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Leveraging the experiencescape for destination attractiveness: Empirical insights from casino resorts

Abstract

Purpose: The experiencescape is a relatively new concept, and research using it remains scarce. This study contributes to the understanding of the experiencescape and its role in tourism consumption by constructing a novel conceptual model of the experiencescape elements of a casino resort visit and their effects on its attractiveness.

Design/methodology/approach: Partial least squares structural equation modelling was employed, using data collected from 491 casino resort visitors in Macao, to establish a link between the experiencescape and visitors' perceived overall attractiveness of the casino resort through the mediating effect of arousal.

Findings: The findings establish the relationship between experiencescapes and the perceived overall attractiveness of integrated casino resorts through the mediating effect of arousal.

Originality: This study presents novel insights into the role of emotions in an integrated casino resort context. It identifies a set of strategies through which managers can increase the attractiveness of their resorts by stimulating customers' emotions.

Practical implications: Casino resort executives are advised to orchestrate various experience elements from the perspective of the experiencescape to trigger positive tourism experiences. Specifically, all factors related to tangible, gaming and non-gaming, and social experiential stimuli need to be continually reviewed, improved, and innovated.

Keywords: experiencescape, gaming experience, non-gaming experience, arousal, destination attractiveness, integrated casino resorts

Introduction

Over the past five decades, a substantial body of literature has emerged on servicescapes (Tasci and Pizam, 2020). However, some scholars argue that the servicescape concept, which focuses on the micro-level environment, offers limited guidance for systematic service delivery (Chen et al., 2022). To address this limitation, researchers have adopted the broader concept of 'experiencescape', which is defined as the comprehensive and interactive framework that includes diverse inputs from various actors and activities, shaping the consumer's experience journey (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). In the tourism field, the concept of the experiencescape is relatively new and under-researched (Radic et al., 2021). Scholars note that the experiencescape transforms a simple conceptual space into a complex one, incorporating tangible assets as well as social, cultural, and emotional elements (Chen et al., 2023a).

Pizam and Tasci (2019) proposed six dimensions of the experiencescape: sensory, functional, social, natural, cultural, and hospitality. Other studies suggest that experiencescape

components are context-dependent, varying significantly across sectors of the hospitality, tourism, and leisure industries (Zong et al., 2023). Although existing studies have explored the dimensions of the experiencescape in several contexts, such as cruise-ship dining (Radic et al., 2021), travel dining (Mhlanga, 2024), and the spa-hotel (Chen et al., 2023a), their findings highlight the flexibility and variability of the experiencescape concept across different settings (Chen et al., 2023b). However, research on the experiencescape and related issues in the context of integrated resorts remains limited. Understanding the nature and role of the experiencescape is crucial for designing memorable, meaningful, and valuable experiences (Kandampully et al., 2023), especially in the context of the integrated resorts industry (Ji and Yan, 2023).

The recent surge in legalised casino gaming and the proliferation of casino resorts globally have reshaped the tourism and hospitality industry, positioning casino resort experiences as a distinct form of leisure travel (Ji and Prentice, 2021). For example, Macao, a micro-economy dominated by the casino resort industry, attracted 28.23 million tourists in 2023 (Macao Government Tourism Office, 2024). Compared to traditional tourism and hospitality properties, casino resorts offer accessible, inclusive, and distinctive tourism experiences (Volgger et al., 2019). These resorts provide not only gaming but also non-gaming activities, such as shopping, dining, shows, events, and sightseeing. In the era of the experience economy, tourism scholars assert that experiences can be thematised and linked to visitors' perceptions of destination attractiveness (Wu et al., 2015). Despite the widespread popularity and economic significance of the casino resort business model, few studies have explored the underlying mechanisms linking experiential elements and the perceived attractiveness of casino resorts (Prentice et al., 2022). This gap impedes the development of a robust knowledge base for experience research in various industry settings. Scholars have also highlighted the challenge of understanding tourism experiences in specific contexts (Kastenholz et al., 2018). As a subcategory of the tourism and hospitality industry, it is essential to explore experiencescape elements in this field and examine their influence on customer perceptions of casino resort attractiveness.

Moreover, one area in which current knowledge is scarce is the mediation of the relationship between experiencescape and attractiveness. A potential mediator is the customer's emotional response to the experiencescape. Emotion is widely recognised as a key determinant of tourist experiences (Şahin and Güzel, 2020). Based on the pleasure–arousal–dominance framework proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), arousal is considered a crucial type of emotion necessary for emotion generation (Huang et al., 2020). Scholars argue that emotional arousal, as a response to environmental stimuli, shapes customer perceptions of the experience and influences their behaviour (Su et al., 2020). However, little is known about the relationships between experience elements, emotional arousal, and tourist perceptions within the experiencescape framework (Pizam and Tasci, 2019; Tasci and Pizam, 2020; Kandampully et al., 2023). Additionally, the level of arousal and its impact on customer psychology or

behaviour can be situation-specific (Doucé and Adams, 2020). To the best of our knowledge, this research is the first to explore the potential connections between the experiencescape, emotional arousal, and visitors' perceptions of attractiveness in the integrated resort context.

