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SERVICE INCLUSION FOR PHYSCICALLY DISABLED TOURISTS: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF FUNCTIONAL AND SOCIAL EXPERIENSCAPE ON TOURIST SERVICE WELL-BEING

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Abstract

Malaysia is one of the travel destinations for millions of tourists from all around the world and thousands of service providers in Malaysia are catering to the varying needs of these travelers. Since ages, Tourism & Hospitality industry has been seen marketing their services to young individuals, couples, families, and business professionals globally. But, among these customers, there exists a significant market segment comprised of disabled tourists which is being largely overlooked by this industry. Therefore, this research is to study the impact of functional and social experienscape on service inclusion and tourist service well-being. Data is collected from the 354 respondents and a self-administered questionnaire was used. Results showed that Functional and Social Experienscape have positive influence on service inclusion and service inclusion have positive influence on tourist service well-being. Results drawn from the current study are expected to help academicians as this research would be a great contribution towards existing literature which will link marketing efforts to disabled consumers' experiences with a totally new approach of Service Inclusion. Also, it will be helpful and valuable for service/marketing managers (practitioners) of Tourism & Hospitality industry to better operationalize their marketing strategies pertaining to disabled consumers in order to reduce their suffering and to make them feel cared for.

Keywords: Functional Experienscape, Social Experienscape, Service Inclusion, Tourist Service Well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

The travel and tourism industry accounts for 10.3% of the global GDP, that is one of the world's top economic drivers, as reported by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC). The travel sector grew by 3.5% in 2019, faster than the world economy as a whole grew by 2.5%. Malaysia is one of the South East Asian countries whose tourism industries have flourished recently (R. Hirschmann, 2020).

The tourism and hospitality sector has long targeted the world's youth, couples, families, and working professionals. There is, however, a sizable market niche of disabled travellers among these customers. Disabilities affect one in five individuals worldwide or one billion people; the rate of disability is twice as high in emerging nations (*Disability Inclusion*, 2020). Most people aren't born with a gift for serving the disabled (Israeli, 2002); therefore, many services are still poorly tailored to their needs. To put it simply, barriers to economic and social inclusion for people with disabilities include but are not limited to inaccessible transportation and physical environments, a lack of assistive technologies and devices, an inability to communicate effectively due to a lack of adaptations, discriminatory bias and stigma, and service delivery gaps (*Disability Inclusion*, 2020).

In order to meet the needs of tourists, Malaysia has developed a thriving tourism and hospitality sector. This sector includes airlines, hotels, restaurants, attractions, and tour operators. There is a pressing need for service organisations to have a much deeper understanding of tourists with disabilities and how their well-being can be further improved by including them as a major part of the inclusive society. Although the Malaysian tourism and hospitality industry is accommodating disabled tourists by providing almost all physical facilities, such as specially designated spaces in parking areas, airports, bus and train stations, restrooms, elevators, etc., but

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still service providers have an obligation to ensure that people with disabilities have the same access to, and benefit from, those services, as anyone else, and that those people with disabilities are treated with the same level of respect as anyone else (*World Report on Disability: Main Report*, 2011). Despite having differing physical demands (which are being met), tourists with disabilities are just "differently-abled," and their social and psychological needs are to be met on par with those of "abled" customers by the service providers.

One approach to differentiate oneself in today's market is to provide customers with an unforgettable experience; yet, very little is known about the perspectives of persons with disabilities, especially those who are able to speak for themselves (Yates, 2007). It is crucial that all customers have access to the same high quality of service as it is one of the values being offered by any business (Fisk et al., 2018). This is because the concept of Service Inclusion states that all customers should be able to receive the same level of value that is prevalent in a marketplace exchange without any discrimination. While studies with a marketing lens have laid the groundwork for our conceptualization of the Servicescape, we still need to learn more about the Experienscape notion from the impaired traveler's point of view (Pizam & Tasci, 2019).

