Corporate Meeting Delegates' Perception on Venue Selection Attributes: Empirical Evidence from Five-star Hotels in Egypt

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study is to determine the attributes that corporate delegates consider important in hotel selection for meetings. This study employed a self-administered questionnaire as the data-gathering instrument. A composite list of 75 selection attributes was developed and included in the questionnaire. A sample of six out of 38 five-star hotels in Greater Cairo, Egypt was chosen for this study using convenience sampling. A total of 400 questionnaires were randomly hand distributed to corporate meeting delegates across all six hotels, whereas 286 usable questionnaires were personally retrieved, representing a return rate of 71.5%.The data were analysed using Mann-Whitney test, Kruskal-Wallis test, exploratory factor analysis using SPSS, and confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS. Based on the study findings, 57 attributes out of 75 were found to be important for meeting delegates in the selection of hotels as venues. In a more focused analysis, 29 attributes out of the 57 were discovered to be of top importance, 17 attributes of medium importance, and 11 attributes of low importance. The current study contributes to the limited literature in the field of corporate meeting delegates' requirements in hotel selection. As a consequence, this study has significant theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords:
Corporate meeting delegates, Venue selection attributes, Egyptian hotels, Exploratory factor analysis (EFA), Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

INTRODUCTION

Meeting delegates are the end users of the conference product and therefore, understanding their needs helps venues to properly tailor their product in a way that satisfies such needs effectively, the issue that will lead to improved customer service and increased profitability. Satisfied customers are most probable to engage in favorable word-of-mouth communication, demonstrate product brand and company loyalties (Anthanassopoulos *et al.,* 2001).

Satisfaction is crucial in determining convention loyalty and includes intentions regarding next year's return and whether or not to recommend the conference to others. Returning attendees generate significant benefits to host cities and facilities (Severt *et al.*, 2007).

Yet, the research area of meeting delegates' needs was largely neglected. Although there have been a number of research projects considering the importance of venue selection attributes, the majority of surveys have been US and UK-based and there is relative scarcity to other geographical locations such as Egypt. To the best of our knowledge, no scholarly work was conducted on venue selection attributes for hotels in Egypt. Consequently, the current paper addresses that deficiency via identifying the needs of the corporate meeting delegates. Hence, an appreciation of such attributes can constitute a further contribution to the body of knowledge on the significance of attributes for venue selection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) industry is a large economic driver for the Economy (Elston and Draper, 2012). The MICE industry is a young dynamic industry which is growing and maturing rapidly. It is a truly international industry witnessing huge investments across all continents (Rogers, 2013). Beaulieu and Love (2004) added that the MICE industry is a multi-billion-dollar-a-year business. The number of meetings held in the United States alone in 2010 was 1.8 million and the industry generated US$263 billion in direct spending in 2010 (Convention Industry Council, 2011), that was 215 percent increase from US$122.3 billion in 2004 (Lee, Park and Khan, 2012). Moreover, meeting destinations worldwide are competing rigorously in order to host different types of meetings. The 2013 International Meetings Survey developed by Successful Meetings (2013) revealed the most popular international meeting destinations among which are Costa Rica, Brazil, United States, England, Germany, Bahamas, Japan, South Africa, and Egypt.

In recognition of MICE importance, researchers have published numerous convention and meeting-related articles in both scholarly journals and trade publications (Lee and Back, 2005). Convention research has been focused on two convention players meeting: buyers (associations and meeting players) and meeting providers (destinations and facilities). While relatively little attention has been given to meeting attendees (Lee and Back, 2005; Mair and Thompson, 2009; Robinson and Callan, 2005). Evidence of this is reflected in Mair's (2012) study in which she examined the main themes of scholarly research over 10 years from 2000 to 2009. Study results demonstrated that

some of the main research themes include the economic impact of events, the site selection process of conference, the evaluation of satisfaction by meeting planners, and the decision-making process of convention attendees.
Similarly, Yoo and Weber (2005) conducted a study that aimed to determine the progress in convention tourism research by utilizing a content analysis on 115 articles that were published in 14 academic journals from 1983 to 2003. Their content analysis revealed that most studies concentrated on determining and ranking convention service attributes important to meeting planners during the destination/site selection process, developing effective destination marketing strategies, and estimating the potential economic impact of convention and meeting tourism on destinations. Additionally, Lee and Back (2005) analyzed the content of a total of 137 convention articles published in major hospitality and tourism journals from 1990 to 2003. Their results revealed that articles for the area of meeting buyers (associations, corporations, and meeting planners) had the largest percentage of articles, with 33.58% or 46 publications, whereas the least published research focus across all publications was meeting delegates, with only eight articles (5.84%).

MEETING SELECTION ATTRIBUTES

In their study, Riley and Perogiannis (1990) used a set of fifty attributes in an attempt to find the attributes that are salient to the decision of choosing a particular hotel for meetings. Salient attributes included high quality of food, cleanliness of a hotel, experienced conference manager to deal with, comfortable seating in conference room, helpful staff and good acoustics in conference room. The approach used by Shaw *et al.* (1991) was to analyse overall satisfaction of meeting planners with a specific 900 room hotel's convention services department. The factor analysis produced some important attributes such as meeting rooms free from noise, coffee breaks on time, timely billing, and preliminary planning and pre-convention meeting.
In line with the above two studies, the work of Rutherford and Umbreit (1993) aimed to identify the important aspects of the interactions between meeting planners and hotel-staff employees as critical attributes of venue selection in the MICE industry. Six incident dimensions surfaced as the key components in the successful delivery of services in the MICE industry. These incident dimensions included communication, organisation, execution, developing relationships, initiative and crisis management. In the entire inventory of incident dimensions, nothing was more crucial than communication. In a less recent research work, Renaghan and Kay (1987) were particularly interested in determining what meeting planners expected in

a meeting facility, which of these attributes were the most important. Results have shown that meeting planners considered the size and soundproofing of the meeting room to be of top importance followed by audiovisual capabilities, climate and lighting control and price. The location of breakout rooms came slightly behind the previous three factors.

