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The Moderating Role of Staff Training and Mediating Role of Venue Reputation in Accessible MICE Tourism: Effects on Business Event Satisfaction

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Abstract

This paper investigates how physical accessibility and information accessibility affect the business event satisfaction of the attendees with disabilities in MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), considering the moderating influence of staff training and mediating influence of venue reputation. Based on Social Exchange Theory and Signaling Theory, a moderated-mediation model was estimated based on a survey conducted among 250 attendees in an emerging destination setting in MICE. The findings indicate that physical accessibility ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and information accessibility ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) have positive direct impacts that are significant on business event satisfaction. These relationships are moderated by staff training, and the beneficial impacts of accessibility are twice when staff training is high ($\beta = 0.56$) than when it is low ($\beta = 0.28$). Venue reputation mediates the relationship between accessibility and satisfaction with a partial and significant impact of about 42–45 percent. Surprisingly, information accessibility is not more strongly influenced than physical one; these two dimensions are equally influenced. The results contribute to the theoretical knowledge of accessibility as a strategic competitiveness dimension in MICE tourism and offer a real-life advice to venue managers, destination marketing organizations, and policymakers. The paper has concluded that physical infrastructure, information systems and staff training are an integrated system whereby one element enhances the rest and the approach to accessibility should be marketed as a competitive edge and not as a compliance focus.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector is one of the most economically important sectors of the worldwide tourism economy. In contrast to leisure tourism, MICE creates high value-added effects by business networking, knowledge sharing, diffusion of innovations, and international collaboration (Erfinda et al., 2024). The digitalization, the investment in infrastructure in the emerging markets, and the demand of human connection after the pandemic are driving the global MICE market, which is currently estimated at USD 907 billion to USD 1.12 trillion as of 2025 with projections of USD 1.5 to 2.4 trillion as of 2030 (World Tourism Forum Institute, 2026). It is expected that the Asia-Pacific region, specifically, will be the quickest expanding MICE market worldwide with a yearly growth rate of 10 to 13 percent until 2030 (World Tourism Forum Institute, 2026).

In this context, upcoming destinations are working hard to secure a bigger portion of the growing MICE industry. Such destinations provide a rare cultural heritage, price benefits and new experiences over traditional European and North American centers. Sustainability, however, is now a prevailing topic in academic literature and industry practice with the expansion of the MICE industry (Sujarwadi and Thea Monika, 2023). As corporations are now obliged to report Scope 3 emissions, such as business travel, with the full application of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) of the European

Union, sustainability is a voluntary move that turns into a compliance policy (World Tourism Forum Institute, 2026).

1.2 The Accessibility Gap

Although much research has been conducted on environmental sustainability, a complementary aspect of sustainability is of crucial underresearch: social sustainability based on accessibility and inclusion. Sustainability principles are becoming a central part of the philosophy and practice of tourism, and the aspect of accessibility is one of the most important dimensions (Farkas et al., 2026). The concept of accessibility in tourism goes beyond the simple non-existence of physical barriers but involves the idea of barrier-dismantling as a human trait and acknowledges that our definition of disability influences the design of inclusive spaces (Farkas et al., 2026).

Barrier-free or accessible tourism is the provision of environments to provide equal access to people with disabilities and individuals with limited mobility. It includes physical accessibility (entrances, ramps, parking, restrooms, elevators, walkway surfaces), online accessibility (websites, reservation systems, alternative forms), service customization (staff training, communication guidelines), and qualified staff to provide inclusive experiences (Jung and Yang, 2023; Ko and Lim, 2023). According to the World Health Organization, more than one billion individuals; about 15 percent of the world population are living with some type of disability; this is a huge market with a huge disposable income to travel and conduct business.

In spite of this demographic and economic fact, recent studies demonstrate that there are still gaps in the access to events. A 2025–2026 survey of over 1,000 delegates and over 100 venues revealed that 93 percent of delegates with disabilities still experience barriers at events (The Business of Events & ICC Wales, 2026). The study identified significant gaps between the confidence of the venue and the experience of the delegates, especially relating to physical access, staff training, sensory needs, communication, and digital access (The Business of Events & ICC Wales, 2026). This empirical data highlights the fact that there is a systemic flaw in the events industry in terms of transforming good intentions into those that are accessible.

1.3 Research Gap and Problem Statement

Although accessibility as a key aspect of sustainable tourism is increasingly being appreciated, the available literature shows that there are three important shortcomings.

To begin with, MICE tourism research has been mainly done on economic impact, competition in the destination and environmental sustainability, yet it never mentioned accessibility as a strategic development aspect. A large part of the current literature tacitly equates destination readiness to the presence of physical facilities and service amenities on the assumption that the supply-side increases automatically result in destination competitiveness (Klinmalai and Kaewlai, 2024). These linear assumptions fail to take into consideration the dimensions of governance, which inform the way readiness is implemented, especially on the issue of including persons with disabilities.

