Investigating the Role of Servicescape on Site Selection for Traditional and Virtual Event Venues: A Comparative Study

by

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Abstract

The meeting and event industry has transformed into one of the leading sectors of the hospitality and tourism industries, making it important for traditional and virtual event venues to understand the logistics behind meeting planners' site selection decisions. Previous research has shown consumers are influenced by their surroundings, or environmental factors known as 'servicescape'. This study examines the relationships between a venue's layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, and social factors for virtual event venues, in regards to meeting planners' intent to return to the venue or recommend it to others. Additionally, the study aims to identify any differences that exist between the traditional and virtual event venues. This empirical study applied a quantitative research method to survey a sample of meeting planners through an online-based questionnaire. Findings of the study indicate that the servicescape of an event venue can be influential in regards to a meeting planners' intent to recommend a venue, and the study identifies similarities and differences among venue types. Theoretical and managerial implications of the study are discussed and recommendations for future research are introduced.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview

   Over the past few decades, consumers have witnessed the emergence of the meeting and

event industry as a leading driver of the hospitality and tourism sectors in terms of income,

employment and investment (World Tourism Organization, 2014). In 2014 alone, there were

over 1.8 million meetings and events held in the U.S., which led to $280 billion in spending as a

direct contribution to the economy (CIC, 2014). Even more compelling is that the U.S. Bureau of

Labor Statistics projects the meeting, convention and event planner profession will grow 33

percent between 2012 and 2022, tripling the average growth rate of all occupations at 11 percent

(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012).

   With the growth of the meeting and event industry, and the predicted increase of meeting

planners, it can also be projected that there will be an increased supply of both traditional and

nontraditional event venues to meet the demand of businesses. In the context of this study,

traditional venues, such as a conference center, are physical environments designed for the

purpose of group gatherings. On the other hand, the nontraditional venues referred to in this

study are virtual venues, or online environments designed to connect multiple people

simultaneously through a form of technology. With more venues to choose from, the importance

of understanding meeting planner behavior, specifically during the site selection process, becomes critical for event venues to sustain a competitive advantage and retain market share. Focusing on the meeting planner during the site selection process is important since the meeting planner is typically responsible for researching and visiting potential event sites and making recommendations to the association or business that they are representing (Fawzy & Samra, 2008; Rompf, et al,, 2008).

Though previous studies have identified site selection criteria for meeting planners, the majority of these studies have had a very broad focus and include criteria that are beyond the scope of the venue, leaving little room for managerial control (McGurgan, Robson, & Samenfink, 2010; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; DiPietro, et al., 2008; Chacko & Fenich, 2000). Many of these studies have identified a venue's environmental factors as impactful selection criteria, but very few studies have attempted to identify specific environmental factors or investigate their relation to a meeting planner's site selection (Siu, Wan, & Dong, 2012). The current study aims to focus on these specific factors and use concepts from environmental psychology to explain the impact that these determinants have during the site selection decision.

Environmental psychology revolves around the idea that the environment that a consumer is in impacts his/her behavior (Kotler, 1973; Bitner, 1992). It has been proven that certain environmental design factors, or a servicescape, of a service setting, such as a retail store, a hotel, a restaurant or a casino, has a significant impact on a consumer's interpretation of a place (Bitner, 1992; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). The idea of an e-servicescape, or design factors of an virtual environment, has also been studied largely in online retail environments and consumer's shopping behavior and has resulted in findings showing significant relationships between the two (Eroglu, 2003; Koernig, 2003). However, studies

focusing on the servicescapes and e-servicescapes of event venues are limited for traditional environments and nonexistent for virtual environments, creating a gap in understanding the environmental psychology of event venues and meeting planner behavior (Hilliard & Baloglu, 2008; McGurgan, Robson, & Samenfink, 2010).

Furthermore, the emergence of virtual meetings and events is evident in industry sources, but researchers have yet to explore the selection process of virtual venues or attempt to identify the controllable selection criteria for these nontraditional venues. Since environmental elements are often easily controlled by management and are able to be altered, research identifying optimal servicescape factors could provide venue managers with information that serves a practical guide. Specifically, this study is looking at the layout and functionality, aesthetical appeal, and safety and security factors for traditional and virtual event venues, along with social factors for the virtual event venues.

The current study's theoretical framework will be centered on an adapted version of Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) S-O-R paradigm. This model is used to show how environmental stimuli (S), creates an internal reaction for consumers (O), which ultimately influences the consumer's behavioral response (R) (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). The current study will focus on using servicescape factors as the environmental stimuli and will measure the behavioral response by investigating if the servicescape factors positively or negatively affected their site selection decision.

Statement of the Problem

The meeting and event industry is a large industry with huge expected growth, making it a potential source of business and great revenue for venues designed to host these groups.

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However, with the expected increase in meetings and events comes a rise in the number of potential venues. This includes traditional physical 'brick and mortar' type venues, as well as virtual venues that are now being selected to host online meetings and events. This influx of venues creates an increased need for a competitive advantage for a venue, whether traditional or virtual, to stay profitable. Perhaps the biggest competitive advantage for a venue is to appeal to a meeting planner during the site selection process, which is conducted with the purpose of choosing a venue for an event or meeting. The ultimate goal of any venue is to be selected as the venue of choice by the meeting planner. As with any sector of the hospitality industry, there are certain elements that take place during this process that general management simply cannot control or easily change, such as service delivery, location of a venue, and surrounding attractions. Conversely, previous studies suggest that there are also certain controllable design elements that have been positively linked to consumer behavior. However, a limited number of studies has attempted to identify these elements within a traditional event venue, and even fewer in regards to a virtual venue, and investigate their relation to site selection from a meeting planner perspective.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

As event venue competition increases, the key to a venue's success will be appealing to the meeting planners during the site selection process. Using environmental psychology as the basis of the study, this study aims to identify various environmental factors, or 'servicescape' factors, of both traditional and virtual venues that impact whether a meeting planner selects a venue to host a meeting or event. Once these factors have been identified, statistical analysis will

then reveal which ones are more influential during the selection process for both these venues, giving this study theoretical and practical implications.

This study will provide significance to both industry and research alike. From an industry standpoint, this study will provide venues with information that can be useful in developing or renovating a space in order to attract business. Theoretically, the study will further the existing knowledge of meeting planners site selection determinants by narrowing the current broad range of determinants that are currently cited to focus on environmental elements that are controllable (McGurgan, Robson, & Samenfink, 2010; Crouch & Louviere, 2004; DiPietro, et al., 2008; Chacko & Fenich, 2000). Furthermore, this study will fill a current gap that exists between current researcher and industry developments by investigating the servicescape of a virtual event venue, an area that is currently absent from current research, but is evident in the industry.

Research Objectives

The main purpose of this study is to reveal the meeting planners' perceived importance of servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues, and to investigate the relationships between these factors and the planners' future behavioral intentions. Previous studies incorporating environmental psychology into hospitality design have found positive relationships between servicescape factors and consumer behavior, which have contributed practical implications for the industry (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Spielmann, Laroche, & Borges, 2011). Therefore, the specific objectives of this study include: (1) to compare the meeting planners' perceived importance of the servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues to determine if any differences exist (2) to determine how the servicescape factors of a traditional event venue impact meeting planners' future behavioral

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intentions; (3) to determine how the servicescape factors of a virtual event venue impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions; (4) to test the S-O-R model in the context of this study for traditional event venues; and (5) to test the S-O-R model in the context of this study for virtual event venues. Together, these objectives aim to introduce virtual event venues to academic sources, expand the current servicescape and site selection literatures, and test the S-O-R model in the context of event venues.

Research Questions

With the great impact and the large expected growth of the meeting and event industry, comes a projection that there will be a rise in both traditional and nontraditional event venues to meet the increased demand. Due to the competition that will arise, it becomes important for venues to sustain a competitive advantage to stay profitable. By focusing on the controllable elements of a venue's environmental design, this research aims to provide insight that venues can use to create optimal spaces to appeal to meeting planners. With this in mind, the following research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. What differences, if any, exist between the meeting planners' perceived importance of servicescape factors for traditional and nontraditional event venues?
2. How does layout and functionality impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions for a traditional event venue?
3. How does aesthetic appeal impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions for a traditional event venue?

4. How does safety and security impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions for a traditional event venue?

5. How does layout and functionality impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions for a nontraditional event venue?

6. How does aesthetic appeal impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions for a nontraditional event venue?

7. How does safety and security impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions for a nontraditional event venue?

8. How does social factors impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions for a nontraditional event venue?

9. Do the servicescape factors and meeting planners' emotional responses impact their future behavioral intentions towards traditional event venues?

10. Do the servicescape factors and meeting planners' emotional responses impact their future behavioral intentions towards virtual event venues?

Definition of Terms

Environmental psychology: The field of study that focuses on understanding how the environment that a consumer is in affects his/her behavior (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974).

E-servicescape: Elements that make up an virtual environment with intentions to appeal to a consumer (Eroglu, 2003; Koernig, 2003).

Event: This study refers to an event as a planned public or social occasion, often held in a contracted venue. Examples of this include social activities, recreational activities and consumer shows (CIC, 2012).

Face-to-face meeting/event: For purposes of this study, face-to-face meeting or event refers to a simultaneous gathering of multiple people at a specific physical place for a purpose

*Hybrid event: "*A mixture of physical events with elements of a virtual event usually running simultaneously with overlapping content and interactive elements" (Doyle, 2013).

Meeting: "A gathering of 10 or more participants for a minimum of 4 hours in a contracted venue" (CIC, 2012). This includes various types of assemblies including conventions, conferences, exhibitions, and other organized professional gatherings.

Meeting planner: The person who is responsible for researching and visiting potential event sites on behalf of an organization, and makes recommendations about potential sites based on their knowledge and experience (McGurgan, Robson, & Samenfink, 2010).

Meeting planner behavior: For purposes of this study, meeting planner behavior refers to the planners' intent to return to a venue and intent to recommend the venue to others.

Servicescape: The manmade, physical surroundings of a space extending beyond the natural environment (Bitner, 1992). A servicescape is comprised of certain measurable environmental factors that can be controlled (Bitner, 1992).

Traditional venues: For purposes of this study, traditional venues refer to physical environments that are designed for the purpose of group gatherings for a purpose. These include conference centers, exhibition halls, meeting rooms, etc.

Virtual meeting/event: A gathering of individuals to achieve a specific goal that includes participants in multiple locations who are connected by some form of technology (Fryatt, et al., 2012).

Virtual event venue: For purposes of this study, a virtual event venue refers to on online platform that was specifically designed to host meetings and events virtually, with the ability to simultaneously connect attendees, produce web content, share information and more.

Study Limitations

One limitation of this study is that many of the participants of the study will not have previous experience with virtual event venues, since this is still an emerging style of events that many meeting planners have not yet been exposed to. Another limitation in this study is that there are many additional factors that indirectly affect meeting planners' behavioral intentions that will not be taken into account. It is also important to note that this study did not use a pilot study.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has provided a brief introduction to the significance of the meeting and event industry, and the importance of understanding the role of a venue's servicescape. The purpose and significance of the study was outlined and specific questions that helped guide the study were identified. Definitions of important terms were provided and limitations of the study were discussed. The following section will be a review of existing literature relevant to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

This chapter provides a review of the relevant literature to support the research model and the research questions that are posited by this study. Information specific to this research study will be presented on the meeting and event industry itself, the impacts of the industry, and the emergence of technology into the industry. Current and past literature on meeting planners' site selection determinants will be presented, along with a review of the stimulus-organism-response model, specifically as it relates to the hospitality and tourism industries. The chapter will conclude with a brief summary of the information presented.

The Meeting & Event Industry

The meeting and event industry is a broad spanning industry that encompasses many different industry sectors. These include travel and hospitality, convention and visitors bureaus, meeting planners, event venues, equipment providers, and speakers (MPI, 2015). Together these sectors come together in various ways to serve a purpose. A typology of events suggests that there are eight different classifications of events: cultural celebrations, political and state, arts and entertainment, business and trade, education and scientific, sport competition, recreational, and private events (Getz, 2008). Meetings and events can also be classified by size, ranging from

small local events to occasional mega-events, ranging from different levels of value and demand (Getz, 2008). Though each classification has its' own unique characteristics, they all share the goal of bringing people together for a purpose (Rogers, 2013).

The Beginning and Evolution of an Industry

Documented meetings and events date back centuries ago to the Roman times, when trade and commerce drove the needs for spaces to be developed to support the gathering of people (Shone, 1998). Throughout the centuries, these types of meetings and events flourished, and saw exponential growth, with the venues that hosted them becoming forever embedded into some of the most significant moments in world history. Monumental decisions occurred in conference halls, such as the first Continental Congress in 1774, the Congress of Vienna in 1814, the meeting in Paris that led to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and the Yalta Conference in 1945, just to give a few examples (Rogers, 2013). Early gatherings such as these led to the foundation of an industry, which would emerge as one of the leading and most impactful hospitality and tourism sectors in the decades that followed.

Definitions

Meetings and events can be extremely diverse, with varying purposes and sizes, thus making it difficult to provide a singular definition that captures the holistic essence of the industry (CIC, 2012). However, there are a few commonalities that all meetings and events have, centering around sharing a goal of bringing people together to exchange information and ideas (Rogers, 2013). The UNWTO partnered with Reed Travel Exhibitions, ICCA, and MPI in 2009 to develop a universal definition for the term 'meeting' in regards to the industry. Together, they

announced that a meeting is defined as 'a gathering of 10 or more participants for a minimum of 4 hours in a contracted venue' (CIC, 2012).

This definition covers an umbrella of various types of gatherings including conventions, conferences, congresses, trade shows and exhibitions, incentive events and corporate/business events, among others. In accordance with this definition, meetings exclude events such as social activities, permanently established formal educational activities, purely recreational activities, political campaign rallies, or consumer shows (CIC, 2012). For purposes of this study, the universal definition of a meeting will be adopted, and the excluded gatherings of people for a purpose will be considered an event.

