
A Conceptual Framework: Examination the Role of Physical Environment on Airbnb Experiences

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Abstract

Airbnb accommodation in Malaysia is increasingly competing with the hotel industry on the guest experience. However, the role of physical environment and perceived value is seen as a critical factor in maintaining growth for Airbnb's success. The physical environment and perceived value are essential elements to discover because research on this issue is underrepresented in the hospitality literature. The purpose of this article is to construct and test a model by proposing a new conceptual framework consisting of the physical environment with two dimensions, namely ambience and amenities, perceived value and guest satisfaction, to better understand a recent phenomenon in the accommodation sector. Also, the Airbnb accommodation will focus more on its usage of the two A's, namely ambience and amenities, to encourage guests to interpret their experiences through these aspects. This conceptual study will employed a structural equation model (SEM) to test the model proposed. Later, the findings will expand knowledge through hospitality services with an examination of variables that lead to guest satisfaction.

Keywords:

Airbnb; Physical Environment; Ambience; Amenities; Perceived Value; Satisfaction

1 Introduction

Airbnb has become one of the dominant segments of the accommodation industry. Their focus is primarily on the guest's satisfaction by considering benefits such as lower

price, comfort, and home concept. The rise of Airbnb has created new avenues for guest satisfaction studies (Xiang et al., 2018; Cheng et al., 2019). Indeed, Xi et al. (2021) observe that review comments can create a comprehensive picture of guest satisfaction. Although academics and experts continue to study guest satisfaction in hotel settings, Airbnb has quickly gained traction in the industry (Cheng, 2020; Samengon et al., 2020). Regardless of these concerns regarding advancement, Airbnb continues to grow internationally, and is currently the world's largest provider of shared lodgings (Leong et al., 2019; Mody et al., 2019). Additionally, Airbnb is the most popular platform in the lodging industry (Sthapit et al. 2019). According to Oxford Economics (2019), the Airbnb community was contributed more than RM3.9 billion to the Malaysian economy and supported more than 52,000 local jobs. Also, Airbnb guests spent more than 4.4 billion in Malaysia.

Despite Airbnb's continuous success, examining the Airbnb phenomenon from various perspectives has become necessary in the tourism and hospitality study fields (Ferreri and Sanyal, 2018). COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has negatively impacted the economy due to the international tourists have fallen with estimated inclinations of 4% yearly growth to a 20–30% drop. The hotel industry has been pressured by the situation (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Similarly, Malaysia also faced a horrible phase with over RM6.53 billion in losses for 2020 in the accommodation sector (Malaysian Association of Hotels, 2021). Airbnb also is no exception. Covid 19 pandemic has put Airbnb hosts under more burden. Most UNWTO panel experts believed tourism would recover after 2023 (UNWTO, 2021). This scenario demonstrates that urgent effort should be undertaken to ensure Airbnb sustain its returning guest, particularly after the Covid 19 pandemic.

Researchers should highlight supplementing the sparse literature with empirical investigations to provide the hospitality industry with actionable data-driven insights and remedies for a resurgence. According to Hollebeek and Rather (2019), guests are more likely to recall positive physical environment experiences with the memories they received. In comparison, experience, and novelty result in increased guest engagement, creating Airbnb branding and beneficial to the host and guest experience (Rather et al., 2019).

The environment in which guests occur has an insightful influence on the physical environment experiences. As a result, it is necessary to comprehend each physical environment dimension (Ali et al., 2016). Airbnb's heartening guests to segment such familiarities on community websites positively affects branding (Rather & Hollebeek, 2020). These connected communities promote natural interactions that help define and cultivate the product (Hollebeek et al., 2017). Hence, maintaining guests' experience of physical environments is crucial for tourism businesses to sustain a competitive edge. This paper contributes to the lack of understanding by focusing on physical environment dimensions namely ambience and amenities, perceived value as mediating role on guest satisfaction in the Airbnb Malaysia context.

2 Literature review and hypotheses development

The literature review section explains in detail each construct of the study: ambience, amenities, perceived value, and guest satisfaction.

2.1 Ambience

The ambience is described as the personality and atmosphere, covering how individuals think and feel about their physical surroundings (Nawi, Hashim, Shahril & Hamid; 2019). According to Biswas et al. (2019), it is not easy to forecast the ambience effect on the guest. However, all extreme elements, such as highly bright light or shallow temperatures, or vice versa, can be easily detected in the guest approach or avoidance behaviour. The atmosphere is the guest's perceived quality of the surrounding place (Nawi et al., 2019).