In a more recent scholarly work, Hu and Hiemstra (1996) aimed to analyse meeting planners' preferences in their hotel selection decisions by measuring the relative importance of the individual attributes involved in planners' decisions. In terms of relative importance, the attribute of price was found to be the most important attribute among the six tested attributes followed by hotel location. Guestroom comfort came third followed by meeting room properties. Hotel food and beverage function and hotel conference planning procedure came in the fifth and sixth rankings respectively.

With a broader focus on destination selection rather than venue selection, Oppermann (1996) aimed to ascertain the main selection attributes, among a total of 15 attributes, in the meeting planners' destination selection process. It was found that meeting planners placed most importance on meeting room facilities and hotel service quality. Hotel room availability was rated as the third most important attribute followed by clean/attractive location, and safety/security. In accordance with the the study of Oppermann (1996), Simpson and Wilkerson (1997) conducted their study to examine selection attributes for the historically significant town of Natchitoches, Louisiana. Meeting room size was discovered to be the most important selection attribute. Additional important attributes involved the number of meeting rooms, quality of service, general price level and good food.

In line with Oppermann and Simpson and Wilkerson (1997), the focus of a study conducted by Nelson and Rys (2000) was aimed to assess the convention selection preferences of association executives for US smaller convention cities. They compiled a list of 31 of convention selection attributes. Study results showed that convention centre staff was rated as the most important convention attribute followed by security and safety, competitive hotel rooms, availability of meeting rooms, and competitive rates for exhibit space. Moreover, the study of Weber (2000) asked respondents to imply the importance of 28 hotel attributes that were listed according to where each falls in the time sequence in convention planning and execution that is before, during and after the event. Prior to the event, the most important attribute was prompt follow-up on calls and faxes that was closely followed by hotel flexibility to accommodate the specifics of the event and to allow reasonable changes once the contract is signed. An additional important attribute was the availability of one hotel representative with full authority on event planning. The most important aspect for meeting planners

during the event was the delivery of services as promised. Additional attributes such as staff members' ability and authority to deal with unexpected problems and their friendliness were also identified as very important during that phase. Once the event was concluded, the attribute of accurate billing procedures was rated by respondents as the most important attribute. Hotel offers discount for immediate payment was perceived as the least important attribute.

A study accomplished by Lee and Hiemstra (2001) was interested in measuring the factors related to relationship quality between meeting planners and hotel salespeople as important attributes of venue selection. In this respect, meeting planners were asked to examine the extent to which a number of factors related to the hotel salesperson might affect their relationship quality, including frequency of communication, feedback of communication, expertise, willingness to meet meeting planner's responsibility, power to deliver what is promised, turnover and negotiation with opposite gender. Study results have shown that the attribute of expertise was discovered to be an important predictor of relationship quality. The power of the hotel to deliver what is promised was also found to be of significant importance to meeting planners. Salesperson's willingness to meet meeting planner's responsibility was found to be the most important predictor of relationship quality. On the other hand, high salesperson turnover was a strong predictor of reduced relationship quality.

In a more recent study, Choi and Boger (2002) aimed to determine the importance of 45 attributes and convention selection factors. Generally, respondents gave high ratings on location of facility, capacity of meeting rooms, hotel cleanliness, number of meeting rooms, quality of food and beverage, banquet space, complimentary meeting space, meeting room rates, friendliness of hotel personnel and problem solving skills of hotel personnel. The work of Lee and Park (2002) reported on a research project that was designed to identify the important aspects of the interactions between Korean meeting planners and participants in selecting a meeting venue. Location of accommodation was found to be the most important service factor. Other important service factors embraced programme handling, responsiveness to participant's need, language fluency of convention staff and service attitude.

The main purpose of a study conducted by Hinkin and Tracey (2003) was to identify the physical and service-related characteristics viewed to be the most important attributes provided by meeting planners, in the United States, when selecting hotels as potential meeting venues. Results have revealed that the attribute of safety and security was of utmost importance to meeting planners. Additional factors of critical importance included cleanliness of facilities, competence of staff, sensory attributes of meeting space (i.e. temperature, adequate lighting, appropriate size) and accuracy and efficiency of billing

procedures. Factors of moderate importance involved quality of food, cleanliness of meeting rooms and other public areas, soundproofing, inclusion of adequate work space in guest rooms and provision of breakout rooms that are sufficient in size and quantity.

In addition, Robinson and Callan conducted two studies to identify the importance of venue selection attributes. More specifically, in 2002, the primary aim of a study undertaken by the previous researchers was to identify UK conference organisers' perceptions of the importance of venue selection attributes. In a further recent study, in 2005, they aimed to identify UK conference delegates' cognizance of the importance of venue selection attributes. In both studies, they divided the developed meeting attributes into 10 categories including: location and image, price/value, competence, access, tangibles – bedroom, tangibles – other, leisure facilities, the service provider, meeting room tangibles, and additional services.

As for the first category of location and image, good standard of décor and facilities and accessible road links were rated by conference organizers and delegates as extremely important. Other attributes such as shopping nearby, nightlife nearby and venue belonging to a group/chain were of less importance (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005). As far as the second category of price/value was concerned, competitiveness, offers value for money and willingness to negotiate rates were the three most important attributes to both organizers and delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005).On the other hand, the least important attributes were refreshments in the price for organizers (Robinson and Callan, 2002), and additional discount for large numbers for delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2005). In terms of competence, the attributes of cleanliness of facilities, and arrangements carried out as requested, were the most important attributes to organizers and delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005). As for the fourth category of access, clear location signs within the venue and clearly signed fire exits and routes were found to be extremely important attributes to both organizers and delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005).Tea/coffee/soft drinks available all day and flexible meal times were another important attributes in this category to delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2005).As for tangibles – bedrooms, all delegates' accommodation on site and comfortable en-suite bedrooms were regarded as the two most important attributes by the majority of organizers and delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005).