In recent decades, technology has begun to play a pivotal role in hosting meetings and events. What began as trends of useful resources to aid in the execution of meetings and events has now become the basic essentials needed to conduct one. Today, there is an ever-increasing amount of virtual and hybrid events that are evidenced by industry publications. These type of meetings and events, especially the virtual ones, are still in their infancy and therefore lack a universal definition, but one industry study defines virtual meetings or events as 'gatherings of individuals to achieve a specific goal that includes participants in multiple locations who are connected by some form of technology' (Fryatt, et. al, 2012). Similarly, the well-known Professional Convention Management Association defines virtual meetings as "digital events, meeting and learning technologies that include: Webcasting (streaming media); virtual environments (2D and 3D) such as virtual events, virtual trade shows, conferences, campuses, learning environments; and perpetual (365 days per year) business environments (PCMA, 2011). Hybrid events can be defined as 'a mixture of physical events with elements of a virtual event usually running simultaneously with overlapping content and interactive elements (Doyle, 2013).

These definitions will be adopted for purposes of this study. Although these types of gatherings all differ, they all have one common goal of bringing people together, both face-to-face and virtually, in order to exchange ideas and information, to build friendships and closer business relationships, and to encourage better performance by individuals and organizations (Getz, 2016).

Impacts of the Industry

Scope and Size

The meeting and event industry has significantly grown over the past few decades, and today is a truly global industry with over 250 countries sharing this lucrative market (CIC, 2014). This is largely due to the rise of the middle class, causing markets in China, US, India, Japan and Brazil (the top 5 in middle class populations) to see an explosion in the number of events taking place (World Tourism Organization, 2014). Industry reports showed that during the first decade in the new millennia, the total number of international meetings held worldwide experienced a growth rate of 60% (CIC, 2014).

Due to continuous growth within the meeting and event industry, it is extremely difficult to evaluate its size. To date, no study has been done to approximate the size of the global meeting and event market. However, based on various industry publications that seek to estimate the scope and size of the industry, it has been estimated that over 1.8 million meetings and events happen each year in the United States (World Tourism Organization, 2014).

Growth

In 1997, it was reported that there were 984,000 meetings that took place in the U.S., with attendees spending $41.8 billion, which was up by 12 percent from the previous two years (Meetings and Conventions, 1998). A few years later, the meeting and event industry experienced a decline of demand at the beginning of the millennium, largely due to the economic downturn of 2001 and the September 11 terrorist attacks (DiPietro, et. al., 2008). Several years later, the industry was hit again by the economic recession. In the past decade, the meeting and event industry has transitioned from a state of recovery due to the impactful economic recession, to experiencing cautious optimism, to now having robust and healthy growth worldwide (Meetings and Events Forecast, 2015). As reported before, in 2014 there was over 1.8 million meetings and events that were held in the U.S, signifying immense growth over the past twenty years (MPI, 2015). Recent statistics highlight this growth and the impact that it has on the economy and industry forecasts predict the continuation of this phenomena (World Tourism Organization, 2014; CIC, 2014).

Economic Impacts

A report done by the Convention Industry Council captured the economic impacts of the meetings industry for the year 2009 at the tail end of the economic recession, and several years later gave an update for the year 2012 (CIC, 2010, 2014). It is important to note that this study focused strictly on business related meetings, and did not take into account the entire scope of the broader meeting and events industry. The results of these studies showed that between 2009 and 2012, there was $17 billion increase in total direct spending associated with U.S. meetings activity. There was also an 8.3% increase in jobs created by meetings during these years, which

nearly doubled the average employment growth rate at the time (CIC, 2014). To highlight some

of the economic impacts revealed through the study, in 2012 there were 1.83 million meetings

held in the US, which provided over $115 billion in contribution to the GDP. These meetings

also generated $88 billion in taxes, which were used to support communities across the country

(CIC, 2014). This industry also benefits the broader economy by generating higher spending

levels from consumers, reducing seasonality; it contributes to the regeneration of destinations,

spreads knowledge and enhances innovation and creativity (World Tourism Organization, 2014).

Emergence of Technology in the Industry

As the meeting and event industry is steadily growing, it is experiencing an evolutionary

inclusion of technology. Meeting planners are continuously striving to integrate the most up-to-

date technological methods within their meetings and plans in order to enrich the experience for

the attendees (Kim & Park, 2009). As the latest technologies are being utilized, meetings are

being significantly transformed within the industry (Chudoba, et. al., 2011). Whereas just years

ago, technology was viewed as a great tool to assist in optimizing meetings and events, today it

is viewed as an opportunity to host virtual meetings and events.

While face-to-face meetings continue to be the most commonly utilized and successful

type of meetings, virtual and hybrid meetings are becoming more popular alternatives due to

their innovative technological opportunities that they offer meeting planners and attendees. The

virtual world has had a great influence on the meeting and event industry, and it was estimated to

be an $18.6 billion industry in 2015 (Fryatt, et. al., 2012b). Industry sources have indicated that

hybrid meetings, and event virtual ones, are the future of the meeting and event industry (Fryatt,

et. al., 2012b); however, there have been limited published academic studies focusing on virtual

and hybrid meetings (Pearlman & Gates, 2012). Most research on virtual meetings has focused on the increase of these types of meetings and future plans to utilize virtual meetings as an alternative to face-to-face meetings (PCMA, 2011). The majority of information regarding virtual and hybrid meetings is found within trade publications, industry websites, or provided by private consultants (Pearlman & Gates, 2010).

Technology is beginning to take on a vital role within the meeting and event industry. A previous study investigated the practice of hosting meetings and events in virtual worlds and concluded that this does not appear to simply be a fad, but rather is the future of the meeting and event industry (Pearlman & Gates, 2010). The study found that although only a small percentage of meeting professionals had actually utilized virtual worlds, it was clear that these meetings are increasing due to the many benefits that they present (Pearlman & Gates, 2010). Some of these benefits include enhanced networking opportunities, additional sponsorship opportunities and additional options for content delivery (Feldman, 2009). Other researchers have drawn similar conclusions, predicting growth for these types of meetings due to additional benefits such as cost savings, convenience, and easier global business operations (Fryatt, et al., 2012; Zakrwewksi, 2016). It is also predicted that the uptake of technology will continue to increase as younger generations with more of these skills takes hold in the industry. Due to their constant exposure to, and experience with technology, virtual events will no longer be seen as complex (Meeting and Events Forecast, 2016).

In addition to the benefits that virtual and hybrid events pose for the planners themselves, these types of meetings also offer benefits for attendees. Some of these advantages include decreased costs and time associated with travel, which could lead to increased education and training participation (Rheingold, 2008). Technology can also enhance attendee comfort,

alertness, engagement and enjoyment, leading to better quality contribution and information absorption, ultimately creating a better overall meeting experience (Dixon & Mulligan, 2013). It has also been suggested that since individuals cannot be seen in virtual worlds (unless desired), prejudices regarding race, gender, age, and physical appearance, may not be formed, allowing professional business to be conducted without bias (Rheingold, 2008).

Role of Meeting Planners

Meeting planners are often employed by businesses with the purpose of planning and ensuring proper execution of any planned meeting or event. With this come many various roles and responsibilities depending on the event type or size. Although previous studies have shown that often the meeting planners do not actually make the site selection decision themselves (Hilliard & Baloglu, 2008), one of the main objectives of a meeting or event planner is to determine destinations or venues that matches the criteria set for the event and make recommendations to a board or committee tasked with the ultimate site selection decision (DiPietro, et. al., 2008). Previous studies have shown that this crucial decision impacts the number of attendees that will attend, which ultimately determines the success of the meeting or event (Lee & Back, 2005; DiPietro, et. al., 2008).

Site Selection Process

The site selection process is comprised of three consequential steps, as followed: convention preplanning, site selection analysis, and recommendations and site selection decisions (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Crouch & Louviere, 2004). The convention preplanning step is the initial stage in which prospective dates are set, a budget is made, and other decisions

regarding the essence of the meeting or event are discussed (Crouch and Ritchie, 1998). The second step of this process is the analysis and recommendation of potential sites. During this stage, the meeting planner is responsible for gathering information from prospective sites, and often visiting the sites personally to inspect the facilities and gather further information (Crouch and Ritchie, 1998). The final step in this process is the site selection decision, where the planner from step two reports their findings back to the host organization or business with their recommendations (Crouch & Ritchie, 1998). Although the planners may not be making the ultimate site selection decision, their input is heavily considered during this process, making them a key player in the meeting and event industry.

Site Selection Determinants

Though it is understood that the environment plays a large role on consumer behavior, it is important to investigate the role that it plays on venue site selection for meetings and events. Few studies have looked specifically at the controllable determinants of conference center selection by meeting planners, but the broader, more holistic studies that have been done provide implications and guidelines for the current study.

In 2000, Chacko and Fenich highlighted convention destination factors that had been identified in previous studies (Clark & McClearly, 1995; Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Fortin & Ritchie, 1997; Opperman, 1996), but noted that in these previous studies simply listed the variables and did not assess the importance of each attribute to meeting planners (Chacko & Fenich, 2000). In their study, they used the factors that had been identified by these previous studies and found that the site appeal was the most critical factor among meeting planners, suggesting a high relevance of servicescape factors.

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In 2004, Crouch and Louviere used experimental data to determine the factors that attribute to convention site selection and ultimately expose which factors are of greatest importance to meeting planners (Crouch & Louviere, 2004). Some of the identified factors include: accessibility, local support, extra-conference opportunities, accommodation facilities, meeting facilities, information, site environment, and other criteria (Crouch & Louviere, 2004). Based off of the experimental data results, it appeared that the proximity of convention participants to conference sites, accommodation connect to or part of the convention facility, accessibility of the accommodation site, opportunities for entertainment, the cost of the convention venue, and the quality of exhibition space, plenary room, break-out rooms, and perceived food quality were among the most important determinants of site selection (Crouch & Louviere, 2004).

In one of the most recent studies investigating attraction to conventions, researchers identified significant factors that delegates and/or attendees perceived as great importance in generating exhibition attendance on three different levels of analysis: exhibition, facilities, and destination (Whitfield, 2014). Though the study found that overall destination-level attributes appeared to have the most influence on exhibition attendance, facility attributes ranked high in importance among attendees (Whitfield, 2014). Some of these facility attributes included: the reputation of the exhibition facility, the atmosphere and environment created by exhibition facility, the standards of service within exhibition facility, and the safety and security within the accommodations (Whitfield, 2014). A summary of the site selection determinant literature is listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Summary of the Literature Review on Site Selection Determinants

Author(s)	Paper Title	Main Objectives	Related Study Variables	Sample	Methodology	Results	Future Research
Summary of the literature review							
Studies on site selection determinants							
McGurgan, Robson, & Samenfink (2010)	The Importance of Site Selection Criteria for Special Events	To test business site selection criteria on special events	1. Venue ambience 2. Venue décor	Special event planners on LinkedIn or Twitter	Online questionnaire	Venue ambience and décor were rated among the top site selection criteria for special events	1. Test more criteria 2. Qualitative research 3. Include geography and education in the study
Fawzy & Samra (2008)	A Conceptual Model for Understanding Associations' Site Selection Processes: An Organizational Buyer Behavior Perspective	To develop a model of the site selection process for associations from the perspective of organizational buyer behavior	1. Meeting facilities 2. Site environment	Academic literature	A review of the literature	A proposed model was developed in aim to help meeting sites design competitive marketing strategies	1. Test the proposed model
Whitfield, et al., (2012)	Attracting Convention and Exhibition Attendance to Complex MICE Venues: Emerging Data from Macao	To identify relevant attributes that influence exhibition attendees' propensity to attend an exhibition.	1. Facility atmosphere and environment 2. Safety and security	Delegates attending the China Jade Cultural Festival	In-person questionnaires Importance performance analysis	The facilities environment and safety and security were rated to be the two most important attributes (out of 20) to attendees	1. Broaden the study to include a more generalizable sample

Table 2.1 Summary of the Literature Review on Site Selection Determinants Continued							
Crouch & Louviere (2004)	The Determinants of Convention Site Selection: A Logistic Choice Model from Experimental Data	To investigate the role of individual site attributes and their relationship in the site selection process	1. Meeting facilities 2. Site environment	Meeting planners who were members of the Meetings Industry Association of Australia	Random Utility Theory Qualitative interviews	Results found that the quality of the meeting facilities and the site environment contributed to the site attractiveness	1. Investigate site selection from an organization buyer-behavior perspective 2. Organizational or industrial decision making models
DiPietro, Breiter, Rompf & Godlewska (2008)	An Exploratory Study of Differences among Meeting and Exhibition Planners in their Destination Selection Criteria	To determine if there are differences among the members of 3 event associations in ratings of selection variables	1. Exhibit space 2. Safety and security	Meeting planners who are members of IAEE, MPI, and PCMA	Quantitative survey 1 way between-groups ANOVA	IAEE members rated exhibit space one of the top criteria, while PCMA members rated safety and security as one of the top criteria	1. Include international members 2. Determine if the decision-making process and variables are important to the attendees
Chacko & Fenich (2000)	Determining the importance of US convention destination attributes	To build on site selection literature by looking at ratings of destinations site attributes	1. Meeting space 2. Safety	Planners from client lists of Convention and Visitor Bureaus and mailing list	Survey questionnaires Regression analysis	The meeting space and safety and security were predictors of a destinations attractiveness	1. Further studies need to be done testing individual attributes
Opperman (1996)	Convention destination images: analysis of association meeting planners' perceptions	To examine the importance of convention destination attributes to association planners	1. Meeting facilities 2. Safety/security	Association meeting planners	Mailed questionnaires Importance performance analysis	The meeting facilities was rated the most important attribute, with safety and security being in the top five.	1. Focus on a more detailed segmentation analysis 2. Focus on the attendees perceptions

Servicescapes and e-servicescapes

In 1992, Mary Jo Bitner took a first step towards integrating theories and empirical findings from diverse disciplines into a framework that describes how the built environment (i.e., the manmade, physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment), affects both consumers and employees in service organizations (Bitner, 1992). This environment was coined "servicescape" and the original model was composed of three environmental dimensions: ambient conditions, space/function, and signs, symbols and artifacts (Bitner, 1992). 'Ambient conditions' included environments background characteristics such as temperature, lighting, noise, and music within a space (Kim, 2004). 'Space/function' was in regards to the way in which machinery, equipment, and furnishings are arranged, the size and shape of these items, and the spatial relationships between them (Kim, 2004). Lastly, 'signs, symbols, and artifacts' refers to things such as labels (e.g. name of company), for directional purposes (e.g., entrances, exits), and to communicate rules of behavior (e.g., no smoking) (Kim, 2004). Bitner's framework suggests that these environmental dimensions make up the perceived servicescape of the holistic environment, which in return creates employee and customer response moderators. These moderators elicit cognitive, emotional, and physiological internal responses within employees and customers, which ultimately results in either approach or avoidance behaviors (Bitner, 1992).

