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# **An Airport Experience Framework from a Tourism Perspective**

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## **Abstract**

This study, by integrating the perspectives of sociological, psychological, and service marketing and management, all of which affect the passenger experience, proposes a theoretical framework for the creation of the airport experience in relation to tourism. This research responds to the current phenomenon in which airports are offering other types of experiences within the airport terminal, expanding the role of an airport from being a utility for transportation into a place where various and different values can be offered. This research explores the current airport experience and adds to research on airport experience by clarifying ten key components necessary for airport passenger experience propositions based on existing research, the current industry phenomena, and the empirical study. The paper also underlines those components that can enhance passenger experience in relation to tourism and highlights the role that airports contribute to a destination.

## **1. Introduction**

Since deregulation of airports in the 1990s, the role and scope of the airport industry has dramatically changed (Graham, 2014; de Neufville & Odoni, 2003). The commercialisation, privatisation, and deregulation of aviation are key factors that led to the increasing significance of air travellers and pushed the airport industry to adopt a business management philosophy for its operations (Graham, 2014). Air travel was no longer reserved for the privileged few, and travel destinations around the world multiplied, pushing airlines and airports to have a more efficient, productivity-oriented, and quality-focused outlook (Loughnane, 2005). Since the early 2000s, the airport experience has emerged as an important concept for airport operators. This has been due, in part, to the growing understanding that the airport experience can enhance travel, create airport non-aeronautical revenue (DKMA, 2014), and improve an airport's competitive position (see Airport Council International Europe [ACI Europe], 2014; Civil Aviation Authority [CAA], 2013; Futureairport (2012); Moodley, 2014; Myant & Abraham, 2009; Shankman, 2013; Wightman, 2014). Initiated by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the Fast Travel Program — which pushes for self-service options in the six areas in a traveller's airport journey — also pushes airports and airlines to offer smoother and faster travel. With the availability of state-of-the-art technologies from key suppliers, together with the growth of mobile applications, these push the possibility for airports to take the passenger experience to the next level. This is achieved by allowing passengers to have more control and more choices in the process, as well as minimising the processing time to conduct the transaction (IATA, 2013).

The airport experience has become a crucial factor in airport management for various reasons: (1) a positive airport experience enhances passenger satisfaction, the potential of future visits, and an

increase in reputation (DKMA, 2014); (2) airport experiences can help increase an airport's non-aeronautical revenue (DKMA, 2014; Graham, 2014); (3) how travellers view their experience also influences their choice of airline and airport, and this also influences the airline's decision to choose an airport as a transfer hub (CAA, 2013; Parrella, 2013); and (4) the airport experience can be used as a key differentiator of airports, especially when there are other key transit hubs in the same region (DKMA, 2014).

Despite its increasing adoption within industry, important questions remain about the nature of the airport experience.

Firstly, the airport experience has not been comprehensively defined or conceptualised. As a result, it remains unclear how the airport experience is being used in the industry and what are its defining characteristics. Airports tend to offer airport experiences to passengers based on management decisions that are affected by the availability of resources and interpretation of airport experience. Unlike other functions in airports, which have been thoroughly studied, planned, standardised, and regulated, the concept of the airport experience remains vague, subjective, and unsystematically understood.

Secondly, the airport industry tends to talk about the airport experience from a commercial and business viewpoint, with airports mainly viewing passengers as customers who have become a significant source of the non-aeronautical income. Airports neglect that the majority of passengers are tourists and therefore the passengers carry with them the psychological and sociological aspects of this role. According to IATA (2013), around three billion people used air transport for business and tourism needs in 2013, and according to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), around 51% of international tourists in 2013 chose air as a transportation mode. According to the UNWTO's definition, tourists are overnight visitors who travel "outside his or her usual environment for less than a year and for a purpose other than being employed in the place visited" (UNWTO, 2014). Taking this definition into account, both business travellers and leisure travellers are tourists who travel to the destination with some psychological and sociological attitudes that relate them to the destination. These attitudes affect their cognitive and affective perceptions before they leave the destination. Since the airport is said to be the first and the last representative of the destination for air travellers, the creation of an effective experience in relation to tourism in the airport space can potentially enhance the connection between the traveller/tourist, airport, and destination, thereby contributing to their willingness to return and promoting growth for both the airport and tourism industries (Brilha, 2008). Nevertheless, airports overlook this aspect and treat air travellers as merely customers who generate revenue for the airport.

This study responds to the above two points by providing a conceptual framework of the airport experience from a tourism perspective. This study attempts to conceptualise the airport experience and identify important components within it. This framework is proposed based on research related to airports by using both primary data and secondary data collection, which will be discussed later in the case study section.

## **2. Research Related to the Airport Experience**

The early research related to the airport experience dates back to 2000 and was conducted by Caves and Pickard (2001). They addressed the satisfaction of human needs in airport passenger terminals by focusing particularly on the ergonomic components of space and wayfinding, and how these

components affect passenger's feelings. More topics were brought into the airport context and many are from research in business management, reflecting the changes in how airports view passengers as their direct customers rather than airlines' customers. In the past few decades, related business research has been adopted and conducted in the airport context. These topics are, for instance, the servicescape model by Bitner (1992; see Jeon & Kim, 2012), service quality (Bogicevic, Yang, Bilgihan, & Bujisic, 2013; Fodness & Murray, 2007), service encounter (Rowley & Slack, 1999), and airport retail (Omar & Kent, 2001; Rowley & Slack, 1999). Some topics are specific to airport terminals and seek to improve objective measurements or the current conditions to enhance passenger satisfaction, for instance the level of service (LOS; Correia, Wirasinghe, & de Barros, 2008a, 2008b) and wayfinding (Farr, Kleinschmidt, Yarlagadda, & Mengersen, 2012). Other research has been conducted related to the use of space and human behaviour, such as the study of dwell-time and airport space (Lloyd, 2003) or the role of space and experience (Wright, 2011). These research topics have provided a fundamental understanding to support the development of systems, activities, and meaning in airport terminals.

