

Passengers perceptions of airport branding strategies: The case of Tom Jobim International Airport – RIOgaleão, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the passengers perceptions of Tom Jobim International Airport – RIOgaleão branding strategies and its impact to their experiences in light of the airport branding elements proposed by the literature. To achieve these aims it was conducted a semi-structured interview with the airport's branding manager and a questionnaire with the passengers (n = 92). The findings showed that the airport's new management company has been employing tourist branding strategies using a mix of elements, but it is possible that these actions have had the main objective of raising the airport to international service standards, whereby the operation of terminals by large companies is a trend. It was also concluded that some of the airport branding elements (i.e. logos and slogans) are well developed and represent a higher impact on passenger experience, while others (i.e. retail pricing strategies) require further attention and new approaches in order to improve passenger experience in the terminal.

1. Introduction

Tourism is closely linked to transportation. According to Lamb and Davidson (1996), transportation is one of the three fundamental components of tourism, the other two being the tourism product (supply) and the tourism market (demand, or the tourists themselves). Technological innovations in means of transport have been key to the evolution of tourism, with air transport being perhaps the main contributor to the development of tourism in the world (Lohmann et al., 2013; Lohmann & Panosso Netto, 2012).

Because of the growing competition among airports for travelers and cargo, airport managers realize the need to invest in innovative and more focused marketing strategies. One of the differentiation strategies adopted by airports is branding. Although this concept is widely discussed in the airport marketing arena, academic studies of airport branding are still rare. Some noteworthy examples of research in this area are the works of Tse (2009) and Castro (2015). The former, an MBA thesis from the University of Calgary, examined the branding of Canadian airports, while the latter, a doctoral thesis from Rio de Janeiro Federal University, investigated airport branding as a tool to promote tourist destinations.

Tom Jobim International Airport - RIOgaleão is the gateway to the city of Rio de Janeiro and one of the main airports in Brazil in terms of

passengers handled. In April 2014, the expansion, maintenance and operation of the airport were the subject of a privatization auction, and the winning bidder was Consórcio Aeroportos do Futuro, a consortium formed by the Brazilian construction company Odebrecht and the airport operator Changi Airports International from Singapore, acquiring a 51% stake, while Infraero, the Brazilian government's airport operating company, retained 49% (RIOgaleão, n.d.). Odebrecht sought to sell its share in 2017 following its implication in a corruption scandal involving the Brazilian government. China's HNA Infrastructure announced that it had acquired control of the airport management company, but it was unable to obtain the requisite authorization from the Chinese government in a timely manner. Thus, all private participation in the airport was ultimately held by Changi Airports (Rittner, 2017). The new management team adopted a commercial vision with a more diversified outlook, treating passengers as customers rather than mere airport users. Thus, the new airport management strives constantly to identify the needs and expectations of customers so they will have pleasant and memorable experiences (Halpern and Graham, 2013).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of RIOgaleão's branding strategies on the passenger experience, recognizing that the airport is an important part of the overall tourist experience. The results are relevant both for airport managers and scholars interested in the topic, since these branding strategies can help to promote a more

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diversified portfolio of customers and products/services, thereby attracting new investments and companies, generating employment and increasing the flow of tourists to Rio and to Brazil as a whole. These outcomes in turn will substantiate the academic literature regarding the role of airports in tourism.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we present concepts from existing literature regarding the branding of airports as it relates to the tourist experience. Following this literature review, we present and discuss the results obtained and then provide our final considerations.

2. Airport branding and the tourist experience

Crouch and Ritchie (1999) affirm that policymakers who have a vision of tourism for their particular destination that is shared with all stakeholders, who understand both the destination's strengths and weaknesses and develop and implement appropriate marketing strategies, can make that destination more competitive than destinations where the role of tourism in economic and social development is not addressed (Balakrishnan et al., 2011; Bornhorst et al., 2010).

The marketing of tourist destinations is a complex activity that needs to be carried out in cooperation between the public and private sectors. It involves components that range from physical inventory (infrastructure and entertainment) to the quality of services. At the forefront of these components is the character or flavor of the place that is conveyed to potential tourists, because the positioning of a tourist destination contributes in a major way to the formation of a positive image, by distinguishing a destination according to its use of natural and cultural resources (Zardo, 2003).