This proposed framework was created as a general model, and over the past two decades has provided the bases for a variety of different adaptations that aim to understand the environment's role on specific venues. Though much of this research has been aimed towards retail sectors of the service industry (Nyugen, 2012), there has also been a growing interest in

various hospitality sectors of the service industry (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996; Lucas, 2003; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Newman, 2007).

The findings from this stream of research have demonstrated that the physical environment influences the customer's perceptions of the service experience (Baker, et al., 1992; Bitner, 1990), price, and value (Babin & Attaway, 2000; Babin & Darden, 1995) and has an effect on sales (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Donovan, et al., 1994; Milliman, 1986), time spent in the store (Grossbart, et al., 1990), satisfaction (Bitner, 1990; Doyle & Broadbridge, 1999), dissatisfaction (Morrin & Ratneswhar, 2000), product choice (Buckley, 1991), and customer retention (Babin & Attaway, 2000). Hence, the buying environment can directly influence purchasing behavior (De Mozota, 1990) and as such may make the difference between the success and failure of the service organization (Bitner, 1990).

In recent years, researchers have expanded and tested the concept of servicescapes to encompass virtual environments as well (Eroglu, 2003; Koernig, 2003; Harris & Goode, 2010). Eroglu's (2003) study found that online shoppers had positive reactions when the e-servicescape factors, or online atmosphere elements, of the environment were present. Koernig (2003) created multiple fake hotel websites with varying environmental characteristics, and his results yielded great implications for developing a virtual servicescape that appeals to hospitality consumers. Harris and Goode's (2010) study used a variety of websites to investigate the influence of a sites' aesthetic appeal, layout and functionality, and financial security on consumers trust in the site and ultimately purchase intentions. Though it is still a relatively new research stream, the importance of e-servicescapes has yet to be studied from the perspective of a virtual meeting or event venue. Furthermore, there is a research gap in regards to comparing the results of the

importance of servicescapes and e-servicescapes in a comparable research setting. In order to address this research gap, the following hypothesis was developed:

Hypotheses 1: Differences will exist between the meeting planners' perceived importance of the servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues

Layout and Functionality

Derived from Bitner's original space/function dimension, layout and navigation has been proven to be influential on consumers' satisfaction in service settings (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996; Ryu & Jang, 2007, Bitner, 1992). These results are also evidenced beyond servicescape literature, with studies focusing on success of an event finding that the exhibit space was the most important criterion for an optimal event (DiPietro, et al., 2008). In the studies that have investigated e-servicescapes, layout and functionality has been modified to encompass the usability, relevance of information, customization/personalization, and interactivity levels of a virtual site (Harris & Goode, 2008; Koernig, 2003). The results of these studies have found that these layout and functionality items are indicators of pleasure for online users. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses were developed for the current study:

> ***Hypotheses 2a:*** There is a positive significant relationship between the layout and
>
> functionality of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral
>
> intentions
>
> ***Hypotheses 3a:*** There is a positive significant relationship between the layout and
>
> functionality of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral
>
> intentions

Aesthetic Appeal

As a slight modification to Bitner's original ambient conditions servicescape dimension, aesthetic appeal has been tested in various settings over the years, and holistically remains one of the primary indicators of customer satisfaction for both traditional and virtual servicescapes. Studies focusing on hospitality servicescapes often use aesthetic appeal as one of their factors, alluding to perceived importance of it in the industry. Ryu and Jang (2007) found that the aesthetics of a restaurant led to consumers' pleasure in an upscale restaurant. Similarly, aesthetic appeal was found to influence customers' cognitive, affective and behavioral responses in a casino (Lucas, 2003). Harris and Goode (2010) developed the aesthetic appeal dimension for virtual sites to measure the visual appeal, originality of design, and entertainment value provided by the site. The results of this study found that aesthetic appeal was the most significant predictor of trust on websites, which suggests its' importance for virtual venues in addition to traditional ones. Based on these findings, the following hypotheses were developed for the current study:

> ***Hypotheses 2b:*** There is a positive significant relationship between the aesthetic appeal of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions
>
> ***Hypotheses 3b:*** There is a positive significant relationship between the aesthetic appeal of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

Safety and Security

Safety and security has been well established in hospitality and tourism literatures as being an important factor to all types of consumers when considering travel destinations or venues, including business men and women (McCleary, et. al, 1994), older travelers (Wuest, et al., 1998) and to meeting planners (Hilliard & Baloglu, 2008; Hinkin & Tracey, 2003;

Rutherford & Umbreit, 1993; Weaver & Oh, 1993). From a venue's standpoint, safety involves protecting employees and customers within the property from potential injury or death. As a generalization, safety issues deal with the effects of accidents, hazardous materials, and fire (Ellis & Stipanuk, 1999). Venue security goes beyond protecting employees and guests and is also concerned with protecting guests' possessions and the property itself (Enz, 2009).

Though traditionally considered 'safe' places, crises and incidents have occurred in meeting spaces in recent years, highlighting the importance of the perceived safety and security of a venue. In 1999, a tornado hit a convention center in Salt Lake City, leading to a fatality, hundreds of injuries, and thousands of dollars' worth of damage to the venue (Mushenko, 2000). In 2005, there was concern of a hepatitis A breakout at a Las Vegas convention (Harasim, 2005). In 2006, a destination management company lost two corporate meeting attendees, who were found three days later stranded on a mountain (Harasim, 2005). Even more recently, the terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California took place inside of a conference room, killing 14 attendees and wounding 17 others (Potter, 2016). These incidents listed here are just a few of many examples of crises that have occurred at meetings in recent years, and give insight into understanding the increased importance of safety and security from a meeting planner's perspective (Potter, 2016).

Safety and security has not traditionally been considered one of the servicescape factors, but in 2008, a study examined various hotel safety and security attributes as part of the hotel servicescape from the perspective of the meeting planner (Hilliard & Baloglu, 2008). The findings of this study were consistent with prior studies, and indicated that safety is an important determinant for site selection, and that a majority of meeting planners inquire about the venues safety and security attributes during a site inspection (Hilliard & Baloglu, 2008). When

investigating servicescape factors for e-servicescapes, it was found that security, in regards to factors such as financial security and personal identification protection, is one of the top drivers of virtual satisfaction (Montoya-Weiss, et. al, 2003; Zeithaml, et. al., 2002; Chen & Chang, 2003). Therefore, based on the findings shown above, two hypotheses were provided:

> *Hypotheses 2c:* There is a positive significant relationship between the safety and security of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

> *Hypotheses 3c:* There is a positive significant relationship between the safety and security of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

Social Factors

Hospitality servicescapes are unique since they incorporate physical complexity and social interactions (Spielmann, et al., 2012). Since one of the biggest differences that occur between virtual and face-to-face experiences is the lack of direct contact, the social presence of a virtual world becomes important (Cyr, et al. 2007). Social presence has been defined as "the extent to which a medium allows users to experience others as being psychologically present" (Gefen & Straub, 2003). In Cyr's (2007) study, it was found that social presence resulted in higher levels of trust, e-loyalty, perceived usefulness and enjoyment for a virtual services site.

Although not considered one of the original servicescape factors, social factors have been included in a few e-servicescape studies in recent years and are evidenced in studies focusing on web design, especially for virtual service settings (Cyr, et al., 2007; Lee & Jeong, 2012, Nyugen, et al., 2012). In a study designed to create a conceptual model focusing on the e-servicescape in

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the context of the lodging industry, social factors was incorporated due to its perceived

importance (Lee & Jeong, 2012). These findings led to the following hypothesis:

Hypotheses 3d: There is a positive significant relationship between the social factors of a

virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

Table 2.2 Summary of the Literature Review on Servicescape and e-Servicescape

Summary of the literature review							
Author(s)	**Paper Title**	**Main Objectives**	**Servicescape Variables**	**Sample**	**Methodology**	**Results**	**Future Research**
Studies on servicescape and e-servicescape							
Hilliard & Baloglu (2008)	Safety and Security as Part of the Hotel Servicescape for Meeting Planners	This study explores the impact that safety and security attributes influence the site-inspection practices of meeting planners	1. Visible safety features 2. Documentation and staff training 3. General security features	Meeting planners who were attendees of two industry conferences	Survey questionnaire Factor analysis Multiple regression analysis	Visible safety features and safety documentation have been found to play a key role in shaping meeting planners' site-selection choices and willingness to pay more for a venue	Investigate how hotels use safety/security in marketing tactics How they contribute to customer equity
Nyugen, DeWitt, & Russell-Bennet (2012)	Service convenience and social servicescape: retail vs hedonic setting	The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the effects of service convenience and the social servicescape as moderators	1. Social factors	Convenience samples of consumers at a kitchen display showroom, and concert attendees	Mailed surveys Regressions	Social servicescape was found to impact retail settings, but not hedonic ones	Further test social servicescapes in various settings
Siu, Wan, & Dong (2012)	The impact of the servicescape on the desire to stay in convention and exhibition centers: The case of Macao	To investigate the role of the servicescape in influencing customer's cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses	1. Ambient conditions 2. Spatial layout 3. Functionality 4. Signs, symbols, and artifacts 5. Cleanliness	Convention attendees	In depth interviews Survey questionnaires	Cleanliness and functionality were the most important in influencing customers' cognitive, affective and behavioral responses	Expand the study to include multiple locations Investigate nature of exhibition
Lucas (2003)	The Determinants & Effects of Slot Servicescape Satisfaction in a Las Vegas Hotel Casino	To test the effects of servicescape in a casino environment	1. Seating comfort 2. Interior décor 3. Cleanliness 4. Navigation 5. Employees	Casino attendees	In person questionnaires Regressions	All factors were supported, with navigation and cleanliness being the most significant	To further expand the servicescape scale and to examine other servicescape determinants

Table 2.2 Summary of the Literature Review on Servicescape and e-Servicescape Continued							
Wakefield & Blodgett (1996)	The effect of the servicescape on customers' behavioral intentions in leisure service settings	To test a servicescape model in a leisure service setting, using Major League Baseball stadiums	1. Spatial layout and functionality 2. Aesthetics	University students who had not visited the stadiums used in the study	Showed videos of two very different stadiums and surveyed the students	The perceived quality of the servicescape was highly correlated with patronage intentions	To test the servicescape in other leisure settings
Ryu & Jang (2007)	The effect of environmental perceptions on behavioral intentions through emotions: the case of upscale restaurants	To build a conceptual model to show how customers' perceptions of dining environments influence behavioral intentions in upscale restaurants	1. Facility aesthetics 2. Lighting 3. Ambience 4. Layout 5. Dining equipment 6. Employees	Upscale restaurant customers	In person questionnaires Structural equation modeling	Facility aesthetics, ambience, and employees led to pleasure associated with the upscale restaurant	To examine the effects of physical surroundings in various service industries Pursue differences in demographics
Harris & Goode (2010)	Online servicescapes, trust, and purchase intentions	To present and discuss a conceptual model of purchase intentons, trust, and e-servicescape that presents online physical environments	1. Aesthetic appeal 2. Layout and functionality 3. Financial security	Online shoppers	Surveys Scale development procedures Structural equation modeling	All were found to be significant predictors of trust in a website, with aesthetic appeal being the strongest	To further develop and test e-servicescape conceptualizations
Lee & Jeong (2012)	Effects of e-servicescape on consumers' flow experiences	To investigate the importance of e-servicescape in the context of the lodging industry and develop a conceptual framework	1. Ambient factors 2. Design factors 3. Social factors		Extensive literature review	A conceptual model focusing on e-servicescapes effects on flow experience, and ultimate behaviors was developed	To empirically test the model

Environmental Psychology

That human behavior is influenced by the physical setting in which it occurs is essentially a truism. Interestingly, however, until the 1960's psychologists largely ignored the effects of physical settings in their attempts to predict and explain behavior (Bitner, 1992). Since that time, a large and steadily growing body of literature across a variety of fields has addressed the relationships between human beings and their built environments.

Mehrabian-Russell Model

One of the most widely accepted developments under the branch of environmental psychology is the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model. This model, which is also coined the Mehrabian-Russell Model, was created in 1974 in attempt to explain the relationships between environmental stimuli, emotional states, and behavior responses of the consumers (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This framework proposed that a consumer's environment evokes various emotional states, which can be explained as pleasure, arousal, dominance, or their opposites (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). These emotional states in return create either an approach or avoidance behavior among consumers, which ultimately leads to either approximation or withdrawal from a venue (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). This framework proved to be very effective, and over time has become one of the primary environmental psychology models. Based off of these findings, the following hypotheses were created:

> *Hypotheses 4:* There is a positive significant relationship between the stimuli and organismal response on the behavioral intentions of meeting planners when selecting traditional event venues

Hypotheses 5: There is a positive significant relationship between the stimuli and organismal response on the behavioral intentions of meeting planners when selecting virtual event venues

Summary

In conclusion, a review of the relevant literature suggests that there lies a multitude of opportunities for additional research to be done in regards to the ever-growing meeting and event industry. In addition, research focused on meeting planners' site selection was found to be very diverse and broad, therefore creating much needed attention to understanding how particular factors of a venue impact the site selection. By employing the stimulus-organism-response model, this research attempts to answer research questions regarding the influence of servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues, as well as attempts to bridge the research gap on e-servicescapes for event venues as there is limited literature that currently exists regarding virtual events.

Although extensive literature on site selection and servicescape exists and has been reviewed; this study seeks to add to the literature by using quantitative methods testing meeting planners. The following chapters will examine these methods and highlight the findings from this study, as well as the conclusions and recommendations to be drawn from them.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter presents information that outlines the research questions of the study, and the methods, survey instrument, target sample, data collection procedures, and techniques that were used to analyze and interpret the collected data. For the purposes of this study, a quantitative approach utilizing modified adapted survey measures was used to uncover the relationships between various servicescape factors and future behavioral intentions of meeting planners during the site selection process for traditional and virtual venues. The main research variables of layout and navigation, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, and social factors for virtual event venues, have been explored in this context, thus adding original academic work to the existing literature.