In view of the above research gaps, this paper investigates the relationship between experiencescapes and overall attractiveness in the context of casino gaming resorts. Specifically, the main aims of this paper are as follows: (1) to construct a model to provide an improved understanding of the mechanisms through which experiencescape influences attractiveness perceptions based on Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) stimulus–organism–response (S-O-R) model, (2) to identify the relative importance of the constructs within the proposed model in affecting customers' attractiveness perception, and (3) to examine the mediating role of emotional arousal in the formation process of customers' perceptions of attractiveness. This study makes significant original contributions by presenting a novel application of the S-O-R model to the casino resort context, offering unique insights into the interplay between experiential elements and customer perceptions. In particular, this research advances the theoretical understanding of how the experiencescape influences attractiveness perceptions in casino resorts. Additionally, it identifies the relative importance of various experiencescape dimensions and examines the mediating role of emotional arousal in shaping customers' perceptions of attractiveness. Exploring these critical issues from the experiencescape perspective will help industry professionals strategically manage specific experiential elements to enhance the perceived attractiveness of casino resorts. This study not only enriches the academic literature but also provides actionable recommendations for improving customer experiences and competitive positioning in the casino resort sector, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Literature review and development of hypotheses

Elements of the experiencescape

Since Pine and Gilmore (1999) introduced the concept of the experience economy, creating memorable customer experiences has become a key management objective for firms, including those in tourism and hospitality (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016; Kandampully et al., 2018). Scholars argue that an experiential approach is needed to understand the service–delivery–consumption process holistically (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Accordingly, Pizam and Tasci (2019) proposed the broader concept of 'experienscape' to represent the mix of inputs from various actors and activities during the consumer's experience journey. The 'experienscape', widely considered synonymous with 'experiencescape', refers to the 'experience landscape' in which experiences are co-constructed (Pizam and Tasci, 2019).

In tourism research, although mentioned earlier by Quan and Wang (2004) and O'Dell (2005), the concept of the experiencescape has recently gained more attention (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). It encompasses tangible elements and social, cultural, and emotional components (Chen

et al., 2023a). Scholars argue that the experiencescape is context-dependent, leading to varying components across different sectors (Ji and Yan, 2023; Zong et al., 2023). Pizam and Tasci (2019) proposed a six-dimensional framework, but other scholars have suggested different dimensions in various contexts. For example, Radic et al. (2021) identified three dimensions in cruise-ship dining: perceived crowdedness, dining atmospherics, and interaction with other guests. Opoku et al. (2023) found that speciality coffee shop experiencescapes are shaped by individual tastes, social connections, and ambiance. Saragih (2023) identified dimensions such as health and safety measures and thrilling adventures in theme parks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chen et al. (2023a) identified four components in spa-hotels: health promotion treatments, mental learning, unique travel experiences, and healthy diet. Zong et al. (2023) defined eight components in Hanfu tourism: social, cultural, historical, sensory factors, hospitality culture, functionalities, technological interventions, and natural elements. Mhlanga (2024) distinguished ten dimensions in travel dining experiencescapes: entertainment, aesthetics, education, escapism, serendipity, localness, personalisation, ethical consumerism, hospitableness, and communitas. Given the flexibility of the experiencescape concept (Chen et al., 2023b), a broader understanding is essential for designing memorable, meaningful, and valuable experiences (Kandampully et al., 2023). The experiencescape should be seen as a sequence of elements unique to the context of the experience (Kandampully et al., 2023).

Scholars characterise casino resorts as experience-based destinations that offer a wide range of leisure experiences (Xiao et al., 2022). Existing studies link gaming elements (Prentice et al., 2022; Lai and Hitchcock, 2020), non-gaming elements (Prentice et al., 2022; Lai and Hitchcock, 2020), physical objects (Gao and Lai, 2015), and social elements (Tuguinay et al., 2022; Io, 2017) to customer experiences. Thus, this study synthesises existing research on casino resort visitors' experiences using the experiencescape framework.

A four-dimensional construct is proposed that includes physical setting, gaming experience, non-gaming experience, and social interaction. Physical elements are based on classifications by Bitner (1992) and Pizam and Tasci (2019), which were tested by Chang (2016) and Dong and Siu (2013). These encompass sensory, functional, and natural aspects, which are widely accepted in experiencescape literature (Pizam and Tasci, 2019; Kandampully et al., 2023; Saragih, 2023). Gaming and non-gaming components focus on the functional service environment (Bitner, 1992; Pizam and Tasci, 2019), classified by the types of products and services provided (Ji and Prentice, 2021). These are linked to functional, cultural, and hospitality elements (Ji et al., 2024), which are important in the experiencescape framework (Pizam and Tasci, 2019). Finally, social interaction elements are adapted from Campos et al. (2018) and Walls (2013), highlighting the importance of customer interactions. These interactions reflect the cultural component noted by Pizam and Tasci (2019). Together, these components emphasise the multifaceted nature of the casino resort experiencescape, highlighting the interplay of various elements that shape the overall experience.

Experiencescape and arousal

This study utilises the S-O-R model introduced by Mehrabian and Russell (1974) to investigate the impact of environmental stimuli on human cognitive and affective reactions and subsequently the influence of these reactions on human behaviour. The S-O-R model is widely adopted in tourism and hospitality research (Şahin and Kılıçlar, 2023). For example, Chen et al. (2023a) explored the influence of the wellness tourism experiencescape on tourist revisit intentions by investigating the mediation roles of authenticity, memorability, and organisational identification.

