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## Stopover destination attractiveness: A quasi-experimental approach

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## **Stopover destination attractiveness: A quasi-experimental approach**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study contributes to the emerging field of stopover destination attractiveness. There has been a paucity of published research around the phenomenon of stopovers, including stopover destination image, during long haul international air travel. This is surprising given long-haul commercial flights date back to the 1930s, and that destination image has been the most popular topic in the tourism marketing literature since the 1970s. A quasi-experimental research design with samples of consumers in the UK and Australia was used to test aspects of a proposed model of stopover destination attractiveness. The results highlight the influence of perceived airport ambience and positive user-generated content on social media on enhancing attitudinal destination loyalty for Dubai as a stopover destination. The study also highlights the positive influence of previous visitation on attitudinal destination loyalty for a destination located in the Middle East, a region with a history of negative media publicity around conflicts. It is proposed these findings have practical implications for emerging stopover destinations, and for other destinations in conflict-ridden regions such as the Middle East.

### **KEY WORDS**

Stopover; destination image; Middle East; long haul; Dubai; previous visitation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a lack of published research into the phenomenon of stopovers during long haul international air travel. This is surprising given layovers (<24 hours) and stopovers (1-3 nights) en route to a final destination have been a necessary part of long haul air travel between the UK and Australia for over 80 years. For example, the first commercial flight from Australia to the UK in 1935 took 12 days and made 31 stops (Sutton, 2016). Sutton also reported Qantas launched the 'Kangaroo route' between Sydney and London in 1947, making 10 layovers along the way, plus a stopover in Singapore. Other than a direct flight between Perth and London operated by Qantas, travellers on the UK/Australia route still need to transit an intermediary port en route. Such transits enable travellers the possibility of a stopover rather than a layover. The first published research into stopovers was Pike and Kotsi's (2016) exploratory investigation identifying salient attributes of stopover destination image. The lack of published research about the phenomenon of stopovers during long haul travel, and stopover destination attractiveness, represents a major gap in the literature, given the long history of long haul international air travel, and given destination image research has been the most popular topic in the tourism marketing literature since the field commenced in 1973. While more research is required to understand key issues such as motivations for stopovers, activities during stopovers, frequencies of stopovers, and satisfaction with stopovers, the focus of the present study is on perceived stopover destination attractiveness.

In the history of air travel between the UK and Australia, the traditional stopover destinations have been Singapore and Hong Kong. Both of these destinations have enjoyed a long history of strong business, tourism, cultural and sporting ties with the UK and Australia through the British Commonwealth of nations. It is proposed there is a high level of awareness and familiarity with Singapore and Hong Kong among UK and Australian travellers. For example, recent surveys using an unaided open-ended question to elicit preferred stopover destinations on the UK/Australia route found Singapore and Hong Kong the most popular choices (references withheld). Both destinations actively promote stopover options (see Discover Hong Kong 2020, Visit Singapore 2020). The average length of stay for international visitors is three days in Singapore (Singapore Tourism Board, 2014), and four nights in Hong Kong (Hong Kong Tourist Board, 2015). This is in keeping with a definition of a stopover during long haul international air travel as a stay of between one and three nights at an intermediary port en route to the primary destination (Kotsi, Pike & Gottlieb, 2018).

The destination of interest in this study is Dubai, which has emerged as a strong competitor to Singapore and Hong Kong for the stopover market on the UK/Australia air route. The UK and Australia are in the top 10 long haul markets for Dubai, providing 6.5% and 4.8% of total visitors in 2018 (United States Travel Association, 2019). Visit Dubai, the destination marketing organisation (DMO) promotes a ‘hustle-free, short and sweet’ stopover experience (Visit Dubai, 2020), and collaborates with airline Emirates to offer a free visa for stays of 48-96 hours (Emirates, 2020). Average length of stay in Dubai for international visitors is 3.7 nights (Dubai Airports, 2017), which is in keeping with the defined length of a stopover. In the year ended September 2019 there were 2.2 million passengers on the eastern hemisphere route between UK/Australia and Australia/UK (Airline Network Analysis, 2019). Of these passengers, Emirates carried over 430,000 via Dubai. The Dubai Tourism Strategy 2025 aims to attract 25 million annual visitors and reposition the destination from the fourth most popular destination in the world to the most visited city in the world (Langton, 2018).

Dubai is an interesting destination for destination image research. On one hand the emirate has attracted international attention for the scale and pace of development of tourism, business and residential infrastructure, and was set to host World Expo 2020 until the COVID-19 global pandemic forced a postponement to 2021/22 (Expo 2020 Dubai, 2020). On the other hand, Dubai is located in the Middle East, a region with a long history of negative media editorial about conflicts. While not the focus of the present study, there is a need for more research into the extent that negative media publicity has influenced the perceptions of Middle Eastern destinations. For example, a large survey of UK residents found 47% would avoid Dubai due to safety concerns and the threat of war in the Middle East (Travel and Tour World, 2020). In the context of stopovers for UK and Australia travellers there has not been a long history of relationships with Dubai in terms of previous visitation and sporting relationships as has been the case with Singapore and Hong Kong. The aim of the present study was to test aspects of a recent hypothesised model of stopover destination attractiveness (reference withheld for review anonymity) in the context of Dubai for UK and Australian travellers.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The present study aims to contribute to the emerging field of research into the phenomenon of stopovers, by testing aspects of a model of stopover destination attractiveness. The key constructs of interest are the influence of destination image on attitudinal destination loyalty. The proposed model hypothesised positive associations between three factors of stopover destination image (access, airport ambience and attractions) with attitudinal stopover destination loyalty.

