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First Impressions vs. Lasting Impressions: Comparing Hospitality and Memorable Hosting Experiences Between Guests

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Abstract: This paper aims to investigate whether the perception of hospitality experience and its consequent relationships with memorable hosting experiences, and behavioral intention could be perceived differently between First-time and Repeat guests. This is descriptive research using structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis. A survey was carried out with guests of a hot spring resort. A sample of 582 participants was obtained and divided into two distinct groups (First-time and Repeat guests) for analysis purposes.

Keywords: Hospitality, memorable experiences, first-time guest, resorts.

Introduction

First-time guests and repeat guests constitute the two types of guests who may visit a resort during holidays and vacations. Rather than being just a place to sleep, resorts are seen as places to live an experience. Quality lodgings, food and beverages, entertainment, recreational facilities, health amenities, pleasant and relaxing settings, and, most importantly, a very high level of service offered in a courteous and individualized manner are all part of the resort concept (Murphy, 2009). In short,

resorts are places for hedonic activities where guests enjoy and create memorable experiences. In fact, resort guests' experiences aren't restricted to the amenities provided by the resort. Creating great and memorable experiences for guests remains a top priority for hoteliers, as positive experiences are a crucial factor in a customer's decision to stay at a certain resort (Dedeoglu et al., 2018).

First-time guests represent new consumers who are discovering the resort for the first time. The first-time guest is those who are unfamiliar with the place and, even if they are, will be consuming experiences for the first time. First-time guest often seek enjoyment (McKercher & Wong, 2004), and may plan ahead of time what they want to accomplish, conduct a more thorough information search, rely on external sources for information, and be more receptive to ideas (McKercher et al., 2012). So, first-time guest experiences are then determined by those services and products that can meet their needs and desires. Ideally, the overall hospitality experience is perceived as the performance of the resort's staff, products, services, and facilities, as well as the benefits to first-time guests of this performance. The outcome of this hospitality experience will influence the future responses towards the resort.

Research Aim and Research Questions

We did not find any previous studies in the literature that identified the existence or not of differences between the behavior of first-time and repeat guests. To bridge this gap in the literature, this research aims to investigate whether the hospitality experience can be perceived differently among first-time guests compared to frequent guests. Thus, the research problem presented is: Can the perception of hospitality experience and its consequent relationships with memorable experiences, and behavioral intention be perceived differently between first-time and frequent guests? Descriptive research was carried out using structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis to achieve this objective and answer the proposed question. A survey was carried out with guests of a hot spring resort, and a sample of 572 participants was obtained and divided into two distinct groups (First-time and Repeat guests) for analysis purposes.

Literature Review

Hospitality involves the provision of food, beverages, and accommodation and represents an act of friendship: it creates symbolic bonds, connects people who establish relationships, and engages those involved in the sharing of hospitality (Lashley, 2015; Pitt-Rivers, 2012). Although the definition seems simple, hospitality is a complex construct, and considerable literature has been generated across various disciplines on definitions and approaches (Lynch et al., 2011).

Hospitality is an integral set of behaviors within society. Its primary function is to establish or strengthen existing relationships (Camargo, 2015; O'Gorman, 2007). The object of study in hospitality is defined as the different forms and models of human relationships (Camargo, 2015);, in other words, hospitality concerns the relationship between human beings and the bonds that are strengthened or weakened as a result of behaviors. The origin of hospitality arises not from someone who invites, but from someone who needs shelter and seeks human warmth (Camargo, 2004). Montandon (2003) e (Grassi, 2011) complement Camargo's assertions, stating that hospitality is a way of living in a society governed by rites, rules, and laws.(Brotherton & Wood, 2010).

Service plays a key role in the creation of memorable experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Making individuals feel valued or receiving personalized attention are both wonderful service indicators (Horniman, 2008). A guest has an experience when they have any feeling or knowledge because of interacting with various aspects made by a service provider (Pullman & Gross, 2004).

A memorable experience is one that leaves a lasting impression on the person and has significance for them long after the event itself. It might start to develop vivid recollections of the encounter, reignite linkages to past experiences, or start to transform the experiencer permanently (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009).

First-time and repeat guest have a significantly different perception of a destination or place, and probably because repeat guest's perception are based on their actual experiences whereas first-time guest must rely on external sources like environment, relationship with other guest and resort staff (Frías-Jamilena, Del Barrio-García, & López-Moreno, 2013). The proposition presented to be tested by the hypotheses is that first-time guests are more sensitive and suggestive to stimuli offered by the environment and relationships than compared to repeat guests. Based on the review of the relevant literature, we propose the following three hypotheses and the model with the relationship between the constructs (see Figure 1).