Regarding the stimuli component (S), existing studies have examined the impact of physical stimuli on customers' emotional states (Ryu and Jang, 2007). In the context of the servicescape, the physical environment in which the service and customer interact is emphasised as a key stimulus (Kim et al., 2020). The second part of the S-O-R model, organism (O), serves as a bridge between stimuli and responses (Bagozzi, 1986). Organism refers to the emotional states generated by environmental stimuli (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), usually classified as pleasure, arousal, and dominance. Although Mehrabian and Russell (1974) viewed these dimensions as distinct, Russell and Pratt (1980) argued that pleasure and arousal are interrelated. Later studies have combined these constructs (e.g., 'pleasant arousal' in Lertbuasin (2015)) to determine the impact of environmental stimuli (Sun et al., 2021). However, this study follows Oh et al. (2007) and Mody et al. (2019) in treating arousal and pleasure as distinct constructs. Arousal includes finding the experience interesting, stimulating, and exciting, excluding enjoyment, which relates to pleasure. Scholars have argued that physical environments significantly influence customers' pleasure and arousal (Moon et al., 2016). Wang et al. (2020) confirmed that physical stimuli positively affect tourists' arousal levels. In integrated resorts, physical setting elements such as ambient conditions, spatial layout, and design are critical components (Prentice et al., 2022), yet the relationship between the physical environment and visitors' arousal has not been empirically examined. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1. Physical setting elements have a significant positive impact on customers' arousal in an integrated resort.

Scholars have argued that the stimuli component of the S-O-R model should be expanded to include both physical environments and customers' perceptions of the nature of their interactions with employees, be they conscious or subconscious (Sun et al., 2021). In tourism and hospitality literature, Choi and Kandampully (2019) noted that when a customer enters an environment, their experience is influenced not by a single physical stimulus, but by a combination of various physical and non-physical stimuli that are cognitively grouped together, resulting in holistic perceptions. Furthermore, Chen et al. (2022) confirmed that perceived destination attributes, which include social environment, cultural resources and entertainment,

accessibility, tourism safety and security, natural attractions, shopping, and tourism infrastructure and service, positively drive honeymooners' emotions based on the S-O-R model. In particular, Jiang (2020) verified that tourists' perceptions of the natural soundscape are positively associated with arousal. As a one-stop, all-inclusive entertainment centre, integrated resorts rely on both gaming and non-gaming elements to enhance tourists' experiences (Prentice et al., 2022), and these elements are considered key stimuli for eliciting positive emotions in visitors (Io, 2017). Based on these considerations, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H2. Gaming experience elements have a significant positive impact on customers' arousal in an integrated resort.

H3. Non-gaming experience elements have a significant positive impact on customers' arousal in an integrated resort.

In their study using the S-O-R model to assess customer experience of a themed hotel, Sun et al. (2021) argued that the nature of a customer's positive attitude towards a themed hotel can be influenced by the physical setting, ambience, and social stimuli. Compos et al. (2015) also highlighted the importance of the active participation and interaction of customers in the tourism experience from the tourists' perspective. Tuerlan and Scott's (2021) systematic literature review on the factors that elicit emotions within the S-O-R framework in the context of hospitality and tourism indicates that the social environment is one of the five most critical stimuli for arousing positive emotions (including arousal). In the integrated resort context, social interaction has been identified as a motivator for gambling among casino customers (Tuguinay et al., 2022). Ji and Yan (2023) identified the social component as one of the key experience elements of integrated resorts. Finally, Li et al. (2023) confirmed that social stimuli or social interaction factors positively influence tourists' emotional ties to an integrated resort. Based on the above factors, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H4. Social interaction elements have a significant positive impact on customers' arousal in an integrated resort.

Arousal and perceived attractiveness

Oh et al. (2007) defined arousal as 'the intensity of physiological response to a stimulus on the continuum from calmness to excitement', which creates positive memories and leads to favourable evaluations of a vacation trip (Bagozzi, 1996). These evaluations represent customers' responses in the S-O-R model, including outcomes such as memories, satisfaction, place attachment, loyalty, and post-experience behaviours (Ji and Prentice, 2021; Şahin and Güzel, 2020). For instance, Ryu and Jang (2007) showed a significant influence of arousal on customer behavioural intentions in upscale restaurants, while Sun et al. (2021) found a positive

relationship between pleasant arousal and place attachment in themed hotels. Despite these findings, research on the relationship between arousal and perceived attractiveness is scarce. Jin et al. (2021) found that heightened arousal during a virtual reality (VR) store experience leads to higher perceived store attractiveness. In tourism and hospitality, no study has yet investigated the relationship between emotional arousal and customer perceptions of attractiveness, particularly in integrated resorts. Research on attractiveness in tourism has mainly focused on specific elements of a destination, such as local food (Guan and Jones, 2015), cultural heritage (Wu et al., 2015), and overall destination attractiveness (Vengesai et al., 2009). Given the significant growth of casino resorts as prominent and attractive tourism destinations (Ji and Prentice, 2021), it is essential to explore the relationship between arousal and customer perceptions of casino resort attractiveness. Therefore, we proposed the following hypothesis:

H5. Arousal has a significant positive impact on the perceived overall attractiveness of an integrated resort.

