuvenate. These findings also resonated with fairness perception outcomes, where physical setting received the second highest association because air travelers felt that airports compromised the well-being of passengers for commercial revenue. The other fairness outcomes were associated with price (D-3,), which were particularly identified by air travelers based on their duty-free shopping and dining experiences.

4.3 Synopsis of AE from the perspective of travelers

Air travelers tend to view their experience as a combination of separate activities (e.g., experiences provided by different parties, such as airlines, immigration, security, or duty free), but they have a holistic judgment of overall AE. Responding to Helkkula's (2011) study, the experience of air travelers in an airport is event-specific. The perspectives of air travelers show the two dimensions of AE as a process and a phenomenon and the dimensions of AE as outcomes are inter-associated. In AE as a process, airport activities concerning functional experience and service personnel received the most passenger comments. These

experiences strongly associate the dimension of experience outcome, particularly with the emotional and memory aspects of air travelers. This context-specific aspect determines that AE differs from customer and tourist experiences in the sense that the memory outcomes are not much influenced by hedonic and aesthetic consumption (which are highly linked to the "memorable" feelings of consumers and tourists as discussed by Edvardsson, Enquist, and Johnston, 2005; Arnold and Price, 1993), but are related to functionality and service personnel aspects of an airport.

Experience as a process also supports the research of Kirk et al. (2014), who determined that the perspective of air travelers even during pre-experience at an airport is mainly centered on necessary activities. These fundamental experiences, namely, functional and service personnel, are highly significant. Passengers only feel that their AE are satisfactory once these fundamental AEs are met. However, the study found that air travelers are unlikely to appreciate any additional experience provided at the airport (e.g., aesthetic and some hedonic activities) when their perceptions and memories are influenced by the negative emotional responses attributed to inefficient fundamental processes.

Figure 5
Final proposition of the framework of the passenger airport experience
(the thickness of the lines indicate the high potential of a strong association)

AE as a phenomenon, particularly hedonic aspect, is associated to the emotional and perceptual outcomes of experience. Hedonic experience also shows stronger association with the fairness perception outcome, which is mainly related with price, followed by physical layout (physical justice). In terms of price, airports that provide a wide range of prices received highly satisfactory responses from air travelers. This result indicates that the situation is not the norm for airport environments. The need for a wide range, particularly for food items, indicate that airports do not respond to the psychological needs of air travelers who have different travel motivations, purposes, and spending abilities. Travelers in these airports feel that they have been "ripped off." In terms of fairness perception of physical justice, feelings of unfairness emerge when air travelers felt that the layout over-promoted the retail purpose instead of the resting area. Some airports "force" air travelers to walk past retail areas and psychologically entice them to spend money. As discussed by McIn tosh el al. (1998) and explained by Namasivayam and Hinkin (2003), when the nature of air travel involves high levels of psychological stress and anxiety, strong negative emotion and fairness perception become critical aspects of AE. Figure 5 shows the conceptual associations of the proposed framework as shown in Figure 1.

5. AE in relation to destination

Based on content analysis, passengers mentally linked three aspects with AE and destination.

First, the view of the passengers on the role of airports is associated with destination, which can be metaphorically compared with the role of an ambassador or representative of a place. Airports were generally perceived as the first and last impressions of a destination to local hosts and visitors. Excerpts in Table 5(a) demonstrate how a local host and a tourist addressed their mental association of an airport as a representative entity before providing a holistic judgment of its role towards a destination. Phrases, such as "you are an embarrassment" and "not a good face" are emphasized at this point. This notion has been addressed as a role of the airport in tourism literature (Martín–Cejas, 2006).

Second, a new emerging issue is found, which shows that airports are the interpretative location of tourism/destination slogan and image. Airport service processes and operations (the functional and the service personnel experiences) are factors that are mostly used as point of comparison to the destination slogan. Passengers tend to view the airport according to their mental perception of the characteristics of a destination. They observe these particular characteristics, which are advertised about the destination to compare with the service experience within the airport. The excerpts in Table 5(b) present terms, such as "efficient, organized, and smile," which indicate the image or characteristic of particular destinations being evaluated.