## **2.1 Destination image**

A number of reviews of the destination image literature have been reported, which is indicative of the importance of the construct (see Assaf, Woo & Kock 2015, Cai & Lu 2014, Chon 1990, Gallarza, Saura & Garcia 2002, Tasci, Gartner & Cavusgil 2007, Pike 2002, 2007, Stepchenkova & Mills 2010, Zhang, Fu, Josiassen). Since the first studies were published in the early 1970s (see Matejka 1973, Mayo 1973,), destination image research has been the most popular topic in the tourism marketing literature (Pike & Page, 2014). The reason for consistent and continued research into destination image is the long-held recognition that perceptions held of a destination can affect destination competitiveness, due to the intangibility of tourism services (see Hunt, 1975). Destination image is a complex construct and there is not yet a consensus definition in the literature. Key issues underpinning the complexity of destination image measurement include: intangibility and previous visitation, the influence of the travel situation, and destination image formation,

### ***2.1.1 Intangibility and previous visitation***

Unless a traveller has previously visited a destination, they can only base their opinions of the place on images they hold (or don't hold) in their mind (Hunt, 1975). This is a critical point because images sometimes only have a tenuous and indirect relationship to fact (Reynolds, 1965), and the individual believes their perceptions to be true. This is referred to by marketers as *perception is reality*, with origins in Thomas' theory that "What is defined or perceived by people is real in its consequences" (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p.572, in Patton 2002). Whether an individual's perceptions of a destination are accurate or false, they will be influential in decision making. Research has shown previous visitation influences positive perceptions and intent to revisit (Bigne, Sanchez & Sanchez 2001, Fallon & Schofield 2004,

Gallarza, Saura, & Garcia 2002, Hu, Wan & Ho 2007, McKercher & Wong 2005). This is an important issue for Dubai as a relatively recent emerging stopover destination for UK and Australian travellers, given the lack of history between the emirate and the UK/Australia markets, and the history of negative media attention around conflicts in the Middle East.

### ***2.1.2 The travel situation/travel context***

It has been proposed an individual's perceptions of the attractiveness of a destination might differ according to the travel situation (Crompton, 1992). For example, a destination might appeal to a traveller considering a honeymoon, but not appeal for their family summer vacation. However, there has been a lack of published research about travel context in destination image measurement (Gertner 2010, Hu & Ritchie 1993, Snepenger & Milner 1990). Indeed, Pike's (2002, 2007) categorisation of 262 destination image studies published between 1973 and 2007 identified only 37 that stated an explicit travel situation to research participants. In this study the travel situation of interest is a stopover during long-haul international air travel. The first published definition of a stopover was proposed by Kotsi, Pike & Gottlieb (2018) as a stay of one to three nights at an intermediary port en route to the final destination. As discussed, prior to Pike & Kotsi (2016) there had been a lack of published research into the phenomenon of stopovers during long haul air travel. Recent contributions to this emerging field of study have included Tigu and Stoenescu (2017), Lund, Loftsdottir, and Leonard (2017), Masiero, Qui and Zoltan, (2019).

### ***2.1.3 Destination image formation***

Consumers' perceptions of destinations can be developed organically, through an individual's own assimilation of information, or induced by marketers' advertising (Gunn, 1988). There is a diverse range of organic image sources, such as user-generated content on social media, word of mouth from significant others, media editorial, movies, school geography classes and so on. Gunn argued that organic images are more influential in development of destination perceptions and that induced images are likely to be developed during travel planning, due to higher credibility. Gartner (1993) proposed a typology of image formation agents, along a continuum ranging from overt induced advertising through to organic sources such as visitation. The practical implication is that DMOs could employ different image formation agents independently, or in combination, to suit different marketing objectives. For example, encouraging positive user-generated content on social media can be a powerful organic

source, with greater credibility than advertising. As discussed, Dubai is an emerging destination located in the Middle East region, which has long suffered negative media publicity around conflicts. This situation might be similar to the case of Ireland, where Ehemann (1977) found media editorial at that time to be overwhelmingly negative of the country, due to the history of the troubles. Bassil (2014) found that a conflict in one part of the Middle East can have negative flow on effects for neighbouring destinations. This can lead to stereotypes for destinations in what has been a volatile region (Avraham & Ketter, 2016). This might explain why consumers' perceptions of a conflict-free destination, such as Dubai in this region, might suffer from the ongoing negative media reporting of the Middle East and Arabian Peninsula.