Mediation effects of arousal

The S-O-R model posits that environmental stimuli influence individuals' emotional states, which in turn determine their responses (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). In other words, emotions are seen as consequences of environmental perceptions and as antecedents of tourists' responses. In tourism and hospitality research, arousal is considered one of the key emotional state variables, and its mediating role has been confirmed based on the S-O-R model. For instance, Zhang and Xu (2019) found that emotional arousal mediates the positive effects of physical, social, socially symbolic, and natural toursapes on liminal experiences. Similarly, Wang et al. (2020) confirmed that arousal levels mediate the relationship between environmental stimuli (including physical stimuli, intrinsic motivation, and attitude stimuli) and tourist experiences. These findings suggest that arousal, which serves as the organism in the S-O-R model, may mediate the impact of various environmental stimuli on tourists' perceived destination attractiveness. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6. Arousal significantly mediates the positive effects of (a) physical setting elements, (b) gaming experience elements, (c) non-gaming experience elements, and (d) social interaction elements on perceived overall attractiveness.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study, which encapsulates the various hypotheses used in this study.

Figure 1 near here

Methods

Sample and data collection

Given the subject of this study, the target sampling population comprised individuals who had both gaming and non-gaming experiences in Macao, known as ‘the Las Vegas of Asia’. Due to the difficulty of obtaining a known population and establishing a sampling frame, a convenience sampling approach was applied. Trained research assistants approached customers at the entrances of six selected casino resorts: Galaxy Macau, MGM Cotai, Wynn Palace, Venetian Macao, City of Dreams, and Grand Lisboa. As of October 2024, Macao’s six licensed gaming operators had collectively managed 30 casinos or casino resorts. These six selected properties are the most representative casino resorts operated by these companies.

A pretest with 36 casino resort visitors was conducted to refine the questionnaire. Data were collected on different days and times over two months. To ensure respondent eligibility, a filtering question verified that participants had experience with both gaming and non-gaming activities at casino resorts. Data collection was conducted at various times throughout the day and week to capture a diverse range of tourists. A total of 550 eligible customers were invited to participate, all of whom completed the survey. After excluding 59 sets of responses due to missing values or extreme answers, 491 valid responses were used for further data analysis.

Measures

Following the example of Campos et al. (2018), four dimensions were identified to assess the experiencescape of casino resorts. The scale for the physical setting component was synthesised and redesigned from Chang (2016) and Dong and Siu (2013), resulting in a nine-item measure. A sample item is ‘The casino resort I visited boasts a plethora of unique theme attractions with distinctive architecture and landscape settings’. The scales for both the gaming experience and non-gaming experience components were adapted from Gao and Lai (2015) and further refined by Ji and Prentice (2021), each consisting of four items. For the gaming experience component, an example item is ‘The casino resort I visited offers my preferred types of gaming’. For the non-gaming experience component, an example item is ‘The casino resort I visited offers a diverse range of non-gaming services’. The social interaction component was measured using a six-item scale adapted from Walls (2013). A sample item is ‘I felt warmly welcomed during my visit to the casino resort’. The arousal scale, comprising three items, was adapted from Oh et al. (2007). A sample item is ‘How stimulating did you find your stay at this casino resort?’ Finally, the perceived attractiveness scale, with three items, was adapted from a study by Guan and Jones (2015). An example item is ‘Overall, I found the casino resort I visited to be highly attractive’. All the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = ‘strongly disagree’ to 5 = ‘strongly agree’).

Data analysis

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed in the data analysis, which was operationalised using SmartPLS 3.0. In this study, the results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test indicated that the data present a non-normal distribution, and the model is also a relatively complex one. Scholars have verified that PLS-SEM is widely regarded as an appropriate approach to ensure the validity of analysis results when dealing with small-sample data, a relatively complex model, or non-normal distributions (Hair et al., 2012; Sarstedt et al., 2014). PLS-SEM was therefore considered the best option for this study. During the execution of the PLS-SEM analysis, a two-step approach was strictly followed, in which the structural model was examined after the measurement model had been assessed via confirmatory factor analysis (Manley et al., 2020).

Demographic profile

The demographic information of the respondents is presented in Table 1. Of the 491 participants, 41.8% were female and 58.2% were male. In terms of age, 24.9% of the respondents were aged 21 to 24, 31.8% were aged 25 to 34, 27.3% were aged 35 to 44, and 16.1% were aged 45 and above. Regarding monthly personal income, 48.9% of the respondents had a monthly income level of over HK\$9,000. Regarding education level, 52.4% of respondents had received a bachelor's degree or greater.

Table 1 near here

Results

Exploratory factor analysis

The data were first divided randomly into two separate datasets. The primary dataset was utilised for the purpose of undertaking an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Based on the research by Howard and Henderson (2023), which indicates that principal axis factoring and varimax rotation methods are among the most popular techniques in tourism and hospitality research, EFA was conducted using these methods to extract factors and items. Due to their factor loadings being under the recommended value of 0.4 (Pituch and Stevens, 2015), three specific items from the experiencescape construct were eliminated. The results of EFA rotated factor loadings are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 near here

Assessing common method bias

Common method bias (CMB) is a potential threat when data for all variables are collected from the same respondents at the same time. Several methods have been adopted to address this issue. First, simple vocabulary and sentences were used in the questionnaire design to ensure accurate understanding by the respondents (Hew et al., 2018). Second, Harman's single-factor

test showed that the foremost unrotated principal component accounted for 45.34% of the overall shared variance, below the advised 50% limit (Harman, 1960), implying that CMB did not significantly influence the research. Finally, Kock's (2015) procedure for inspecting variance inflation factors (VIFs) at the factor level showed all values below the cut-off point of 3.3, suggesting that the research was unaffected by CMB.