As for the six category of tangibles – others, ambience within the venue, satisfactory quality of food for price paid and sufficient quantity of food were all rated as extremely important to organizers and delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005). In terms of the category of leisure facilities, the three attributes of social activities, leisure centre and facilities and in-house

entertainment were of least important to organizers (Robinson and Callan, 2002); however, these attributes were of most important to delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2005). In the category of service providers, the most important attribute to organizers and delegates was friendly and helpful staff. On the other hand, the attributes of staff speak appropriate languages and meeting the chef were rated as less important by the majority of organizers and delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005). For the category of meeting room tangibles, comfortable seating was an important attribute to both organizers and delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005); however, availability of audio-visual equipment was found to be an important attribute to only delegates (Robinson and Callan, 2005). For the last category of additional services, good taking and delivering of messages, convenient and free parking and a flexible menu were ranked as the three most important attributes to organizers and delegates. In contrast, the attributes that appeared to be relatively unimportant to organizers and delegates included in-house shopping and translating facilities (Robinson and Callan, 2002; 2005).

In their study, DiPietro *et al*. (2008) identified three international associations for different types of event professionals and compared members' ratings of 13 destination selection criteria. The most important criteria for Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) members embraced support services for events, overall costs, perceived value for the money, safety and security, and reputation for hosting successful events. The most important criteria for Meeting Professionals International (MPI) members included perceived value for the money, overall cost, and reputation for hosting successful events, desirable destination image, support services for events. The most important criteria for International Association of Exhibitions and Events (IAEE) members involved exhibit space, perceived value for the money, overall cost, desirable destination image, and reputation for hosting successful events.

The purpose of an exploratory study undertaken by Draper, Dawson, and Casey (2011) was to develop a list of sustainable practices at convention facilities and assess the importance of these items according to meeting planners. The most important criteria were discovered to be on-site recycling programs for paper, newspaper, and cardboard and on-site recycling programs for plastics.

A study undertaken by Elston and Draper (2012) aimed to review empirical studies regarding meeting planners' site selection attributes. The results revealed that since 1990, the cost of hotel rooms, meeting space, food and beverage, and other costs have consistently been important attributes.

METHODS

Procedure

This study employed a self-administered questionnaire as the data-gathering instrument. The ultimate purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the relative importance that corporate meeting delegates ascribe to attributes in hotels for meetings. After careful scrutiny of the literature on site-selection attributes for corporate meetings, a preliminary list of attributes was compiled, which was then pre-tested by experienced corporate meeting planners to examine its content validity as well as assess the wording of questions, continuity and flow, question sequence, and length and timing. The pre-test generated a final list of 75 attributes for inclusion in the questionnaire. There was no concern about the wording of questions, continuity and flow, question sequence, the perceived length of the questionnaire, and it took around 20 minutes to complete it.

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. The first section included the 75 attributes referred to previously, and respondents were asked to rate each attribute on a five-point Likert scale where "1" was *very unimportant* and "5" was *very important*. The second section asked respondents to identify any additional important attributes that were not included in the first section and rate their importance. The implication of this was to enable respondents to use their own initiative in reflecting additional important selection attributes and hence, benefit from their knowledge and experience in this field. The third section asked respondents about their gender, age, and educational background in an attempt to ascertain their nature and composition.

Participants and sampling

A sample of six out of 38 five-star hotels in Greater Cairo (The Egyptian Hotel Guide, 2011) was chosen for this study using convenience sampling. The hotels were selected by the researchers for having a long pedigree as prestigious venues for corporate meetings. The researchers tried to reach as many delegates as possible attending conferences at the chosen hotels during the data collection period. After acquiring formal permission from the hotel, a total of 400 questionnaires were randomly hand distributed to corporate meeting delegates across all six hotels, whereas 286 usable questionnaires were personally retrieved, representing a return rate of 71.5%.

Data analysis

SPSS version 22 was used for data analysis. To explore the dimensionality of the questionnaire items, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted

on the 75 items with orthogonal rotation (i.e. varimax). Two statistical measures were generated to help assess the factorability of the data: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. For the factor extraction, the number of factors to be retained was guided by Kaiser's criterion. For factor rotation, orthogonal rotation is recommended by Field (2009) when the underlying factors are assumed to be independent. Cronbach's α was implemented to test the reliability and the internal consistency of the factors.

After the EFA was employed, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to investigate interrelationships between two types of variable: measured and latent. *Measured (observed) variables* have data that can be directly measured by a researcher. *Latent (unobserved) variables or constructs,* on the other hand, are variables that are of interest to a researcher but are not directly observable (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). A software programme called Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS), which is part of the SPSS software suite (Arbuckle, 2011),was used for CFA.Composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's α for each latent variable were used to test the construct reliability as well as average variance extracted (AVE) was used to test the construct convergent and discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Lastly, significance between delegates' gender and their preferred meeting attributes was calculated using the Mann Whitney U test. To explore the influence of delegates' age and educational background on delegates' perception of meeting attributes, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted.

RESULTS

The results section is organized into four parts, which are: the meeting delegates' profile, EFA, CFA, and analysis of variance.

Meeting delegates' profile

The majority of respondents were male (78%). Almost 40% of delegates were aged 21–30, 43.7% aged 31–40, 15% aged 41–50, and 1.3% over 50. In terms of education, it was found that 8% had secondary education, 69.2% a bachelor's degree, 12% a master's degree, and 10.8% had earned a PhD. This finding indicates a relatively adequate level of delegate knowledge and intellectual judgment.