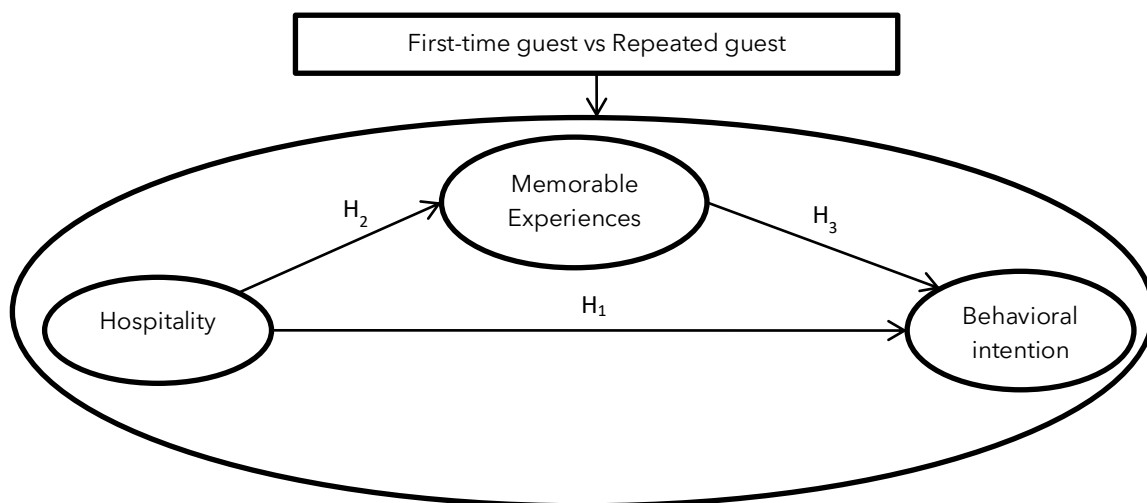
H₁: Hospitality has a positive and significant relationship with behavioral intention and will be perceived differently between First-time and Repeat guests.

H₂: Hospitality has a positive and significant relationship with memorable experiences and will be perceived differently between First-time and Repeat guests

H₃: Memorable experiences have a positive and significant relationship with behavioral intention and will be perceived differently between First-time and Repeat guests

Figure 1

Proposed model and its hypothesis



Methodology

This is descriptive research using structural equation modeling and multigroup analysis. A survey was carried out with guests of a hot spring resort. A sample of 582 participants was obtained and divided into two distinct groups (First-time and Repeat guests) for analysis purposes. Structural Equation Analysis (SEM) was used with SmartPLS 4 software, employing Multigroup Analysis (MA).

Research Results

For the evaluation of the structural model, as indicated in the literature (Hair et al., 2014), the bootstrapping technique (5,000) resamples, unilateral Student's t distribution with (n-1) degrees of freedom, was used. It is also necessary to evaluate β , R^2 , and the corresponding t values. Table 1, shows the values for the hypothesis tests.

Table 1

Structural model evaluation and hypothesis testing.

	β	R^2	Q^2	f^2	t statistic	p-value	Status
HOSP → B_INT	0.358	0.254	0.172	0.100	5.725	0.000	A***
HOSP → M_EXP	0.647	0.418		0.720	14.428	0.000	A***
M_EXP → B_INT	0.192		0.254	0.029	3.218	0.001	A***

Notes: B_INT = Behavioral intention; HOSP = Hospitality; M_EXP = Memorable experience; A = hypothesis accepted; R = hypothesis rejected; * = Significant at 5%; ** = Significant at 0.1%; *** = Significant at 0.01%

Managerial implications for first-time guests and repeat guests can be different, and it is crucial to understand the different needs of these groups. First time guest has several managerial implications that a hospitality business should consider ensuring that has a positive hospitality experience and becomes a repeat guest. A guest's first impression of a business is crucial, and providing excellent customer service is essential. The business should ensure that its employees are trained to be friendly, welcoming, and helpful to guests. They should also be knowledgeable about the products and services the business offers and be able to answer any guests' questions. The business should create a welcoming environment that makes guests feel comfortable and relaxed. This can be achieved by using warm lighting, comfortable seating, and pleasant background music. The business should also ensure that the facility is clean and well-maintained. Offering special promotions to first-time guests can encourage them to return. For example, the business could offer a discount on their first purchase or provide a free sample of their products. The business should gather feedback from first-time guests to identify areas for improvement. This feedback can be gathered through surveys, comment cards, or asking the guest directly. The business should use this feedback to make changes and improvements to its products and services. Following up with guests: The business should follow up with first-time guests to thank them for their patronage and encourage them to return. This can be done through email or by sending a personalized thank-you note. The business can also offer special promotions or incentives to encourage the guest to return.

Repeat guests, on the other hand, are an essential source of revenue for hotels and resorts. Providing them with a personalized hospitality experience and recognizing their loyalty is crucial. Offering loyalty programs, special discounts, and customized amenities can go a long way in retaining repeat guests. Moreover, hotels and resorts can use data analytics to understand guest behavior and preferences to tailor their services and experiences. This approach can help hotels and resorts increase guest satisfaction, loyalty, and revenue.

Conclusions

Hospitality plays a critical role in creating a positive and memorable hosting experience for first-time guests. It encompasses a wide range of factors, including warm and welcoming staff, clear communication, attention to detail, and consistent service, among others. By prioritizing hospitality, hotels and hospitality providers can increase guest satisfaction, build brand loyalty, and generate positive word-of-mouth recommendations, ultimately leading to a more successful and sustainable business. A First-time guest's initial hospitality experience with a hotel or resort can set the tone for their entire stay. Warm, welcoming staff and a clean, comfortable environment can make a guest feel valued and at ease from the moment they arrive. A clear communication with the First-time guest before, during, and after their stay can help ensure that their needs are met, and any issues are addressed promptly. This includes providing accurate information about amenities and services, being responsive to requests or concerns, and following up to make sure the guest is satisfied.

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