Inspecting the measurement model

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted with a focus on both reliability and validity. In terms of construct reliability, we evaluated using Dijkstra–Henseler's rho (rho_a) for internal consistency and Jöreskog's composite reliability (rho_c) for the consistency of construct indicators. Since all the values surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2012), the reliability of all constructs was affirmed. The validity of each construct was assessed through the lens of convergent validity and discriminant validity, as suggested by Sarstedt et al. (2014). As shown in Table 2, the findings showed that all item factor loadings exceeded the benchmark of 0.6 set by Chin (1998a), thereby confirming the achievement of convergent validity.

Discriminant validity was first examined using the criteria proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) in conjunction with cross-loading criteria. As illustrated by the data in Table 3, the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded the corresponding correlation coefficients, thereby demonstrating satisfactory discriminant validity. Moreover, as inferred from Table 4, each item displayed higher loadings on its own construct than on any other construct, further substantiating the confirmation of discriminant validity (Sarstedt et al., 2014).

Table 3 near here

Table 4 near here

Measurement model

Following the attainment of satisfactory results from the measurement model, the analysis proceeded to the evaluation of the structural model. This involved examining the statistical significance of the proposed hypotheses through a bootstrapping procedure that incorporated 5,000 bootstrap iterations. Although PLS-SEM is not as reliant on model fit as covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) (Hair et al., 2019), the present study employed the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR) suggested by Henseler et al. (2016) as a bootstrap-based model test. The resulting SRMR value of 0.083 was below the threshold of 0.1 as per the guidelines provided by SmartPLS, thereby confirming the appropriate fit of the model for this study.

The predictive accuracy of the model was evaluated using the coefficient of determination (R^2) values. All associated R^2 values (arousal: 0.551; perceived attractiveness: 0.286) exceeded

the recommended threshold of 0.1, as recommended by Chin (1998b), thereby affirming the model's predictive accuracy. To ascertain the predictive relevance of the model, the Q^2 value proposed by Sarstedt et al. (2014) was employed. According to Hair et al. (2017), a Q^2 value greater than zero indicates the model's predictive relevance. In this study, all Q^2 values (arousal: 0.429; perceived attractiveness: 0.227) were significantly above zero, thereby demonstrating the model's overall predictive relevance.

Test of research hypotheses

The results of the hypothesis testing are concisely summarised in Table 5. The findings revealed that elements such as the physical setting ($\beta = 0.305$, $T = 6.512$), gaming experience ($\beta = 0.164$, $T = 2.948$), non-gaming experience ($\beta = 0.149$, $T = 2.741$), and social interaction ($\beta = 0.260$, $T = 4.745$) each had a significant positive impact on arousal. Moreover, arousal was found to exert a considerable positive influence on perceived attractiveness ($\beta = 0.536$, $T = 14.048$). Consequently, hypotheses H1, H2, H3, H4, and H5 were supported.

Table 5 near here

To evaluate the mediation effect of arousal between experiencescape dimensions and perceived attractiveness, the bootstrapping method recommended by Hair et al. (2017) was followed. As shown in Table 6, the indirect effects of all experiencescape dimensions through arousal to perceived attractiveness were significant, and 97.5% of the bootstrap confidence intervals did not include zero. Therefore, hypotheses H6a, H6b, H6c, and H6d are supported.

Table 6 near here

Discussion and conclusion

Conclusion

The main focus of this study has been to explore how experiencescapes affect the perceived attractiveness of casino resorts. Inspired by previous experiencescape studies, this study constructed a structural model with nine theoretical hypotheses based on the S-O-R model. The structural model was examined with SmartPLS 3.0 using data collected from 491 casino resort visitors in Macao.

The findings of this study reveal that the casino resort experiencescape significantly affects visitors' arousal. Specifically, the physical setting component had the greatest significant impact on arousal ($\beta = 0.305$), followed by the social interaction component ($\beta = 0.260$) and the gaming experience component ($\beta = 0.164$), with the non-gaming experience component having the smallest (but still significant) influence ($\beta = 0.149$). These results align with previous studies by Lockwood and Pyun (2019) and Wang et al. (2020), which highlighted the importance of physical stimuli in influencing arousal in the field of tourism and hospitality research. In addition, while scholars have argued that social stimuli/interaction influence

tourists' positive emotions (Tuerlan and Scott, 2021; Li et al., 2023), only a few studies have empirically examined this relationship. Within the context of casino resorts, this study extends the existing literature by examining the impact of experience elements (both gaming and non-gaming) and social interaction on arousal.

Moreover, the study's findings support arousal theory, which posits that environmental factors induce a physiological autonomic response that influences behaviour (Harrison, 2015). By taking arousal as a mediator, this study elucidated the mechanism through which experiencescape dimensions affect visitors' perceived attractiveness of casino resorts. The results demonstrate that the four experiencescape dimensions stimulate visitors' mental responses and arouse their emotions, which in turn influences their evaluation of the casino resort's attractiveness. The mediation effect of arousal has also been confirmed by other researchers (Wang et al., 2020; Su et al., 2020; Şahin and Güze, 2020).