Exploratory factor analysis

EFA was conducted on the 75 attributes with orthogonal rotation (varimax). The KMO measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .837 which is 'great' according to Field (2009); all KMO values for individual attributes were > .733, which is well above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2009). For Bartlett's test of Sphericity, χ^2= 18502.134with 2926

degrees of freedom, p<.001, indicating that correlations between items were sufficiently large for EFA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Seven components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of 1 and in combination explained 54.68 percent of the total variance. Only factor loadings with an absolute value greater than 0.5 were retained (Pallant, 2013).Table 1 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same components suggest that component 1 represent 'accommodation, A', component 2 'personnel, P', component 3 'meeting rooms, MR', component 4 'rates, R', component 5 'in-house facilities, IF', component 6 'accessibility and image, AI' and component 7 'inventory, I'. The overall Cronbach's α score of the scale (i.e. 0.88) exceeds the minimum acceptable value of0.7 (Hair *et al.,* 2010) with the individual Cronbach's α for each of the seven subscales ranging from 0.82 to 0.92, indicating good internal consistency among the items within each subscale.

Confirmatory factor analysis

CFA was performed on the 57 attributes with factor loadings greater than 0.5to test interrelationships between measured and latent variables (i.e. measurement model) using AMOS 20. The results of CFA show that the values of CR and Cronbach's α for all of the constructs exceeded the minimum acceptable value of 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), indicating a good reliability level. Furthermore, the values of AVE for all of the constructs exceeded the minimum acceptable value of 0.5 (Hair *et al.*, 2010), indicating good convergent validity (see Table 2). To test discriminant validity, the results of CFA show that the AVE of each construct is greater than the squared correlation for each pair of constructs, indicating that each construct is distinct (see Table 3). Additionally, the various measures of the overall model goodness-of-fit suggest a satisfactory model fit. More specifically, χ^2 value is 3813.425with 1518 degrees of freedom, p =.001; GFI= 0.93; AGFI= 0.90; NFI= 0.93; RFI= 0.90; IFI= 0.95; TLI= 0.92; CFI= 0.95 – all greater than the recommended level of 0.90 and RMSEA= 0.048, smaller than the cut off value of 0.05 (Arbuckle, 2011). Another rule for a good-fitting model is that the ratio of the χ^2 statistic to the degrees of freedom to be less than 3 (Arbuckle, 2011). The ratio of the model is 3813.425/1518 = 2.51. Further, the *t*-values for all the parameter estimates are all statistically significant at the 0.1 percent level. Hence, the measurement model is stable and converges properly.

Table 1: The rotated component matrix of a 75-attribute, seven-factor solution (N=286)

Code	Attribute	Rotated Factor Loadings						
		A	P	MR	R	IF	AI	I
A1	Comfortable, clean rooms	**.776**	-.135	-.042	-.094	.007	.035	.240
A2	Modern bathroom fixture	**.745**	-.046	-.114	-.112	-.115	.003	.080
A3	Adequate lighting	**.729**	.019	-.024	.000	-.076	.052	-.162
A4	Evacuation information provided	**.696**	.160	-.069	-.095	-.081	.045	.170
A5	Availability of refrigerator/microwave	**.637**	.170	.016	-.066	-.191	-.022	-.223
A6	Cleanliness of hallways	**.634**	-.009	-.054	.039	-.032	.025	-.242
A7	Good quality towels and bed linen	**.624**	-.087	-.143	-.040	.110	.136	.091
A8	Appearance of sleeping rooms	**.623**	-.158	.047	-.163	.054	.065	.022
A9	Smoke detectors in room	**.594**	.243	-.082	.031	.074	-.101	.116

(continued)

Table 1 (continued): The rotated component matrix of a 75-attribute, seven-factor solution (N=286)

Code	Attribute	Rotated Factor Loadings						
		A	P	MR	R	IF	AI	I
A10	Availability of an executive section offering special business services	**.591**	-.008	.045	-.161	-.077	.072	.388
A11	Room availability	**.572**	.029	.004	-.122	.110	.089	.000
A12	Reservation procedures and policies	**.564**	.080	-.034	-.101	-.009	-.024	-.263
A13	Availability of floor plans	**.547**	.144	.050	-.064	-.019	.033	.353
A14	Adequate closet space and hangers	.480	.081	.058	-.079	.004	.123	-.318
A15	Availability of in-room desk and chair	.454	.118	-.015	-.110	.281	-.033	-.156
A16	Availability of in-room audio-visual sockets/connections	.443	.104	-.045	-.097	.312	.045	-.044
A17	Size of sleeping rooms	-.389	.230	-.047	-.053	.212	.212	.365
A18	The degree to which accommodation and meeting facilities are integrated in one venue	.359	-.009	.100	-.114	.270	-.042	-.064
P1	Service attitude	.009	**.762**	.068	-.043	-.052	.056	.071
P2	Responsiveness to participant's needs	-.099	**.735**	.030	-.040	-.147	.017	.036
P3	Cooperative convention staff	.018	**.734**	.080	-.005	.099	.026	.043
P4	Availability of single contact person	.079	**.644**	-.070	-.107	-.074	.198	.115
P5	Language fluency	-.195	**.640**	.124	-.027	-.081	.116	-.010
P6	Delivery of services as promised	.043	**.599**	.034	-.145	-.091	.185	.158
P7	Problem-solving skills	-.082	**.587**	.235	.109	.067	-.005	.188
P8	Friendliness	-.070	**.585**	.393	.097	.078	.013	.020
P9	Staff members' ability and authority to deal with unexpected problems	.068	**.583**	.015	-.030	-.051	.103	.248
P10	Enthusiasm and commitment of staff	-.103	**.533**	.020	-.056	.006	.215	.018
P11	Follow-through by hotel staff	-.159	**.526**	.142	.018	-.078	.216	.057
P12	Efficiency of check-in/-out	-.016	**.517**	.099	.111	.048	.173	.269
P13	Timely, readable, and accurate billing	-.257	-.393	.137	-.071	-.065	.036	.244
MR1	Air conditioning	.039	.168	**.655**	-.068	-.130	-.040	.003
MR2	Complete blackout	-.034	.075	**.650**	-.147	.087	-.015	-.115
MR3	Safety	-.028	-.228	**.615**	.072	.145	-.037	.197
MR4	Comfortable seating	.093	-.025	**.599**	-.128	-.126	-.223	.025
MR6	Lighting, climate and surrounding	.159	-.084	**.581**	.101	.228	-.155	.179