The Research Setting and Study Samples

This study was approved by Auburn University's Institutional Review Board. Data was collected through online survey questionnaires that were administered to registered members of the Meeting Planners International (MPI) organization, the largest meeting and event industry association worldwide.

Through MPI's member database, there were a total of 8,271 members listed as meeting planners in the United States at the time of use. Of these members, there were 6,544 meeting planners with email addresses listed. These email addresses were collected and compiled into an Excel spreadsheet. Using a randomization technique through Excel, these email addresses were randomly distributed into two groups of 3,472 each. The first group of meeting planners was administered the survey modified for traditional event venues, while the second group of meeting planners was administered the survey modified for virtual event venues.

The traditional event venue survey focused on evaluating physical and functional attributes of a brick and mortar event venue, while the virtual event venue focused on evaluating design and functional attributes of a virtual event venue accessed through a digital device. Due to virtual event venues still being in their infancy, a demonstration video was created and included in the virtual event survey so that those who had not previously been exposed to virtual event venues could still have their feedback considered for this study. The site used in this demonstration video was created using iMovie and utilizing the INXPO virtual event platform demonstration as a basis.

Emails were sent out 25 at a time with at least 30 minutes in between groups at the recommendation of a university IT specialist, in order to avoid being flagged as a scammer. Of the survey invitations that were emailed, 441 came back as undeliverable, resulting in 6,103 deliverable surveys being administered. Data collection took place over a period of nearly two months, from January 27th through March 20, 2017. During this time, there were 326 submitted surveys for traditional venues and 313 for virtual event venues. Due to the elimination of significantly incomplete surveys and surveys that showed extreme responding, or showed little to

no variation in their responses, the process resulted in 438 total responses (252 for traditional, 186 for virtual), creating a 7.18% return rate.

Although this return rate appears low, it is not surprising as backed by previous research supporting that online surveys achieve a significantly lower response rate than paper-based surveys (Dommeyer, et al., 2004; Ogier, 2005; Nair, et al., 2005). The low response rate can also be attributed to the lack of incentive offered with the study, (Deutskens, 2004), in addition to the nature of the target sample. In previous studies targeting meeting planners, low response rates have been achieved for both paper based (Baloglu & Love, 2005) and web based surveys (DiPietro, et al., 2008). Follow up emails were not sent due to the anonymity of the responses and due to time constraints.

Target Sample

For this study, meeting planners who have experience conducting site visits and being involved in the site selection process were the target population. The target sample was composed of actively employed meeting planners who are members of MPI. Participants consisted of meeting planners over 19 years of age who, as listed on the MPI database, were residing in the United States. This sample is suitable for this study due to the organization's emphasis on education, promotion, and growth of the industry. This creates a dedicated membership base of experienced meeting planners who are open minded and willing to contribute to research initiatives. Prospective participants were sent a survey invitation outlining the purpose and objectives of the study, and were also required to consent to the survey once the link was opened. Online survey responses were collected through Qualtrics.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

In Chapter 1, the five research objectives of the study were introduced. The research objectives were to: (1) to compare the meeting planners' perceived importance of the servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues to determine if any differences exist; (2) determine how the servicescape factors of a traditional event venue impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions; (3) determine how the servicescape factors of a virtual event venue impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions; (4) test the S-O-R model in the context of this study for traditional event venues; and (5) test the S-O-R model in the context of this study for virtual event venues. The first objective was designed to fill the current gap in literature where there is currently very limited studies that implore virtual event venues, and furthermore compare the results to those of traditional event venues. The next two objectives were designed to expand existing servicescape literature to encompass the meeting and event industry. The final two objectives were designed to expand the current literature utilizing the S-O-R model to encompass traditional and virtual event venues. Therefore, it was necessary to adopt and modify two sets of quantitative surveys that would be randomly distributed to two participant groups focused on traditional and virtual event venues respectively. To guide this study, the following hypotheses were developed from the previously mentioned research objectives to test the relationships amongst the key variables in the study.

H1: Differences will exist between the meeting planners' perceived importance of the servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues

H2a: There is a positive significant relationship between the layout and functionality of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

H2b: There is a positive significant relationship between the aesthetic appeal of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

H2c: There is a positive significant relationship between the safety and security of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

H3a: There is a positive significant relationship between the layout and functionality of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

H3b: There is a positive significant relationship between the aesthetic appeal of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

H3c: There is a positive significant relationship between the safety and security of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

H3d: There is a positive significant relationship between the social factors of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions

H4: There is a positive significant relationship between the stimuli and organismal response on the behavioral intention of meeting planners when selecting traditional event venues

H5: There is a positive significant relationship between the stimuli and organismal response on the behavioral intention of meeting planners when selecting virtual event venues

The Research Variables

The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on several previous studies, and explores six research variables as represented in Figure 3.1 and discussed below. Each of the variables includes adopted and modified scale items from previous studies. These items were modified to fit the context of the current study, but the meanings of the original items were still pursued. The modifications and origins of these variables are outlined in Table 3.1. Each of the servicescape factors and future behavioral intentions were measured using 5-point Likert-type scales, while the emotional responses were measured by semantic differential scales.

Layout and Functionality

The first variable examined in this model is "Layout and Functionality." This variable is designed to examine the impact of various design elements regarding a venue's structural layout and ease of use. Layout and functionality is predicted to have significant impacts on meeting planners' behavioral intentions for both traditional and virtual event venues. This variable was explored through nine scale items, as adopted from previous research as listed in Table 3.1 below.

Aesthetic Appeal

The second variable examined in this study is "Aesthetic Appeal." Aesthetic appeal is intended to capture the impact of various aesthetic elements of a venue, or how a venue looks. This is predicted to have significant impacts on meeting planners' behavioral intentions for both

traditional and virtual event venues. This variable is composed of five scale items that were

adopted from a previous study, which is summarized in Table 3.1 below.

Safety and Security

"Safety and Security" is the third variable that is tested in this study. This refers to the

perceived level of safety and security of a venue and is meant to capture the impact of various

safety measures. Safety and security is predicted to significantly impact meeting planners'

behavioral intentions for both traditional and virtual event venues. This variable is made up of

five scale items that were adopted from a previous study as listed in Table 3.1 below.

Social Factors

The fourth variable that is investigated in this study is "Social Factors." This variable is

only tested for virtual event venues, and it is designed to explore the impact of various social

elements, or the extent of social presence that is evidenced. Social factors is predicted to

significantly impact meeting planners' behavioral intentions for virtual event venues, but is not

being tested for traditional event venues. This variable is comprised of four scale items that were

adopted from a previous study as listed in Table 3.1.

Organismal Response

The fifth variable in this study is "Organismal Response" which is designed to measure

the meeting planners' internal response that is evoked by the environmental stimuli that the

planners are exposed to during the site visit. This variable is measured by various emotional

responses that are evoked. This variable is predicted to be significantly affected by layout and

functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, and social factors. These emotional responses elicit an approach or avoidance behavior, which impacts the future behavioral intentions. The eight scale items used for this variable are comprised of six semantic differential items and two Likert type scale items that were adopted from previous research as listed in Table 3.1.

Future Behavioral Intentions

The final variable being measured in this study is "Future Behavioral Intentions" which measures a meeting planner's intent to return to or recommend a venue. This variable is predicted to be significantly affected by layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, and social factors, as well as the organismal response that the stimuli create. Two items adopted from the literature as seen in Table 3.1 represent variable scale items.

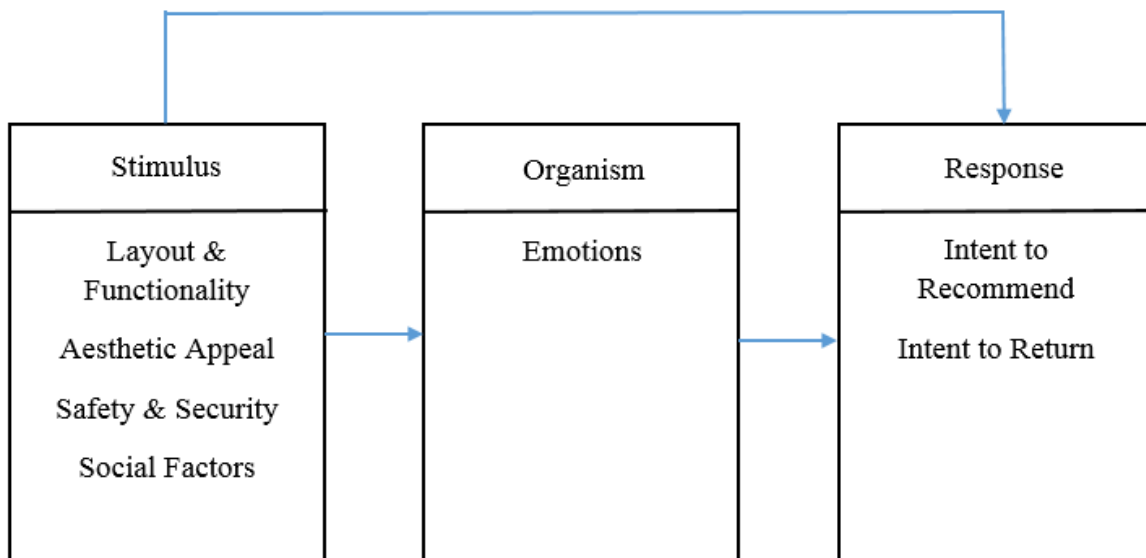| Stimulus	Organism	Response
Layout & Functionality Aesthetic Appeal Safety & Security Social Factors	Emotions	Intent to Recommend Intent to Return

Figure 3.1 Research Model Depicting the Relationships among Study Variables

Table 3.1 Summary of the research variables

	Summary of the modified research variables used in the traditional and virtual venue surveys	
	Variable	**Source**
Layout and Functionality	There are useful navigational aids	Harris & Goode, 2010
	The directional signs are obviously placed	Harris & Goode, 2010
	It is easily navigated	Harris & Goode, 2010
	There are convenient ways to explore different areas of the site	Harris & Goode, 2010
	Navigation is intuitively logical	Harris & Goode, 2010
	A first-time visitor can find their way around without much help	Harris & Goode, 2010
	There is an accessible information desk	Harris & Goode, 2010
	It fits the criteria for my meeting or event	Harris & Goode, 2010
	It is accommodating for attendees	Harris & Goode, 2010
Aesthetic Appeal	It is visually attractive	Harris & Goode, 2010
	It has visually appealing décor	Harris & Goode, 2010
	It is designed in an attractive way	Harris & Goode, 2010
	It is aesthetically appealing	Harris & Goode, 2010
	I like the way it looks	Harris & Goode, 2010
Safety and Security	It seems very secure	Harris & Goode, 2010
	I have no concerns about using it	Harris & Goode, 2010
	The security systems seem rigorous	Harris & Goode, 2010
	I am not reassured by the security procedures	Harris & Goode, 2010
	Overall, it seems security conscious	Harris & Goode, 2010
*Social Factors	There is a sense of human contact facilitated by the virtual site	Cyr, et al., 2007
	There is a sense of personalness facilitated by the virtual site	Cyr, et al., 2007
	There is a sense of sociability facilitated by the virtual site	Cyr, et al., 2007
	There is a sense of human sensitivity facilitated by the virtual site	Cyr, et al., 2007
Organismal Response	Happy - Unhappy	Eroglu et al., 2003
	Pleased - Annoyed	Eroglu et al., 2003
	Contented - Melancholic	Eroglu et al., 2003
	Stimulated - Relaxed	Eroglu et al., 2003
	Excited - Calm	Eroglu et al., 2003
	Aroused - Unaroused	Eroglu et al., 2003
	I enjoyed visiting	Eroglu et al., 2003
	I was satisfied with my experience	Eroglu et al., 2003
Behavioral Response	I would go back	Eroglu et al., 2003
	I would recommend it to others	Eroglu et al., 2003
	* Refers to those statements only appearing in the virtual venue survey	

Data Analysis Techniques

Data Cleaning Procedure

Before analysis, the initial data set went through multiple data cleaning procedures. Since participants were asked to recall the importance of variables during their site selection decisions, they were asked if they had conducted a site visit in the last six months. Those who answered 'No' were eliminated from the study since it could influence the accuracy of the data if the planners had not recently conducted a site visit. Additionally, any responses that were missing more than a couple of responses were eliminated. Surveys that had little to no variety in the responses were also excluded due to the potential of these surveys being biased.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics (e.g. mean, standard deviation, and frequency) were employed to reveal sample characteristics (e.g. age, gender, education level, and experience level) and provide basic information about some of the key variables of the study.

Independent Sample t-tests

The independent samples t-test was used to measure the difference between the means of two independent groups. The Levene's test of Equality of Variances determined whether or not the equality-of-variance assumption has been violated. If the test is significant, it can be assumed that the equality-of-variance assumption has been violated, and therefore the *t* value for unequal variances should be reported (Green & Salkind, 2011). For this study, the test is used to test the means of perceived importance of servicescape for traditional and virtual event venues. These results are used to address the first hypothesis of the study.

Correlation

In this study, the Pearson correlation coefficient is used to test the relationships among the various servicescape factors of a venue, the emotional responses evoked by a meeting planner, and their behavioral intentions after a site visit. These results help address hypotheses two through eight in this study. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was developed in 1895 by Kari Pearson in order to test whether two variables within a population have a linear correlation that exists between them. According to Kline (2005), a Pearson's r that is above .850 signifies multicollinearity issues. Multicollinearity is the statistical phenomenon in which two or more of the predictor variables in a multiple regression model are highly correlated. Multicollinearity checks were conducted to ensure that the data did not violate the assumptions of multi-variate regression.

Multi-variate Regression

Regression analysis is used to test the relationships among variables. It focuses on determining how well the independent variables predict dependent variables. In this study, regression is used to determine how the servicescape factors influence the organismal, or emotional, response of meeting planners and ultimately their behavioral response. The results of this test will be used to address the last two hypotheses of the study regarding testing the S-O-R model.

Summary

In conclusion, Chapter 3 has provided a detailed description of the methods that were employed in collecting and analyzing data for this study. The research questions, variables, target

sample, data collection and data analysis techniques were introduced. The following chapter will present the results of this study as determined by the research design discussed in the aforementioned sections. Various visual representations will be used to aid in presenting the information gathered from the quantitative analyses. The chapter will also highlight demographic information obtained from the meeting planners.