Table 5

Excerpts that illustrate how air travelers perceive AE in relation to a destination

Figure 6

Perception of air travelers of the roles of airports in a destination

Passengers mentally assess their actual experiences of airports and compare them with the tourism promotional message. Thus, passengers regard airports as an integral and internal part of tourist experience. Excerpts from Table 5(c) illustrate how passengers addressed their disappointment with how airports misallocated resources to meet the perceived tourism promotional message prior to their arrival. These findings indicated how passengers perceive and assess tourism and airports as a single collaborative unit.

The second and third aspects of airports in the opinions of air travelers indicated that airports have a more significant role towards a destination than what was initially perceived. The characteristics and destination images or slogans were merged, and the perception and tourism experience were congregated to transform the positions of airports from an external identity (a mere facility for air travel to and from a destination) to an internal part of the overall tourism experience.

The finding also implies the gap between the perspectives of managers and air travelers. Wattanacharoensil et al. (2016) determined that a sense of place and cultural activities are addressed by airport managers to enhance the relation of travelers to a destination, but these factors are rarely distinguished by air travelers. However, functional and service personnel experiences have strong associations when air travelers relate their AE to a destination based on holistic and specific judgments. The first aspect of the three has been addressed in tourism

literature, but the latter two have not. Air travelers perceive their AE together with a destination slogan, image, and national identity. The prominence of these elements, as well as the positive functional and service experience, can potentially enhance the positive perception of a traveler toward a destination. According to Namasivayam and Hinkin (2003), the performance of an airport increases the anticipation of travelers to visit a destination and thus indicates a serious need for a proactive and systematic collaboration between tourism and the airport authorities. Figure 6 illustrates the shifting positions of airports from the perspectives of air travelers.

6. Research contributions

This study provides theoretical contributions to literature by identifying AE as a context-specific concept. AE is different from customer and tourist experiences because of the hedonic and aesthetic consumptions that are not primarily associated with the "memorable" feelings of consumers and tourists, but with the aspects of functional experience and service personnel of airports. Additional features in the form of hedonic and aesthetic experiences only impress air travelers when fundamental experiences reach a satisfactory level. However, the findings reinforce early literature in service quality, thereby indicating the importance of applying the dimensions of functional (process) and technical (outcome) qualities (Gronroos, 1988) in the airport context. In providing a greater understanding of the three roles of airports in relation to a destination, AE exhibits a temporal influence on air travelers by mediating the feelings related to a destination and the journey both before and after. AE also illustrates the position of airports with a destination and emphasizes that an airport is an internal part of the overall tourism experience.

The research has managerial implications for airport management and tourism authorities. First, considering the AE as a "process" is very important when air travelers view their experience at the airport and is essential that airport management allocates sufficient resources and plans efficient passenger flows to promote the experience of the air travelers. Moreover, airport management encourages collaboration among the service agents (e.g., ground agents, security staff, and immigration officers) and promotes the customer-centric approach. Thus, all parties understand their roles in promoting the AE of passengers, mainly on functional and service personnel aspects. Second, air travelers mentally compare airport performance with a destination slogan or image and thus provide consistent promotional messages and well-delivered and aligned operations that will enhance satisfaction levels in airports and destinations. Finally, passengers can view airports and the tourism destinations as a single entity, thereby indicating that airports are an internal part of the tourism service system. Therefore, the collaboration between a destination marketing organization and an airport management should extend beyond general practices, which primarily involve setting up booths and exhibitions in airport terminals. Destination slogans should be well-conceived and delivered through good efficiency and service, which have strong influences for air travelers than objective representation, such as exhibitions and cultural activities.

7. Limitations

Although this study has contributed to the knowledge of AE from the perspective of air travelers, it still has certain limitations; therefore, further research is recommended to strengthen the findings. First, the number of feedback derived from the individual airports varied, where comments were biased towards the airports, and passengers contributed the most feedback because some airports only received limited comments. Given that Skytrax does not differentiate the best 100 airport awards based on size, the airports in this study had varying sizes and capacities, which affect the number of passenger comments. It is worth pointing out that the different sizes of airports (large versus small) might contribute to different levels of resources and capabilities used to serve the passengers and may also reflect in the nature of the comments. Nevertheless, the study does not aim to differentiate the airport types and sizes, but rather chooses to gather the overall comments to identify the airport experiences in the three aspects. This limitation can be rectified in further research by using alternative sampling techniques and by using the criteria of airport selection on the Skytrax ranking.