In the recent years, Popovic, Kraal, and Kirk (2010) defined the airport experience as the "activities and interactions that passengers undergo in an airport (terminal building)", which can be categorised into two broad categories: (1) necessary activities, which are the activities required for the passenger to board the flight (e.g. check-in, bag drop, immigration, security, and so forth) and (2) discretionary activities, which are activities other than the processing activities (e.g. shopping and dining; Popovic et al., 2010). Harrison, Popovic, Kraal, and Kleinschmidt (2012) further proposed the conceptual model by deconstructing the airport experience into three perspectives: the airport, the passenger, and the public. This model introduced five types of experiences: staged, past, expected, perceived, and public, represented in each perspective, and identified by the roles and nature of the experience (objective versus subjective). The model proposed by Harrison et al. (2012) allowed for an understanding of where the type of experience that took place, the nature of the experience, and the inter-relationship among types; nevertheless, it did not go further to explore the airport experience components and its characteristics. This present study will attempt to fill this gap by identifying experience components and how these can be implemented within the industry.

### **3. Visiting Tourist Experience and Identifying its Key Characteristics**

Current research shows that airports view passengers as their direct customers as opposed to purely an airline customer (Graham, 2014). Research concerning the customer experience and tourist experience were reviewed to provide a better understanding of both terms. Although research in both areas has similarities between the customer's role and the tourist's role as both are a consumer of services (Arnould & Price, 1993; Otto & Ritchie, 1996), and both customers and tourists have a need for hedonic consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), there are certain aspects that highlight and emphasise the specific role of tourists. Research shows that the following characteristics are focal points of the tourist experience:

- Tourism research has tended to approach the tourist experience from a sociological perspective (see Boorstin, 1964; Cohen, 1979; Lash & Urry, 1994). Many tourism scholars argue that tourism is the quest for the centre (symbolised the ultimate meaning of an individual, Cohen, 1979), authenticity (Boorstin, 1964; MacCannell, 1973), meaning (Meyersohn, 1981 as cited in Mannell & Iso-Ahola, 1987), and value (Przeclawski, 1985). However, in the past decade, scholars have started to see the tourist experience through a postmodernist lens (Uriely, 2005) in which the craving for fun and enjoyment complements

or slowly replaces the quest for meaning, blurring the border between reality and the virtual world (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

- Based on the above, a strong emphasis on intense and real elements can be included by using support from multisensory elements, which enhance the concept of the tourist experience (Quan & Wang, 2004; Wang, 1999). The strong emphasis on the importance of the senses also makes it important to incorporate concepts such as the sensescape or hyperreality in order to stimulate the emotions and affect tourists (Murray, Foley, & Lynch, 2010; Tussyadiah, 2014).
- Binkhast and den Dekker (2009) conclude that the specific character of the tourism experience is derived from the tension between everyday life and other realities that are experienced as a result of changes in one's habitual temporal and spatial structures. Tourism studies have addressed the so-called escape motive as one key motivation for travel (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). However, recently, this escapist aspect has become blurred due to technology that allows tourists to simultaneously feel at home and stay in touch while being away (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).
- In tourism research, stages and types of experiences have been addressed in terms of its activity-based dimension and especially the recollection phase (Clawson, 1963) or reflective phase (Craig-Smith & French, 1994). The former uses the psychological element to explain the nature and result of an experience and is defined by Larsen (2007, p. 15) as "a past personal travel-related event strong enough to have entered long-term memory".
- Research on the tourist experience also discusses personal involvement leading to learning and transformation (Aho, 2001; Ritchie & Hudson, 2009), as well as its interpretation through social and cultural interaction (Morgan, 2007; Tussyadiah, 2014), which leads to the idiosyncratic emotional stage after the consumption experience is complete.

Now, many of these elements are observed in many airports. The following section will discuss how these components that are offered in an 4 airport experience will enhance the connection between airport experience and tourism perspective.

#### **4. Proposed Conceptual Framework**

Verhoef et al.'s (2009) conceptual model is used as a fundamental framework and adapted for this study. It is the theoretical model aimed to create holistic customer experience in retail enterprises. The model is suitable to this study from the three reasons. First, it is derived from research on customer experience and based on certain inter-related relationships between the customer experience and the concepts of service management, marketing psychology, and the social context. Second, it sets out to understand the customer experience as a holistic concept, focusing on the role of customer experience management by the enterprise or service provider. The framework builds on various components by focusing on retail enterprises, yet many components are seen to fit well with the airport industry particularly in terms of business management. Third, the framework involves comprehensive outcomes for experience responses such as the cognitive, affective, social, and physical responses of customers towards the service provider provided within the airport context. The situation (culture, competitor, and seasonal) and consumer (socio-demographic characteristics and attitudes) moderators also affect the experience. This framework is perceived to be thorough and a good fit for understanding the airport experience context.

Verhoef et al.'s (2009) framework has been adapted in this study for the airport context. The proposed components are grouped into three different perspectives: sociological, psychological, and service marketing and management based on where the nature of knowledge is introduced in

the literature. It is important to note that both sociological and psychological perspectives are regarded as the fundamental disciplines (Sommer, 2000) on which key knowledge specialities are constructed (Clark, 1983 as cited in Sommer, 2000), whereas service marketing and management is regarded as the field of study, which is a sphere of action, operation, or investigation, where various disciplines are applied. Service marketing and management are influenced by both sociology and psychology. The components from the Verhoef et al.'s framework have been revised according to the literature and the study's results. The adapted framework and the detail of literature will be provided in Figure 1 and Table 1 respectively. The justification of the perspectives and the components will be provided in the following section.

#### *4.1. Sociological Perspective*

A sociological perspective is important to understand the airport experience, especially when research about airport space can affect the social behaviour of passengers (Lloyd, 2003). In research related to the sociology of place, airports were perceived as non-places (Auge, 1995), pseudoplaces (Boorstin, 1964), or the utility of placelessness (Relph, 1976) due to their lack of identity and meaning (Lloyd, 2003). Airports were seen as transit spaces for passenger's enplaning from and deplaning to the destination; nevertheless, some argued that airports are a place where the journey begins and ends and makes people start "feeling" like a traveller (or tourist; see Read, 2004 for example). In the airport space, other sociological aspects of people interaction also take place. The interactions among people in the airport take place in different forms: passenger-to-passenger versus passenger-to-airport personnel, or face-to-face interaction versus electronic interaction. Under the sociological perspective in this study, two key concepts are found in the literature and the empirical study. They are regarded important and affecting the passengers' airport experience. The two concepts are (1) sense of place and (2) social interaction.