Chapter 4

Results

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the processes that were used and the results that were found of the quantitative methods that were discussed in Chapter 3. Statistical analyses were performed on both sets of data. This section will present the demographic information and respective quantitative results for both samples and will reveal the quantitative comparative results in an attempt to answer the research questions that have been introduced.

Demographics

A total of 326 people took the traditional event venue survey, with 252 useable responses obtained. These participants were mostly female (n=220, 87.6%) meeting planners that are working full time as a paid employee (n=199, 79.3%) with over 10 years of experience (n=176, 69.8%). The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 50-59 (n=75, 30.7%), obtained a bachelor's degree in college (n=173, 68.7%) and plan between 1-15 meetings per year (n=119, 47.2%). Demographic information collected from the traditional venue participants is presented in Table 4.1.

A total of 313 people took the virtual event venue survey, with 186 usable responses obtained. The participants of the virtual event venue survey were mostly female (n=166, 89.2%) meeting planners that are working full time as a paid employee (n=157, 84.4%) with over 10

years of experience (n=131, 70.4%). The majority of the respondents were between the ages of

30-39 (n=52, 29.6%), obtained a bachelor's degree in college (62.9%) and plan between 1-15

meetings per year (n=91, 48.9%). Demographic information collected from the virtual venue

participants is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1 Demographics of Traditional Event Venue Meeting Planners

Traditional Event Venue Meeting Planner Demographics			
Demographics	**Levels**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age	19-29	22	9
	30-39	62	25.4
	40-49	63	25.8
	50-59	75	30.7
	60-69	21	8.6
	70 and older	1	0.4
	Total	244	100
Gender	Male	31	12.4
	Female	220	87.6
	Total	251	100
Education	High School graduate	2	0.8
	Some college but no degree	27	10.7
	Associate Degree	6	2.4
	Bachelor's Degree	173	68.7
	Master's Degree	43	17.1
	Professional Degree	1	0.4
	Total	252	100
Employment	Working full time (paid employee)	199	79.3
	Working full time (self-employed)	31	12.4
	Working part time (paid employee)	4	1.6
	Working part time (self-employed)	9	3.6
	Not working (unemployed)	1	0.4
	Other	7	2.8
	Total	251	100
Experience	0-2 years	5	2
	2-5 years	24	9.5
	5-10 years	47	18.7
	Over 10 years	176	69.8
	Total	252	100
Events Planned Per Year	0-15	119	47.2
	16-30	63	25
	31-45	15	6
	46-60	15	6
	61 and Up	40	15.9
	Total	252	100
Previously Used a Virtual Venue	Yes	79	31.3
	No	173	68.7
	Total	252	100

Table 4.2 Demographics of Virtual Event Venue Meeting Planners

Virtual Event Venue Meeting Planner Demographics			
Demographics	Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Age	19-29	16	9
	30-39	52	29.6
	40-49	51	29
	50-59	47	26.7
	60-69	10	5.7
	70 and older	0	0
	Total	176	100
Gender	Male	20	10.8
	Female	166	89.2
	Total	186	100
Education	High School graduate	4	2.2
	Some college but no degree	20	10.8
	Associate Degree	10	5.4
	Bachelor's Degree	117	62.9
	Master's Degree	34	18.3
	Professional Degree	1	0.5
	Total	186	100
Employment	Working full time (paid employee)	157	84.4
	Working full time (self-employed)	17	9.1
	Working part time (paid employee)	1	0.5
	Working part time (self-employed)	7	3.8
	Not working (unemployed)	2	1.1
	Other	2	1.1
	Total	186	100
Experience	0-2 years	5	2.7
	2-5 years	16	8.6
	5-10 years	34	18.3
	Over 10 years	131	70.4
	Total		100
Events Planned Per Year	0-15	91	48.9
	16-30	41	22
	31-45	18	9.7
	46-60	12	6.5
	61 and Up	24	12.9
	Total	186	100
Previously Used a Virtual Site	Yes	61	32.8
	No	125	67.2
	Total	186	100

Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

The overall mean scores and descriptive statistics for each servicescape factor were

computed for both traditional and virtual event venues, using 5-point Likert-type scales. In the

scales, "1" represented "Extremely Important", while "5" represented "Not at all Important".

Detailed tables showing the descriptive statistics for each scale item can be found in Appendix B.

Table 4.3 shows that the overall mean scores for each of the servicescape factors reveal that the

meeting planners perceived each factor to be of almost equal importance. However, the meeting

planners perceived safety and security (M=2.00, SD=.61) to be the most important factor,

followed closely by layout and functionality (M=2.07, SD=.53) and aesthetic appeal (M-2.10,

SD=.68).

Table 4.3 Descriptive Statistics for Overall Servicescape Factors for Traditional Event Venues

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Layout and Functionality	2.07	0.534	0.517	0.314
Aesthetic Appeal	2.10	0.682	0.252	-0.133
Safety and Security	2.00	0.609	0.304	-0.016

Table 4.4 highlights the overall mean scores and descriptive statistics of the servicescape

factors for virtual event venues. The results show that meeting planners perceived layout and

functionality (M=1.55, SD=.43) to be the most important factor, followed by safety and security

(M=2.03, SD=.84), social factors (M=2.07, SD=.84), and aesthetic appeal (M=2.15, SD=.73).

Table 4.4 Descriptive Statistics for Overall e-Servicescape Factors for Virtual Event Venues

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Layout and Functionality	1.55	0.434	1.031	1.679
Aesthetic Appeal	2.15	0.731	0.619	1.438
Safety and Security	2.03	0.779	0.899	1.138
Social Factors	2.07	0.842	0.841	0.919

Independent Samples t-test

An independent samples t-test was used in Table 4.5 to compare the means of the respondents' answers from the traditional event venue survey and the virtual event survey, in regards to the importance of servicescape factors for meeting planners' future behavioral intentions. It is important to note that only layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, and safety and security were used in this test, as social factors cannot be compared due to only being tested for virtual venues. A total of 3 variables were used in this independent samples t-test for comparison amongst 252 responses from traditional venue surveys and 186 responses from the virtual venue survey. Only overall mean scores of the variables from both surveys that were identical in nature were compared in order to determine which differences exist, if any, in the respondents' perceptions of importance of the variables.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between groups based on perceived importance of layout and functionality, t=11.287, $p<.001$, with the perceived importance of layout and functionality receiving lower mean scores for virtual venues (M=1.55, SD=0.43) than for traditional venues (M=2.07, SD=0.53). This indicates that meeting planners rated layout and functionality as significantly more important for virtual venues. Aesthetic appeal of a traditional venue (M=2.10, SD=0.68) reported slightly lower mean scores than its' virtual counterpart (M=2.15, SD=0.73), indicating that meeting planners' were more concerned with the aesthetic appeal of a traditional venue than of a virtual one. However, this is only a suggestion, since the t-test did not report to be significantly significant. Additionally, although not statistically significant, the mean scores for safety and security were slightly lower for traditional venues (M=2.00, SD=0.61) than for virtual ones (M=2.03, SD=0.78), indicating that

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in this study, participants perceived safety to be slightly more influential for traditional venues than virtual ones.

Table 4.5 Independent Samples t-test

Independent Samples T-test Comparison between traditional and virtual venues						
Layout and Functionality	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**DF**	**Sig.**	**Mean Diff.**
Layout and Functionality			11.29	431.89	0.000	0.522
Traditional	2.07	0.534				
Virtual	1.55	0.434				
Aesthetic Appeal	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**DF**	**Sig.**	**Mean Diff.**
Aesthetic Appeal			-0.69	436	0.489	-0.047
Traditional	2.1	0.682				
Virtual	2.15	0.731				
Safety and Security	**Mean**	**SD**	**t**	**DF**	**Sig.**	**Mean Diff.**
Safety and Security			-0.464	338.66	0.655	-0.031
Traditional	2.00	0.609				
Virtual	2.03	0.779				

Based off of the results of the independent samples t-test, the following hypothesis can be addressed:

H1: Differences will exist between the meeting planners' perceived importance of the servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues

The independent samples t-test showed that a significant difference occurs between the perceived importance of layout and functionality for traditional and virtual event venues, providing support for this hypothesis.

Correlation Analysis

As shown in Tables 4.6 and 4.7, correlation analyses were used to illustrate any relationships that exist between the presence of the servicescape factors, the emotional responses, and the future behavioral intentions as indicted by 'intent to return' and 'would recommend to

others', for meeting planners visiting traditional and virtual event venues. In terms of the traditional event venues, there were a few statistically significant relationships that existed. Each of the servicescape factors were significantly correlated with the meeting planners' emotional response, with aesthetic appeal showing the strongest correlation ($r = .307$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, meeting planners' emotional response was found to be significantly correlated with their intent to recommend the traditional venue ($r = .268$, $p <.001$). When measuring meeting planners' intent to return for traditional event venues, there were no statistically significant relationships indicated. The weakest relationship existed between layout and functionality and intent to return, which also had a negative correlation ($r = -.006$, $p=.462$). However, all of the servicescape factors were statistically significant for intent to recommend, with safety and security showing the strongest relation ($r = .208$, $p=.001$).

Similarly for virtual event venues, each of the servicescape factors were significantly correlated with the meeting planners' emotional response, with aesthetic appeal having the strongest correlation ($r = .307$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, the emotional response was significantly correlated with meeting planners' intent to recommend the virtual venue ($r = .549$, $p <.001$). In addition, there was only one statistically significant relationship that existed in terms of the servicescape factors of virtual event venues and meeting planners' behavioral intentions. This was between layout and navigation and recommending the site to others ($r = .152$, $p=.019$). No statistically significant relations existed between the servicescape factors and intent to return, but the weakest relationship existed between layout and functionality and intent to return ($r = .031$, $p=.337$). It can also be noted that aesthetic appeal had a negative, yet insignificant, correlation with intent to return ($r = -.078$, $p =.15$), as did safety and security with intent to recommend ($r = .004$, $p=.48$).

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Table 4.6 Results of Pearson Correlation for Traditional Event Venues

Results of Pearson Correlation for Traditional Venues						
Traditional Event Venue (n=246)		Return	Recommend	Emotions	Layout & Functionality	Aesthetic Appeal
Return	Pearson Correlation					
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
Recommend	Pearson Correlation	-0.029				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.651				
Emotions	Pearson Correlation	0.017	.268**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.786	.000			
Layout & Functionality	Pearson Correlation	-0.006	.184**	.189**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.924	0.004	0.003		
Aesthetic Appeal	Pearson Correlation	0.044	0.202**	.307**	0.093	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.495	0.001	.000	0.143	
Safety & Security	Pearson Correlation	-0.082	.208**	.232**	.381**	.163**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.203	0.001	.000	.000	0.010

Table 4.7 Results of Pearson Correlation for Virtual Event Venues

Virtual Event Venue (n=186)		Return	Recommend	Emotions	Layout & Functionality	Aesthetic Appeal	Safety & Security
Return	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
Recommend	Pearson Correlation	0.1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.176					
Emotions	Pearson Correlation	0.103	0.549**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.16	0.001				
Layout & Functionality	Pearson Correlation	0.031	0.152*	.314**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.674	0.039	0.001			
Aesthetic Appeal	Pearson Correlation	-0.078	0.072	.232**	0.329**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.29	0.33	0.001	0.001		
Safety & Security	Pearson Correlation	0.106	-0.004	.147*	0.361**	0.064	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.15	0.955	0.045	0.001	0.382	
Social Factors	Pearson Correlation	-0.102	0.04	.148*	0.371**	0.195**	0.251**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.165	0.587	0.044	0.001	0.008	0.001

Given the results, it can be suggested that for both traditional and virtual event venues, each of the servicescape factors have significantly positive relationships with the emotional responses of meeting planners. Furthermore, there is a significantly positive relationship between the servicescape factors (layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, and safety and security) and meeting planners' intent to recommend for traditional event venues. However, there is not a significant relationship between the servicescape factors and meeting planners' intent to return for traditional event venues, and negative relationships actually exist between two of the dimensions and intent to return. Similarly, the results show that there is a significantly positive relationship between the layout and functionality and intent to recommend for virtual venues, while no significant relationships exist among the servicescape factors and intent to return.

These results suggest that although the servicescape factors are significantly correlated with the emotional responses of meeting planners for traditional and virtual event venues, they are limited in their relationships with the planners' future behavioral intentions. The servicescape factors may influence meeting planners' perceptions of a venue and the likelihood of recommending it to others, but does not necessarily impact whether or not they will utilize the venue themselves.

Based off of the findings of the Pearson correlations, the following hypotheses have been addressed:

H2a: *There is a positive significant relationship between the layout and functionality of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions*

The results of the Pearson correlations and the regression analyses conducted above provide partial support for this hypothesis. In terms of intent to recommend, layout and functionality proved to be correlated to the behavioral intention, but it was not found to be correlated to intent to return.

H2b: *There is a positive significant relationship between the aesthetic appeal of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions*

The results of the Pearson correlations conducted above provide partial support for this hypothesis as well. Aesthetic appeal was found to be significantly correlated to meeting planners' intent to recommend but not to the planners' intent to return.

H2c: *There is a positive significant relationship between the safety and security of a traditional event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions*

The results of the aforementioned Pearson correlations provide partial support for this hypothesis. Safety and security was found to be significantly correlated to a planners' intent to recommend but there was no significant correlation to intent to return.

H3a: *There is a positive significant relationship between the layout and functionality of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions*

The results of the correlation analysis showed that layout and functionality was significantly correlated to a planners' intent to recommend the virtual venue, but not with a planners' intent to return, providing partial support for this hypothesis.

H3b: *There is a positive significant relationship between the aesthetic appeal of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions*

The results of the Pearson correlations did not provide any support for this hypothesis.

H3c: *There is a positive significant relationship between the safety and security of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions*

The results of the Pearson correlations did not provide any support for this hypothesis.

H3d: *There is a positive significant relationship between the social factors of a virtual event venue and the meeting planner's future behavioral intentions*

The results of the Pearson correlations did not provide any support for this hypothesis.

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analyses were conducted to test a predictive model testing a venue's servicescape factors, meeting planners' emotional responses, and their intent to return and intent to recommend traditional and virtual event venues. The group means were computed for the dependent variables "intent to return" and "intent to recommend." In conducting the analysis, the relationship between the dependent variable (meeting planners' future behavioral intentions) and the predictors (layout and functionality, safety and security, aesthetic appeal, social factors for virtual event venues, and emotional responses) was assessed.