MR7	Coffee breaks on time	.143	-.038	**.562**	-.144	-.017	-.167	.147
MR8	Ease of meeting registration	-.240	.237	**.550**	-.068	.029	.148	.084
MR9	Set-ups on time	.168	-.008	**.511**	-.073	-.030	-.271	.064
MR10	Exhibition space	-.215	.265	.492	-.072	-.098	.145	.008
MR11	Selection of rooms to choose from	-.200	.132	.490	-.079	.209	.151	-.059
MR12	Breakout rooms	-.263	.066	.470	-.037	.220	.207	-.009
MR13	Meeting rooms refreshed	.015	.188	.441	-.189	-.171	-.348	-.098
MR14	Height of ceiling	-.355	.300	.382	-.139	.098	.281	.005
R1	Additional discount for large numbers of	.076	.063	.000	**.822**	-.024	.004	.008
R2	Sleeping room rates	-.189	-.017	.026	**.812**	-.035	-.007	-.035
R3	Refreshments in the price	.027	-.086	.044	**.802**	.001	-.078	.032
R4	Complimentary meeting space	.108	.023	-.118	**.794**	-.031	.067	-.003
R5	Meeting rooms rates	.163	-.054	-.082	**.789**	.001	.043	.059
R6	Sleeping room discounts	-.221	.023	.136	**.775**	-.092	.038	.012

(continued)

Table 1 (continued): The rotated component matrix of a 75-attribute, seven-factor solution (N=286)

Code	Attribute	Rotated Factor Loadings						
		A	P	MR	R	IF	AI	I
R7	Competitive catering rates	-.174	-.080	-.012	**.739**	-.030	.048	.081
R8	Offers value for money	.251	.086	-.033	**.694**	.078	-.004	.136
R9	Willingness to negotiate rate	-.008	.103	.128	**.658**	.063	.014	.046
IF1	Availability of in-house entertainment	.000	-.069	-.278	.060	**.670**	.148	.108
IF2	Availability of leisure facilities	-.072	-.049	-.345	-.063	**.626**	.114	.020
IF3	Medical support	-.215	-.103	.365	-.106	**.603**	-.061	-.051
IF4	Children facilities	.252	-.049	-.278	-.207	**.592**	-.089	-.148
IF5	Spouse and family programmes	.296	-.060	-.254	-.143	**.586**	-.063	-.091
IF6	Quality of food and beverage services	.188	.013	.388	-.152	.489	-.226	.101
IF7	The availability of a tourist information desk	-.383	-.030	.047	-.128	-.474	-.002	.015
IF8	General hotel information /assistance	-.188	-.106	-.335	-.069	.455	.042	.067
IF9	Sufficient quantity of food	-.222	-.027	-.430	-.139	.444	-.106	.025
IF10	Convenient and free parking	-.362	-.121	.127	-.062	-.393	.025	.064
IF11	Business centre facilities	.222	.227	-.063	-.061	-.240	-.054	.061
AI1	Venue belongs to group/chain	-.102	.104	.085	.085	.052	**.675**	.133
AI2	Reputation	.005	-.062	.135	-.011	.144	**.627**	.127
AI3	Good standard of decor and facilities	.138	.126	-.168	-.073	.010	**.561**	.178
AI4	Within 5 km of airport	-.065	.247	.180	-.135	-.026	**.537**	-.072
AI5	Disabled access and facilities	.012	.160	-.076	-.072	-.173	**.509**	.280
AI6	Town/city location	.035	.146	.059	.059	.024	-.015	.257
I1	Banquet space	.110	-.041	-.230	.038	-.036	.063	**.754**
I2	Capacity of meeting rooms	.211	.076	-.197	-.119	-.015	-.027	**.718**
I3	Number of meeting rooms	.064	.029	-.017	-.035	.245	.007	**.668**
I4	Number of sleeping rooms	-.101	-.042	-.055	-.138	.081	.146	**.552**
Eigenvalues		20.84	5.26	4.40	3.56	3.19	2.61	2.23
% of variance		27.06	6.83	5.72	4.62	4.14	3.39	2.90
α		0.92	0.93	0.90	0.92	0.85	0.82	0.83

Note: Factor loadings over.50 appear in bold

Table 2: The parameter estimates of the measurement model, validity analysis, and reliability test

Latent and Measured variables	Factor loadings	*t*-values	Path coefficients	CR	AVE	A
Accommodation (A)				0.916	0.525	0.915
A1	1.00		0.72			
A2	1.03	12.19	0.83			
A3	0.97	11.74	0.80			
A4	0.95	12.00	0.81			
A5	0.96	11.27	0.76			
A6	0.83	10.45	0.69			
A7	0.88	10.56	0.70			
A8	0.93	9.98	0.65			
A9	0.84	9.79	0.64			
A10	0.83	9.64	0.61			
A11	0.82	9.53	0.60			
A12	0.85	10.95	0.69			
A13	0.80	8.70	0.54			
Personnel (P)				0.929	0.529	0.928
P1	1.00		0.82			
P2	0.93	14.25	0.74			
P3	0.88	13.65	0.72			
P4	1.05	14.99	0.77			
P5	0.86	13.29	0.70			
P6	0.96	15.71	0.79			
P7	0.88	12.47	0.67			
P8	0.76	11.34	0.62			
P9	0.89	14.26	0.74			
P10	0.93	13.23	0.70			
P11	0.88	13.22	0.70			
P12	0.82	12.22	0.66			
Meeting Rooms (MR)				0.900	0.502	0.898
MR1	1.00		0.71			

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)**:** The parameter estimates of the measurement model, validity analysis, and reliability test