Second, the quantitative examination is recommended to strengthen the results of the preliminary crosstab suppositions. This study identified the associations from the comments of air travelers in a narrative form, but further analysis should be conducted before making the final claims on the relationship of experiential components. Finally, this research addressed the AE from the general views of the passengers, but did not classify them based on the types (e.g. business versus leisure). Different types of passengers may have different perceptions and priorities on their AE. Therefore, further research on passenger categorization and airport experience should be conducted to provide more insights on this matter.

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[Total 6,901 words]

Table 1

Categorization and field or discipline of the literature related to experience

Field/Discipline	Characterization	Relating Author(s)/Studies
Service literature	**Process:** Service provision, which includes interactions with the employees, the technology and facilities, and the servicescape.	Helkkula (2011); Dube & Helkkula (2015); Edvardsson et al. 2011);
	Phenomenon: The consumption experience, including hedonic responses, aesthetic criteria, and subjectivity.	Helkkula (2011); Dube & Helkkula (2015); Holbrook & Hirschman (1982); Caru & Cova (2007);
	Outcomes: Functional and emotional outcomes or the total service experience.	Helkkula (2011); Dube & Helkkula (2015); Berry et al. (2002);
Tourism literature	**Phases of experience:** Tourist phases identify the time during which all tourist events can occur from anticipation to recollection	Clawson & Knetsch (1971); Botterill & Crompton (1996);
	Modes of experience: Modes of experience refer to the different points along the spectrum of experience between the experience of tourists as travelers in pursuit of mere pleasure or in a quest for meaning.	Cohen (1979); Otto & Ritchie (1996);
	Outcomes of experience: Five outcomes of the tourist experience are classified as knowledge, memory, perception, emotion, and self-identity;	Cutler & Carmichael (2010); Hudson & Ritchie (2008); Tung & Ritchie (2011);
	Influential realms of experience and phenomenological aspect: The four realms of experience can be applied to the motivation or influential factors, namely, escapist, educational, aesthetic, and entertainment.	Pine & Gilmore (1999); Hayllar & Griffin (2005);
	Dimensions of experiential modules: The five dimensions include sensory, emotional, thinking, operational, and related experiences.	Schmitt (1999);

Figure 1

Theoretical framework for the experience of air travelers, (adapted from

Helkkula (2011) and Cutler and Carmichael (2010)), applied to the airport context

Table 2

The airport sample

SKYTRAX airport ranking 2014	Airport code	Name of airport	Passenger volume in 2015 (Millions)	Total reviews	Screened comments (50 words and above)	Percentage of the 647 reviews
1	SIN	Singapore Changi Airport	55.5	54	50	8%
2	ICN	Incheon International Airport	48.7	40	37	6%
3	MUC	Munich Airport	31.3	30	28	4%
4	HKG	Hong Kong International Airport	68.3	63	50	8%
5	AMS	Amsterdam Schiphol Airport	58.3	76	57	9%
48	BKK	Bangkok International Airport	52.9	82	61	9%
49	STN	London Stansted Airport	20.9	247	220	34%
50	OOL	Gold Coast Airport	6.02	12	11	2%
51	OSL	Oslo Airport, Gardermoen	24.7	20	18	3%
52	YHZ	Halifax Stanfield International Airport	3.7	3	1	0%
96	ORD	O'Hare International Airport	76.9	49	41	6%
97	CLT	Charlotte Douglas International Airport	44.9	18	16	2%
98	WAW	Warsaw Chopin Airport	11.2	17	14	2%
99	FUK	Fukuoka International Airport	20.9	4	4	1%
100	PHL	Philadelphia International Airport	31.4	47	39	6%
				762	**647 (85%)**	

Figure 2

Data coding examples

comment A (excerpt)	"Efficient as ever during my stopovers to and from Australia, the only airport I actually look forward to visiting, cannot fault it in anyway.