Therefore, this study intends to assess whether Service Inclusion has an influence on the Well-being of tourists with disabilities. Data was collected from the disabled tourists in Malaysia specially with mobility disabilities in order to know the effect of Functional and Social Experienscape on their Service Inclusion and Well-being when they avail the services of different sectors involved in the Tourism & Hospitality service ecosystem. In sum, this research will be useful for both academics and professionals in their efforts to create a society that is both sustainable and welcoming to all members of society.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Functional Experienscape

Bitner (1992) considered the location, size, and shape of furniture, equipment, and other items in a service environment while determining the optimal layout for efficiency and aesthetics. Numerous quantitative and qualitative studies incorporate this dimension into their analyses of design, layout, space, signs, and functionality. Since a space's utility is determined by its general design, layout, space, and signs, these factors can be collectively referred to as the functional component (Pizam & Tasci, 2019). Bitner's (1992) servicescape model incorporated artefacts, symbols, and signals that communicated about the product, company, and brand to consumers in direct or indirect ways; however, only a small number of studies really accepted this component.

Research shows that people with disabilities benefit more from an increase in their perceived value of accessibility or functional experience than those without disabilities. Therefore, disabled people's perceptions of the relative relevance of accessibility criteria should be interpreted in a different way than those of able-bodied visitors (Gassiot Melian et al., 2016). There is a continuous, dynamic evolution of expectations regarding disability and functional experience across all forms of impairment and all tiers of support required. People with disabilities have higher expectations than ever before, thus it's up to authorities to keep up with the evolution of best practises around the world and update the accessibility rules accordingly (Darcy, 2017).

Transportation and parking issues are of greatest concern to tourists with physical disability (Chikuta et al., 2019). In addition, they are more concerned than people with other impairments about the availability of lodging, meals, and opportunities to view birds and animals. When designing and building accessible infrastructure, it is important to take into account the specific requirements of various impairments. In order to better serve all individuals with disabilities, tourist service providers should embrace universal design principles (Chikuta et al., 2019). This will allow for more inclusive services and reduce the need for constant facility upgrades. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H₁: Functional experienscape positively influence service inclusion for tourists with physical disabilities

2.2. Social Experienscape

Both natural and social environmental cues were removed by Bitner (1992). Sociologists and social psychologists have long known that people's actions are influenced by the social and cultural aspects of their surroundings. Tombs & McColl-Kennedy (2003) established the concept of the social servicescape and claimed that social density, context, and the displayed emotions of persons in the servicescape can all comprise the social element of the servicescape. They also advocated for additional study into the ways in which customers' and workers' emotional connections to one another shape the servicescape and can be manipulated by management. It's critical to recognise that the way disabled individuals are treated during vacations is a major motivating factor for them. The most crucial aspect of accessibility is to be treated as equally as possible to everyone else. If a person with a disability is first treated with dignity, then other accessibility concerns can be more effectively

addressed (Chikuta et al., 2019). As a result, the social component was implemented in a wide variety of ways, such as through the facilitation of conversations between customers and employees (Pizam & Tasci, 2019; Tasci & Pizam, 2020). Thus, we posit that:

H₂: Social experienscape positively influence service inclusion for tourists with physical disabilities

2.3. Service Inclusion

Everyone has the right to be treated fairly by the institutions and businesses they interact with. If businesses treat their customers differently because of who they are, that's not just unfair; it's disservice. The idea of service inclusion is based on the development of the concept of universal human rights, which originated in the eighteenth century and is continuing to this day. Under the wing of TSR, which seeks to improve the quality of life for all members of society, the concept of service inclusion has arisen (Anderson et al., 2013; Anderson & Ostrom, 2015; Gustafsson et al., 2016). Benoit et al. (2017) argue that service providers may readily address the issue of service inclusion by drawing on a variety of theories and methodologies.