According to Palhares (2002), a positive initial impression and good service can be the start of an outstanding tourist experience. The competitiveness of a destination and the satisfaction of a tourist depend on a set of attributes that compose the tourist product. These are the elements that will inform the customer-tourist's perception of the benefits of the experience. Airports, in their role as gateways, are extremely important and influential in the tourist experience, including by attracting new tourists to the destination (Lohmann and Castro, 2013).

Nghiêm-Phú and Suter (2018), for example, studied images of airports, focusing on McCarran International Airport in Las Vegas. Their findings showed that this specific airport is directly associated with a series of attributes such as visible, functional, psychological, mixed and affective. Moreover, they discovered that certain attributes of the airport are correlated with the name of the city of Las Vegas, indicating that the airport plays an important role in creating a visitors' first and last impressions of the city. According to the authors (p. 79), "if the city seeks to create positive feelings in its visitors, it must deliver positive cognitive images right at the airport."

The importance of the airport experience (AE) to the overall experience a tourist has in a destination has also been addressed by Wattanacharoensil et al. (2017). A content analysis of passenger review comments from 15 international airports was conducted, and the conclusion was that passengers mentally associated three AE aspects with the destination: (1) the airport was viewed as an ambassador or representative of a place, which has been previously discussed in the tourism literature as one of the roles of an airport (Martín-Cejas, 2006); (2) airports are the interpretation of a destination's tourism slogan and image, as passengers tend to understand the airport according to their mental perception of a destination's characteristics; and (3) passengers mentally compare their actual experience at an airport with the destination's tourism message.

Competition among tourist destinations is an increasing reality, the impact of which has naturally been felt by airports, especially since the deregulation of air transport by most nations in recent decades. Halpern and Graham (2013) mention that travelers are becoming more experienced and less loyal and that they now expect a greater choice of airports and air services. In light of this actuality, airport managers appreciate the need to invest in innovative and more incisive marketing

strategies (Castro and Lohmann, 2014). Today, most airports target their marketing to the end consumer, i.e., passengers. This approach, besides stimulating the development of terminal infrastructure, provides for a wide range of services for the target public (passengers) (Jarach, 2001). Halpern and Graham (2013) believe that marketing directly to passengers is particularly complex because the choice of airport is largely determined by the nature of the air carriers that serve it, in terms of fares, frequency of flights, range of destinations and services offered. In addition, Jarach (2001) describes airports as "multipoint service-provider firms" in which diverse services and products are offered to a broad group of target customers, not only to passengers. In this regard, five areas of activity can be identified as complements to the traditional core activities of commercial airports: commercial services; tourist services; meeting and incentive services; logistic services; and consulting services. Tourist services, for instance, are important for the development of airport branding strategies since they involve the "airport as a tourism and leisure destination" concept.

According to Keller (2008), a brand is a set of mental associations, held by the consumer, that add to the perceived value of a product or service. An airport's brand, then, is the sum of all the experiences of consumers at a terminal (Paternoster, 2008). Furthermore, according to the author, there are two types of airport brands: (1) ad hoc brands, which are those formed by the perception of customers or anyone who may have heard or learned about a given airport; and (2) strategic brands, which are those defined, communicated and managed by the airport operator in collaboration with the airport's business partners and stakeholders, such as airline companies and destination marketing organizations.

Branding is one of the main strategies adopted by airports. It can be used both to increase recognition of the airport and to strengthen the loyalty of customers (Wheeler, 2013). According to Tse (2009), branding differs from the marketing of products and services by including all the experiences, contact points and perceptions that customers have with respect to the particular organization, not just the products and/or services the organization produces and sells. He also states that branding of airports is the process used to create a distinct identity that is both positive and memorable. By creating a distinct, positive and memorable identity, branding can increase the use of terminals and generate greater revenues, mainly non-aviation revenues such as parking, the lease of commercial spaces, and the hosting of cultural events and/or leisure activities (Graham, 2008; Graham, 2009; Halpern and Graham, 2013).

Tse (2009), in one of the only studies available on the subject, established the elements (tangible and intangible) that constitute the branding strategies of airports. According to him, airports can offer distinct, positive and memorable experiences by using strategies that involve the following elements (Fig. 1): (1) retail pricing; (2) selection of retail outlets; (3) choice of food and beverage outlets; (4) architectural layout and design; (5) artwork; (6) services and entertainment; (7) service staff; and (8) airport logos, slogans and wordmarks.