## **2.2 Attitudinal destination loyalty**

For DMOs, understanding destination image in target markets increases the predictability of future loyalty to the destination (Zhang, Fu, Cai & Lu, 2014). In this regard, attitudinal destination loyalty is a dependent variable in modelling DMO performance measurement (Pike 2016, 2021). For example, recent research into the concept of consumer-based brand equity for destinations has consistently shown how destination image is correlated with attitudinal destination loyalty (see for example Bianchi & Pike 2011, Bianchi, Pike & Lings 2014, Boo, Busser & Baloglu 2009, Chen & Myagmarsuren 2010, Gartner & Konecnic Ruzzier 2011, Horng, Liu, Chou & Tsai 2012, Konecnic 2006, Kotsi, Pike & Gottlieb 2018, Lim & Weaver 2012, Tasci 2018, Wong 2018). Following these studies, with an interest in 'likelihood of future visitation' and 'likelihood of recommending to others' as the key variables to operationalise attitudinal destination loyalty.

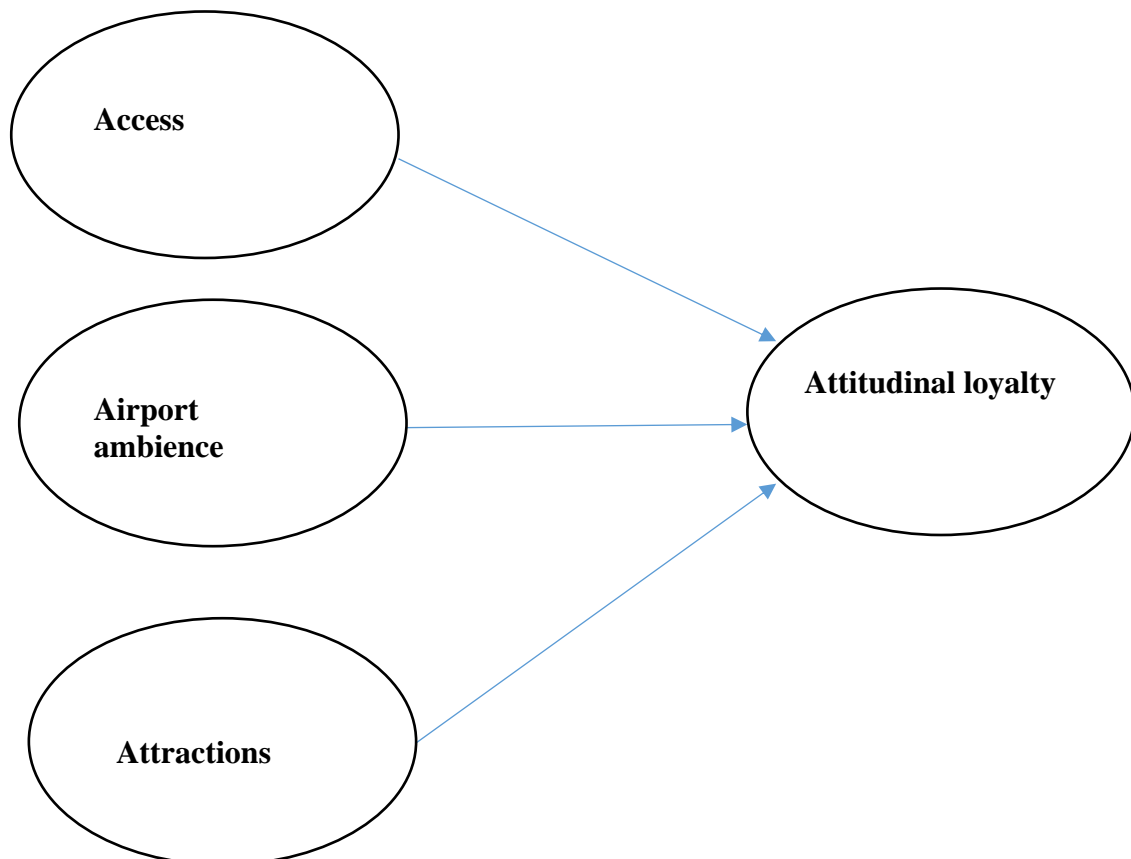
## **2.3 The 3A's of stopover destination image: attractions, airport ambience, access**

The present study tests aspects of a proposed model of stopover destination attractiveness (Pike & Kotsi, 2020). Previously there had been no model of stopover destination attractiveness. The model, which was developed from data collected from a large sample of 2000 travellers in four countries, through a four-stage mixed methods research design, is shown in Figure 1. From an initial pool of 17 destination image attributes commonly reported in the literature as well as 12 attributes in the context of stopover destinations that were identified as important in personal interviews with consumers in four countries, the model



proposed three factors of stopover destination image positively influence attitudinal stopover destination loyalty in the context of stopover destinations: attractions, airport ambience, and access.

**Figure 1 – Model of stopover destination attractiveness**



- H1 Perceived access positively influences attitudinal loyalty
- H2 Perceived airport ambience positively influences attitudinal loyalty
- H3 Perceptions of attractions positively influence attitudinal loyalty

### **3. METHOD**

Members of a commercial marketing research panel in the UK and Australia were invited by email to participate in separate online surveys during the months of June and July 2019.