Latent and Measured variables	Factor loadings	*t*-values	Path coefficients	CR	AVE	α
MR2	1.06	9.16	0.67			
MR3	0.94	9.12	0.67			
MR4	1.05	9.94	0.78			
MR5	1.09	10.28	0.81			
MR6	0.82	9.51	0.75			
MR7	0.99	9.50	0.75			
MR8	0.85	8.25	0.56			
MR9	0.84	8.82	0.64			
Rates (R)				0.921	0.567	0.920
R1	1.00		0.80			
R2	1.20	15.22	0.81			
R3	0.97	13.00	0.71			
R4	1.10	14.86	0.79			
R5	1.04	14.30	0.77			
R6	1.18	14.39	0.77			
R7	1.12	14.66	0.78			
R8	0.83	12.43	0.69			
R9	0.96	11.28	0.64			

(continued)

In-house Facilities (IF)				0.856	0.545	0.854
IF1	1.00		0.70			
IF2	1.00	10.26	0.67			
IF3	0.79	9.86	0.64			
IF4	1.39	12.44	0.83			
IF5	1.26	12.48	0.83			
Accessibility & Image (AI)				0.831	0.500	0.820
AI1	1.00		0.80			
AI2	0.71	8.83	0.74			
AI3	0.66	8.99	0.75			
AI4	0.89	7.78	0.55			
AI5	0.73	8.31	0.67			
Inventory (I)				0.844	0.584	0.831
I1	1.00		0.85			
I2	1.02	17.17	0.90			
I3	0.96	13.82	0.73			
I4	0.69	9.05	0.52			

Note: All factor loading were significant at ≤ .001

Table 3: Discriminant validity for the measurement model

	Variance						
Construct	A	P	MR	R	IF	AI	I
A	**0.525**						
P	0.288	**0.529**					
MR	0.225	0.346	**0.502**				
R	0.324	0.125	0.154	**0.567**			
IF	0.169	0.259	0.134	0.158	**0.545**		
AI	0.101	0.071	0.163	0.097	0.170	**0.500**	
I	0.110	0.144	0.163	0.084	0.042	0.097	**0.584**

Note: The bold values along the diagonal line are the AVE values for the constructs, and the other values are the squared correlations for each pair of constructs.

Meeting attributes' importance

In an attempt to provide greater insights into the importance of attributes, three categories of meeting attributes were established based on their level of importance. Such categories involved the upper category, the medium category, and the lower category. The upper category contained those attributes which were most important to corporate delegates in selecting a hotel as a meeting venue. The medium category embraced those attributes which were moderately important, whereas the lower category consisted of those attributes which were least important. The upper category was established by calculating a cut-off mean of .72 for all 57 attributes. This was arrived at by adding together the standardized parameter estimates for all attributes (i.e. 40.95) and then dividing the result by the total number of attributes (i.e. 57). Hence, based on the preceding calculations, it was decided to include any attribute with a standardized parameter estimate of .72 or more

in the upper category of most important attributes. In line with this, a total of 29 attributes were included in that category, whereas 28 attributes remained for inclusion in the medium category and/or lower category.

The medium category was established by calculating a cut-off mean of .65 for all remaining 28 attributes. Similar to the upper category, this was arrived at by adding together the standardized parameter estimates for all 28 attributes (i.e. 18.21) and then dividing the result by the remained number of attributes (i.e. 28). Therefore, based on the above calculations, it was decided to include any attribute with a standardized parameter estimate of .65 or more in the medium category. In accordance, a total of 17 attributes were included in that category. The lower category embraced all other remaining attributes with a standardized parameter estimate less than .65 (i.e. 11 attributes). Figure 1 depicts graphically the results of the final measurement model. The circles are latent variables, the rectangles are measured variables (i.e. the highlighted rectangles represent the most important meeting attributes to corporate delegates), the single arrows denote regression paths, and double-headed arrows demote covariances.