Unfair service systems are pervasive throughout human history and can be found in nearly every culture. In most service encounters, customers end up being the targets of bias at every level of the service delivery chain, including the company itself. The umbrella phrase for all these forms of discrimination is "service exclusion" (Fisk et al., 2018). For example, "service exclusion happens when services (service providers or service systems) purposefully or inadvertently fail to include or to effectively serve customers in a fair manner," as stated by Fisk et al. (2018). The concept of service inclusion has been proposed with the goal of achieving comprehensive service inclusion by the year 2050. (Fisk et al., 2018, 2020).

One or more human qualities can serve as the basis for the discriminatory practises. Different ways of thinking and behaving, as well as a person's demographics and health (including mental and physical health, as well as the presence or absence of any disabilities) may fall into this category. There is a need to develop novel methods to the design of service systems in order to satisfy the requirements of all people. While there has been some research on inclusive services (Dickson et al. (2016) being an exception), much more needs to be done in this area before service inclusion can become a reality (Fisk et al., 2018). Fisk et al. (2020) advocate for service research collaborations (ServCollab) aimed at enhancing human experiences (HX) with a primary emphasis on Service Inclusion in order to lessen human suffering and boost human well-being. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H₃: Service inclusion positively influence tourist service well-being

2.4. Tourist Service Well-being

Customers these days would rather not be lumped into a generic "customer target group" where individualised care is neglected in favour of the group as a whole. Therefore, service providers should aim for human centricity, in which the demands of each individual customer are prioritised. Not too long ago, people thought of consumers' well-being as if it were some abstract mental concept. And it was more concerned with products or the services that accompany certain products (Sirgy, 2012). This is why the notion of Transformative Service Research was developed; it requires businesses to consider how their actions will affect the well-being of society's consumers (Anderson & Ostrom, 2015).

Several sectors of the service economy have a vested interest in measuring customer satisfaction in diverse service settings (Falter & Hadwich, 2020). Different service scenarios, such as customers' interactions and relationships with service staff, customers' experiences and feelings that emerge from their level of involvement in the provision of services, and so on, can all contribute to consumers' well-being. Interaction between customers and employees is crucial and can have a variety of effects on both parties' well-being (Ahn et al., 2019; Altinay et al., 2019; Asokan Ajitha et al., 2019; Awan et al., 2023; Awan, Shamim, & Saleem, 2022).

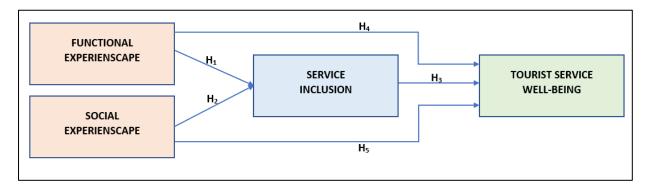
The authors Kirillova et al. (2020) investigated the effect that contrast between the hotel's back- and front-of-house departments had in the relationship between aesthetic workplace design and employee subjective well-being. Also examined were the positive and negative changes that travellers reported in their sense of well-being over the course of a leisure trip (Awan, Shamim, Saleem, et al., 2022; Mayer et al., 2020). Nonetheless, there exists a significant dearth of research investigating the impact of diverse service encounters on the welfare of individuals with disabilities who engage in tourism. Building upon insights from psychological studies and embracing a comprehensive perspective on well-being, Falter and Hadwich (2020) delineated customer service well-being as "a favorable outcome arising from the experiential, relational, procedural, and interactive aspects of a service or service scenario involving customer-employee engagement, drawing from psychological research and a holistic well-being framework." In order to fully comprehend the nomological network of consumer service

well-being and its many influencing elements, outcomes, moderators, and mediating effects, more study is required (Falter & Hadwich, 2020). Therefore, we posit that:

H₄: Functional Experienscape positively influence Tourist Service Well-being

H₅: Social Experienscape positively influence Tourist Service Well-being.