Separate online URLs were used for the two surveys. The survey was relatively short, which

the marketing research firm estimated would take their participants around five to ten minutes to complete. The requirements were that participants needed to be over 18 and had either flown long haul internationally or intended to do so in the future. Resources enabled the purchase of 272 participants from each country for a total sample of 554. An even split of males and females was requested. Both samples had similar ratios of gender, education, marital status, and number of dependent children. The Australian sample was on average slightly older than the British participants, but this difference was not statistically significant. As there were no effects of participants' country of origin on our dependent variables, this aspect is not discussed further. The characteristics of the two samples are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1 - Participants' characteristics**

|                            | <i>Australia</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>UK</i>      | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------------|------------------|----------|----------------|----------|
|                            | <i>N = 272</i>   |          | <i>N = 272</i> |          |
| <b>Gender</b>              |                  |          |                |          |
| Male                       | 142              | 52.2%    | 133            | 48.9%    |
| Female                     | 130              | 47.8%    | 136            | 50.0%    |
| Other                      | 0                | 0.0%     | 3              | 1.1%     |
| <b>Age</b>                 |                  |          |                |          |
| 18-25                      | 19               | 7.0%     | 37             | 13.6%    |
| 26-34                      | 51               | 18.8%    | 51             | 18.8%    |
| 35-49                      | 73               | 26.8%    | 69             | 25.4%    |
| 50-64                      | 84               | 30.9%    | 69             | 25.4%    |
| 65+                        | 45               | 16.5%    | 46             | 16.9%    |
| <b>Marital Status</b>      |                  |          |                |          |
| Single                     | 76               | 27.9%    | 83             | 30.5%    |
| Married                    | 159              | 58.5%    | 143            | 52.6%    |
| Separated/divorced/widowed | 37               | 13.6%    | 46             | 16.9%    |
| <b>Dependent children</b>  |                  |          |                |          |
| 0                          | 173              | 63.6%    | 177            | 65.1%    |
| 1-2                        | 89               | 32.7%    | 87             | 32.0%    |
| 3+                         | 10               | 3.7%     | 8              | 2.9%     |
| <b>Education</b>           |                  |          |                |          |
| Less than high school      | 15               | 5.5%     | 9              | 3.3%     |
| High school                | 110              | 40.4%    | 112            | 41.2%    |
| Professional qualification | 40               | 14.7%    | 37             | 13.6%    |
| University graduate        | 70               | 25.7%    | 76             | 27.9%    |
| University post-graduate   | 37               | 13.6%    | 38             | 14.0%    |
| <b>Income (AUD)</b>        |                  |          |                |          |
| \$30,000 or less           | 50               | 18.4%    | 51             | 18.8%    |
| \$30,001 - \$69,999        | 99               | 36.4%    | 106            | 39.0%    |
| \$70,000 - \$99,999        | 44               | 16.2%    | 67             | 24.6%    |
| \$100,000 - \$149,999      | 56               | 20.6%    | 33             | 12.1%    |
| \$150,000 or above         | 23               | 8.5%     | 15             | 5.5%     |

A hypothesized model that the three A's of stopover destination attractiveness was followed, in which perceptions of 'access', 'airport ambience' and 'attractions' positively influence 'attitudinal destination loyalty'. The present study comprised a 2 (access) x 2 (ambience) x 2 (attractions) between-subjects methods design. First, participants were asked to imagine that they had decided to travel to London (Australian sample) or Sydney (UK sample) for their next holiday. Each participant was then randomly exposed to only one of the eight possible experimental manipulation conditions. Perceptions of destination access were manipulated by telling participants that while they were searching for flights, they found really good (vs. bad) flight times via Dubai to their end destination and that they felt these flight times to be very comfortable (vs. uncomfortable). In order to manipulate airport ambience, participants read a fictitious (positive vs. negative) consumer review about Dubai's airport which was adapted from Trip Advisor consumer reviews. In the positive airport ambience manipulation, the review showed a 5-star rating and a headline that read "Absolute awesome experience at Dubai airport". On the other hand, in the negative airport ambience manipulation, the review showed participants a 1-star rating and a headline that read "Absolute disgusting experience at Dubai airport". Finally, a manipulation of whether participants were exposed to an advertising showing Dubai's tourist attractions. Half of participants saw a Banner Ad depicting Dubai's top attractions while the other half of participants were shown some general information about Dubai (e.g., population, area in km<sup>2</sup>, GDP). Manipulations of airport ambience and attraction are showed in detail in the Appendix. After attending to the stimuli, participants turned to the dependent measures on the next screen.

Following previous studies measuring attitudinal destination loyalty (Bianchi & Pike 2011, Bianchi et. al 2014, Boo et. al. 2009, Chi & Qu 2008, Konecnik & Gartner 2007, Tasci, 2018) this construct was measured by two seven-point scale items (1 = definitely not; 7 = definitely) assessing participants likelihood to stop-over in Dubai for at least one night and the extent to which participants would recommend Dubai for a stop-over. In the first study to measure consumer-based brand equity for a stopover destination, Kotsi, Pike & Gottlieb (2018) found these two items valid. These measures were then averaged to form a single composite score of attitudinal destination loyalty (Cronbach's alpha = 0.90; r = .81). To measure previous visitation and stop-over travel experience, participants answered two questions relating to whether they had travelled to the final destination and how likely they would be to travel again to the final destination. Further, participants were asked to answer

whether they had ever been to Dubai's airport and whether they had previously stayed in Dubai for at least one night. These questions were rated in a yes/no binary scale. Finally, participants answered questions regarding demographics.