Because of the importance of airports to the development of tourist destinations, Castro (2015) articulated a concept that considers the promotion of destinations and stronger competition among airports. Based on the literature review and research conducted for his doctoral thesis, he proposed the expression "tourist airport branding," defined as:

[...] a set of disciplined actions aimed to build awareness and identity of an airport's brand by means of including local elements that convey a sense of place and memorable tourist experiences to passengers and visitors (Castro, 2015, p. 177 - our translation).

Therefore, the concept of tourist airport branding enables an understanding of how the branding strategies of RIOgaleão help create a singular identity, setting it apart from other airports based on the positive and memorable experiences of passengers and other users. Moreover, this concept contributes to a better understanding of the



Fig. 1. Elements of airport branding.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the research of Tse (2009).

perception of passengers considering Rio de Janeiro as a tourist destination. The elements of tourist airport branding are discussed below.

2.1. Choice of food and beverage (F&B) outlets

One of the areas where airport branding is most noticeable is that of food and beverage establishments, where the mix of establishments is part of the strategy to create a unique experience at the airport by offering a wide range of options to exigent consumers. Offering a wide selection of outlets with renowned brand names can increase the satisfaction of customers, since travelers will feel more comfortable and prefer to purchase products that they recognize, and the airport can thus distinguish itself from competitors (Newton, 2000).

Many airports have tried to find a balance between establishments of large internationally known brands and local brands. Some airports have instead adopted a strategy of filling their concession spaces mainly with local or regional brands, desiring to create a sense of place and reflect the local culture. According to Castro (2015), this latter strategy of support for the tourist experience can be perceived as expressing greater hospitality to travelers.

2.2. Selection of retail outlets

Currently, the time spent at airports is considerably longer on average than it was before the turn of the century, mainly because of the heightened security control processes as well as more common flight delays due to increased air traffic. This longer waiting time gives customers more time to shop or use the services available at airport terminals (Bertoli, 2002; Geuens et al., 2004). Palhares (2002) mentioned that airports have been modernizing, primarily changing the focus of their terminals to make them more like shopping centers. Sales at airports have been getting more sophisticated in recent years, and various successful practices of high-end stores have been implemented at airports as well (Castro, 2015).

As earlier noted, airports also try to offer a mix of retail stores with strong international brands as well as local brands. A variety of known stores can increase customers satisfaction and make the experience more agreeable to travelers, in addition to encouraging both travelers and local residents (Jarach, 2001) to revisit the airport (Tse, 2009). The commercial positioning of airports, when done properly, contributes to a positive image in the minds of consumers and increases non-aviation revenues (Castro, 2015).

2.3. Retail pricing strategies

It is generally recognized that the prices charged at shops located in airport terminals tend to be much higher than those in other venues. However, there is a gradual movement towards street pricing at airports (Behnke, 2000, cited in Tse, 2009). This practice promotes better goodwill with customers and is essential to any branding project that aims to provide passengers with a positive and memorable experience.

2.4. Architectural design

For a long time, most airports were designed to be functional, connecting the “land side,” where the facilities and structures for passengers and freight are located, with the “air side,” consisting of the runways, aprons, control tower, hangars, etc. (Lohmann et al., 2013). One of the main trends in airport architecture today is the use of bold and futuristic designs that prioritize the safety, comfort and convenience of passengers. The current designs typically use large expanses of glass to let in natural light and sinuous forms that incorporate the look of airplanes into the design (Binney, 1999, cited in Tse, 2009). Besides being functional, these architectural designs can reflect local culture, customs, histories and landscapes, which is a particularly important feature of a branding project that strives to provide a sense of place to passengers.

2.5. Artwork

Works of art are a part of any branding project and are essential to the architectural design and layout of an airport. They can reflect the heritage and culture of the region, helping to create a positive experience for passengers and for the airport to stand out (Castro, 2015). Vancouver International Airport is a great example of the use of works of art in airports. Its award-winning collection includes pieces depicting land, sea and sky themes that are characteristic of the British Columbia region, providing a greater sense of place to tourists and other passengers.