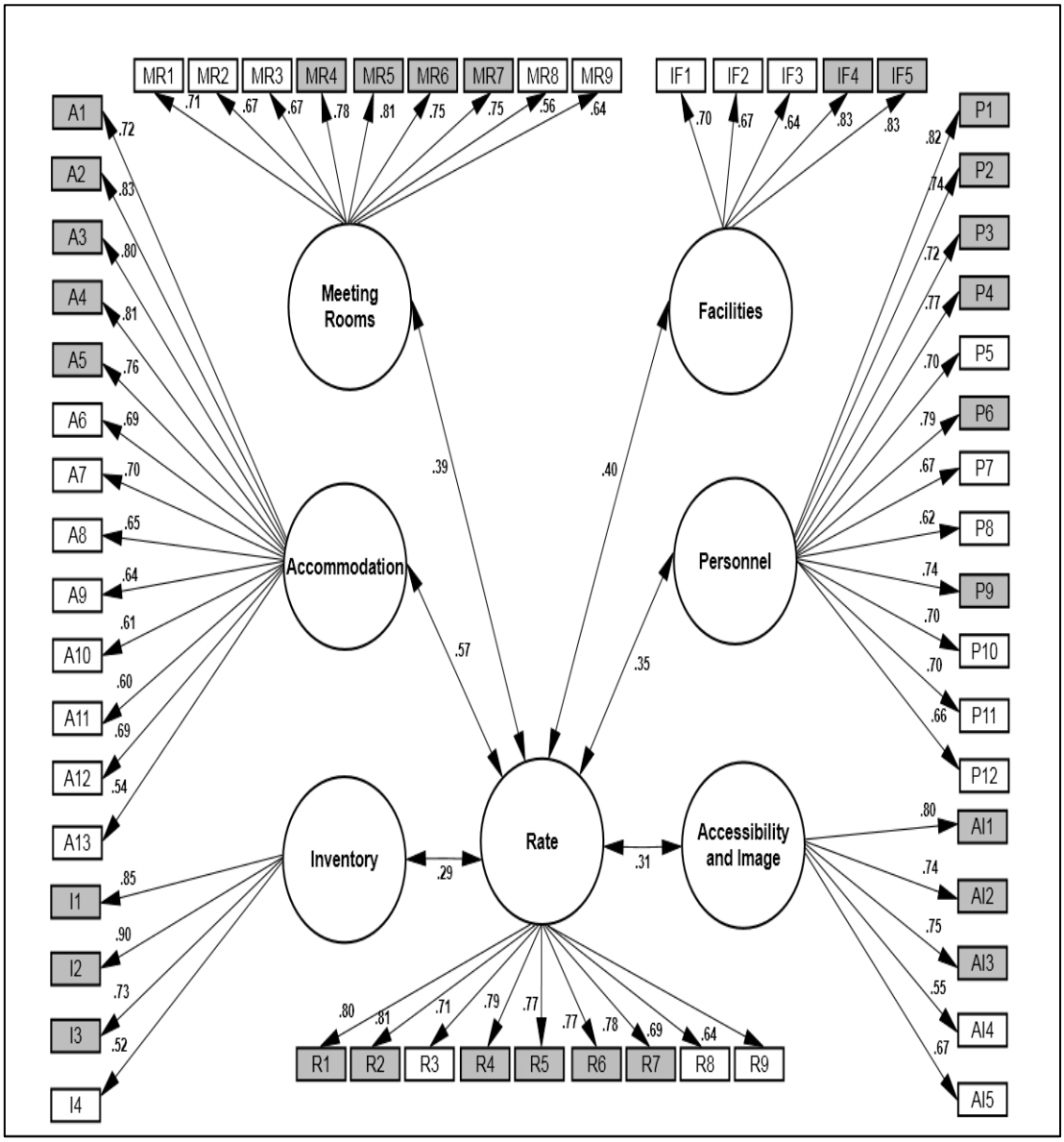

Figure 1: The standardized parameter estimates of the measurement model

Additional important meeting attributes

Five additional attributes were mentioned by a number of meeting delegates embracing "in-room data port," "in-room wireless internet," "translation booth," "wireless microphone," "special desk for delegates," "prayer room," "kids' facilities including food corner and babysitting". These attributes should be investigated in further research.

Analysis of variance

Significance between delegates' gender and their preferred meeting attributes was calculated using the Mann Whitney U test. The most significant gender differences were with females scoring higher "hotel reputation," "availability of an executive section," and "evacuation information provided." In terms of "high reputation", it may be suggested that females are more concerned with highly reputable hotels that would be easily accessible and secure. As for "availability of an executive section", it is suggested that females would prefer to have all facilities handy in their rooms so that they can use them easily 24/7 without having to depart their rooms, especially at night time, to use hotel business facilities. In terms of "evacuation information provided," it is suggested that females are more safety conscious as compared to male delegates. There is no a priori reason why such differences exist, and further study would provide interesting insights.

To explore the influence of delegates' age and educational background on perception of meeting attributes, the Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted. In terms of age, Jonckheere's test revealed a significant trend in the data: as the age increased, the median "good standard of décor," "comfortable seating," "air conditioning," "coffee breaks on time," "smoke detectors in rooms," "disabled access and facilities," "spouse and family programmes," "children facilities," and "in-house leisure and entertainment facilities" counts increased. This suggests that elder delegates are more concerned with attributes related to venue comfort and safety. Additionally, it seems that elder delegates are likely to travel with their families and hence, they are keen to find special programmes and facilities/entertainment for their spouses and children. As for education, results revealed that delegates with secondary school and bachelor attributed higher scores to "venue belongs to group/chain," "hotel reputation," "meeting room rates," "complimentary meeting space," "sleeping room rates," "competitive catering rates," "offers value for money," and "willing to negotiate rates." It is evident that such a group of delegates are more price sensitive as compared to their counterparts who hold master and doctorate degrees.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the developed measurement model, this section discusses the most important attributes found in this study in comparison with other important attributes discovered in scholarly work to pinpoint similarities/differences. As mentioned earlier in the section of meeting attributes' importance, five attributes were found to be of top importance in the category of accommodation embracing "comfortable, clean rooms," "modern bathroom fixture," "adequate lighting," "evacuation information provided" and "availability of refrigerator/microwave". The attribute of "comfortable, clean rooms" was also assessed to be of prime importance in the work of Hinkin and Tracey (2003) and Robinson and Callan (2002). The importance of "modern bathroom fixture" in venue selection was also supported by the work of Hinkin and Tracey (2003). Moreover, the attribute of "comfortable, clean rooms" was found to be important in the research work of Hinkin and Tracey (2003) and Robinson and Callan (2002). Adequate lighting was also found among the most important attributes in venue selection in a number of other studies (e.g., Hinkin and Tracey, 2003; Lee and Park, 2002; Renaghan and Kay, 1987). The importance of the "evacuation information provided" attribute supports the findings of Robinson and Callan (2002; 2005) in which the equivalent attribute of "clearly signed fire exits and routes" was discovered to be extremely important. It is worth noting that this is the first study to assess the importance of the availability of refrigerator/microwave attribute.

Within the personnel attributes, six attributes were found to be most important including "service attitude," "responsiveness to participant's needs," "cooperative convention staff," "availability of single contact person.", "delivery of services as promised," and "staff members' ability and authority to deal with unexpected problems". The attribute of "service attitude" was found to be of moderate importance in the work of Lee and Park (2002). The attribute of "responsiveness to needs" was discovered to be important in the work undertaken by Shaw *et al.* (1991), whereas it was found to be of moderate importance in the study of Lee and Park (2002). The attribute of "cooperative convention staff" was found to be of crucial importance in previous studies (e.g., Hinkin and Tracey, 2003; Nelson and Rys, 2000; Renaghan and Kay, 1987; Riley and Perogiannis, 1990; Robinson and Callan, 2002). The attribute of "availability of single contact person" was found to be of key importance in the research undertaken by Riley and Perogiannis (1990) and Weber (2000), whereas it was discovered to be of moderate importance in the work of Renaghan and Kay (1987). The importance of the attribute of "delivery of services as promised" was also

supported in the work of Lee and Hiemstra (2001), Renaghan and Kay (1987), Rutherford and Umbreit (1993), and Weber (2000). Similarly, the attribute of dealing with unexpected problems was discovered to be of prime importance in the study of Weber (2000).