### ***3.1 Manipulation checks***

To check for the effectiveness of our manipulations, participants were asked to rate Dubai's airport in terms of access, airport ambience, and availability of attractions using seven-point Likert scales taken from a previous study (reference withheld for review anonymity). In particular, two items measuring flight time comfort and flight schedules were used to measure access. Airport ambience was measured using seven items (e.g., clean, not too crowded, women respected) and perceived availability of attractions was measured in 12 items (e.g., lots to see and do, famous sights, interesting architecture).

Consistent with our manipulations, results in Table 2 show that participants perceived flight time and schedules to be less comfortable when viewing the uncomfortable access condition ( $M = 4.33$ ) than when they were exposed to the comfortable access manipulation ( $M = 5.13$ ,  $t(515) = -5.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Likewise, participants perceived airport ambience less positively when reading the negative online review ( $M = 3.97$ ) than when they were exposed to the positive online customer review ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $t(515) = -9.97$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, participants perceived Dubai to have less touristic attractions when exposed to the general information condition ( $M = 4.88$ ) than when they were exposed to a banner ad depicting Dubai's top attractions ( $M = 5.23$ ,  $t(515) = -3.07$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results confirm the effectiveness of our manipulations.

**Table 2 – Manipulation checks, means and factor loadings.**

| Items                            | Mean | Standard Deviation | Factor Loadings | Cronbach Alpha |
|----------------------------------|------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| <i>Access</i>                    |      |                    |                 |                |
| Comfortable flight time          | 4.72 | 1.65               | .817            | .94            |
| Good flight schedules            | 4.72 | 1.60               | .797            |                |
| <i>Ambience</i>                  |      |                    |                 |                |
| Clean environment                | 4.92 | 1.71               | .711            | .95            |
| Friendly people                  | 4.68 | 1.72               | .756            |                |
| Safe place                       | 4.73 | 1.71               | .766            |                |
| Women are treated with respect   | 4.16 | 1.80               | .752            |                |
| They speak my language           | 4.52 | 1.75               | .831            |                |
| Nice airport                     | 5.00 | 1.75               | .587            |                |
| Not too crowded                  | 4.45 | 1.74               | .655            |                |
| <i>Attraction</i>                |      |                    |                 |                |
| Historic places                  | 4.71 | 1.66               | .760            | .95            |
| New experiences                  | 5.33 | 1.45               | .791            |                |
| Interesting architecture         | 5.33 | 1.46               | .829            |                |
| Famous sights                    | 5.20 | 1.51               | .807            |                |
| Interesting / different culture  | 5.30 | 1.49               | .785            |                |
| Lots to see and do               | 5.11 | 1.53               | .777            |                |
| Opportunity to meet local people | 4.88 | 1.51               | .711            |                |
| Nature / Scenery                 | 4.80 | 1.55               | .738            |                |