2.6. Services and entertainment

Providing customers with a variety of services and amenities at airports can enhance their satisfaction. This is also a way for airports to differentiate themselves from competing facilities (Castro, 2015). Along with F&B and retail stores, airports can offer banking, postal and

Table 1
Statements used in the questionnaire.
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Tourist Airport Branding Elements	Statements used on the first part of the questionnaire to identify passengers' expectations towards airport services
Choice of Food and Beverage Outlets	"The selection of food and beverage establishments (e.g., bars, snack counters, restaurants) creates a unique experience at the airport and makes me more comfortable."
Selection of Retail Outlets	"Shopping at airports is part of my travel routine, making it a really unforgettable experience."
Retail Pricing Strategies	"When the prices charged at airports are fair, I feel more stimulated to buy things when traveling."
Architectural Layout and Design	"An airport whose architecture reflects the local culture and landscape whets my curiosity to see more of the place."
Artwork	"The artwork installed at airports are a differential for my experience. They bring me closer to the local heritage and culture."
Services and Entertainment	"The supply of entertainment options (e.g., cinema, swimming pool, etc.) and varied services (e.g., banks, post office, currency exchanges, etc.) provide memorable experiences at an airport."
Service Staff	"The employees of an airport guarantee that my experience is as agreeable as possible and also promote the locale."
Logos, Slogans and Wordmarks	"The logos of airports when indicating local attributes help me feel that the brand and locale are in harmony."

currency exchange services, as well as amenities that include conference facilities, hotels, movie theaters, tourist information counters and art galleries. Adequate signage is also an important factor in the comfort of passengers since it prevents them from becoming lost. These conveniences reduce stress and make the airport more agreeable.

2.7. Service staff

Although most of the service people who come into direct contact with passengers are employees of airlines and airport shops rather than the airport itself, all of them should reflect the image of the airport (Tse, 2009) and also of the tourist destination (Castro, 2015). Offering local ambassador programs, for example, is a strategy that can provide a greater sense of place and better hospitality for tourists and other passengers.

2.8. Logos, slogans and wordmarks

As is the case with any other product or service, many airports use logos and slogans as important parts of their corporate brands. Logos and slogans are visible in various areas within the airport, as well as in media advertising, vehicle identification, printed materials such as brochures and other channels. Some airports have been introducing local/regional elements into their logo and/or slogans, for example, Liverpool Airport, which has been rebranded as Liverpool John Lennon Airport. In this case, a drawing of the singer's face was added to the logo, and a new slogan was created using a reference to his song "Imagine": "Above us only sky."

As noted, a wide variety of elements can be combined to construct an airport brand and create a positive experience for passengers. Airport managers need to plan and design their facilities carefully to convey a clear image of their brand to customers.

Understanding the way branding is or is not being used as a tool to promote tourist destinations at airports is very important, especially with regard to the competitiveness of those destinations. Many airports already have branding strategies to promote cities and regions as tourist destinations while at the same time differentiating their terminals in the marketplace.

3. Materials and methods

This work examines airport branding strategies, mainly focusing on how airports can assure that customers have pleasant and memorable experiences. In particular, this study investigated how the branding strategies developed by RIOgaleão Airport are perceived by passengers, based on the elements of airport branding proposed in the literature (Tse, 2009) and their relation to the promotion of tourist destinations. First, an exploratory descriptive study was conducted using the quantitative method, starting with an analysis of the impact of airport branding strategies on the experiences of passengers.

A review of the existing literature was performed, which covered articles published in national and foreign journals, master's dissertations and doctoral theses, as well as books in Portuguese and English, to establish a theoretical foundation and to formulate a questionnaire for passengers. From May 3–4, 2017, a pretest of the data collection instrument was conducted with teachers and students at the Petrópolis campus of the Celso Suckow da Fonseca Federal Center for Technological Education (CEFET/RJ), with the aim of validating and ascertaining the completion time of the questionnaire. The form was completed via tablets and was developed using the Typeform platform, a tool for managing online surveys. Twenty questionnaires were completed in the pretest, and based on the feedback received, small adjustments were made to the questionnaire.