Figure 2.1: Proposed Framework



3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

People in Malaysia with a range of physical disabilities made up the survey population for this study. To fulfill the objectives of the research, the researchers engaged in discussions and interactions with pertinent stakeholders, such as disability associations and sheltered workshops catering to individuals with disabilities, in Malaysia. Introducing themselves as academic professionals with a genuine interest in understanding the perspectives of disabled tourists, they sought assistance by requesting completion of a standard document, promptly sending it via email to the provided addresses. Because directly questioning respondents about potentially sensitive subjects could create stress, the survey questionnaire and instructions for filling it out were submitted to the organisations for final clearance. All responders and organisations serving people with disabilities gave their consent to take part voluntarily.

To measure the quantitative response for each observed variable(s), the Likert scale was utilizsed ranging from one strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree, as a basis for the scale in the survey questionnaire. For functional and social experiences, the scale was adapted from Pizam & Tasci (2019). To measure service inclusion for tourists with disabilities, an already developed scale by Awan et al. (2022). Was utilised Furthermore, for tourist service well-being, the scale was adapted from Falter & Hadwich (2020). Consequent to the dissemination of the survey through different means, the research team managed to gather final valid responses from 345 local tourists with different disabilities across Malaysia.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis, Measurement, and Structural Models

Our hypothesised model showed a satisfactory model fit against the selected fit indices, i.e. P-Value > 0.05, RMSEA 0.024, GFI =0.90, NFI =0.89, AGFI =0.887, CFI =0.979, TLI =0.967, and CMIN (Chisq/df) = 1.21 for the overall measurement model, because all of these scales are predefined in prior literature. Each item was statistically significant and had a high factor loading (P<.01). "Social Experienscape" had factor loadings in the 0.76-0.81 range, "Functional Experienscape" in the 0.73-0.83 range, "Service Inclusion" in the 0.71-0.75 range, and "Tourist Service Well-Being" in the 0.71-0.74 range.

4.2. Reliability and Validity of the Research Constructs

The overall reliability of the scale employed in this study was determined by assessing the internal consistency of the items within each component. According to Nunnally (1978), item values exceeding 0.70 are considered acceptable for ensuring scale reliability. Our scale demonstrated strong psychometric properties, including internal consistency, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.874 for Functional Experienscape, 0.856 for Social Experienscape, 0.942 for Service Inclusion, and 0.899 for Tourist Service Wellbeing. Metrics including composite reliability, standardised factor loading (SFL), and average variance extracted (AVE) were used to assess the scale's convergent validity further. In keeping with the guidelines established by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), results indicating values above CR>0.70, AVE>0.50, and SFL>0.60 were deemed acceptable and satisfactory. These findings are presented in Table 4.1. Furthermore, we evaluated the correlation coefficient of each research construct against the square root of its AVE to ascertain the scale's discriminant

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validity, which yielded affirmative results (refer to Table 4.2). By comparing each variable's correlation coefficient with the square root of the AVE, the discriminant validity was evaluated using the standards provided by Bagozzi and Yi (1988), and these results are also presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.1: Assessment of Constructs' Convergent Validity and Reliability

	Alpha	CR	AVE
Functional Experienscape	0.874	0.903	0.609
Social Experienscape	0.856	0.896	0.634
Service Inclusion	0.942	0.948	0.535
Tourist Service Well-being	0.899	0.916	0.522

Note: "Alpha=Cronbach's Alpha, CR= Composite Reliability, AVE= Average Variance Extracted"

Table 4.2: Discriminant Validity

	Functional	Service Inclusion	Social	Tourist Service Wellbeing
Functional	0.78			
Service Inclusion	0.156	0.731		
Social	0.047	0.278	0.796	
Tourist Service Wellbeing	0.259	0.317	0.422	0.723

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

Using structural equation modelling (SEM), we examined the hypothesised model presented in figure 2.1. According to the findings of the study, the first hypothesis, "Functional Experinscape → Service Inclusion," was supported by the data. The positive path coefficient and significant P-value for the second hypothesis (Social Experienscape → Service Inclusion) confirmed that this relationship holds true. Significant statistical values also supported the third hypothesis, which examined how Service Inclusion affected the tourist service well-being. Last but not least, we put fourth and fifth hypotheses to the test to see the direct impact of Functional and Social Experienscape on Tourist Service Well-being. Table 4.3 displays the path coefficients for the study framework.