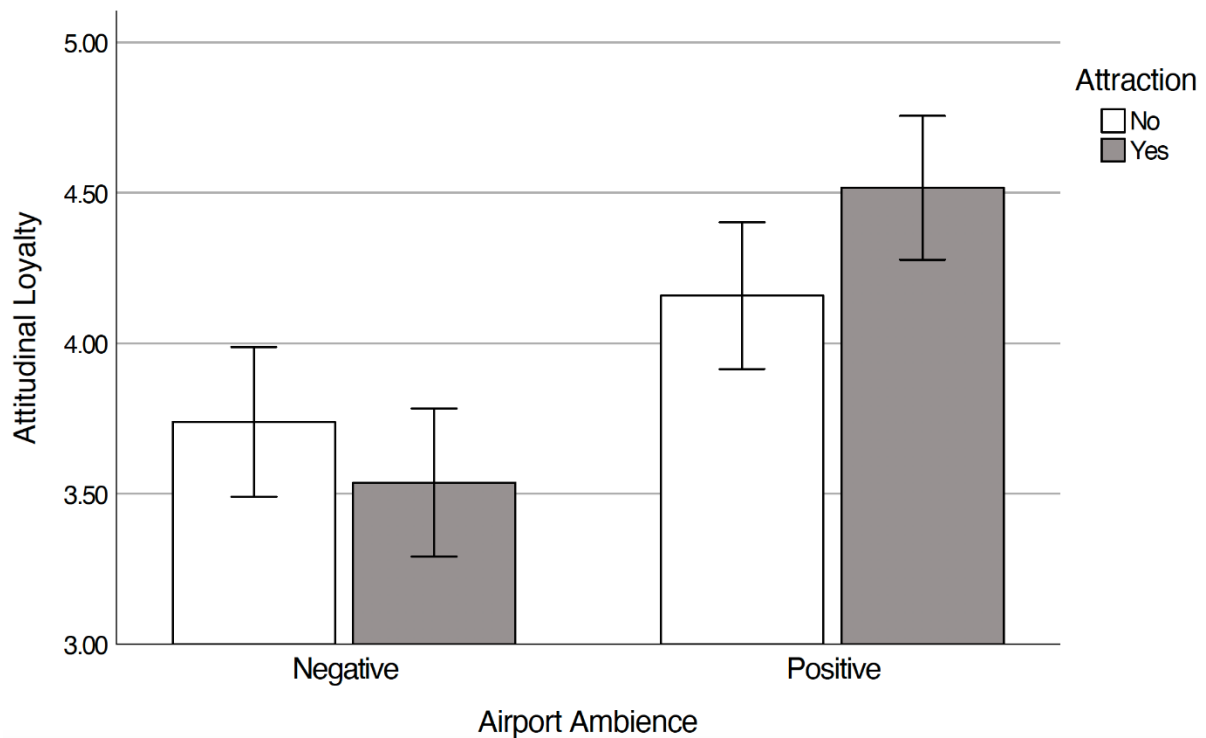
#### 4. RESULTS

To test the hypotheses, a 2 (access) x 2 (ambience) x 2 (attractions) analysis of variance (ANCOVA) on attitudinal loyalty was conducted with participants travel experience and demographics as control variables. Our results reveal that age,  $F(1, 526) = 4.87, p = .028$ , income,  $F(1, 526) = 6.42, p = .012$ , and whether people have children or not,  $F(1, 526) = 3.57, p = .059$ , all have a significant effect on people's decision to stopover. This implies that people who are older, who have higher income, and those with more children are, generally, more likely to choose to stopover. Likewise, our data shows that whether people have been to,  $F(1, 526) = 5.73, p = .017$ , or have stayed in Dubai previously,  $F(1, 526) = 11.92, p = .001$ , also influences their decision to stopover or not. That is, people who have already experienced Dubai are also more likely to stop over than those who have not. Finally, it was also found that people who intend to travel to the proposed destination (Australia or UK),  $F(1, 526) = 48.20, p = .000$ , have a higher propensity to stopover than those who are not planning to undertake such long trips in the near future. The results revealed that the main

effects of access or attractions on attitudinal loyalty were not statistically significant. However, the main effect of airport ambience on attitudinal loyalty was significant even when controlling for the effects of demographics and previous stopover and destination travel experience. Not surprisingly, participants were more likely to stop-over in Dubai and recommend Dubai as a stop-over destination when reading a positive online review ( $M = 4.38$ ) than when reading a negative review ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $F(1, 526) = 31.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This effect was qualified by a significant interaction between airport ambience and attractions ( $F(1, 526) = 5.07$ ,  $p = .025$ ).

As shown in Figure 2, when participants read a positive online review, they displayed better ratings of attitudinal loyalty when they were exposed to a banner ad depicting Dubai's top attractions ( $M = 4.52$ ) than when they viewed some general information about Dubai ( $M = 4.16$ ,  $F(1, 526) = 4.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In contrast, when participants read a negative online review, there was no difference in participants' ratings of attitudinal loyalty ( $M_{no} = 3.74$  vs  $M_{yes} = 3.54$ ,  $F(1, 526) = 1.28$ ,  $p > .10$ ), regardless of whether they were exposed to a banner ad or some general information about Dubai's attractions. This result is consistent with the airport ambience main effect such that advertising is only able to slightly improve one's attitudes toward a stop-over in Dubai when perceived airport ambience is positive but not when there is a negative ambience perception.