The final questionnaire was administered May 9–11, 2017, at Terminal 2 of RIOgaleão Airport (Terminal 1 has been closed since November 2016), with the prior authorization of the management company and with one of its employees in attendance. The passengers (chosen randomly) were approached in the domestic and international boarding areas, past the retail area, while awaiting boarding. The questions were presented only in Portuguese, but the research team translated to English or Spanish when requested by the respondents.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part contained statements that referred to the elements of branding proposed by Tse (2009) that promote local tourism and affect passengers' expectations towards airport services (Table 1). The respondents were asked to indicate the degree of their agreement with the statements on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

The second part of the questionnaire also consisted of a series of statements, but this time, they were directly related to the tourist airport branding strategies adopted by RIOgaleão, culled from the company's Branding Manual and the semi-structured interview with the airport's branding manager. It is worth noting that this interview was conducted for the sole purpose of formulating this part of the questionnaire. Thus, the data obtained from this interview are not analyzed in this study (Table 2).

The third and last part of the questionnaire consisted of questions to obtain demographic data on the respondents. These results allow classification of the respondents according to their ability to make comparisons with other airports. A large portion of the respondents stated they had frequent experience at airports, with 43% having traveled by airplane three or more times, and only 7% saying that they rarely traveled by air. Finally, 70% of the respondents stated that they had traveled abroad, so they can be assumed to be able to make comparisons with other airports. In terms of gender, 50% of the respondents identified themselves as female, 47.8% as male and 2.2% as other. Most of the interviewees were from the state of Rio de Janeiro (44.6%), but 16 other Brazilian states were mentioned, and 7.6% reported living outside of Brazil. With respect to age, 38% were from 26 to 35 years old and 28.3% were from 36 to 45 years old. Most were well-educated, with 30.4% having completed a higher education degree and 31.5% having

Table 2
Some strategies developed by RIOgaleão in relation to the elements of airport branding.
Source: Prepared by the authors, based on [Ferreira \(2017\)](#).

Tourist Airport Branding Elements	Strategies developed by RIOgaleão based on the semi-structured interview	Statements used in the second part of the questionnaire to identify a strategy's impact on passenger experiences
Choice of Food and Beverage Outlets	Increase the presence of local brands. For example, in February 2017, Confeitaria Colombo ^a opened a café at RIOgaleão Airport, located in the restricted area for international departures.	"The selection of food and beverage establishments (e.g., bars, snack counters, restaurants) of RIOgaleão takes into consideration the Carioca flavor ^b and makes me feel welcome in the city of Rio de Janeiro."
Selection of Retail Outlets	Increase the presence of local brands. Besides having a traditional duty-free store, RIOgaleão also offers a "Carioca Corridor" with shops flying local banners such as Osklen, Chocolate Q, Bob's, Salinas, Delfrio Tropical, and Carol Nader.	"The selection of retail shops at RIOgaleão allows customers to have contact with international brands but also those with a Carioca soul."
Retail Pricing	The "Barato do Galeão" seal: The retail shops are encouraged to charge lower prices, to make the environment more competitive.	"The prices charged by the retail shops at RIOgaleão make me more willing to shop without needing to leave the airport."
Architectural Layout and Design	In the restricted area of RIOgaleão, the replacement of solid walls with walls having ample windows now allows passengers not only to view the inland mountains and other elements of the local landscape, but also the aircraft maneuvering area. This gives passengers a sensation of tranquility (knowing their airplane is already on the tarmac) and also allows the entry of natural light.	"The layout and decorative aspects of the spaces of RIOgaleão are essentially related to Rio, reflecting the Carioca soul."
Artwork	The artwork created for the Welcome Center of RIOgaleão was developed by the noted Carioca artist Gilson Martins. Another example of local art is the mural in the restricted domestic departure lounge, which brings Carioca street art to the airport.	"The artwork (pictures and installations) on display at RIOgaleão creates a real connection to the local culture."
Services and Entertainment	The Welcome Center of RIOgaleão aims to provide customers with information not only about the airport but also about tourist attractions in the city of Rio de Janeiro.	"RIOgaleão offers services (e.g., tourist information services) and entertainment options (e.g., musical presentations) that put me in touch with Carioca's welcoming spirit."
Service Staff	While still in transition to the new brand, RIOgaleão urged all airport personnel to effectively disseminate and participate in the local culture (the "RIOgaleão way of serving and operating"), taking into consideration the pillars of the brand. Periodic training events are held to maintain high levels of service quality and cordiality.	"The employees of RIOgaleão are trained to reflect the Carioca spirit and the true connections between people. My needs are always put in first place."
Logos, Slogans and Wordmarks	The brand platform is structured on the values, objectives and targets that the airport management wants to attain, i.e., the three pillars that support the brand: respect for time (at an airport, punctuality is essential); spirit of service (always do a little bit extra for the passenger); RIOglobal (with the goal of joining the RIOgaleão standard of services with the Carioca soul in line with the best international standards). The new logo (adopted in 2014) represents Carioca cadence, mixing musical rhythms and homage to the airport's namesake, composer Tom Jobim, while at the same time simulating the beating of the heart, with vibrant colors, inspired by the movement of people in the city and the Carioca geography.	"RIOgaleão has adopted a visual identity that prizes the city's attributes and shows its local elements, with curves that dance to different Carioca rhythms and vibrant colors of Rio."