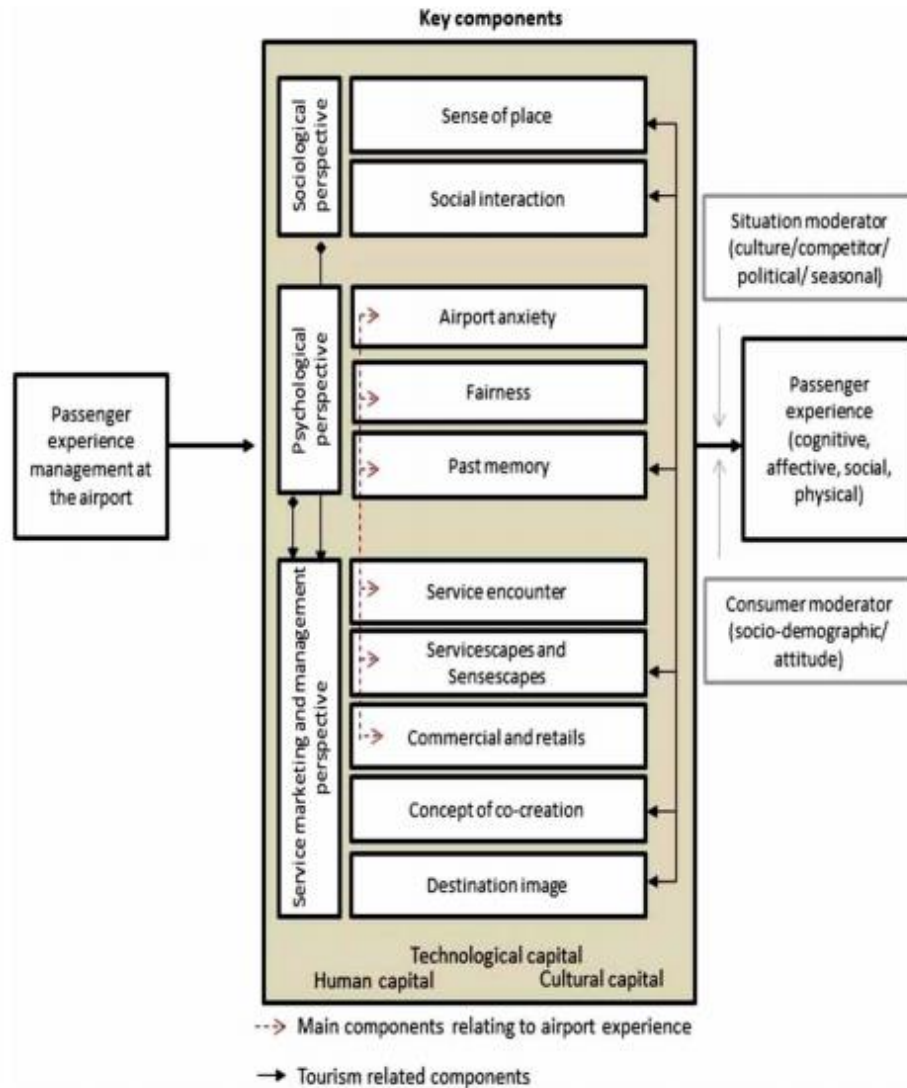


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework for airport experience creation.

Both the literature and research show that airports want to project a ‘sense of place’ in which passengers’ time can be spent through engaging in meaningful activities, and in which the airport identity can be presented within the airport terminal, all of which enhance the overall airport experience. Sense of place has been incorporated into airport terminal design and allowed culture to manifest through the airport construction within the airport space (DKMA, 2014; Lloyd, 2003). It has moved airports from giving the perspective of a non-place, to a place where meaning can be incorporated, thus enhancing the supplementary purposes of its existence (Pride, 2008). Stedman’s (2003) definition states that a sense of place refers to the three elements of (1) physical environment, (2) human behaviours, and (3) social and/or psychological processes woven together to create the place’s meaning and attachment. In the context of an airport, the physical environment is more often used to enhance the place identity, whereas the last two forms of human behaviour and social and/or psychological processes are less observed. For the physical environment, cultural artefacts, interior design, mural paintings, and local brands are normally applied to enhance the feeling of place (and in many cases relating to the culture of destination). Cultural activities and events which involve travellers’ participation also exist in some airports in order to enhance the place meanings and destination image (DKMA, 2014). In fact, the staged

setting by using the cultural artefacts, art pieces, and sculptures in the airport terminal project the form of object-authenticity (Wang, 1999), which is a long-addressed element for tourist experience (Ritchie & Hutson, 2009). Moreover, these stage settings can trigger visual consumption of passengers, which Urry (1990) defined as the “tourist gaze” that helps enhance the tourist experience consumption. All these attempts to create a sense of place in the airport can enhance passenger airport experience consumption and cause the passengers to connect cognitively with the place and the destination.

Table 1. Research supporting the dimensions and aspects of the proposed conceptual framework

Dimension	Aspects	Supporting literature
Sociological dimension	Sense of place	Lloyd (2003); Pride (2008); Stedman (2003); Yuksel, Yuksel, and Bilim (2010)
Psychological dimension	Social interaction	Huang and Hsu (2009); Murphy (2001)
	Airport anxiety	Caves and Pickard (2001); McIntosh et al. (1998); Scholvink (2000)
	Fairness	McCull-Kennedy and Sparks (2003); Campbell (1999); Mattila, Cho, and Ro (2011)
Marketing and service management dimension	Past experience	Larsen (2007); Clawson (1963); Craig-Smith and French (1994)
	Service encounter and service experience	Rowley and Slack (1999); Berry, Wall, and Carbone (2006); Otto and Ritchie (1996); Sarel and Howard (1998)
	Servicescape and sensescape	Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011); Bitner (1992); Reimer and Kuehn (2005)
	Co-creation	Binkhorst and Den Dekker (2009); Morgan et al. (2010); Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004); Vargo and Lusch (2008); Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin (2014); Edvardsson et al. (2005); Gentile, Spiller, and Noci (2007)
	Commercial	Freathy & O’Connell (2000); Livingstone, Popovic, Kraal, & Kirk (2012); Rowley and Slack (1999)
	Representing destination	Brilha (2008); Kazda and Caves (2007)