In Airbnb accommodation, the ambience is a significant factor in determining which location to rent for a stay. Capturing the environment of Airbnb postings could enable a variety of applications, including ambience-based search engines. It contains everything from a romantic studio for a weekend getaway, roomy, and comfortable property for a week-long family holiday to automatic suggestion systems that help hosts enhance their listing appearance (interior design, decoration). The sensory experience of Airbnb accommodation homelike atmosphere plays a significant role in guests' emotional attachment to Airbnb properties. This is consistent with earlier research, which has identified the sensory component (home mood, beautiful décor, and serene ambience) as critical (Gunasekaran and Anandkumar, 2012).

Numerous studies have established a strong correlation in a different context, including shopping, dining environments, and hotel ambience (Sim, Mak, & Jones, 2006; Hamid et al., 2021). Ariffin et al. (2013) claimed that an authentic ambience experience might boost satisfaction, especially for hospitality businesses such as hotels and other accommodation service provider. Previous research has established that ambience is positively associated with perceived value. The ambience attractiveness is shaped by the facility scenery renowned as a critical factor in attracting and savouring guest perceived value (Breazeale & Ponder, 2011; Mari & Poggesi, 2013).

Past research has confirmed overall effects on guest satisfaction ambience (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2018; Priporas et al., 2017). A feeling of an ambience like home can represent positive social environments such as family, friendship, and community status, all of which contribute to satisfaction (Clark & Kearns, 2012). Furthermore, physical environments such as physical design, aesthetics, and ambience can influence guest satisfaction (Graham et al., 2015; Ulrich, 1991). In summary, a healthy home environment promotes positive experiences and individual well-being. When applied to the tourism business, the study proposes that Airbnb lodgings are related to an ambience of feeling "at home" and satisfaction. The following hypotheses are based on the previous arguments:

H1a: Ambience has a significant effect on perceived value.

H1b: Ambience has a significant effect on guest satisfaction.

1.1 Amenities

According to Kucukusta (2017), amenities are fixed belongings that contribute to relaxation, practicality, or pleasure. Wireless Internet access, a shower in the bathroom, a television, the size of the room, coffee or tea, and the type of mattress are all standard in-room amenities. Nevertheless, amenities' consequences and appeal vary according to the unique demands of the people who utilise the service. Recognizing Airbnb's advantages and disadvantages, past scholars have examined the motivation (Guttentag & Smith, 2017). In addition, study on involvements (Cheng & Jin, 2019; Möhlmann, 2015); and host performance (Lee, Yang, & Koo, 2019).

However, the amenities dimension substantially impacts a guest perceived value that has not been appropriately explored. Compared to standard hotel research, just a few studies have examined Airbnb features (Nawi et al., 2020; Cheng & Jin, 2019; Kennedy, Jones, & Gielen, 2019; Tussyadiah, 2016). Additionally, scarce responsiveness to this dimension, limiting intellectuals and experts from developing a more nuanced thought to build some tactics.

While significant research limits are undertaken on the amenities offered by hotels, less research has been conducted on the amenities offered by Airbnb accommodations. Airbnb amenities have been identified as a significant factor impacting guest happiness (Tussyadiah, 2016; Tussyadiah & Zach, 2015). While there are some equivalents between Airbnb accommodations and hotels in terms of in-room amenities, Airbnb accommodations are defined by the absence of standards that imply the unique environment of individual homes (Cheng & Jin, 2019).

Regardless of the circumstance that accommodations amenities play a crucial impact on guests perceived value, Airbnb amenities have received insufficient attention. At Airbnb, certain practical traits are seen as more valuable than others that are experiential (Guttentag et al., 2018). According to the literature, Airbnb guests do not find the 'location' attribute statistically significant. However, it is noted that 'amenities' have a favourable effect and are statistically significant (Tussyadiah, 2016).

As guest needs become increasingly diversified, accommodation providers examine ways to provide services that match varying wants. Prior research has established that amenities create a shortcut to increasing competitiveness (Yu et al., 2020). Additionally, research has been conducted on the effect of amenities and readiness to pay on guest satisfaction (Masiero et al., 2015). In addition, the quality of accommodation amenities has a significant impact on guest perceived value that leads to satisfaction (Wang & Hung, 2015). As a result, the study formulates the following hypotheses:

H2a: Amenities has a significant effect on perceived value.

H2b: Amenities has a significant effect on guest satisfaction.