^a A traditional Carioca eatery, founded in 1894, it is considered part of the city's cultural and artistic heritage ("Confeitaria Colombo," n.d.).

^b Carioca is the designation of people born and living in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and by extension, the adjective for any feature of the city.

some postgraduate education. Finally, for the question about the purpose of that specific trip, 41.3% indicated that they were traveling for leisure, 31.5% for business and 20.7% to visit friends and/or family. The rest were traveling for studies or for medical treatment. A total of 92 questionnaires, all of which were deemed valid, were completed by passengers embarking on domestic and international flights. The results are presented below.

4. Results and analysis

Graph 1 presents the percentages of agreement and disagreement with respect to the statements made about the impact of the various branding elements on passenger expectations of airport services. The elements with the highest percentages of agreement were "architectural layout and design" (46.7% strongly agreed; 32.6% agreed) and "service staff" (46.7% strongly agreed; 29.3% agreed). These results indicate that these factors are considered important by the respondents, so they may be key to assuring the comfort and safety of passengers. It is noted that most respondents were curious to see more of the destination when the airport architecture reflected the local culture and landscape. They also believed that the airport service staff is responsible for ensuring the quality of their experiences and for promoting the locale.

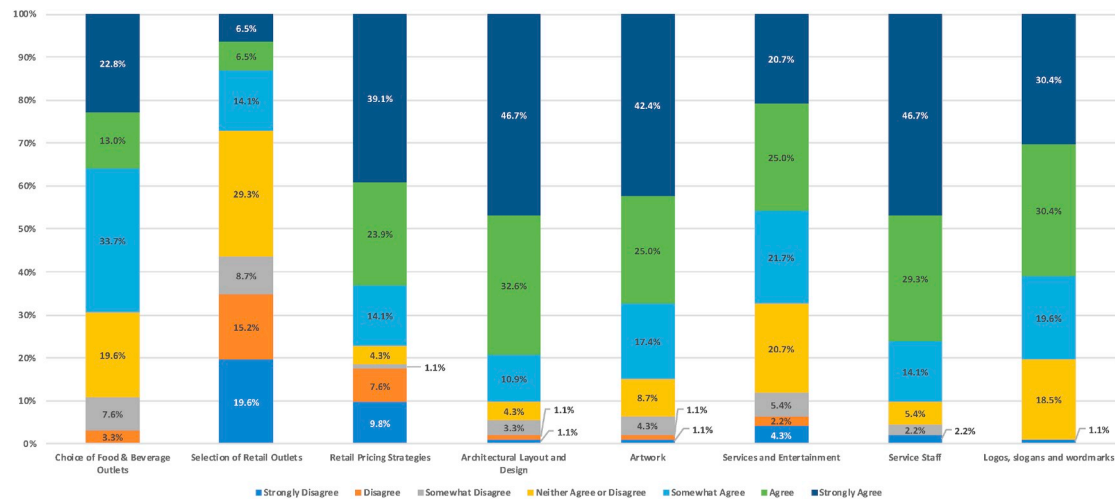
"Artwork strategies" were also shown to have a high impact on passenger experiences. More than 42% of the respondents strongly agreed that the presence of works of art at airports creates a distinctive

experience and brings them closer to the destination's heritage and culture. They also agree that when the airport's logo contains local attributes, it makes them feel that the airport and the destination are in harmony, which results in a good feeling towards both the airport and destination.