Regarding “social interaction”, Larsen (2007) addressed that social interactions contribute to the construction of experience; although, to him, the psychological aspect of individuals should not be overlooked. Huang and Hsu (2009) found in their study that the interaction among customers shape the overall experience and affect their vacation satisfaction, and that customer-and-customer or tourist and-tourist interaction are crucial for the experience (see also Holloway, 1981; Murphy, 2001). This notion is also observed in the airport especially when there is evidence that airports start offering activities in the terminal building, both cultural and non-cultural related that promote passenger participation. The social interaction in the airport context can also come in a different form. Social connections can be in the form of the communication through an airport social forum to get information or to update the airport status. This helps facilitate the passengers’ airport experience by keeping them informed, for instance about flight delay or gate change, and involving them in the forum community. Recent developments in mobile applications has further moved social interactions to the next level by allowing them to take place on social media platforms and through sharing the experiences with the selected social friends or groups. Online photo sharing and interaction on social networking sites have been an important phenomenon in this era, particularly on younger users, when travelling (Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011) and this evidence gives an implication for the tourist experience in the airport context. Current research also addressed that the uploading of photos of travellers on Facebook helps



enhance the perception of place and that photos shape the travel experience (see Kim, Kim, & Wise, 2014; Larsen, 2007; White, 2009). Therefore, social network interaction has become part of experience enhancement, particularly those passengers or tourists leaving the airport and the destination.

#### *4.2. Psychological Perspective*

The psychological perspective of travellers is also crucial for the airport experience. Time, space, activities, and mobility in the airport terminal can affect, to some degree, travellers' state of mind either by relaxing them or creating stress and anxiety (Livingstone et al., 2012). Anxiety has been a challenging factor for airports and has been addressed in previous research (see McIntosh, Swanson, Power, Raeside, & Dempster, 1998) due to its negative psychological and physical impact on passengers. The psychological impact of airports in air travel became worse once strict regulations were enforced after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, raising travel-related anxiety, and stress levels (Schillinger, 2010). In 2007, international organisations (i.e. IATA) began to discuss better ways to reduce stress levels and speed up the airport process. From these discussions, they proposed the simply travel initiative, from which came the Fast Travel Programme (IATA, 2013).

The proposed framework discusses the psychological dimension of the airport experience based on the two components of airport anxiety and airport fairness because both have a high degree of psychological stress on passengers. The former component is derived from research on airports and the latter is an emerging component from research findings and not yet thoroughly discussed within the airport literature. In terms of airport anxiety, apart from a personal psychological reason that causes stress and anxiety, such as fear of flying (McIntosh et al., 1998), other environmental and situational reasons which cause airport anxiety fall into five categories: (1) anxiety and fear of missing the flight, (2) anxiety from disruptive situations such as weather conditions or engine failure (ACI Europe, 2014; Caves & Pickard, 2001; McIntosh et al., 1998), (3) anxiety about the potential mishandling of functional processes such as lost baggage (Scherer & Ceschi, 2000), (4) anxiety from facing a highly restricted/controlled condition both from process and personal interaction such as at the immigration and security (Rubinstein, 2006), and (5) anxiety from psychological stress caused by being in the aircraft and wanting to be back on the ground, which is mainly found in transfer passengers. It is not wrong to consider that airports which provide good airport experience are those that effectively accommodate and alleviate travellers' anxiety through different approaches such as managing an effective system, providing customer service and creating sense of tranquillity.

On the other hand, despite limited research on fairness or justice in air travel (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003), this study demonstrates that such notion exists in airports. Although, due to the subjectivity of the term 'fairness', it might be difficult to articulate how the airport can meet passengers' expectations. It is the lack thereof which makes the unfair experience critical, requires airport management's attention, and is in need of further research. Research shows that travellers strongly and negatively expressed their emotional dissatisfaction once they encountered feelings of injustice or unfairness. Three issues found in this study in which airports have under-treated passengers, and which affect the emotional level of passengers to a certain magnitude are (1) overpriced products and services, (2) the mistreatment by airport authorities, particularly airport security (Rubinstein, 2006), and (3) unpleasant airport physical condition, especially the boarding gate. The importance of justice and fairness has also been found in research on services, which indicates that justice and fairness also affects customer dissatisfaction and future loyalty (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003). Moreover, the issue of unfairness has been addressed in previous

research and it has found that the use of metaphoric terms can be used to express negative perceptions in regard to unfairness (for instance, inequality; Barrett & Cooperrider, 1990). Considering the nature of air travel, which put travellers under stress (McIntosh et al., 1998), facing a stressful situation prior to the flight can intensify the stress level and trigger a stronger feeling of injustice in travellers.

Lastly, past airport experiences, either at a different airport (such as the airport where the traveller flew from or an airport experienced on a previous trip) or the same airport also affects the perception of a traveller's current experience. The past experience plays a role on shaping customer experience (Verhoef et al., 2009) and affects the travellers' expectations of their airport experience at the current airport (Harrison et al., 2012). This implies that the perception a passenger leaves the airport with affects their future expectations and perceptions of airport experience.

#### *4.3. Service Marketing and Management Perspective*

The concepts of service marketing and management only reached the airport industry when airports started adopting a business management philosophy in the past decade, wherein service quality is used as a mechanism to enhance customer satisfaction (Bogicevic et al., 2013; Graham, 2014). Airports attempt to ensure acceptable service levels by implementing service quality guidelines and criteria specifically framed for airport functions and operations, which are addressed in research and international ranking (Correia et al., 2008a, 2008b) to enhance passenger satisfaction and create a desirable overall service experience.