The type of multiple regression used in this research was the Enter regression method. This method allows all of the independent variables to be entered into the

equation simultaneously and allows for each predictor to be assessed individually to determine what it offers to the prediction of the dependent variable that is different from the predictions offered by the other variables in the model (Pedhazur, 1997). After entering the dependent variable and independent variables into SPSS for Enter regression with a collinearity diagnostic test, a series of models were generated. The results of each insignificant regression models can be found in Appendix D, as only significant models will be discussed here. The first model looked at "emotions" as the dependent variable and used the servicescape factors of a traditional event venue as the independent variables. This model had a residual value of .371, an R^2 of .137, an adjusted R^2 of .127, and was significant with an F statistic of 13.066. This suggests that 13% of the variations in meeting planners' emotional response can be explained by the servicescape factors of a traditional event venue. When looking at the coefficients of the model, it was found that the aesthetic appeal and the safety and security of the venue significantly influenced the emotional response. Predictors of the second model were emotions and the dependent variable was the intent to recommend. This model had a residual value of .268, an R^2 of .072, an adjusted R^2 of .068, and was significant with an F statistic of 18.919. This suggests that 7% of the variance in meeting planners' intent to recommend the venue to others can be explained by the emotional response that is evoked. Meeting planners' intent to return to the venue was excluded from the regression analysis, as it was statistically insignificant. The final regression model looked at "intent to recommend" as the dependent variable and the servicescape factors and the emotional response as the independent variables. This model had a residual value of .337, an R^2 of .113, an adjusted R^2 of .099, and was significant with an F statistic of 7.697. This suggests that 11% of the

variance in meeting planners' intent to recommend can be explained by the servicescape factors of a traditional venue and the emotional response that they evoke. When all of predictors were taken into consideration, only 'emotions' has a significant and positive influence on the intent to recommend. The results of the final regression model are below in Table 4.8.

In regards to virtual event venues, a similar series of regression models were ran. The results of the insignificant regression models can be found in Appendix D, as only the significant models are discussed here. The first model looked at "emotions" as the dependent variable and used the servicescape factors of a virtual event venue as the independent variables. This model had a residual value of .346, an R^2 of .119, an adjusted R^2 of .100, and was significant with an F statistic of 6.136. This suggests that 10% of the variance in meeting planners' emotional response can be explained by the servicescape factors of a virtual event venue. When looking at the coefficients, it was found that only layout and navigation had a significant influence on emotions. Predictors of the second model were emotions and the dependent variable was the intent to recommend. This model had a residual value of .549, an R^2 of .302, an adjusted R^2 of .298, and was significant with an F statistic of 79.120. This suggests that 30% of the variance in meeting planners' intent to recommend the venue to others can be explained by the emotional response that is evoked. Meeting planners' intent to return to the venue was excluded from the regression analysis as it was statistically insignificant. The final regression model looked at "intent to recommend" as the dependent variable and the servicescape factors and the emotional response as the independent variables. This model had a residual value of .559, an R^2 of .313, an adjusted R^2 of .313, and was significant

with an F statistic of 16.288. This suggests that 31% of the variance in meeting planners'

intent to recommend can be explained by the servicescape factors of a traditional venue

and the emotional response that they evoke. When all of predictors were taken into

consideration, only 'emotions' has a significant and positive influence on the intent to

recommend. The results of the final regression model are below in Table 4.9.

Table 4.8 Final Regression Analysis for Traditional Event Venues

Dependent variable: Intent to recommend
Independent variables: Layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, emotions

Goodness of fit
Multiple R = .337
R^2 = .113
Adjusted R^2 = .099
Standard error of the estimate = .686

Analysis of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Regression	14.476	4	3.619	7.697	.000
Residual	113.316	241	0.470		

Variable	B	SE β	St. β	t	Sig. (p)	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.414	0.252		1.643	0.102		
Layout and Functionality	0.123	0.090	0.091	1.370	0.172	0.843	1.186
Aesthetic Appeal	0.116	0.068	0.110	1.709	0.089	0.882	1.134
Safety and Security	0.135	0.080	0.133	1.697	0.091	0.828	1.207
Emotions	0.271	0.094	0.189	2.884	0.004**	0.854	1.171
*** - denotes significance at the .01 level*							

Table 4.9 Final Regression Analysis for Virtual Event Venues

Dependent variable: Intent to recommend

Independent variables: Layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, social factors, emotions

Goodness of fit
Multiple R = .559
R^2 = .313
Adjusted R^2 = .294
Standard error of the estimate = .737

Analysis of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Regression	44.218	5	8.844	16.288	.000
Residual	97.187	179	0.543		

Variable	B	SE β	St. β	t	Sig. (p)	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	0.889	0.285		3.177	0.002		
Layout and Functionality	0.069	0.151	0.034	0.458	0.647	0.689	1.452
Aesthetic Appeal	-0.069	0.080	-0.058	-0.870	0.386	0.866	1.154
Safety and Security	-0.104	0.076	-0.093	-1.375	0.171	0.847	1.181
Social Factors	-0.017	0.070	-0.016	-0.243	0.808	0.841	1.189
Emotions	0.783	0.091	0.568	8.617	0.001***	0.884	1.131
*** - denotes significance at the .001 level							

Based off of the findings of the regression analysis, the following hypotheses have been addressed:

H4: *There is a positive significant relationship between the stimuli and*

organismal response on the behavioral intention of meeting planners when

selecting traditional event venues

The results of the regressions provided partial support for this hypothesis. The

results showed that when testing the effect of the 'stimuli' on the 'organismal response',

aesthetic appeal and safety and security had significant influence on the emotional

response. When testing the effect of the 'organismal response' on the 'behavioral response', it was found that emotions significantly influenced the intent to recommend the venue to others, but not the intent to return. When testing the entire model, it was found that only emotions was a significant predictor on the intent to recommend, which suggests that emotions mediates the relationship between aesthetic appeal and safety and security with the intent to recommend. The planners' intent to return to the venue was excluded from the regression analysis as it was statistically insignificant.

H5: *There is a positive significant relationship between the stimuli and organismal response on the behavioral intention of meeting planners when selecting virtual event venues*

The results of the regressions provided partial support for this hypothesis. The results showed that when testing the effect of the 'stimuli' on the 'organismal response', only layout and functionality had significant influence on the emotional response. When testing the effect of the 'organismal response' on the 'behavioral response', it was found that emotions significantly influenced the intent to recommend the venue to others, but not the intent to return. When testing the entire model, it was found that only emotions was a significant predictor on the intent to recommend, which suggests that emotions mediates the relationship between layout and functionality with the intent to recommend. The planners' intent to return to the venue was excluded from the regression analysis as it was statistically insignificant.

Summary

Chapter four presented a comprehensive summary of the descriptive and quantitative results from both samples along with a comparative analysis of the perceptions between the two groups. The results of the mean scores for both the traditional and virtual venues revealed that meeting planners considered each of the servicescape factors on their own to be of importance. The independent sample t-test showed that a significant difference occurred between traditional and virtual venues in terms of perceived importance of layout and functionality, with participants of virtual venues rating it significantly more important than traditional ones. In regards to the correlation analyses, the results indicated that for traditional event venues, the servicescape factors were all correlated with the meeting planners' emotional response and intent to recommend the venue to others. The planners' emotional response was also correlated with intent to recommend the venue. Interestingly, neither the servicescape factors nor the emotional response were correlated with the planners' intent to return to the traditional venue. For virtual event venues, the correlations revealed that the servicescape factors were all correlated with the planners' emotional response and that the emotional response was correlated with the planners' intent to recommend the venue to others. It was also found that layout and functionality was correlated with the planners' intent to recommend the venue. However, no correlations existed in regards to intent to return to the virtual venue.

The regression analyses showed that the aesthetic appeal and the safety and security of a traditional venue were significant predictors of the planners' emotional response, as well as the planners' intent to recommend the venue. The emotional

response was also found to be a significant predictor of the planners' intent to recommend a traditional venue. When all the factors were considered, only the emotional response was found to be a significant predictor of the intent to recommend the venue, which suggests that the planners' emotional response is a partial mediator of the aesthetic appeal and the safety and security of a traditional venue and the planners' intent to recommend the venue to others. In terms of virtual event venues, the regression analyses showed that the layout and functionality was a significant predictor of the planners' emotional response, as well as the planners' intent to recommend the venue. The emotional response was also found to be a significant predictor of the planners' intent to recommend a virtual venue. When all of the factors were considered, only the emotional response was found to be a significant predictor of the intent to recommend the venue, which suggest that the planners' emotional response is a partial mediator of the layout and functionality of a virtual event venue and the planners' intent to recommend the venue. The results have provided some support for a several of the hypotheses provided in Chapter 3. Overall, the findings of the study proved to be quite interesting and provide the basis for discussion. These results will be discussed and concluded in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

Overview

This chapter discusses the findings of this study and offers theoretical and practical implications. It will review the purpose of the research, address the posed research questions, and highlight the significance and contributions of the study. This chapter also acknowledges limitations of the study and provides future related research opportunities. Lastly, a brief conclusion will be provided to summarize the chapter and overall research study.

Description and purpose of the research

The purpose of this study was to create a better understanding for how a venue's servicescape affects meeting planners' behavioral intentions during their site selection process. The research also aimed to compare the results for traditional and virtual event venues, and to detect any similarities or differences that occurred. The well-known S-O-R model (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974) was adopted as the base model of this study to investigate the relationships between the stimuli (layout and functionality, aesthetic

appeal, safety and security, and in regards to virtual event venues, social factors) and

response (intent to return and intent to recommend to others). This research model is

reintroduced below as Figure 5.1 to provide a reference for this chapter.

Stimulus	Organism	Response
Layout & Functionality	Emotions	Intent to Recommend
Aesthetic Appeal		Intent to Return
Safety & Security		
Social Factors		
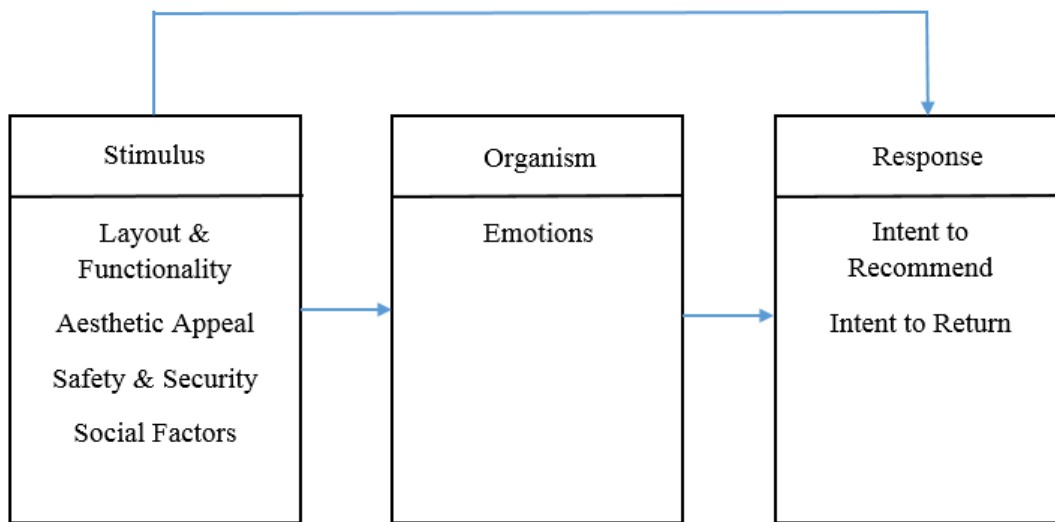
Figure 5.1 Research Model Depicting the Relationships among Study Variables

Addressing the Research Objectives

Research Objective 1: "Compare the meeting planners' perceived importance of the

servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues to determine if any

differences exist. "

Measuring meeting planners' perceptions of the importance of various

servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues was vital to this research in

order to understand if there were any differences between the groups. As determined by

the independent samples t-test, it was found that there was one significant difference that occurred, which poses some important questions for future research on event venues.

A significantly large mean difference (M=0.522) was found between the perceived importance of the layout and functionality of traditional and virtual event venues. Though both sets of meeting planners rated layout and functionality to be of moderate importance, it was found that it was significantly more important for virtual venues (M=1.55) than for traditional ones (M=2.07). One reason behind these findings could be the concerns that have been identified in previous studies, in which meeting planners are hesitant to use virtual event platforms due to worries about attendees' ease of use and ability to navigate the site (Pearlman & Gates, 2010).

As mentioned above, a key difference that was found between the groups was that there was support found between the traditional venue servicescape and the intent to recommend it to others, while no statistically significant evidence was found to support that the servicescape of a virtual venue impacted meeting planners' behavioral intentions. This could indicate that the variables impact the planners in different ways and should be explored more. Future research should focus on uncovering these differences, as well as finding more similarities between the two venue types.

Research Objective 2: "Determine how the servicescape factors of a traditional event venue impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions."

Meeting planners were asked to rate their perceived importance of layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, and safety and security for a traditional event venue on a Likert type rating scale from 1-5 (*1 = Extremely Important, 5 = Not at all Important*).

Based on mean scores alone, each of the servicescape factors for a traditional venue was considered moderately to very important to the planners. Safety and security was rated the most important (M=2.00) followed closely by layout and functionality (M=2.07) and aesthetic appeal (M=2.1). Though all rated very closely in importance, the results highlight that safety and security has developed into a critical aspect that meeting planners must take into account when conducting site visits.

Pearson correlations were conducted to see if there were any relationships that existed between the servicescape factors and the meeting planners' future behavioral intentions. The results of these correlations revealed that the layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, and safety and security of a traditional venue were all associated with the planners' intent to recommend the venue to others, with safety and security having the strongest relationship ($r = .208$, $p=.001$). These findings support Hilliard and Baloglu's (2008) study that focused solely on the need to include safety and security in servicescapes for event venues. However, it was found that the servicescape factors do not influence the planners' intent to return to the venue. These findings suggest that the servicescape factors contribute to a venue becoming part of the planners' evoked set, but are not sufficient by themselves to determine the final site selection decision alone. These findings support previous literature that shows servicescape factors as being influential for meeting planners (Hilliard & Baloglu, 2008; Fawzy, et al., 2008), and also supports previous research that there are other factors that influence the ultimate selection decision such as the location, budget, destination features, and more (Whitfield, et al., 2012; Opperman, 1996; Chacko & Fenich, 2000).