In addition, destination attractiveness has become a crucial factor for tourism destination managers and researchers (Yin et al., 2020). This study builds on the existing body of research by focusing on the factors that influence tourists' perceived destination attractiveness (Thio et al., 2024; Guan and Jones, 2015; Wu et al., 2015). However, unlike existing studies, this study constructed an integrated model linking tourists' perceived destination attractiveness and experiencescape elements and revealed the underlying psychological mechanisms of the transformation between them within the context of casino resorts.

Theoretical implications

Based on the results obtained in this study, some potential implications and meaningful insights can be inferred. First, given that the experiencescape is a relatively new concept, few studies have proposed a conceptual model related to this research area (Tasci and Pizam, 2020; Pizam and Tasci, 2019). In recent years, few studies have begun to explore the impact of experiencescapes on tourists' psychology and behaviour in different contexts based on the S-O-R model. For example, Chen et al. (2023) found that existential authenticity–memorability and existential authenticity–organisational identification exerted full positive mediation effects in the relationship between the wellness tourism experiencescape and revisit intention. Cui et al. (2024) verified the mediation effect of affective/cognitive value in bridging experiencescapes, co-creation behaviour, and subjective well-being in the context of home-based accommodations at cultural heritage sites. However, distinct from existing studies, this research originally explored the impact and underlying mechanisms of the experiencescape on perceived destination attractiveness in the context of casino resorts. Following the logic of the S-O-R paradigm, this study adds to the emerging literature on experiencescapes by empirically examining the relationships between experiencescape, arousal, and attractiveness perceptions. The present research has also responded to scholars' appeals for a more comprehensive

understanding of the experiencescape based on a multidisciplinary approach (Tasci and Pizam, 2020; Pizam and Tasci, 2019).

Second, the findings contribute to the tourism and hospitality literature by extending the framework to the casino resort setting. Although previous studies in servicescape research have confirmed that physical cues play a crucial role in the formation of customers' arousal (Sun et al., 2021; Lin and Worthley, 2012), few have explored the role of non-physical cues in triggering visitors' arousal (Hyun and Kang, 2014). Casino resorts provide visitors with a highly diversified visiting experience that includes both physical and non-physical cues. In this regard, this research sheds new light on the exploration of visitors' emotional responses. The findings of this study suggest that it is necessary to broaden the S-O-R paradigm by including a wider range of stimulus variables to explore visitors' sociopsychological mechanisms.

Lastly, while attractiveness has been widely researched in the tourism and hospitality literature (Wu et al., 2015; Giglio et al., 2019), there is a lack of studies investigating the formation mechanism of destination attractiveness focused on one-stop travel destinations, such as casino resorts. Therefore, this paper makes a theoretically important contribution to the existing destination attractiveness literature by incorporating perceived attractiveness into the expanded nomological network of the experiencescape, as proposed by Tasci and Pizam (2020) and based on the S-O-R paradigm (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The study confirmed that visitor arousal could be recognised as an intrinsic mediating factor in the relationship between experiencescape and perceived attractiveness, a novel insight that has been largely overlooked in previous literature.

Practical implications

This study provides valuable insights for industry practitioners and policymakers. Developing casino resorts is highly capital intensive and requires a long-term financial commitment, but substantial investment and ongoing maintenance are justified because they are closely associated with the resort's perceived attractiveness through the mediating effect of arousal.

First, casino resort executives should orchestrate various experience elements from the perspective of the experiencescape to trigger positive tourism experiences. All factors related to tangible, gaming, non-gaming, and social experiential stimuli need to be continually reviewed, improved, and innovated. For instance, themed zones, such as a tropical paradise or futuristic cityscape, can enhance visual appeal and create a unique atmosphere. Features such as indoor waterfalls, interactive digital art displays, and advanced technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) can captivate visitors and elevate their overall experience. Sensory elements, including ambient lighting, themed scents, and background music, can be integrated into non-gaming areas to create a more immersive environment. In gaming zones, it is essential to ensure that these areas are functional and engaging by incorporating interactive elements and maintaining a high standard of service. Non-gaming

zones should include attractions such as virtual reality gaming zones, interactive art installations, and live performance spaces to engage visitors. Additionally, social elements are crucial in the experiencescape. Training programmes that emphasise social interaction values can enhance staff communication skills and better serve a diverse clientele.

Second, the design and application of experiencescape elements within a casino resort should evoke positive psychological responses from customers. Casino resort executives should use a multidisciplinary design approach, including professional interior designers, architects, and psychological experts, to ensure that the physical environment aligns with psychological principles that enhance customer arousal and satisfaction. For example, design features known to positively influence psychological states, such as natural elements that promote relaxation, vibrant colours that uplift the spirit, and ergonomic layouts that encourage social interaction, should be used. Additionally, incorporating artificial intelligence (AI) can personalise guest experiences by analysing preferences and behaviours to offer tailored recommendations and services.