**Figure 2 - Study 1: Attitudinal Loyalty ratings as a function of airport ambience and attraction advertising.**

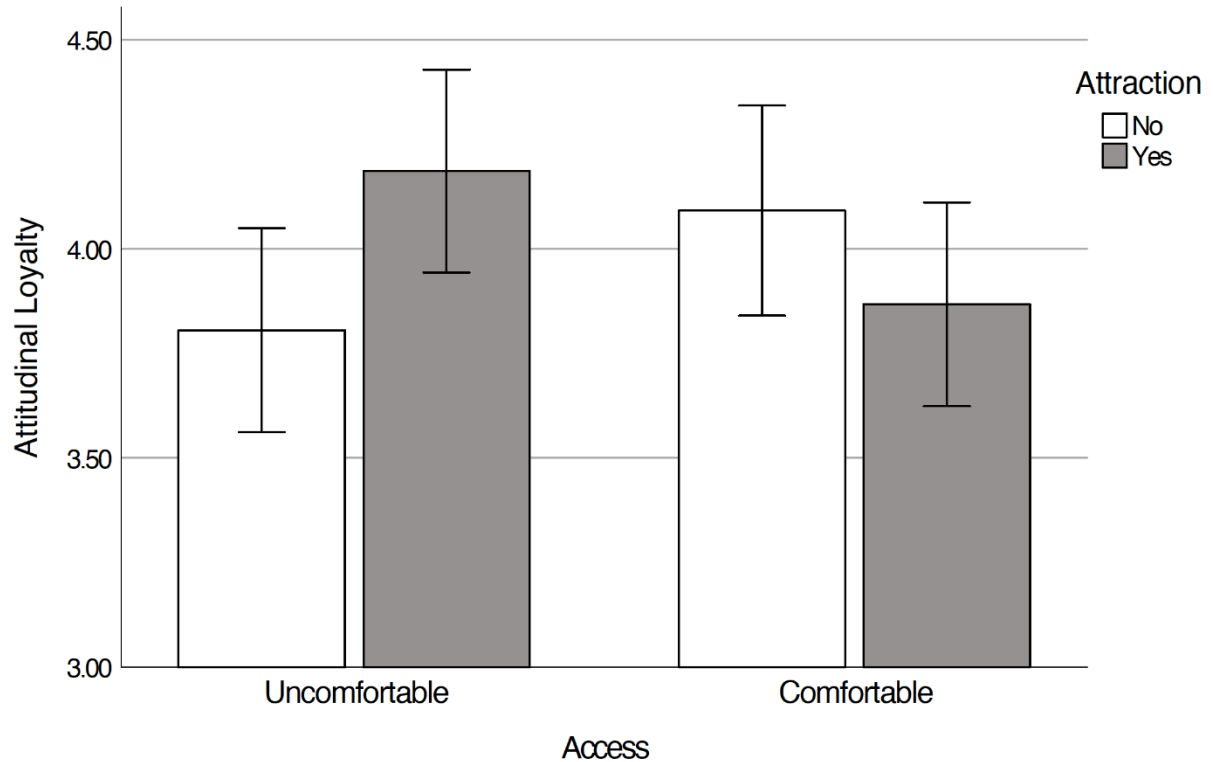


**Note:** Error bars – Between-subjects 95% CI.

However, the exposure to stopover attractions' advertising can be an effective tool to overcome traveler's perceptions of accessibility discomfort as demonstrated by a significant interaction of access and attractions  $F(1, 526) = 5.82, p = .016$ . In particular, for participants who perceived flight times and flight schedule to be uncomfortable, ratings of attitudinal loyalty were significantly higher when they were exposed to a banner ad ( $M = 4.19$ ) than when they were exposed to some general information about Dubai's attractions ( $M = 3.80, F(1, 526) = 4.71, p < .05$ ). On the other hand, when participants perceived flight access to be comfortable, the exposure to a banner ad ( $M = 3.87$ ) or to some general information about Dubai's attractions ( $M = 4.09, F(1, 526) = 1.58, p > .10$ ) did not influence traveler's attitudinal loyalty. The pattern of results is shown in Figure 3. Finally, the interaction between access and airport ambience,  $F(1, 526) = 0.40, p > .10$ , and the three-way interaction,  $F(1, 526) = 0.68, p > .10$ , were both not statistically significant.



**Figure 3 - Study 1: Attitudinal Loyalty ratings as a function of access and attraction advertising.**



**Note:** Error bars – Between-subjects 95% CI.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study attempts a contribution to the emerging field of stopover destination attractiveness. Despite the existence of the stopover phenomenon during long haul international air travel for over 80 years, there has been a lack of research attention. Indeed, the first definition of a stopover was only published in 2018 (Kotsi, Pike & Gottlieb, 2018). Even though destination image has been the most popular topic in the tourism literature since the field commenced in 1973, the first study investigating aspects of stopover destination attractiveness was published in 2016 (Pike & Kotsi, 2016). The current research has tested aspects of a model of stopover destination attractiveness proposed in a previous study (Pike & Kotsi, 2020) using an experimental design approach where three independent variables

(access, airport ambience, attractions) were manipulated. This is the first test of a model of stopover destination attractiveness.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Our results demonstrated a strong main effect of perceived airport ambience such that the more positive the perceived airport ambience, the more likely it is for consumers to consider and recommend Dubai as a stopover destination. On the other hand, our research suggests that the effects of access and attractions are conditional to other factors. In particular, it has been shown that for positive airport ambience, seeing a banner ad can improve one's likelihood to consider Dubai as a stopover destination but that advertising does not enhance attitudes towards the stopover destination when perceived airport ambience is negative. Furthermore, it was found that advertising attractions can be an effective way to overcome flight's access discomfort. That is, advertising of stopover attractions enhanced travelers' likelihood to consider Dubai as a stopover destination when flight times and flight schedule were perceived to be uncomfortable but had no effect for travelers who perceived access to be comfortable.

Taken together, these findings suggest that advertising of stopover destination attractions can be only beneficial as it may enhance stopover likelihood for some customers but has no drawback effects to other customers, representing a useful tool that can be used by marketing managers. For instance, managers who are able to determine which flights are perceived to have the worst connections and/or arrival times may benefit from this knowledge to more effectively target its communications to customers who are more likely to have an uncomfortable flight access and, in turn, increase stop-over destination bookings. In similar way, managers may use targeted attractions' advertising to those exposed to positive airport reviews. By using behavioral online targeting, managers can effectively communicate more directly with those exposed to positive online reviews and use this opportunity to advertising local attractions and offer stop-over deals.

Since the first commercial flights between the UK and Australasia in the 1930s, stopovers and layovers at intermediary ports en route have been a necessary and popular feature. It is suggested the lack of published research into the phenomenon of stopovers during long haul international air travel, until the first study in 2016, represents a major gap in the tourism

literature. Since 2016 there has only been a handful of further research publications. Within this gap in the literature this study focused on destination attractiveness in the context of international stopovers. The topic of destination image has been the most popular in the destination marketing literature since the field commenced in 1973, and despite the proposition that a destination's attractiveness might vary across different travel situations, there has been a lack of published research in the context of a stopover during long haul international air travel. Also, while previous studies have shown a positive association between destination image and attitudinal loyalty, it is suggested this study is the first to find such a relationship between perceived airport ambience and attitudinal loyalty, and that this new finding might be of interest in future destination image research.