As evidenced through research publications, there is a sufficient amount of site determinant literature available in the meeting and event industry (Chacko & Fenich, 2000). However, much of this research is conducted in a broad scope, and does not look at the specific relationships between variables and the impact that they have. Future research should continue to look closely at these specific relationships in order to truly understand the site selection process.

Research Objective 3: "Determine how the servciescape factors of a virtual event venue impact meeting planners' future behavioral intentions?"

Meeting planners were asked to rate their perceived importance of layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, and social factors for a virtual event venue on a Likert type rating scale from 1-5 (*1 = Extremely Important, 5 = Not at all Important*). Based on mean scores alone, each of the servicescape factors for a virtual venue was considered moderately to very important to the planners. Layout and functionality was found to be the most important (M=1.55), followed by safety and security (M=2.03), social factors (M=2.07), and aesthetic appeal (M=2.15). Though all rated relatively close in importance, the results highlight that the layout and functionality of a virtual site is a critical aspect that meeting planners consider when evaluating these platforms.

Pearson correlations were conducted to see if there were any relationships that existed between the servicescape factors and the meeting planners' future behavioral intentions. The results of these correlations revealed that the only statistically significant correlation existed between layout and functionality and the meeting planner's intent to

recommend the virtual venue to others (r = .152, *p*=.019). These results contradict previous studies that have focused on online shopping servicescapes and found that other factors including aesthetic appeal and the safety and security of a site were influential (Harris & Goode, 2010; Koernig, 2003). This could be due to some respondents being unfamiliar with virtual venues and being hesitant about utilizing them, or the servicescape factors included in the study may not encompass optimal servicescape dimensions for virtual venues. Future studies should focus on identifying influential elements of a virtual venue that impact meeting planners' behavioral intentions, and aim to include those with previous experience with virtual venues in the study.

Research Objective 4: "Do the servicescape factors and meeting planners' emotional responses impact their future behavioral intentions towards traditional event venues?"

A series of multivariate regression analyses were conducted to test the relationships between the servicescape factors, the meeting planners' emotional responses, and the planners' behavioral responses. The results showed that the aesthetic appeal and the safety and security of a traditional venue were significant predictors of the planners' emotional response, as well as the planners' intent to recommend the venue, and that the emotional response was found to be a significant predictor of the planners' intent to recommend a traditional venue. When all the factors were considered, only the emotional response was found to be a significant predictor of the intent to recommend the venue, which suggests that the planners' emotional response is a partial mediator of the aesthetic appeal and the safety and security of a traditional venue and the planners' intent to recommend the venue to others.

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Research Objective 5: ""Do the servicescape factors and meeting planners' emotional

responses impact their future behavioral intentions towards virtual event venues?"

A series of multivariate regression analyses were conducted to test the

relationships between the servicescape factors, the meeting planners' emotional

responses, and the planners' behavioral responses. The results showed that the layout and

functionality of a virtual venue was a significant predictor of the planners' emotional

response, as well as the planners' intent to recommend the venue, and that the emotional

response was found to be a significant predictor of the planners' intent to recommend a

virutal venue. When all the factors were considered, only the emotional response was

found to be a significant predictor of the intent to recommend the venue, which suggests

that the planners' emotional response is a partial mediator of the layout and functionality

of a virtual venue and the planners' intent to recommend the venue to others.

Implications

This research study focused on providing a comparative approach towards

traditional and virtual event venues. It also aimed to explore various servicescape factors

of two types of venues and their relationships to meeting planners' behavioral intentions

in regards to intent to return and recommend to others, while testing the S-O-R model in

the context of this study. Results from this study are extremely relevant to the ever-

growing meeting and event industry, and provide great implications for the industry and

related academia alike.

Traditional Venue Implications

This study was designed with event venues in mind, with aims of focusing on the controllable elements of a venue and the perceived importance and the impacts that these have on meeting planners – a venue's target audience. The information that this study gathered from experienced meeting planners provides venues with useful feedback regarding the layout and navigation, aesthetic appeal, and the safety and security of the venue. These items should be taken into account when designing optimal event spaces that appeal to these planners during site visits, and hopefully earn a competitive advantage in the lucrative meeting and event industry. Perhaps one of the great implications that this study provides for the venues is that the study focuses on elements of venues that can be controlled by management. This provides practical results that can benefit the venues immediately.

Virtual Venue Implications

With virtual venues and platforms emerging into the industry as a sometimes cheaper and more convenient alternative to face-to-face meetings and events, it is critical for these designers to understand what is important to their target audience – the meeting planners. With limited studies currently existing that focus on the relationships between the elements of the site, and the behavioral responses of the meeting planners, this study can be a great resource to help guide these virtual venues through the development and implementation of their platforms. The results show how important the layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, and social factors are to the meeting

planners. The study provides practical results that show the impact of controllable elements of the venue.

Theoretical Implications

Lastly, the study has great theoretical implications in regards to expanding the S-O-R model and introducing a relatively new stream of research. Although a very widely accepted and adopted model, there are only a few studies that apply the S-O-R model to the meeting and event industry (Hilliard & Baloglu, 2010). Furthermore, there is very limited research today that addresses the up-and-coming virtual event venues and platforms. This study has successfully furthered previous research that has focused on the servicescape of traditional event venues and has provided a first glimpse into understanding the servicescape for virtual venues. This study has provided some answers and raised many opportunities for future research in this field.

Limitations and Future Research

Due to limited time and resources, this study has its limitations. First, like other studies, this research has limitations on the sampling method that was utilized. The survey invitation was emailed to members of Meeting Planner's International with listed email addresses on the member's database. Although this sample fit the criteria for this study, the researcher is not fully convinced that the sample can represent all meeting planners in the United States. Additionally, planners of this organization are largely focused on professional/business-related meetings and events, and may be impacted by a venue's servicescape differently than a meeting planner searching for a social venue,

such as a wedding venue, where the environment is one of the key determinants of site selection. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the data collection techniques to include a more diverse group of meeting planners and potentially focusing on comparing the results of various types of events.

Another limitation of this study is that a pilot study was not conducted. The items that were used in the study were all adopted from well-established survey instruments that were utilized in previous studies, but without using a pilot study in the current study, the reliability and validity of the survey was potentially not as high as it could have been otherwise. It should be noted that the results for the virtual venue survey were largely collected from planners without any previous experience using this type of venues. Although a demonstration video was provided to expose the planners to this type of venue, the results should be interpreted with caution, as they may be misleading. It is important that future research focuses on capturing the perceptions of those planners who have previous experience with virtual event platforms in order to increase the reliability of the study.

Further limitations include the scale items may not capture the full extent of either the traditional or virtual venues servicescape due to the need for the items to be comparable, although measuring different realms. Since there is currently a research gap that exists in regards to the virtual event platforms and venues, this study was designed to introduce the importance of understanding site determinants for these types of venues, which will ultimately have great benefits for the industry. Future research should aim to uncover the impacts of more specific servicescape factors in order to reap more practical benefits for venues. Due to previous research recognizing that servicescape becomes

increasingly important to consumers in leisure settings, or when exposed to the environment for longer periods of times (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996), perhaps future research should focus on measuring meeting planners perspectives of specific servicescapes after being exposed for durations of time, rather than for just a short site visit.

Conclusion

This study provides a wealth of in depth information focusing on the impacts that servicescape factors of a meeting or event venue, whether traditional or virtual, have on meeting planners' future behavioral intentions. The quantitative study was helpful in understanding meeting planners' perceptions of these factors, and more importantly the role that they play on future intent. Perhaps most importantly, the comparison between the traditional and virtual venues advanced the scope of research in regards to virtual event venues, a research area that has previously been limited thus far. However, this topic is still in its infancy in the academic industry and future research is highly encouraged and recommended.

The results of the study proved to be enlightening in regards to both the traditional and virtual venue perspectives. Meeting planners rated all the servicescape factors of significance importance for both venues types, and each servicescape factor exhibited mean scores supporting the perceived importance of these variables. However, when looking further to see how these factors actually influenced the planners' intent to return or recommend the venue to others, the results were varied. In terms of traditional event venues, the servicescape of the venue was found to have a significant impact on the

planner's intent to recommend the venue to others, but did not have a significant impact on the planner's intent to return to the venue themselves. This suggests that the servicescape of a venue influences the planners' overall perceptions of the venue, and if asked to recall or give personal reflections of the place, would be influential in evoking the planners' opinion. However, the influence of the venues servicescape does not appear to be a determining factor when a meeting planner determines if he/she will return to the venue to utilize it as a host for a meeting or event. Perhaps this can be explained by other studies suggesting that the most influential site selection determinants are dynamic ones such as price, service delivery, etc. (Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Chacko & Fenich, 2000; Clark & McCleary, 1995), which span beyond the controllable scope of the venue. Perhaps most shocking, however, were the results from the virtual venue, which did not show any statistically significant relationships between the servicescape of the virtual venue and the meeting planners' intent to return to the venue or to recommend it to others. As a result of these findings, it is extremely important to note that this increasingly popular venue alternative is an area that needs much more academic attention. Future studies should focus on understanding why meeting planners are choosing virtual platforms to host their meetings and events, and more specifically, on determining the factors that are influencing their platform choice and overall perceptions of these virtual venues.

Overall, this study highlights some major differences between meeting planners' perceived importance of servicescape factors for traditional and virtual event venues and the influence that they have on future behavioral intentions, providing a foundation for future studies to be conducted.

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APPENDIX A Traditional Survey Instrument

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF NUTRITION, DIETETICS,
AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH
CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled
"Investigating the Role of Servicescape on Site Selection for Traditional and Virtual
Event Venues: A Comparative Study"

Dear participants:

You are invited to participate in a research study to test the effects of various environmental factors of an event venue on meeting planner's behavioral intentions during the site selection process. This study will be comparing the results for physical venues, such as conference centers, and virtual event venues. The study is being conducted by Brook Ladner, a graduate student, under the direction of Alecia Douglas, an associate professor in the Auburn University Department of Nutrition, Dietetics, & Hospitality Management. **You are invited to participate because you are currently employed as a meeting planner and are age 19 or older.**

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to fill out an online survey. Your total time commitment is estimated to be approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no identified benefits for you as a respondent. However, successful data collection could provide valuable insight on the impact of environmental factors on meeting planner behavior.

Will you receive compensation for participation? There is no compensation being offered. Participation is on a total volunteer basis, but would be greatly appreciated.

Are there any costs? No, participation is totally free. Thank you for your time.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by **closing your browser window.** If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Once you've submitted anonymous data, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Nutrition, Dietetics, & Hospitality Management.

Your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential. All of the data will be deleted from the database at the conclusion of the study. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement and could be submitted for publication in an academic journal.

If you have questions about this study, *please* contact Brook Ladner at SBL0008@auburn.edu or Dr. Alecia Douglas at ACD0011@auburn.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

Brook Ladner	12/07//2016
Investigator	Date

Alecia Douglas	12/07/2016
Faculty Investigator	Date

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from December 13, 2016 to December 12, 2019.   Protocol #16-494 EX 1612

LINK TO SURVEY

https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6wY1EtSu9PheRpz

Do you consent to participating in the study?
- ❍ Yes, I would like to continue taking the survey.
- ❍ No, I would not like to take this survey.

Please enter your age in numeric format (example: 25).

What is your gender?
- ❍ Male
- ❍ Female

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- ❍ Less than high school degree
- ❍ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- ❍ Some college but no degree
- ❍ Associate degree in college (2-year)
- ❍ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- ❍ Master's degree
- ❍ Doctoral degree
- ❍ Professional degree (JD, MD)

Are you currently employed as a meeting/event planner?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Which statement best describes your current employment status?
- ❍ Working full time (paid employee)
- ❍ Working full time (self-employed)
- ❍ Working part time (paid employee)
- ❍ Working part time (self-employed)
- ❍ Not working (retired)
- ❍ Not working (unemployed)
- ❍ Other _____

How many years of experience do you have working as a meeting/event planner?
- ❍ 0 - 2 years
- ❍ 2-5 years
- ❍ 5-10 years
- ❍ Over 10 years

What type of meetings/events do you typically plan? Please check all that apply.
- ❑ Corporate
- ❑ Association
- ❑ Conferences
- ❑ Exhibitions
- ❑ Trade Shows
- ❑ Government
- ❑ Social
- ❑ Other _____

Do you currently obtain any of the following certifications? Please check all that apply.
- ❑ Certified Meeting Professional (CMP)
- ❑ Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP)
- ❑ Certificate in Meeting Management (CMM)
- ❑ Certified Government Meeting Professional (CGMP)
- ❑ Certified Professional in Catering and Events (CPCE)
- ❑ Global Travel Professional Certification (GBT)
- ❑ Digital Event Strategist Certification (DES)
- ❑ Other _____

On average, how many meetings/events per year do you plan?

Have you conducted a site visit in the last six months?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Have you ever used an online site to host a virtual meeting/event?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Please rate how important the following attributes of a venue are in regards to your site selection decision from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
There are useful navigational signs	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The directional signs are obviously placed	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The venue is easily navigated	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
There are convenient ways to explore the different areas of the venue	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Navigation through the venue is intuitively logical	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
A first-time visitor can find their way around the venue without much help	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The venue has an accessible information desk staffed with people who can help me	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
In general, the venue fits the criteria for my meeting or event	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The venue is accommodating for attendees	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Please rate how important the following attributes of a venue are in regards to your site selection decision from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
The venue is visually attractive	○	○	○	○	○
The venue has visually appealing decor	○	○	○	○	○
The venue is designed in an attractive way	○	○	○	○	○
The venue is aesthetically appealing	○	○	○	○	○
I like the way the venue looks	○	○	○	○	○

Please rate how important the following attributes of a venue are in regards to your site selection decision from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
The venue seems very secure	○	○	○	○	○
I have no concerns about using the venue	○	○	○	○	○
The security systems of the venue seem rigorous	○	○	○	○	○
When visiting the venue, I am not reassured by the security procedures	○	○	○	○	○
Overall, the venue seems security conscious	○	○	○	○	○

Keeping the previously mentioned venue attributes in mind, please rate how the presence of those attributes influence your feelings towards a venue.