Third, casino resort operators need to adopt quantitative rubrics to ensure the role of the experiencescape element in the attractiveness of the casino resort, as well as changes in the casino's attractiveness itself. Casino resort managers could use customer surveys and mystery-client exercises to monitor visitors' overall experiences and evaluate different aspects of visitor–staff interactions. Executives can implement regular feedback sessions in which visitors share their experiences directly with management, providing valuable insights. Training programmes emphasising social interaction values could be provided for all frontline employees, including role-playing scenarios to enhance staff communication skills and workshops on cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, in light of potential threats like pandemics, casino resorts should develop robust health and safety protocols, including enhanced cleaning procedures, contactless services, and flexible booking policies to ensure guest safety and confidence. By adopting these strategies, casino resort managers can create a compelling experiencescape that enhances visitor arousal, attractiveness, and overall satisfaction, leading to greater visitor loyalty and repeat patronage.

Limitations and future research

The main limitations of this study are as follows. First, this research is a preliminary exploration of the experiencescape concept in casino resorts, highlighting a significant knowledge gap that requires further investigation. Second, the proposed model focuses solely on the customers' perspective, whereas a multiple-stakeholder perspective could provide a more holistic understanding. Third, the components of the experiencescape identified by the gaming and non-gaming sectors are a rough classification, with different segments potentially impacting customer experiences differently, thus warranting separate investigation. Fourth, this study did

not consider moderating variables, such as whether the respondents were first-time visitors or the influence of socio-demographic factors (age, income, and gender).

Future research could explore several directions. For instance, social interactions among consumers and between consumers and employees may influence emotions differently, creating varying levels of arousal. Examining these differences could deepen our understanding of the customer experience and offer more insights into marketing strategies and customer services for resort operators. Additionally, residents, vendors, communities, social organisations, and policymakers may also impact the customer experiencescape and resort attractiveness, warranting a multiple-stakeholder perspective. Furthermore, the impacts of various segments of the gaming and non-gaming sectors remain unclear and require further examination. As research on experiencescapes in casino resorts is relatively new, further investigation into these elements and their relationship with factors such as customer satisfaction, loyalty, and property attractiveness will significantly contribute to the literature.

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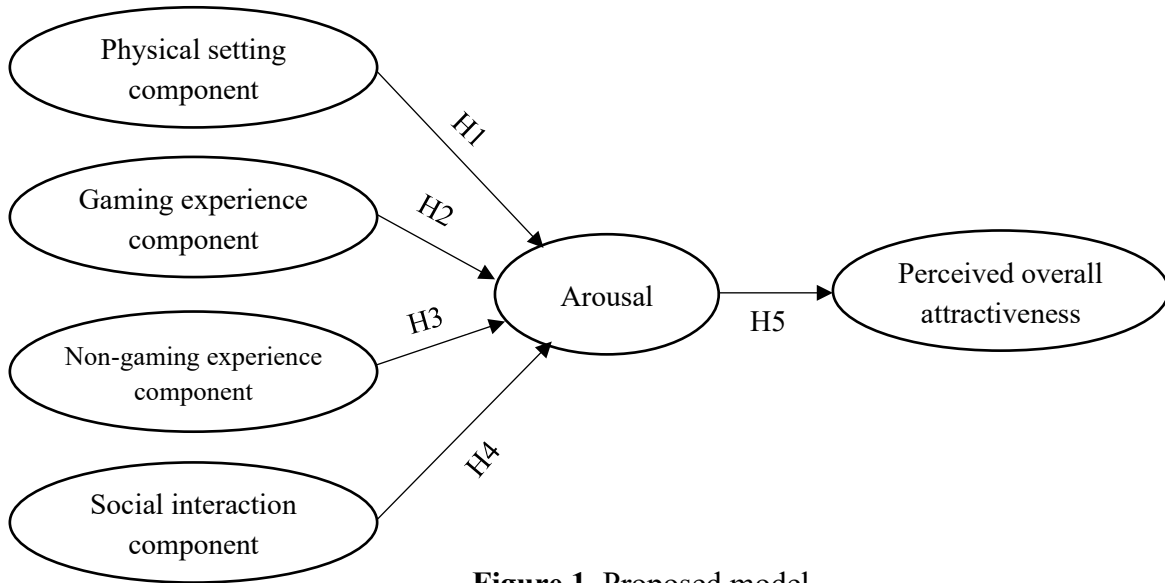


Table 1 Demographic Information

Characteristic		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	286	58.2
	Female	205	41.8
Age	21-24	122	24.9
	25-34	156	31.8
	35-44	134	27.3
	≥45	79	16.1
Education level	High school or less	234	47.6
	Bachelors	237	48.3
	Masters and above	20	4.1
Personal monthly income	< HK\$3,000	74	15.1
	HK\$3,000-6,000	100	20.4
	HK\$6,001-9,000	77	15.7
	HK\$9,001-12,000	51	10.4
	≥ HK\$12,000	189	38.5