A limitation of the present study was that tests were limited to data collected to specifically test aspects of a proposed new model of stopover destination attractiveness. This precluded the use of other established antecedents of attitudinal destination loyalty, such as those in models of consumer-based brand equity (CBBE) such as quality, value and awareness. One option for future research is to test the effect of airport ambience in an expanded model of CBBE in the context of stopovers.

Also in terms of future research, it is suggested the lack of research into the phenomenon of stopovers during long haul international air travel represents a major gap in the tourism literature. It is also proposed that further testing of the findings of the present study with other stopover destinations. While not the focus of the present study, there is a need for more research into the extent that negative media publicity has influenced the perceptions of Middle Eastern destinations. For Dubai and the wider Middle East region, future research could use sentiment analysis on social media, and content analysis of news media editorial to examine the effects on perceptions of stopover destination attractiveness. While recent studies, such as in the present research, since the field commenced in 2016 (see Pike & Kotsi, 2016) have begun to address the destination image construct, there are other important aspects of stopovers needing research attention. These include but are not limited to: motivations for taking a stopover versus a layover; satisfaction with stopover destinations and services; stopover destination experiences; frequency of stopovers by individual travelers; and segmentation of stopover participants.

Finally, research has indicated the majority of structured destination image studies have not advised participants of an explicit travel situation of interest. This is despite the long held proposition that a destination's perceived attractiveness might differ across different travel situations. There remains a paucity of published research to test this proposition. The implications for future research are 1) that more research is needed to test the salience and determinance of destination attributes across different travel situations, and 2) researchers are encouraged to consider the influence of the travel situation in destination image questionnaire design.

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## APPENDIX

### *Positive airport ambience:*



#### **Absolute awesome experience at Dubai Airport**

Excellent treatment at Dubai Airport despite having access to exclusive airline lounge which was a bonus. There were plenty of places to sit and eat in comfort, and they had amazing shower facilities - and there were no queues for toilets, gents as well as ladies.

EVEN the toilets at the airport were really clean and floors were spotless. There was always someone there cleaning. The best was the fast track security... they give you a pass on board to get through quicker - which wasn't that great of a benefit because all lines were going really fast. We didn't spend more than 20 minutes in the queue. Furthermore, signage was clear as. Everything was also written in English AND... when you asked for help or information, most staff spoke English and were really helpful and polite.

### *Negative airport ambience:*



#### **Absolute disgusting experience at Dubai Airport**

Disgraceful treatment at Dubai Airport despite having access to exclusive airline lounge which was packed. Nowhere to sit and eat in comfort, no chance of a shower - and even longer queues for toilets, gents as well as ladies. AND... if you try going to the toilets at the airport... good luck. Toilets at the airport were really dirty and floors needed cleaning.

Despite bragging about fast track security... they give you a pass on board to get through quicker - then you discover there is no fast track for security. Join the queue like everyone else. It was easily more than 1 hour wait. Furthermore, signage was confusing as not everything was written English. When you asked for help or information, staff were really unhelpful and rude.

## Attractions information

### Information about Dubai

Dubai is a city and emirate in the United Arab Emirates that has become known for its successful building projects, including:

- The Burj Al Arab, the world's tallest freestanding hotel,
- The Palm Islands, a construction of three artificial islands in the shape of the date palm, on which residential and commercial property will be built, and
- The World Islands, a massive man-made archipelago of 300 islands in the shape of the world.

**Area:** 4,114 km<sup>2</sup>

**Population:** 3.137 million (8 Oct 2018)

**Gross domestic product:** 105.6 billion USD (2015)

### Attractions advertisement

**Explore Dubai**

|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <p><b>NATURE &amp; WILDLIFE</b><br/>Premium Red Dunes &amp; Camel Safari with BBQ at Al Khayma Camp<br/>5/5 (680 reviews)</p>                                    | <p><b>Best Seller</b><br/><b>DAY TRIPS</b><br/>Full-Day Tour of Abu Dhabi City From Dubai<br/>5/5 (516 reviews)</p>     | <p><b>DAY CRUISES</b><br/>Dubai RIB Boat Cruise: Palm Jumeirah and Dubai Marina<br/>5/5 (656 reviews)</p>         | <p><b>SIGHTSEEING PASSES</b><br/>Burj Khalifa: At the Top (125th floor) &amp; Dubai Aquarium Combo Entrance<br/>5/5 (32 reviews)</p> |
| <p><b>Best Seller</b><br/><b>4WD, ATV &amp; OFF-ROAD TOURS</b><br/>Dubai Desert 4x4 Dune Bashing, Sandboarding, Camel Riding, Dinner<br/>5/5 (2,188 reviews)</p> | <p><b>Best Seller</b><br/><b>CULTURAL TOURS</b><br/>Abu Dhabi Small-Group Day Trip from Dubai<br/>5/5 (372 reviews)</p> | <p><b>WATER PARKS</b><br/>Dubai Atlantis Aquaventure (including Lost Chambers Aquarium)<br/>5/5 (186 reviews)</p> | <p><b>DINNER CRUISES</b><br/>Bateaux Dubai Dinner Cruise<br/>5/5 (373 reviews)</p>   |

Dubai, more than 300 attractions for you to see and explore.

History, culture, and modern architecture. All in one place.

Meet the locals and enjoy the most amazing scenery.

Dubai a place like no other.