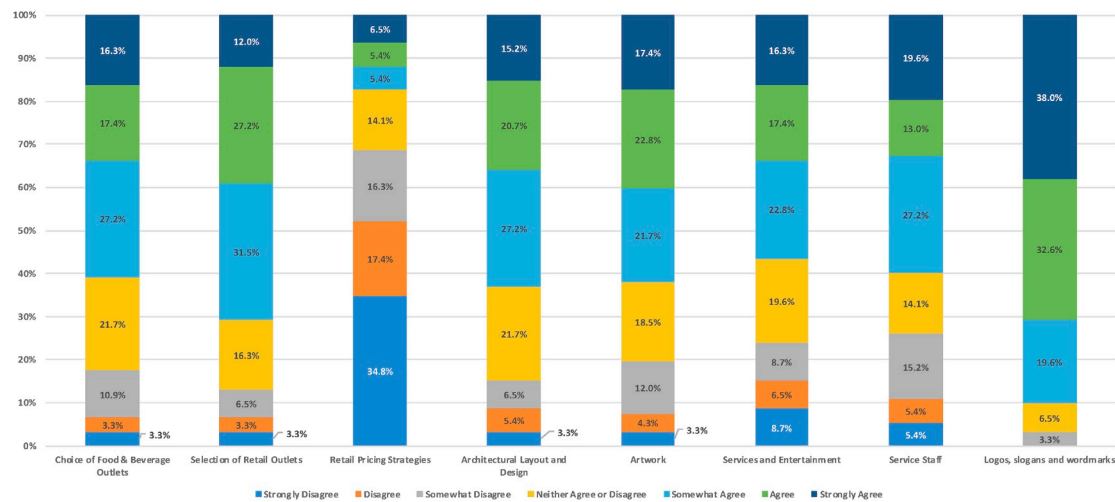
In contrast, the lowest percentage of agreement was observed on the "selection of retail outlets" element (6.5% strongly agreed; 6.5% agreed). These low numbers may indicate that while passengers do not necessarily discount the importance of retail establishments in their airport experience, as a cultural matter, Brazilian passengers do not perceive airports as a place for shopping. On the other hand, the statement about the "retail pricing" element obtained a high percentage of agreement (39.1% strongly agreed; 23.9% agreed), suggesting that most respondents would be more likely to shop at airports if the prices were lower.

The other branding elements showed similar results, all with agreement percentages of approximately 70%. This indicates that most respondents agree, to a greater or lesser extent, that a set of strategies involving the airport branding elements would have a direct impact on their experiences at airports and tourist destinations.

In the second part of the questionnaire, which addresses the impact of the branding strategies developed by RIOgaleão Airport (**Graph 2**), the element with the lowest percentage of agreement was "retail pricing" (6.5% strongly agreed; 5.4% agreed; 5.4% somewhat agreed; and 34.8% strongly disagreed). This result may indicate that the pricing



Graph 1. Percentage of agreement and disagreement regarding statements made about passengers expectations of airport services – by airport branding element. Source: Prepared by the authors.



Graph 2. Percentage of agreement and disagreement regarding statements made about passenger experiences at RIOgaleão Airport – by airport branding element. Source: Prepared by the authors.

strategies used by the retail shops at RIOgaleão require closer attention from store managers. Although the airport management is investing in a seal called “Barato do Galeão” (“Inexpensive at Galeão”), the questionnaire responses suggest that most passengers are still not motivated to shop at the airport.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that “logos, slogans and wordmarks” obtained the highest percentage of agreement (38% strongly agreed; 32.6% agreed). Almost 91% of the respondents agreed (partially or fully) with the statement that “RIOgaleão has adopted a visual identity that prizes the city’s attributes and shows its local elements, with curves that dance to different Carioca rhythms and vibrant colors of Rio.” The high percentage of agreement suggests that the airport managers have been successful in developing the new logo.

The other branded elements yielded similar results, with agreement percentages of approximately 60%: “choice of food and beverage outlets” was 60.9%; “selection of retail outlets” was 70.7%; “architectural layout and design” was 63.1%; “artwork” was 61.9%; “services and entertainment” was 56.5%; and “service staff” was 59.8%.