1.2 Perceived Value

Paulose and Shakeel (2021) described perceived value as the guest's total estimate of a product or net services worth created based on what is received and supplied. In a similar vein, the perceived value is determined by a comparative assessment of offering reimbursements and expenses. Although perceived value is frequently enumerated in terms of expense, superiority, and loss (Cheng et al., 2019), hidden characteristics such as sensory insight, esteem value, and self-indulgence take precedence over price and quality in the accommodation market (El-Adly, 2019). Both scholars, Rather et al. (2018) and Wilkins et al. (2007), acclaim that businesses focusing on relationship marketing change their attention away from profitability indicators and toward guest value development. Additionally, studies conducted in the social media domain indicate a substantial correlation between customer engagement and perceived value (Aslam & Luna, 2021).

The impending financial strike is anticipated to emphasise the crucial part of guest perceived value in service strategy (Jiang & Wen, 2020). Numerous research has proven the beneficial effect of perceived value generated from a service experience on satisfaction (Kesari and Atulkar, 2016). Similarly, tourist research indicates that perceived value dimensions positively affect satisfaction (Mohd-Any et al., 2015; Prebensen et al., 2014). The beneficial effect of perceived value on guest satisfaction has remained extensively demonstrated in the literature on facilities promotion (Heung & Ngai, 2008). Additionally, it is suggested that in an experiencing economy, simply providing high-quality services at a reasonable price may not be sufficient to amaze clients or ensure guest pleasure (El-Adly, 2019).

According to Zeithaml (1988), perceived value is well-defined as customer inclusive assessments based on the view of what is assumed and what is acknowledged. However, a limited study focuses on perceived value for the hospitality industry (Hussein et al., 2018). In other words, insufficient past literature examined the perceived value as a mediator (Keshavarz & Jamshidi, 2018). Hussein et al. (2018) revealed the effect of the physical environment on guest loyalty in a hotel mediated by perceived value. Also, a study by El-Adly (2019) also stated that the effect of guest satisfaction on guest loyalty incorporates perceived value as a mediating variable. With the above notion, the following is hypothesized:

H3: Perceived value has a significant effect on guest satisfaction.

H4a: Perceived value mediates the relationship between ambience and guest satisfaction.

H4b: Perceived value mediates the relationship between amenities and guest satisfaction.

1.3 Guest Satisfaction

According to Lin (2015), guest satisfaction is an expressive and emotional assessment of the unique guest involvement. Numerous research outcomes for guest satisfaction have been found, including product reliability, connection stability, and trademark encouragement (Shams et al., 2020).

As a result, when guests reserve an Airbnb listing, they anticipate a secure and private atmosphere. Economic rewards, convenience, and the physical environment experience all fall under the performance area. Guests frequently highlight these three virtues; these values almost certainly contribute to their pleasure. The absence of these parameters results in decreased guest satisfaction (Thaichon et al., 2015).

Encounter satisfaction may also change depending on the function of the physical environment, as the guest interpreted the value in various ways. Despite their critical position as one of the primary elements of Airbnb business, guests' opinions have been widely overlooked in the Airbnb literature too far. This study investigates how the outcome variables are related to one another depending on the function of physical environment dimensions in the Airbnb setting.

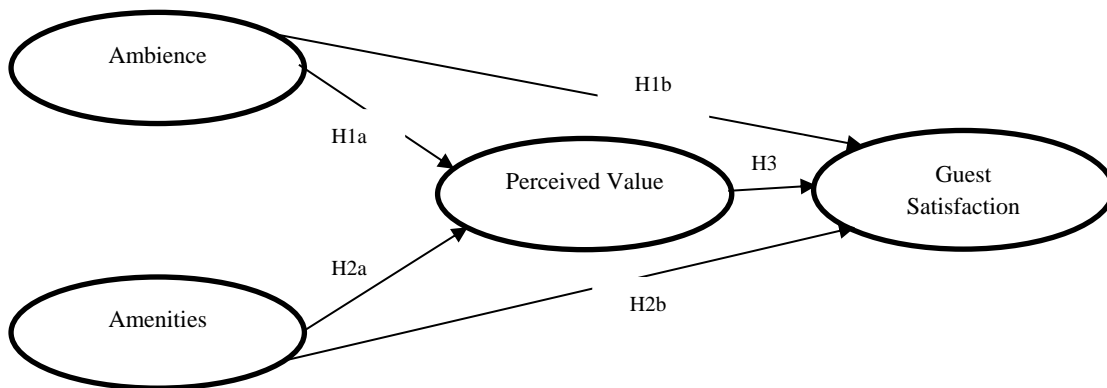


Figure 1: A proposed conceptual framework

3 Methodology

The research methodology section explains the questionnaire design, data collection and data analysis procedure.