Various aspects relating to service marketing and management that enhance passenger experiences can be observed in airport terminals. Studies on airports introduce the concept of "servicescape" to the airport context; its application can increase the positive mood and attitude of passengers (Bitner, 1992) and enhance their navigation in the airport terminal. The servicescape framework proposed by Rosenbuaam and Massiah (2011) matches the airport environment, especially when the concepts of sense of place and destination identity have become crucial to airports. Based on Bitner (1992), Rosenbuaam and Massiah (2011) propose two new dimensions into servicescape: the socially symbolic dimension, which can help represent the destination culture by using signs, symbols, and artefacts, and the natural dimension, which represents a relaxing space for the mental and physical well-being of passengers. 'Sensescape' also enhances airport experience as it affects the aesthetic side of passengers and stimulates experiential consumption. Airports adopt arts and artefacts together with the use of senses (sensescapes), such as smell and sound, to enhance pleasure, alleviate the anxiety of travellers, and increase the aesthetic appreciation of passengers of airport terminals (Prazeres & Donohoe, 2014).

'Service encounters' become crucial elements for airports to enhance passenger experience. Airports generally value face-to-face customer service because numerous airport managers believe that personal encounter fosters improved relationship with customers (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990; Pugh, 2001) and enhances the quality of interaction. However, airports have started introducing self-service technology (SST) in airport terminals (e.g. Common Use Self-Service [CUSS] kiosk, e-immigration, or self-boarding) to provide passengers with certain benefits. SSTs allow passengers to have more control, provide convenience, and prevent service failure that can be caused by human interaction (Meuter, Ostrom, Bitner, & Roundtree, 2003). SSTs are often observed in airports where the cost and the shortage of labour are high. Therefore, SST is used as a substitute to human interaction. The different nature of the service encounter,

between human and technology, in airport terminals can affect service experience and passenger satisfaction. Nevertheless, service experience and passenger satisfaction depend on the demographic of passengers and their technological efficacy.

The concept of value co-creation also exists in airports and affects the experience level of passengers because the customers assume the role of the creator of value once they participate in service transaction (Edvardsson, Enquist, & Johnston, 2005; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). The co-creation of activities in airports is observed through different means and purposes. Value co-creation in airports is observed through the following: (1) SSTs, (2) airport social networking forums to share the current airport experience of a passenger with other travellers, (3) social networking sites such as Facebook or Instagram to enhance travel experience, and (4) airport fun and leisure activities provided in terminals.

In the present study, we refer to value co-creation as the creation of value-in-use of customers (Gronroos & Voima, 2013). Consumers are expected to initiate and implement the required activities of the service process to obtain the service and the value rendered (Gronroos, 2008). The SST is perceived as one type of service resource provided by a service provider to offer customers a chance to be involved with the co-created transaction and to render its value (Dong, Evans, & Zou, 2008). Airports act as a service facilitator who proposes this service resource (i.e. SST) to passengers for them to use, co-create values, and gain such values; passengers then define the value they receive after the co-creation of activities (Gronroos, 2008). In the case of co-creation with SSTs in the airport, if passengers have a choice, they are assumed to prefer skipping a number of airport fundamental processes (e.g. check-in, security, immigration, and boarding) because, in the passengers' opinion, they do not create significant value. These processes rather cause frustration. For example, a passenger is unlikely to go to an airport with a desire to check-in. The use of CUSS kiosk is then introduced to offer value, which is to eliminate the burden caused by the checkin process (e.g. long queue, bad service encounter) and to allow passengers to have control over their transactions, save time, and enhance self-efficacy (Meuter et al., 2003). A similar principle is applied to elements such as electronic immigration and boarding. Nevertheless, before passengers can gain value from these processes, they must have skills to handle the technology. Otherwise, they will not be able to create or retrieve the offered value.

Co-creation is also observed through social forums, which can take place in the social media platforms set up by the airport. This type of co-creation activity ensues when passengers use social networking to co-create their travel experience with others in an airport community forum. The smartphone technology helps facilitate the value co-creation (Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2013). Passengers become co-creators of their airport experience when airports provide forums through a social media platform where passengers can share their experience with other passengers, such as updating the delay or gate status or participating in a current discussion related to the airport. The interactive nature of social networking not only allows passengers to share and exchange information about their airport journey, but also aids airports in understanding the perception of experience of passengers, which has changed the traditional roles of airports and passengers in the information-exchange relationship (Sashi, 2012).

Moreover, airports can enhance other co-creation experiences related to tourism and a destination by providing a setting that can summon the interest of passengers to co-create and promote their travel experience. For instance, cultural elements, such as artefacts, paintings, or unique interior design, entice travellers to take pictures, upload, and share them on social media to represent the roles of tourist before leaving the destination (Neuhofer et al., 2013). This approach can be an

important destination-marketing tool (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013), which was recently introduced by several airports, such as Changi Airport (SIN) and Bangkok International Airport (BKK). Social media marketing, together with popular trends of social networking activities, such as hashtag (Mcfedries, 2013), enhances the roles of airports from a mere supporting place for experiences (Cary, 2004; Volo, 2009) to a place where the mental linkage of passengers to the destination can be solidified. Passengers can take a photo of the iconic sight of the airport and post it on their social networking sites to indicate that they have been to the airport and to the destination; such act co-creates an experience with others who pursue a similar activity (Neuhofer et al., 2013). This notion has given significance to the Wi-Fi facilities or Internet stations at airports, especially when they become an emerging trend of experience, which are favoured by passengers.

Last, co-creation can also be in the form of activities in the terminal building, which permits in-depth participation. Several airports offer the cultural corner or handicraft corner where passengers can spend time before flight departure to make their own souvenir by hand and keep it as a memorable experience. These forms of co-creation can link the airport experience of passengers to the destination as they relate to cultural aspects affecting the perception and experience of passengers in their role as tourists before leaving the destination.

“Commercial and retail” are crucial elements for airports because they stimulate the hedonic experience and excitement of shoppers or passengers (Ballantine, Jack, & Parsons, 2010), especially when airports want to generate a high portion of their revenue from non-aeronautical means (Freatly & O’Connell, 2000; Graham, 2014). The increasing role of passengers in generating revenue urges airports to include retail stores and commercial activities in the airport environment (Brilha, 2008), especially when Kirk (2010 as cited in Livingstone et al., 2012) indicates that passengers spend an average 20% of their overall airport dwell time undertaking necessary activities and 80% of that doing discretionary activities. Passengers may choose to spend their time in retail stores to mitigate travel-related stress (Rowley & Slack, 1999); thus, the retail environment is one of the key factors that contribute to the airport experience of passengers (Livingstone et al., 2012).