	1	2	3	4	5
Happy:Unhappy	○	○	○	○	○
Pleased:Annoyed	○	○	○	○	○
Contented:Melancholic	○	○	○	○	○
Stimulated:Relaxed	○	○	○	○	○
Excited:Calm	○	○	○	○	○
Aroused:Unaroused	○	○	○	○	○

Based off of the presence of the previously mentioned attributes of a event venue and your feelings towards them, please rate the following statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoyed visiting the venue	○	○	○	○	○
I was satisfied with my experience at the venue	○	○	○	○	○
Given a choice, I would probably not go back to the venue	○	○	○	○	○
I would recommend the venue to other people	○	○	○	○	○

APPENDIX B: Virtual Survey Instrument

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCE
DEPARTMENT OF NUTRITION, DIETETICS,
AND HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH
CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER
for a Research Study entitled
"Investigating the Role of Servicescape on Site Selection for Traditional and Virtual
Event Venues: A Comparative Study"

Dear participants:

You are invited to participate in a research study to test the effects of various environmental factors of an event venue on meeting planner's behavioral intentions during the site selection process. This study will be comparing the results for physical venues, such as conference centers, and virtual event venues. The study is being conducted by Brook Ladner, a graduate student, under the direction of Alecia Douglas, an associate professor in the Auburn University Department of Nutrition, Dietetics, & Hospitality Management. **You are invited to participate because you are currently employed as a meeting planner and are age 19 or older.**

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to fill out an online survey. Your total time commitment is estimated to be approximately ten to fifteen minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? There are no identified benefits for you as a respondent. However, successful data collection could provide valuable insight on the impact of environmental factors on meeting planner behavior.

Will you receive compensation for participation? There is no compensation being offered. Participation is on a total volunteer basis, but would be greatly appreciated.

Are there any costs? No, participation is totally free. Thank you for your time.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by **closing your browser window.** If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Once you've submitted anonymous data, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University or the Department of Nutrition, Dietetics, & Hospitality Management.

Your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential. All of the data will be deleted from the database at the conclusion of the study. Information collected through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement and could be submitted for publication in an academic journal.

If you have questions about this study, *please* contact Brook Ladner at SBL0008@auburn.edu or Dr. Alecia Douglas at ACD0011@auburn.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE IF YOU WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT. IF YOU DECIDE TO PARTICIPATE, THE DATA YOU PROVIDE WILL SERVE AS YOUR AGREEMENT TO DO SO. THIS LETTER IS YOURS TO KEEP.

Brook Ladner	12/07//2016
Investigator	Date

Alecia Douglas	12/07/2016
Faculty Investigator	Date

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this document for use from December 13, 2016 to December 12, 2019.   Protocol #16-494 EX 1612

LINK TO SURVEY

https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6wY1EtSu9PheRpz

Do you consent to participating in the study?
- ❍ Yes, I would like to continue taking the survey.
- ❍ No, I would not like to take this survey.

Please enter your age in numeric format (example: 25).

What is your gender?
- ❍ Male
- ❍ Female

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- ❍ Less than high school degree
- ❍ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- ❍ Some college but no degree
- ❍ Associate degree in college (2-year)
- ❍ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- ❍ Master's degree
- ❍ Doctoral degree
- ❍ Professional degree (JD, MD)

Are you currently employed as a meeting/event planner?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Which statement best describes your current employment status?
- ❍ Working full time (paid employee)
- ❍ Working full time (self-employed)
- ❍ Working part time (paid employee)
- ❍ Working part time (self-employed)
- ❍ Not working (retired)
- ❍ Not working (unemployed)
- ❍ Other _____

How many years of experience do you have working as a meeting/event planner?
- ❍ 0 - 2 years
- ❍ 2-5 years
- ❍ 5-10 years
- ❍ Over 10 years

What type of meetings/events do you typically plan? Please check all that apply.
- ❑ Corporate
- ❑ Association
- ❑ Conferences
- ❑ Exhibitions
- ❑ Trade Shows
- ❑ Government
- ❑ Social
- ❑ Other _____

Do you currently have any of the following certifications or certificates? Please check all that apply.
- ❑ Certified Meeting Professional (CMP)
- ❑ Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP)
- ❑ Certificate in Meeting Management (CMM)
- ❑ Certified Government Meeting Professional (CGMP)
- ❑ Certified Professional in Catering and Events (CPCE)
- ❑ Global Travel Professional Certification (GBT)
- ❑ Digital Event Strategist Certification (DES)
- ❑ Other _____

On average, how many meetings/events per year do you plan?

Have you conducted a site visit in the last six months?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Have you ever used an online site to host a virtual meeting/event?
- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Please rate how important the following social factors of an online site are in regards to your site selection decision from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
There is a sense of human contact facilitated by the online site	○	○	○	○	○
There is a sense of personalness facilitated by the online site	○	○	○	○	○
There is a sense of sociability facilitated by the online site	○	○	○	○	○
There is a sense of human sensitivity facilitated by the online site	○	○	○	○	○

Please rate how important the following attributes of an online site are in regards to your site selection decision from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
There are useful navigational signs	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The directional signs are obviously placed	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The online site is easily navigated	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
There are convenient ways to explore the different areas of the online site	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Navigation through the online site is intuitively logical	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
A first-time visitor can find their way around the online site without much help	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The online site has an accessible information desk staffed with people who can help me	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
In general, the online site fits the criteria for my meeting or event	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The online site is accommodating for attendees	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Please rate how important the following attributes of an online site are in regards to your site selection decision from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
The online site is visually attractive	○	○	○	○	○
The online site has visually appealing decor	○	○	○	○	○
The online site is designed in an attractive way	○	○	○	○	○
The online site is aesthetically appealing	○	○	○	○	○
I like the way the online site looks	○	○	○	○	○

Please rate how important the following attributes of an online site are in regards to your site selection decision from 'extremely important' to 'not at all important'.

	Extremely important	Very important	Moderately important	Slightly important	Not at all important
The online site seems very secure	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I have no concerns about using the online site	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
The security systems of the online site seem rigorous	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
When visiting the online site, I am not reassured by the security procedures	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Overall, the online site seems security conscious	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Keeping the previously mentioned venue attributes in mind, please rate how the presence of those attributes influence your feelings towards using an online site.

	1	2	3	4	5
Happy:Unhappy	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Pleased:Annoyed	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Contented:Melancholic	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Stimulated:Relaxed	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Excited:Calm	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Aroused:Unaroused	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Based off of the presence of the previously mentioned attributes and your feelings towards them, please rate the following statements from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I enjoyed visiting the online site	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I was satisfied with my experience at the online site	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Given a choice, I would probably not go back to the online site	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
I would recommend the online site to other people	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

APPENDIX C: Descriptive Statistics for Servicescape and e-servicescape Variables

Descriptive Statistics of Layout and Functionality for Physical Event Venues

Variable Name	Items Layout & Navigation (Importance in regards to site selection…)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
L1	Useful navigational aids	2.5	1.077	0.416	-0.45
L2	Directional signs are obviously placed	2.43	1.071	0.481	-0.391
L3	Venue is easily navigated	1.88	0.741	0.543	0.047
L4	Convenient ways to explore different areas of venue	2.53	0.912	0.239	-0.123
L5	Navigation is intuitively logical	2.32	0.806	0.411	0.26
L6	A first-time visitor can find their way around	2.2	0.839	0.664	0.654
L7	Venue has an accessible information desk	2.27	1.059	0.558	-0.361
L8	Venue fits criteria for meeting/event	1.17	0.439	3.678	22.61
L9	Venue is accommodating for attendees	1.32	0.547	2.075	7.549

Descriptive Statistics of Layout and Functionality for Virtual Event Venues

Variable Name	Items Layout & Navigation (Importance in regards to site selection…)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
L1	Useful navigational aids	1.54	0.683	1.717	5.581
L2	Directional signs are obviously placed	1.58	0.734	1.518	3.697
L3	Site is easily navigated	1.24	0.539	3.057	13.544
L4	Convenient ways to explore different areas of site	1.6	0.722	1.289	2.427
L5	Navigation is intuitively logical	1.45	0.607	1.282	2.041
L6	A first-time visitor can find their way around	1.28	0.496	1.516	1.365
L7	Site has an accessible information desk	1.89	0.853	0.905	0.927
L8	Site fits criteria for meeting/event	1.63	0.816	1.551	3.244
L9	Site is accommodating for attendees	1.71	0.907	1.662	3.223

Descriptive Statistics of Aesthetic Appeal for Traditional Event Venues

Variable Name	Items Aesthetic Appeal (Importance in regards to site selection…)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
A1	Venue is visually attractive	1.98	0.719	2.075	7.549
A2	Venue has visually appealing decor	2.16	0.757	0.172	-0.391
A3	Venue is designed in an attractive way	2.12	0.751	0.206	-0.376
A4	The venue is aesthetically appealing	2.04	0.754	0.435	0.321
A5	I like the way the venue looks	2.21	0.857	0.692	0.556

Descriptive Statistics of Aesthetic Appeal for Virtual Event Venues

Variable Name	Items Aesthetic Appeal (Importance in regards to site selection…)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
A1	Site is visually attractive	1.97	0.805	0.751	1.058
A2	Site has visually appealing decor	2.31	0.919	0.367	-0.069
A3	Site is designed in an attractive way	2.09	0.804	0.654	0.919
A4	The site is aesthetically appealing	2.10	0.822	0.590	0.641
A5	I like the way the site looks	2.26	0.799	0.324	0.418

Descriptive Statistics of Safety & Security for Traditional Event Venues

Variable Name	Items Safety & Security (Importance in regards to site selection…)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
S1	The venue seems very secure	1.71	0.691	0.600	-0.173
S2	I have no concerns about using the venue	1.67	0.626	0.489	-0.128
S3	The security systems seem rigorous	2.26	0.788	0.289	-0.248
S4	I am not reassured by the security procedures	2.50	1.014	0.403	-0.202
S5	Overall, the venue seems security conscious	1.94	0.782	0.668	0.536

Descriptive Statistics of Safety & Security for Virtual Event Venues

| Variable Name | Items | Mean | Std. | Skewness | Kurtosis |
	Safety & Security (Importance in regards to site selection…)		Deviation		
S1	The site seems very secure	1.61	0.846	1.337	1.301
S2	I have no concerns about using the site	1.95	0.931	0.879	0.394
S3	The security systems seem rigorous	2.01	1.032	0.825	0.030
S4	I am not reassured by the security procedures	2.67	1.177	0.385	-0.574
S5	Overall, the site seems security conscious	1.98	0.924	0.791	0.257

Descriptive Statistics of Social Factors for Virtual Event Venues

| Variable Name | Items | Mean | Std. | Skewness | Kurtosis |
	Safety & Security (Importance in regards to site selection…)		Deviation		
SF1	There is a sense of human contact	1.92	1.018	1.126	0.835
SF2	There is a sense of personalness	1.93	0.944	0.957	0.655
SF3	There is a sense of sociability	2.22	0.992	0.620	0.090
SF4	There is a sense of human sensitivity	2.22	1.037	0.637	-0.033

APPENDIX D: Insignificant Regression Models

Regression Model for Traditional Venues with Emotions as a Predictor of Intent to Return

Dependent variable: Intent to return
Independent variables: Emotions

Goodness of fit

Multiple R = .017
R^2 = .0
Adjusted R^2 = -.004
Standard error of the estimate = 1.232

Analysis of Variance	Sum of Squares		Df	Mean Square		f	Sig.
Regression	0.112		1	0.112		0.074	0.786
Residual	367.573		242	1.519			
Variable	**B**	**SE B**	**St. B**	**t**	**Sig. (p)**	**Tolerance**	**VIF**
(Constant)	2.675	0.346		7.74	0.000		
Emotions	0.043	0.157	0.017	0.271	0.786	1	1

Regression Model for Traditional Venues with Servicecape as a Predictor of Intent to Return

Dependent variable: Intent to return
Independent variables: Layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, emotions

Goodness of fit

Multiple R = .106
R^2 = .011
Adjusted R^2 = -.005
Standard error of the estimate = 1.233

Analysis of Variance	Sum of Squares		Df	Mean Square		f	Sig.
Regression	4.103		4	1.026		0.674	0.61
Residual	363.582		239	1.521			
Variable	**B**	**SE B**	**St. B**	**t**	**Sig. (p)**	**Tolerance**	**VIF**
(Constant)	2.776	0.456		6.089	0.000		
Layout and Functionality	0.056	0.162	0.024	0.344	0.731	0.844	1.184
Aesthetic Appeal	0.099	0.123	0.055	0.804	0.422	0.885	1.13
Safety and Security	-0.213	0.144	-0.105	-1.482	0.140	0.827	1.21
Emotions	0.044	0.17	0.018	0.257	0.797	0.858	1.165

Regression Model for Virtual Venues with Emotions as a Predictor of Intent to Return

Dependent variable: Intent to return
Independent variables: Emotions

Goodness of fit

Multiple R = .103
R^2 = .011
Adjusted R^2 = .005
Standard error of the estimate = 0.936

Analysis of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Regression	1.746	1	1.746	1.992	0.16
Residual	161.286	184	0.877		

Variable	B	SE B	St. B	t	Sig. (p)	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.812	0.279		10.077	0.000		
Emotions	0.152	0.108	0.103	1.411	0.16	1	1

Regression Model for Virtual Venues with Servicecape as a Predictor of Intent to Return

Dependent variable: Intent to return
Independent variables: Layout and functionality, aesthetic appeal, safety and security, emotions

Goodness of fit

Multiple R = .219
R^2 = .048
Adjusted R^2 = 0.22
Standard error of the estimate = 0.929

Analysis of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	f	Sig.
Regression	7.851	5	1.570	1.821	.111
Residual	155.181	180	.862		

Variable	B	SE B	St. B	t	Sig. (p)	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	2.945	.356		8.269	0.000		
Layout and Functionality	.079	.190	.037	.418	.677	.687	1.456
Aesthetic Appeal	-.124	.101	-.097	-1.237	.218	.863	1.159
Safety and Security	.142	.095	.118	1.492	0.140	0..848	1.180
Social Factors	-.161	.089	-.144	-1.814	.071	.839	1.192
Emotions	.174	.114	.118	1.527	.129	.881	1.136