Functional experience
Outcome: Compare to past experience
Outcome: Intention to return

comment B (excerpt)	"…friendly too. Unlike the dead face staff at [airport A]"

Service personnel
Outcome: comparison to other airport

comment C	"…About a decade back, there was a common lounge area in the middle between the gates and the shops which is a good common meeting place for travel companions. It's gone now, replaced by more shops. The only place you can actually sit down is in the gate area or (if you're lucky) in the food court upstairs…"

Servicescape
Outcome: Fairness Physical setting
Outcome: Compare to past experience

Table 3

Dimensions of the airport experience categorization with frequencies

Dimensions of airport experience…		Aspects/Characteristics	Frequency of	%
as a process				In approximate
Out of a terminal		Transportation and related out-of-airport terminal activities	57	2
Inside a terminal		Servicescape and navigation (e.g., layout and signage)	157	5
		Self-service technology (SST)	70	2
		Functional experience	505	15
		Service personnel (mindset and performance)	352	10
		Total	*1141*	*33*
as a phenomenon				
Inside a terminal		Aesthetic experience (appreciation of the airport environment)	124	4
		Hedonic experience (retail shopping, restaurants, activities for pleasure)	212	6
		Total	*336*	*10*
as an outcome				
General Perception (A)		Perception of choices (A-1)	103	3
		Perception of the airport authority (A-2)	78	2
		Perception of to the airlines (A-3)	75	2
		Perception of to the destination (A-4)	69	2
		Total	*325*	*9*
Emotion (range from) (B)		Stress/Anxiety (B-1)	170	5
		Frustration/Unpleasant feelings (B-2)	612	18
		Satisfaction/Pleasant feelings (B-3)	257	7
		Feelings related to well-being (strong, weary, tired, etc.) (B-4)	105	3
		Total	*1144*	*33*
Memory (C)		Comparison with past experience (at the same airport) (C-1)	50	1
		Comparison with other airports (former visits) (C-2)	133	4
		Intention to return or avoid (C-3)	140	4
		Intention to recommend the airport to others (C-4)	25	1
		Total	*348*	*10*
Fairness Perception (D)		Interactional justice (D-1)	19	1
		Physical setting/Physical justice (D-2)	33	1
		Price (D-3)	94	3
		Procedural justice (D-4)	36	1
		Total	*182*	*5*
Total			*3267*	**202**

Table 4

Cross tabulation* of service experience as a phenomenon and as a process in relation

to as an outcome

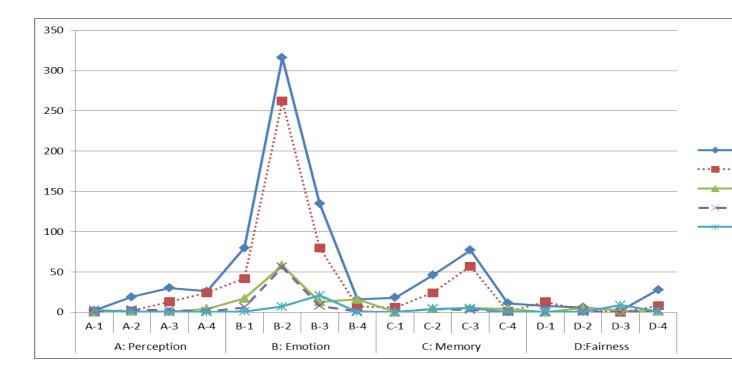| experiences …	Dimensions of the outcomes of the airport experience																	
	A: General Perception					B: Emotion					C: Memory					D:Fairness		
	A-1	A-2	A-3	A-4	Sum A	B-1	B-2	B-3	B-4	Sum B	C-1	C-2	C-3	C-4	Sum C	D-1	D-2	D-3
	2	19	30	26	77	80	316	135	16	547	18	46	77	11	152	8	6	0
	1	2	13	24	40	42	262	80	7	391	6	24	57	1	88	13	2	0
avigation	0	1	1	4	6	17	58	13	16	104	0	4	5	4	13	0	5	2
ology (SST)	0	3	3	1	7	6	56	8	1	71	0	4	3	1	8	0	1	0
related out-activities	3	1	0	0	4	1	7	21	0	29	0	4	5	0	9	1	0	9
	2	0	1	3	6	7	19	24	10	60	1	8	12	2	23	0	2	1
	87	5	0	6	98	12	20	12	23	67	2	13	25	9	49	0	13	54

A: General Perception – A-1: Perception of choices; A-2: Perception of the authority; A-3: Perception of the airlines; A-4: Perce