Table 2 Summary of EFA and Measurement Model Results

Constructs and indicators	EFA Factor	Outer Factor	AVE	Composite Reliability	
	Loadings	Loadings		rho_a	rho_c
Physical setting component	Factor 1				
PSE1	0.73	0.74	0.59	0.92	0.93
PSE 2	0.65	0.74			
PSE3	0.74	0.73			
PSE4	0.65	0.68			
PSE5	0.68	0.81			
PSE6	0.69	0.81			
PSE7	0.69	0.83			
PSE8	0.82	0.82			
PSE9	0.81	0.73			
Gaming experience	Factor 2				
GAM1	0.72	0.84	0.66	0.83	0.88
GAM2	0.88	0.80			
GAM3	0.87	0.80			
GAM4	0.80	0.80			
Non-gaming experience	Factor 3				
NGA1	0.79	0.87	0.67	0.84	0.89
NGA2	0.73	0.86			
NGA3	0.77	0.84			
NGA4	0.64	0.69			
Social interaction	Factor 4				
SOC1	0.76	0.85	0.62	0.88	0.91
SOC2	0.75	0.84			
SOC3	0.79	0.82			
SOC4	0.79	0.79			
SOC5	0.82	0.77			
SOC6	0.69	0.65			
Arousal (ARO)	Factor 5				
ARO1	0.76	0.87	0.79	0.87	0.92
ARO2	0.83	0.90			
ARO3	0.86	0.89			
Perceived overall	Factor 6				
ATT1	0.85	0.90	0.80	0.88	0.92
ATT2	0.82	0.88			
ATT3	0.87	0.90			

Table 3 Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion

	Mean	S.D.	PSE	GAM	NGA	SOC	ARO	ATT
Physical setting (PSE)	3.54	0.69	0.77					
Gaming experience (GAM)	3.93	0.79	0.56	0.81				
Non-gaming experience (NGA)	3.89	0.76	0.54	0.75	0.82			
Social interaction (SOC)	3.72	0.77	0.62	0.68	0.62	0.79		
Arousal (ARO)	3.77	0.82	0.64	0.62	0.60	0.65	0.89	
Attractiveness (ATT)	4.01	0.88	0.49	0.79	0.70	0.52	0.54	0.90

Notes: The square root of the AVE for each construct is denoted in bold, while the inter-construct correlations are shown off-diagonally

Table 4 Item Loadings and Cross-loadings

	Physical setting	Gaming experience	Non-gaming	Social interaction	Arousal	Attractiveness
PSE1	0.74	0.36	0.35	0.38	0.40	0.33
PSE2	0.74	0.44	0.38	0.46	0.48	0.35
PSE3	0.73	0.44	0.43	0.45	0.50	0.42
PSE4	0.68	0.27	0.28	0.35	0.38	0.24
PSE5	0.81	0.47	0.45	0.52	0.50	0.40
PSE6	0.81	0.45	0.45	0.50	0.51	0.41
PSE7	0.83	0.50	0.48	0.54	0.54	0.46
PSE8	0.82	0.49	0.48	0.56	0.55	0.42
PSE9	0.73	0.37	0.35	0.44	0.49	0.30
GAM1	0.50	0.84	0.68	0.57	0.52	0.81
GAM2	0.43	0.80	0.69	0.55	0.51	0.62
GAM3	0.43	0.80	0.58	0.53	0.49	0.56
GAM4	0.44	0.80	0.49	0.56	0.51	0.55
NGA1	0.48	0.72	0.87	0.59	0.52	0.63
NGA2	0.43	0.67	0.86	0.51	0.48	0.64
NGA3	0.43	0.64	0.84	0.52	0.51	0.61
NGA4	0.43	0.43	0.69	0.39	0.44	0.41
SOC1	0.50	0.58	0.48	0.85	0.55	0.44
SOC2	0.55	0.59	0.54	0.84	0.52	0.47
SOC3	0.53	0.59	0.54	0.82	0.52	0.45
SOC4	0.47	0.53	0.47	0.79	0.53	0.42
SOC5	0.45	0.53	0.51	0.77	0.48	0.43
SOC6	0.40	0.39	0.37	0.65	0.48	0.26
ARO1	0.54	0.54	0.53	0.56	0.87	0.46
ARO2	0.57	0.55	0.55	0.58	0.90	0.50
ARO3	0.58	0.57	0.51	0.59	0.89	0.47
ATT1	0.44	0.70	0.64	0.47	0.51	0.90
ATT2	0.38	0.68	0.58	0.43	0.44	0.88
ATT3	0.49	0.73	0.66	0.50	0.49	0.90

Table 5 Results of the Structural Equation Modeling

Hypotheses	Paths	Path coefficients	S.E.	T statistics	Bias corrected confidence intervals	Supported
H1	Physical setting component → Arousal	0.305***	0.046	6.512	[0.213, 0.395]	Yes
H2	Gaming experience component → Arousal	0.164**	0.055	2.948	[0.049, 0.269]	Yes
H3	Non-gaming experience component → Arousal	0.149**	0.054	2.741	[0.046, 0.256]	Yes
H4	Social interaction component → Arousal	0.260**	0.054	4.745	[0.152, 0.365]	Yes
H5	Arousal → Perceived overall attractiveness	0.536***	0.038	14.048	[0.458, 0.608]	Yes

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 6 Results of the Mediation Analysis

Hypotheses and paths	Indirect effects	S.E.	T statistics	Bias corrected confidence intervals	Supported
H6a: Physical setting component → Arousal → Perceived overall attractiveness	0.164***	0.027	5.979	[0.113, 0.221]	Yes
H6b: Gaming experience component → Arousal → Perceived overall attractiveness	0.088**	0.032	2.747	[0.026, 0.152]	Yes
H6c: Non-gaming experience component → Arousal → Perceived overall attractiveness	0.080**	0.031	2.606	[0.022, 0.142]	Yes
H6d: Social interaction component → Arousal → Perceived overall attractiveness	0.140***	0.028	4.920	[0.086, 0.196]	Yes

Notes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.