The notion of “destination image” is proposed in the framework in relation to the common saying that the airport represents the destination (Kazda & Caves, 2007). A new angle of the association between destination image and airport performance is observed in the present study. Passengers evaluate airport performance according to the image or the characteristics that the destination attempts to present. For instance, passengers expect an extra level of efficiency and effectiveness from an airport located in a destination, which is well-known for these characteristics. A strong presentation of destination image has been used by passengers as an intrinsic criterion to evaluate their experience at the airport.

In Figure 1, ten components are proposed under the three dimensions. Under the key components, the dot arrows to the left point to the components, namely, airport anxiety, fairness, past memory, service experience or encounter, servicescape and sensescape, commercial and retail, and co-creation. These components are fundamentally required to create the airport experience under the current business management perspective. Aspects strongly related to tourism (i.e. sense of place, social interaction, past memory, servicescape and sensescape, cocreation, and destination image) are indicated with the black arrows on the right. The linking arrows indicate that these aspects inter-relate and influence each other; for instance, how an airport manages the social interaction component can affect the way it projects its identity and creates a sense of place. The types of

social interaction proposed by airport management can involve passengers in a high level of participation in the co-creation process, which affect the overall airport experience and perception of destination of passengers. The arrows pointing from the sociological and psychological aspects down to the service marketing and management aspect reflect the influence of the two former disciplines to the latter field of study. The following dimensions and key components require support from the three resources (or capital) to promote a desirable airport experience: technological capital, human capital, and cultural capital. The situational and consumer moderators shape and vary the experience of passengers.

## **5. Case Studies: Evidence from Hong Kong International Airport and BKK**

To illustrate the applicability of the proposed conceptual framework of airport experience from a tourism perspective, two case studies justify the components selected in the study. Data were collected from two international airports: Hong Kong International Airport (HKG) and BKK. In-depth interviews were conducted with managers at both the executive level and the department level, particularly those related to creating the passenger experience that was identified by the executives from both airports (for instance, the customer service department and IT department). In total, 11 in-depth interviews were conducted at the two airports. The secondary data sources, such as the airport's 2013 and 2014 annual reports, supplemented this primary data. Moreover, the 195 passenger comments from both airport's Skytrax ranking were also included to reveal the passengers' perception on their airport experience (88 comments for HKG and 107 comments for BKK). This data, including the author's observation of both airports, served to triangulate the study's data, and the contents were carefully managed by using Nvivo 10 software. The results of how an airport experience is created and perceived were found for each proposed perspective as follows:

### *5.1. Sociological: Sense of Place and Social Interaction*

To promote a 'sense of place', both airports make use of the cultural capital at the destination to introduce a sense of identity and a 'place meaning' within the airport. HKG used exhibits of famous local actors, Bruce Lee for instance, and used local Hong Kong brands and the arts to evoke the feeling of Hong Kong inside the terminal building. BKK also attempted to do something similar through the cultural artefacts, murals, and cultural activities. The cultural events that are offered are both static (stay in one place) and dynamic (move from one place to the other) activities, and the roles of travellers are both observers and participants. Hedonic activities such as cultural shows or entertainment provided in the airport terminal are believed to enhance passengers' enjoyment, passengers' involvement and the perception of destination. Moreover, these types of activities are offered to enhance the satisfaction of passengers, in the hope that it will affect their willingness to return and further the airport's reputation. Apart from the interior design, artefacts, and activities in both, HKG and BKK work with the local Tourism Organisations (Hong Kong Tourism Board and cultural department and the Tourism Authority of Thailand) to create the sense of destination within the airport environment. Collaboration with these organisations presents the cultural identity of the destination through the activities and events to promote a sense of place and the interactions among passengers. More perspective on the 'social interaction' on social media is found from both airports. Both HKG and BKK have a social network forum that allows travellers to voice their opinions and interact with one another. HKG (at the time of interview) planned to set up an airport community called 'a friend of airport' to provide a home for travellers to post their comments and ideas for future airport improvement, supporting the role of airport as a facilitator who provide resources for customer's value creation

(Auh, Bell, McLeod, & Shih, 2007; Gronroos, 2008). BKK is less active in terms of establishing dialogue with travellers on social media platforms but put more effort to encourage passengers to participate in social network marketing. This will be further explained.

## *5.2. Psychological: Airport Anxiety and Airport Fairness*

In the psychological perspective, particularly on airport anxiety, an example from HKG will be used to elaborate the management of airport experience in this aspect, down to the passenger positive comments on their experiences. The interview with management reveals that HKG puts strong effort to eliminate passenger anxiety through efficiency. HKG position's on high efficiency also leads to the way they define airport anxiety and these perceptions were widely understood by all the individuals being interviewed. The study reviews two keywords that HKG sees as significant when dealing with the issue of airport anxiety. This involves the notions of 'time' and 'notification'. HKG sees that time is a crucial element for passengers and can create pressure for them in the airport terminal. Passengers spend most of their time in the airport in processes that do not create value and involve queuing for transactions. Travellers' stress levels increase when they wait in a long queue and are concerned about missing their flight. As such, in order to allow passengers to complete the process with minimum time and the least hassle, HKG has put significant effort to minimise the time at each process through the application of efficiency. In fact, HKG has a remote check-in available both in-town and at the Pearl River Delta piers. HKG reduces travellers' hassle during the check-in process by allowing less time at the airport terminal process, as well as enhancing convenience by decreasing the need to carry luggage to the airport. The efficiency of the terminal check-in process, together with the security and the immigration, also helps to alleviate the stress level of air travellers. The SST is offered to fasten the processes at immigration and at the boarding gate and is not only limited to the local people. HKG's management worked with their security and immigration departments in order to enhance customer service and used encouraging mechanisms such as the customer service excellence programme (CSEP) to instil good practices and promote pleasant interactions with passengers. Additionally, other facilities are designed for travellers' convenience. Clear signage is also an important factor to reduce travellers' anxiety in regard to airport navigation. The airport sees that once travellers have passed through all the processes and have plenty of time left for themselves at the restricted area, travellers can appreciate the extra time and the enjoyment the various activities offer there, such as retail shopping, dining, or the relaxation corner.