B: Emotion – B-1: Stress/anxiety; B-2: Frustration/unpleasant feelings; B-3: Satisfaction/pleasant feelings; B-4: Feelings related (physical and mental) C: Memory – C-1: Comparison with past experiences; C-2: Comparison with other airports; C-3: Intentio Intention to recommend the airport to others D: Fairness perception – D-1: Staff treatment during the service process (Interactio setting/Physical justice; D-3: Price; D-4: Fairness of procedures related to the service transaction (Procedural justice)

*The Chi-square test was conducted with the results showing $\chi(90) = 1174.307$, p-value < 0.05, , indicating association between variables.
  Phi and Cramer's V values of more than 0.5 and 0.3 respectively, p-value < 0.05, indicating middle to strong association between variables.
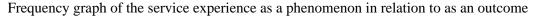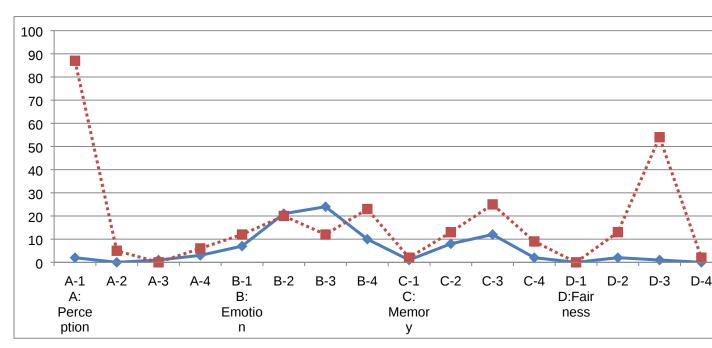
Figure 3

Frequency graph of the service experience as a process in relation to as an outcome

A: General Perception – A-1: Perception of choices; A-2: Perception of the authority; A-3: Perception of the airlines; A-4: Perception of th
B: Emotion – B-1: Stress/anxiety; B-2: Frustration/unpleasant feelings; B-3: Satisfaction/pleasant feelings; B-4: Feelings related to persona
(physical and mental) C: Memory – C-1: Comparison with past experiences; C-2: Comparison with other airports; C-3: Intention to return
Intention to recommend the airport to others D: Fairness perception – D-1: Staff treatment during the service process (Interactional justice)
setting/Physical justice; D-3: Price; D-4: Fairness of procedures related to the service transaction (Procedural justice)

Figure 4

Frequency graph of the service experience as a phenomenon in relation to as an outcome

A: General Perception – A-1: Perception of choices; A-2: Perception of the authority; A-3: Perception of the airlines; A-4: Perception of th

B: Emotion – B-1: Stress/anxiety; B-2: Frustration/unpleasant feelings; B-3: Satisfaction/pleasant feelings; B-4: Feelings related to persona (physical and mental) C: Memory – C-1: Comparison with past experiences; C-2: Comparison with other airports; C-3: Intention to return Intention to recommend the airport to others D: Fairness perception – D-1: Staff treatment during the service process (Interactional justice) setting/Physical justice; D-3: Price; D-4: Fairness of procedures related to the service transaction (Procedural justice)

Figure 5

Final proposition of the framework of the passenger airport experience
(the thickness of the lines indicate the high potential of a strong association)
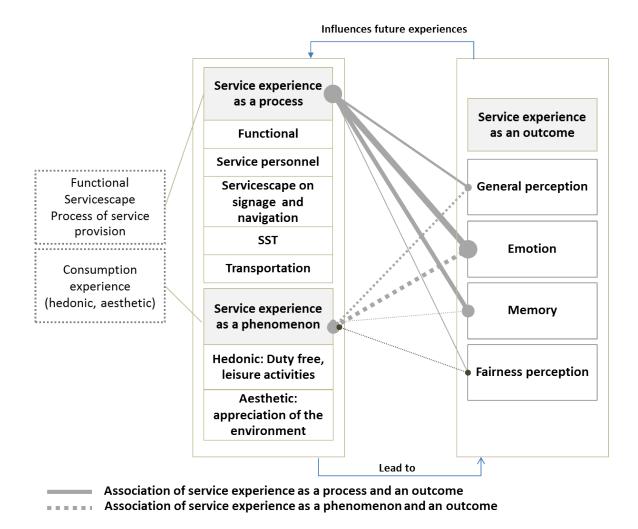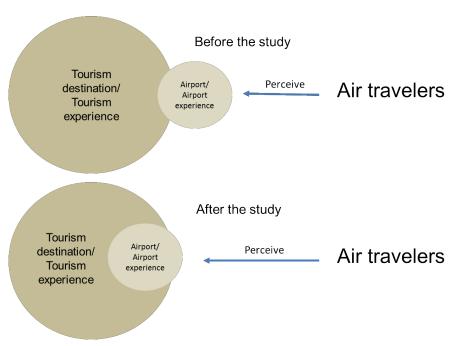
Influences future experiences