3.1 The Questionnaire Design

This research will use questionnaires that consist of four sections to gather the data from respondents. - A seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree will develop. For the first section, the questionnaire requires the respondents to evaluate the role of the physical environment, which comprises of two dimensions with ten items adapted from Ali et al. (2016), Tussyadiah (2016). The second and third sections contain questions related to perceived value and guest satisfaction. Perceived value as mediating variable will be measured using a total of five items adapted from An et al. (2019), Sthapit et al. (2017). On the other hand, guest satisfaction constructs with five items statement adapted from Priporas et al. (2017). The questionnaire concludes with a section on the respondents' demographic profile.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis Procedure

The target population for the study are Airbnb guests who have stayed and experienced Airbnb in Malaysia. This study will select this population due to several reasons: (1) Airbnb is among the largest accommodation sector in the sharing economy (2) Airbnb is among the popular accommodation platform compared to other online travel agents (OTAs). Online survey will conduct to distribute the questionnaire to the respondent.

There are two stages in data collection. The first stage is the pilot study involving a minimum of 100 respondents. Later, the researcher will use IBM SPSS (Version 26) for data entry, coding, normality test, descriptive procedures that include frequencies, mean, standard deviations and reliability test. The second stage of the data collection is fieldwork. The convenience sampling using the SPSS is will utilise to select the data from the sampling frame since the exact number of the total population is not available (Tabachnick et al. 2007). In addition, the samples will select from the sampling frame based on the rules of thumb of sample size as suggested by (Tabachnick et al. 2007). These researchers will recommend using the confidence interval as a formula to calculate the sample size of the study. The data from this stage will then undergo Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to validate the measurement model. Subsequently, when the measurement model has been validated, the model will be converted to a structural model for hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling (SEM) because suitable for a complex structural model with many constructs and relationships (Rigdon et al. 2017 & Hair et al. 2019). Finally, the researcher will use a bootstrapping approach to test the mediation effect because Sobel's test by Baron and Kenny's (1986) failed to explain the normality of the indirect effect (Hair et al., 2017).

4 Discussions

This study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates physical environment dimensions, perceived value and guest satisfaction simultaneously in Airbnb, Malaysia. The study will select the guests who have experience staying in Malaysian Airbnb will be as a target population, and an online survey will be conducted. The proposed conceptual model will offer insightful information about the formulation and validation of domains that measure physical environment dimensions, perceived value and guest satisfaction among international and domestic Airbnb guests. This study expects to discover a significant positive influence of physical environment dimensions on perceived value and guest satisfaction. The study also expects that there will be a significant positive relationship between physical environment dimensions and perceived value, where perceived value will have a positive impact on guest satisfaction.

Most importantly, this study will test two mediating effects: (1) the mediation effect of perceived value on the relationship between ambience and guest satisfaction relationship, (2) the mediation effect of perceived value on the relationship between amenities and guest satisfaction. This research will improve the attractiveness of the physical environment in the Airbnb setting, thereby offering valuable experience and satisfaction to guests.

5 Theoretical and Practical Contribution

Theoretically, this study will contribute to several aspects. The first contribution is the development of a new research model. This study will integrate the four constructs simultaneously in one model: ambience, amenities, perceived value, and guest satisfaction. Consequently, five hypotheses are proposed in a research model that is considered a significant contribution to the existing literature.

The second contribution is the selection of the population of the study. This study will focus on examining specifically on international and domestic guest who has experienced Airbnb in Malaysia. Evaluating this population is crucial for developing an effective market positioning strategy since each population has a different culture, lifestyle, and behaviour. In addition, this study will provide valuable inputs to various stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality sector in Malaysia.

This study will also help practitioners better understand how each dimension stimulate to evoking guests' perceived value and eventually affect guest satisfaction. Due to the dynamic nature of Airbnb lodgings, the physical environment has a growing ability to produce good perceived value and assure positive satisfaction. Due to Airbnb's genuine and homelike aesthetic, guests see their stay as a one-of-a-kind experience.

6 Conclusion

This paper presents a research proposal with regards to the effect of physical environment dimensions, namely ambience and amenities, perceived value, and guest satisfaction, to recommend effective strategies for Airbnb hosts and industry players in Malaysia. The growing body of knowledge indicates that physical environment experiences will have a revolutionary effect on emerging sectors such as Airbnb. In that instance, Airbnb guests' future behaviour will be influenced by various factors, including ambience and amenities. Additionally, guest responses to physical environment variables may vary according to their demographic distinctions. Thus, Airbnb that comprehend and adapt will invariably leap ahead of the curve to adapt to new standards.

7 About the author

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