Moreover, the application of up-to-date technology has helped to reduce airport anxiety in HKG. For instance, HKG keeps passengers informed of various updates by using 'notifications'. This is done through smartphone applications because HKG believes that re-assuring travellers on the unexpected events and reducing the amount of unknown information will help reduce travellers' anxiety. Communication helps reduce risk and the unknown, especially in the airport environment where unexpected situations may arise from something as minor as a gate change to a major disruption such as flight delays due to weather conditions.

The notion of 'fairness' is found in the passenger comments and plays a critical factor for their airport experience. Based on the passenger comments from the two airports, there are three aspects of unfairness: (1) unfair prices for goods, products, and facilities, (2) unfair treatment by the airport personnel, and (3) unfair physical conditions, especially at the boarding gate. In regard to unfair price for consumption, the comments imply that psychologically, passengers feel that it is not their choice to be at the airport; therefore the overpriced goods, such as food and drink, or even some goods and products from the retail stores and duty free are based on these

disadvantages. This study reveals that both HKG and BKK airports receive comments on overpriced duty-free items and products, for instance passengers mentioned “they try to get cash out of you” and “Duty Free shops are very expensive and have obviously swallowed any duty with their greedy pricing, avoid them and buy elsewhere”. The same ‘unfair’ feeling is also reflected in travellers’ comments on the facility, such as Wi-Fi, especially if the previous airport provides the service for free but the current airport charges money or provides it at a much lower speed.

For the second and third aspects, passengers addressed issues of unfriendly treatment by airport security, immigration, or customs staff, as well as the uncomfortable condition of the boarding gate. Different from a typical service provider whose approach to service recovery is to eliminate service failure and gain customer satisfaction (McCollough, Berry, & Yadav, 2000), airports face a bigger challenge as they do not have much control over these aforementioned parties, apart from asking for collaboration. They are less likely to apply interactional justice, which is a method that offers service recovery through a better manner of service interaction (McColl-Kennedy & Sparks, 2003). This is due to the different nature of the organisation and their interests (Graham, 2014; Kazda & Caves, 2007). The finding reveals that HKG has an effective way to work with the immigration and security agents and finds ways to align the airport’s customer centric goal across these stakeholders. HKG’s use of consistent meetings or taskforces and reward events are used to encourage positive collaboration. As a result, the complaints from travellers are far much less than at BKK, which has been found to have weaker collaboration across departments. To make matters worse, passengers use strong metaphors in their comments, such as ‘feel like cattle being processed’, ‘terrible experience all round, shame on them to treat people worse than cattle’ to describe their dissatisfaction on the service interactions. Further unsatisfactory evidence was also found in the physical boarding gate, which passengers described as being put in a ‘holding pen’ to indicate the congestion, discomfort, and disappointment of the place. Nisbett and Ross (1985) suggested that metaphors are powerful because of their capacity for semantic and cognition reconstruction. Therefore, the metaphors derived from travellers’ narrated comments reveal their deep dissatisfaction towards the people and place.

This notion may point to the discrepancy between airports and travellers in terms of ‘space’. Although BKK and HKG’s airport management has employed the LOS to apply a ‘good’ level of space requirement, including the holding area based on IATA’s standards (Graham, 2014), the discrepancies between the acceptable provision of physical space provided to air travellers from the objective criteria and the psychological perception on subjective feelings indicate the differences in airport experience. This confirms Yen and Teng’s (2003 as cited in Harrison et al., 2012) the statement that airport space and passenger space are not the same, but they are treated as one by international airport management.

### *5.3. Service Marketing and Management: Examples of the Five Components*

Ambience is perceived as a fundamental element in the creation of airport experience because it gives passengers their first impression of an airport terminal. HKG and BKK mention ambience in the modern design of the terminal building and the importance of having a spacious and clean terminal. Moving away from a traditional infrastructure of airports, which used to be perceived as lifeless or senseless, HKG and BKK have embedded ‘servicescapes’ and ‘sensescapes’ and attempted to introduce the concept of a sense of place within their environment. HKG and BKK use art pieces, artefacts, and mural paintings to provide a visual perception of the cultural identity of the destination. A clean and spacious terminal, good lighting, effective wayfinding for the

comfort of travellers, and easy navigation in the terminal complements the ambience. Both airports also apply different senses to enhance sensorial perceptions related to hearing, smelling, and feeling, which are supported by recent studies that address the importance of other senses (Pan & Ryan, 2009; Son & Pearce, 2005). HKG and BKK use music in areas such as the baggage claim and the departure hall to enhance aesthetic experience. However, announcements must be made continuously, and numerous different sounds may impair instead of enhance the experience of passengers. HKG also mentions that pleasing scents can be combined with cleanliness. Both airports stressed the importance of making the passengers feel comfortable, relaxed, and warmly welcomed.

‘Service encounter’ is a crucial factor in delivering a high level of ‘service experience’. Different types of training are provided to the departments involved in customer service. Examples of these trainings are the ‘smile’ training and ‘power-of-word’ training at HKG and the ‘greeting training’ at BKK. The effectiveness of training at HKG is measured and assessed, and the rewards system is used to encourage these practices through awards and recognition, such as the CSEP, which is equivalent to the Oscars for airport community. BKK, by contrast, emphasises the importance of customer service in terms of service encounter and service experience. With an intensive labour and lower cost, including the use of the airport slogan, ‘airport of smiles’, BKK uses the Thai hospitality to enhance service encounter quality by (1) instilling ‘Thai-ness’ through the cultural dress and greetings and (2) training staff to be proactive in approaching passengers to offer assistance. Service encounters using technology also enhance service experience in the airport terminal. HKG and BKK provide SSTs throughout the different stages of travel for air travellers who prefer independent travel and favour selfcontrolled processes. These technologies serve as a key element to enhance quick and efficient service encounters within the airport and increase the service experience of passengers. The employment of technologies as an option is offered or will be offered in most of the fundamental processes within the airport, from departure until arrival. For HKG, Cathay Pacific, which is joining the Fast Travel Programme, also pushes the airport to facilitate the movement through the provision of technology, whereas SST in BKK remains limited.