As for the category of meeting rooms, four attributes were found to be of top importance embracing "comfortable seating," "availability of audio-visual equipment," "lighting, climate and surrounding," and "coffee breaks on time". The attribute of "comfortable seating" provides support for the studies of Riley and Perogiannis (1990), and Robinson and Callan (2002; 2005), in which the same attribute was discovered to be of major importance. Interestingly, the audio-visual equipment attribute was found to be unimportant in the work of Hu and Hiemstra (1996) and Renaghan and Kay (1987). Nevertheless, in line with this study findings, the same attribute was found to be among the most important attributes in a number of other studies (e.g., Hinkin and Tracey, 2003; Robinson and Callan, 2005). The attribute of adequate lighting was also found among the most important attributes in venue selection in a number of other studies site (Hinkin and Tracey, 2003; Lee and Park, 2002; Renaghan and Kay, 1987).The importance of the coffee breaks on time attribute was also supported by Robinson and Callan (2005) and Shaw *et al.* (1990).

In terms of the rate category, six attributes were found to be most important in selecting hotels as meeting venues. Such attributes included "additional discount for large numbers of delegates," "sleeping room rates," "complimentary meeting space," "meeting room rates," "sleeping room discounts," and "competitive catering rates". Despite being highly important in the current study, the attribute of "additional discount for large numbers of delegates" was considered among the least important attributes in the work of Robinson and Callan (2005). The attribute of "sleeping room rates" was discovered to be of key importance in the study of Hu and Hiemstra (1996). Additionally, the attribute of "complimentary meeting space" was detected to be of moderate importance in the work of Choi and Boger (2002). The attribute of "meeting room rates" was found to be important in the studies of Choi and Boger (2002), Hinkin and Tracey (2003), and Riley and Perogiannis (1990). The attribute of sleeping room discounts was found to be of moderate importance in the scholarly work of Riley and Perogiannis (1990). The attribute of "competitive catering rates" was detected to be of prime importance in the study of Riley and Perogiannis (1990).

In terms of the category of in-house facilities, two attributes were found to be of top importance embracing "children facilities," and "spouse and family programmes". The attribute of "children facilities" was found to be among the most important attributes in the research work of Riley and Perogiannis

(1990).The spouse and family programmes' attribute was found to be among the important attributes in the study of Baloglu and Love (2005).

As for the accessibility and image category, three attributes were found to be most important including "venue belongs to group/chain," "reputation," and "good standard of décor and facilities". The attribute of "venue belongs to group/chain", which was found highly important in the current study, was discovered to be among the least important attributes in the studies of Riley and Perogiannis (1990) and Robinson and Callan (2002). The attribute of "reputation" was also found to be important in the work of Baloglu and Love (2005). The importance of "good standard of décor and facilities" in venue selection was also supported by the work of Robinson and Callan (2005)

Within the inventory category, three attributes were found to be highly important including "banquet space," "capacity of meeting rooms," and "number of meeting rooms". The attribute of banquet space was also important in the studies of Choi and Boger (2002), Hinkin and Tracey (2003), and Elston and Draper (2012). On the other hand, the attribute of "capacity of meeting rooms" was of key importance in previous scholarly work (e.g., Choi and Boger, 2002; Hinkin and Tracey, 2003; Renaghan and Kay, 1987; Simpson and Wilkerson, 1997; Weber, 2000). Similarly, the importance of the "number of meeting rooms" attribute was reflected in the studies of Choi and Boger (2002) and Simpson and Wilkerson (1997).

In line with the above discussion, the current study has valuable implications for both academics and hoteliers. In terms of academia, the significance of the proposed measurement model (Figure 1) is reflected in the potential of testing it by scholarly researchers on four star hotels and also on venues other than hotels in different geographical locations. Furthermore, the model could provide the basis for making potential comparisons between delegates and meeting organizers on the importance of attributes in an attempt to underpin differences/similarities. As for hoteliers, the current model helps practitioners in the lodging industry acquire the necessary knowledge regarding the important meeting attributes and hence, tailor their meeting product mix to meet the actual needs of delegates. Doing this could lead to the prospective satisfaction of delegates and the enhancement of customer service.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to determine the attributes that corporate delegates consider important in hotel selection for meetings. Based on the study results, 57 attributes out of 75 were found to be important for meeting delegates in the selection of hotels as venues. In a more focused analysis, 29 attributes out of the 57 were discovered to be of top importance, 17 attributes of medium importance, and 11 attributes of low importance. A measurement model

indicating the top important attributes was developed that could contribute further to the understanding of the significance of attributes for venue choice. Also, the developed model could potentially help hotels to cater to the needs of delegates and remain competitive in an era of unlimited competition. Academics could also benefit from the developed model via testing it on other types of venues and make comparisons between their results and those unveiled in the current study and hence, contribute further to the research area of venue selection attributes.

LIMITAIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In spite of this study's informative results, embedded limitations and their implications should be taken into account when interpreting findings. Since the data were collected only from six five-star hotels in Greater Cairo, applications of these study findings to the whole population of five- star hotels should be done only with caution. Therefore, the research methods applied in this study should be extended to five-star hotels in other geographical locations in Egypt (e.g. Sharm El Sheikh and Hurghada) in order to permit generalizations. This presents an opportunity for scholarly researchers to test the importance of attributes in other geographical locations in Egypt as well as make comparisons with the results of the current study. An additional limitation of the current research work is that it focused on meeting delegates only. Hence, further work is required to determine the importance of attributes from the viewpoint of hotels as well. It is argued that the key outcome of looking at both sides of corporate meeting delegates and hotels could contribute to the further understanding of attribute importance in the MICE industry. As mentioned earlier, a number of additional meeting attributes were captured in the second section of the questionnaire. Therefore, it is suggested that scholarly researchers can perhaps expand them further to examine their importance as potential venue selection attributes for meetings in hotels as well as other types of venues.

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