Table 4.3: Path Coefficients of the Proposed Model

	os	SM	S-DEVE	T-Stats	P-Value
Functional -> Service Inclusion	0.143	0.148	0.044	3.241	0.001
Social -> Service Inclusion	0.213	0.216	0.038	5.577	0.001
Service Inclusion -> Tourist Service Well-being	0.183	0.187	0.070	2.625	0.009
Functional -> Tourist Service Well-being	0.271	0.276	0.037	7.332	0.001
Social -> Tourist Service Well-being	0.361	0.362	0.064	5.612	0.001

Note: "OS=Original Sample, SM=Sample Mean, STDVE=Standard Deviation, T-Stats=Tstatistics/Effect Size, P=Value= level of significance.

The results of the mediation study showed that while Service Inclusion did not mediate the relationship between Social Experienscape and Tourist Service Well-being, it did mediate the relationship between Functional Experienscape and Tourist Service Well-being. Table 4.4 presents the findings from the mediated analysis.

Table 4.4: Mediation Analysis Results

	os	SM	S-DEVE	T-Stats	P-Value
Functional Experienscape -> Service Inclusion -> Tourist Service Wellbeing	0.05	0.052	0.021	2.402	0.017
Social Experienscape -> Service Inclusion -> Tourist Service Well- being	0.026	0.028	0.015	1.777	0.076

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Examining how Functional and Social Experienscape affects Service Inclusion and Tourist Service Well-being was the study's overarching goal. To better comprehend the phenomena and its effects/outcomes, this study has attempted to explain a theoretical relationship between all these imperative aspects.

The authors began by making the presumption that both Functional and Social Experienscape had a favourable impact on Service Inclusion. Our findings provided support for this presumption, which is also in agreement with the current body of scholarly research. The more that tourism service providers improve the effectiveness of their functional and social experienscape, the greater the likelihood that tourists with disabilities will feel that they are included in the service.

The authors looked at the relationship between Service Inclusion and Tourist Service Well-being in the second part of their study. The findings of the research lent credence to this line of reasoning as well, demonstrating that service inclusion does, in fact, favourably influence the well-being of tourists with disabilities. These findings are also very consistent with the previous research that has been done. If disabled tourists have the impression that they are included in the service, then this may also increase and improve the quality of the service they receive.

Thirdly, the research claimed that a functional and social experience can have a good influence on the well-being of tourists with disabilities, which the research's findings confirmed to be true. Disabled tourists will experience an improvement in their service well-being if they take pleasure in the combination of a functional and social experienscape. The functional and social experience provided to impaired travellers has a key role in boosting the overall quality of the service they get.

Last but not least, the purpose of this research was to evaluate the impacts of service inclusion as a mediator between the functional experiencescape and tourist service well-being, as well as the social experiencescape and tourist service well-being. The findings indicated that service inclusion acts as a mediator in the connection between functional experienscape and the tourist service well-being. However, the service inclusion does not act as a mediator in the relationship between social experienscape and the tourist service well-being.

5.2. Practical Implications

The practitioners working in the tourism business will be able to use the conclusions gained from this study to their advantage. The practitioners will get an understanding of the significance of the social and functional experienscape, as well as the role that these elements play in the formation of an image of the service providers. Because people with disabilities represent a sizable portion of the tourism industry's target demographic, it is imperative that businesses in the tourism industry come to terms with the fact that it is their responsibility to meet the requirements of disabled tourists and to ensure that they have the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of the vacation experience. This will not only help in the short run, but it will also help in the long term with the sustainability of the business. It is important for those who supply tourism services to keep in mind that the kind of experience they craft for disabled tourists will, in the long run, contribute to the enhancement and improvement of those tourists' wellbeing.

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