In terms of co-creating the airport environment, both HKG and BKK have introduced certain types of value co-creation within the airport terminal at differing degrees. HKG highly involved their passengers with SST and mobile application. The SST and mobile applications offer ‘speedy service’, ‘time-saving’, ‘selfcontrol’, the feeling of ‘self-efficacy’, and ‘anxiety reduction’ as values to passengers, which enhanced their overall experience. Other reasons that HKG offers the SST as their value proposition to passengers are due to its core competencies on efficiency and the response to the Fast Travel Programme. From the consumer’s perspective, the SST process alleviates frustration and anxiety that come from airport processes.

Another type of co-creation in the airport environment that enhances passenger experience is the use of social media and mobile applications. The use of social media and mobile applications affects the components of co-creation activity to enhance airport experience and the role of the airport to enhance destination image. This topic will be elaborated in the following section. Co-creation through social network is strong in BKK because it is used as a destination-marketing tool. BKK promotes unique cultural artefacts that represent the destination, and uses them as an icon that symbolises the airport for taking pictures and uploading them on social networking sites. Thus, BKK was included in the list of top ten destinations of most photographed places in the world in Instagram in 2012 (Bangkok Post, 2012) and 2013 (Instagram, 2013). These types of



social interactions enhance passenger involvement, which, according to BKK, affect the airport experience and improve the reputation of airport.

Retail stores have been regarded as a crucial factor by both airports in the case studies and in literature. The highest portion of the annual revenue of HKG comes from retail sales (approximately 42% of annual revenue) (HKG annual report, 2014), whereas retail and concession sales account for only 24% of the annual revenue of BKK (AoT annual report, 2014). HKG is a good example of an airport with a good duty-free experience because it is ranked as one of the top five airports with the best duty-free shopping experience according to an industry website (Shankman, 2013). Duty-free shopping has been promoted as one of the attractive experiences in HKG. Between the two terminals, over 280 retail shops and 80 catering outlets are available for passengers and visitors (HKG website, 2014). Apart from carefully selected brands, HKG also involves more local brands to enhance the identity of Hong Kong. Moreover, the use of state-of-the-art technology, such as Near Field Communication (NFC), enhances the retail experience of passengers because NFC allows them to know about special promotions through mobile phone notifications.

Last, the notion of ‘destination image’ can be found in the service marketing aspect. Airports want to project the image and culture of the destination in the airport terminal to enhance the intense feelings and mental connections of passengers to the airport. Comments from passengers of both airports indicate that their airport experience is influenced by the image or the characteristics of destinations. Passengers use these images or outstanding characteristics to evaluate airport performance, which affect their perception of overall airport experience. For instance, the following comments indicate that passengers evaluate airports based on the destination image they have perceived: “ ... surly, unfriendly, robotic staff with no sense of humanity — welcome to the Land of Smiles” for BKK and “a simple testimony of what this society is all about, very efficient” for HKG (emphasis added). Although the airport experience of BKK passengers has been disappointing because of under delivery of the advertised destination image of the Land of Smiles of the country, HKG manages to maintain the image of the city owing to its highly efficient airport performance.

## **6. Conclusion, Significance of the Concept and Limitation**

This article proposed a theoretical framework for the creation of the airport experience in relation to a tourism perspective by drawing on research relating to the sociological aspect, the psychological aspect, and the service marketing and management and supporting these findings with empirical evidence from case studies. Although many components from the framework may be applied to other transportation terminals, for instance to cruise terminals or train stations, the framework can be regarded as unique for the airport context, particularly from the psychological perspective. Because of the unique conditions of physical space, time, and specific processes and activities that are provided in the airport environment, this leads to the unique characteristics of airport anxiety and airport fairness. By using qualitative methodology as a research design, emerging components have been derived and placed into frameworks.

Moreover, the qualitative research study has allowed a more in-depth understanding of how the proposed components take place in the airport context, which is limited in the quantitative study; thus the research has some influence on the airport experience. The article benefits the airport industry and research on airport experience as follows: (1) the conceptual framework identifies the crucial components of the airport experience in the terminal; (2) it highlights the connection

between some components relating to the tourist experience that enhances another increasingly significant role of airports as a place that enhances the connection of passengers/tourists with the destination; and (3) the framework benefits the airport industry because it provides clear components and linkages to the issues that must be satisfactorily delivered to passengers so that they can perceive a good level of airport experience. The linkages between the components help airport management to clarify how the delivery of one can affect others and to can create a strategic plan that delivers components rather than focusing on delivering one at a time.

In addition, airports can contribute to the tourism destination and tourist experience by taking on two roles: an experience provider and an experience facilitator. These can be done through (1) creating the airport terminal environment based on the concept of sense of place by providing physical settings, cultural artefacts, and cultural activities to connect passengers with the cultural elements of a destination and (2) encouraging passengers to co-create their travel experience with other travellers via social media platforms by facilitating the airport setting and an effective internet connection in the airport terminal. This will help instil a memory of passengers during the phases of leaving destination and recollection. Lastly, airports need to be aware that passengers connect the destination image and slogan with airport performance; therefore, airports must ensure to satisfactorily deliver those experiences that are highly related to the destination image.

The study has a number of limitations due to its exploratory nature on the composition of the components of airport experience and the limited number of case studies applied; therefore, this has some effect on the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, it is believed that this framework has potential and contributes to a better understanding of the airport experience concept; therefore, a future study is proposed to strengthen the current framework. First, it is recommended to study other airports in different geographic regions and the use of quantitative study to help validate the components of the airport experience. Second, quantitative studies are recommended to strengthen the effects of the proposed components on passenger airport experience. Moreover, there are three specific focuses which it is believed should receive attention for further research: the sense of place, airport fairness, and the co-creation with airport stakeholders. For instance, some questions relating to the three focuses are: (1) how airports create a sense of place and whether the perception of a sense of place between the airport and passengers are perceived similarly; (2) how airports handle fairness, especially according to the theory of justice; and (3) how airports involve stakeholders to co-create the passengers' airport experience. Since airport management have applied a business management approach to manage airport operation, these research questions will help strengthen the airport's role as service provider in which the airport experience can become a competitive factor for the airport.

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