Service experience as a process

Functional

Service personnel

Servicescape on signage and navigation

SST

Transportation

Service experience as a phenomenon

Hedonic: Duty free, leisure activities

Aesthetic: appreciation of the environment

Functional
Servicescape
Process of service provision

Consumption experience (hedonic, aesthetic)

Service experience as an outcome

General perception

Emotion

Memory

Fairness perception

Lead to

——— Association of service experience as a process and an outcome
▪▪▪▪▪▪ Association of service experience as a phenomenon and an outcome

Table 5

Excerpts illustrating how air travelers perceive the AE in relation to a destination

27

Nature of airport relation towards destination	Excerpt(s)	How judgment is
(a) AP is metaphorically compared to the _representative_ of the destination, giving first and last impression to travelers	"…it was clear to all of us in the queue that the normal passport control check in was much faster than the supposedly quicker electronic check in. Infuriating. As other people say here, avoid the electronic passport Gates as you will regret it…The worst I have experienced in Europe. _[Airport A], you are an embarrassment to the [Country A]._" [local, male] "Having flown both International and locally recently I find the queue bearable for the low cost option. The airport is busy and for a major tourist destination _it is not a good face for foreign tourist coming and going._ My major bugbear is once you are going to international departure or returning you are funnelled through duty free which causes major bottle necks… [b]ut my top bug bear is in the departure areas cannot find a water dispenser so you are forced to buy \$5 bottles of water. This is just a rip off. [visitor/tourist, male]	Actual AP forms judgment on the represent the des
(b) AP identifies the _characteristics_ of the destination and it is where the _tourism/destination slogan/image_ is compared to (Specific judgment)	[Airport A] is the most efficient airport in the world, hands down. Yes, it is not the most impressive architecture but it is certainly one of the most well-run and organised airport. The signage are adequate and choices for food are similarly sufficient. Both immigration and custom are efficient…[m]y experience _at [Airport A] is thus a simple testimony of what this society is all about - efficient and organized._ "Passport control is still the worst - surly, unfriendly, robotic staff with no sense of humanity - _welcome to the "Land of Smiles"_"! Security was a minor frustration... All in all, a reasonably good airport, but not on par with other airports in Asia, certainly not "world class" standard."	Actual AP formed judgment of what seeks/expects from
(c) Airport becomes an _integral and internal part_ of the service system in tourism experience as air traveler also assess tourism marketing in relation to the internal airport service experience (Holistic impression)	"Ironically in the weeks before this visit [Destination A] was being promoted as a welcoming tourist destination in commercials on UK TV networks. _I fully understand that the Mayor's tourism dept. does not control the activities of Dept. of Homeland Security or airline employees and while I can respect that immigration procedures are very necessary for the security of [country] borders it is completely ridiculous to use resources to promote the city in overseas TV markets but then not adequately resource immigration procedures to facilitate those visits…_" Arrived at 12 noon… huge queues at immigration with what must have been thousands of passengers. Not all the immigration desks were open and this meant queues going back to the arrival gates. I thought they had put more staff on duty but that must have been a short lived thing. _How can a government promote tourism but ignore fundamental services to those tourists_! The airport needs to get its act together.	Air traveler pe authority and one system, w marketing hol through the se within the air

Figure 6

Perception of air travelers on the roles of airports in a destination

Before the study

Tourism destination/ Tourism experience

Airport/ Airport experience

Perceive

Air travelers

After the study

Tourism destination/ Tourism experience

Airport/ Airport experience

Perceive

Air travelers