Cross-tabulations were carried out in relation to the motivation of the trip (mainly leisure or business) and the origin of the research participants (in the state of Rio de Janeiro, residents of other Brazilian states and foreigners). In analyzing the perceptions of business and leisure passengers regarding the strategies employed by this particular

airport to address the airport branding elements, no significant differences were found between the perceptions of these two passenger profiles, except that the level of agreement assigned to the “architecture design and layout” element by business passengers was grades 6 (27.6%) and 7 (17.2%) compared with 12.8% and 10.3% of leisure passengers to these two grades, respectively.

In addition, no major differences were seen between the perceptions of foreigners, residents of the state of Rio de Janeiro and Brazilians living in other states. However, it was noted that there was a difference between these groups in their perception of the pricing in the commercial areas. Regarding the statement “The prices charged by the retail shops at RIOgaleão make me more willing to shop without needing to leave the airport,” 28.6% of the international passengers indicated agreement at grade 7, while only 4.5% of those living in Brazilian states other than Rio de Janeiro and 4.9% of those living in the state of Rio de Janeiro assigned such a high degree of agreement. This difference in result can be explained in two ways. First, as a cultural matter, the Brazilian passenger is not accustomed to buying at airports and holds fast to the belief that products at airports are always very expensive. Second, the weakening of the Brazilian currency in relation to foreign currencies such as the US dollar and the euro make the products a more attractive value for those living abroad.

A similar result was found with regard to the element “services and

entertainment,” where 42.9% of the interviewees living outside of Brazil assigned grade 6 of agreement to the statement “RIOgaleão offers services (e.g., tourist information services) and entertainment options (e.g., musical presentations) that put me in touch with Carioca's welcoming spirit.” In contrast, the percentages of agreement of those living in Brazilian states other than Rio de Janeiro and those living in the state of Rio de Janeiro were 13.6% (grade 6) and 20.5% (grade 7), and 17.1% (grade 6) and 7.3% (grade 7), respectively. Since Brazilian passengers have a better knowledge of the culture of the city of Rio de Janeiro, they are perhaps more critical in assessing how well it is represented through the service and entertainment strategies used by the airport, whereas foreigners are more satisfied with how the culture is being represented.

5. Conclusions

The goal of this study was to analyze the impact of tourist airport branding on the experiences of passengers of RIOgaleão Airport. We believe that the results can help managers and academics to develop strategies that can contribute to a more diversified population of customers at airports, attract new investments and companies, generate jobs and enhance the role of airports in promoting tourism and tourist destinations.

Initially, we calculated a sample size using a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95% based on a population of 46,417 (average number of daily passengers served at RIOgaleão), which generated a sample size of 382 respondents. However, due to operational limitations imposed by the airport's management in terms of the number of authorized researchers and the days and times available for administering the questionnaires, we only attained a return of 24% ($n = 92$). Nevertheless, we believe that this study produced results that indicate passenger perceptions about the influence of tourist branding strategies at RIOgaleão Airport and raise various questions that can be investigated in future studies.

The results obtained from the responses to the statements in the questionnaire show that the choice of food and beverage outlets received a good average agreement score (60.9% in agreement). In addition, 70.7% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “the selection of retail shops at RIOgaleão allows customers to have contact with international brands but also those with a Carioca soul,” which may indicate that customers appreciate the concern of the new managers with the satisfaction of travelers. Furthermore, 80.4% of the respondents concurred with the statement that “the RIOgaleão brand prizes the city's attributes and indicates its local elements.” With respect to the prices charged at airports, 35% of the sample disagreed totally with the statement that they have greater inclination propensity to shop at RIOgaleão Airport. This result reveals that despite the strategies utilized, the stigma that airports are an expensive place to shop is still strong, so strategies to reduce prices in the commercial area require more work by managers to increase the chances that passengers will have a positive experience. The total respondents who partly agreed, agreed and fully agreed that the artwork installed at airports is a differentiating factor represented 62% of the sample. This number reinforces the importance of these interventions in attracting the attention of travelers and bringing them closer to features of the local environment. Only 3% fully disagreed with this statement.

During the research for this article, it was observed that the new management team of RIOgaleão, despite its recent takeover (2014), has developed tourist airport branding strategies. However, the main objective of these actions may have been to raise the standards of the airport to international service standards, whereas the operation of terminals by large companies has become a trend. The relevance of this study is to remind managers, both in the public and private sectors, that airports, through their branding strategies, can perform an important

role in promoting tourist activities at destinations, particularly in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

Declarations of interest

None.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jairtraman.2018.09.010>.

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