Secondly, the study of barrier-free tourism has been largely focussed on hospitality and recreational leisure travel and business tourism and large-scale events have not been adequately studied. There has been empirical research on accessible tourism in leisure settings (Jung and Yang, 2023), yet very little has been done to identify needs of MICE venues, where professional networking, schedules, and large crowds present demanding access issues.

Third, no integrative frameworks exist that can explain how MICE infrastructure, event management practices, and institutional policies may integrate inclusive practices in developing destinations. There is an ongoing conflict between experiential readiness and capacity to govern as places of high visitor appeal do not have the institutional alignment, policy coherence, or strategic capacity needed to develop MICE inclusively (Klinmalai and Kaewlai, 2024). This disconnect is especially strong in the case of transition economies, where the accessibility criteria might not be formalized, personnel education is still immature, and awareness of disability has not yet disseminated (Ko & Lim, 2023).

Therefore, the main issue that drives the study is the continued marginalization of people with disabilities in the full participation of MICE events because of poor physical and information access, a lack of staff training, and the resulting poor venue image and satisfaction with the business events. By excluding individuals with disabilities in business activities, it not only reduces social inclusion but also financial involvement, thus limiting access to professional networks, career growth prospects, and knowledge sharing (Farkas et al., 2026).

To MICE destinations and venue operators, lack of attention to accessibility is lost market. In MICE, accessibility will be able to increase the market coverage, destination competitiveness, ESG positioning, and international image. Not only is accessibility a social requirement, but also a competitive advantage (Jung and Yang, 2023). Nevertheless, little is known about the mechanisms under which accessibility can be converted to business event satisfaction. In particular, it is unclear whether staff training reinforces the relationship between accessibility of the venue and satisfaction (moderation effect) and whether venue reputation clarifies how accessibility results in satisfaction (moderation effect).

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives

Based on the identified gap, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1

How do physical accessibility and information accessibility of MICE venues affect business event satisfaction among attendees with disabilities?

RQ2

Does staff training moderate the relationship between MICE venue accessibility and business event satisfaction?

RQ3

Does venue reputation mediate the relationship between MICE venue accessibility and business event satisfaction?

RQ4

Which dimension of accessibility has a stronger effect on business event satisfaction?

1.5 Significance and Contribution

This paper has a number of contributions. In principle, it moves MICE destination literature a step further by theorizing readiness as a multi-dimensional and relational phenomenon, instead of being a fixed supply-side phenomenon (Klinmalai & Kaewlai, 2024). The study expands past the simple bivariate relationships to the moderation and mediation mechanisms that determine how and in what circumstances accessibility affects satisfaction outcomes. In practice, the results will inform the evidence-based recommendations of MICE venue managers, destination marketing agencies, and policymakers, especially in emerging economies, on which accessibility interventions provide the best payback (Ko & Lim, 2023).

1.6 Paper Structure

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, the literature review and conceptual framework are provided resulting in the development of a hypothesis. The research methodology is outlined in section 3. The findings are shown in section 4. Section 5 discusses theoretical and practical implications. Limitation and future research directions are a conclusion of Section 6.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

The two theoretical frameworks underpin this study. To begin with, the general prism of the Social Exchange Theory (SET) is the way the accessible environments enable positive satisfaction results. SET assumes that people judge relationships and experiences in terms of the perceived costs and benefits (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Attendees with disabilities experience more benefits (easy movement, dignity, inclusion) and fewer costs (effort, frustration, anxiety) when MICE facilities have ready infrastructure and skilled personnel and become more satisfied and more loyal (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976). In the MICE, availability of venues can be interpreted as organizational interest in attendee welfare, which provokes positive appraisals and intentions towards behavior (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Second, Signaling Theory (ST) describes how the relationship between accessibility and satisfaction is mediated by venue reputation. Signaling theory describes the ways in which organizations can convey qualities that cannot be observed to the stakeholders using observable signals (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973). Accessible infrastructure and staff training are credible indicators of organizational dedication towards inclusion, quality and social responsibility when this investment is made by a MICE

venue (Taj, 2016). Such cues develop a better reputation of the venue, thus motivating attendee satisfaction and attendance intentions (Connelly et al., 2011; Bergh et al., 2014). The combination of SET and ST offers a logical theoretical explanation of both the direct (through perceived benefits) and the indirect (through reputation) impacts of accessibility.

2.2 MICE Tourism and Destination Competitiveness

Destinations around the world have made MICE tourism a strategic priority because of its high yield economic effects, such as high length of stay, off-season demand as well as high per capita spending (Crouch and Ritchie, 2005; Getz and Page, 2016). Compared to leisure tourists, the MICE delegates incur around three to four times higher daily expenditures, which create great multiplier impacts to local economies (Kim et al., 2020; Lee and Back, 2005). The complex of factors that predetermine destination competitiveness in the MICE sector is comprised of infrastructure accessibility, human resource quality, institutional support, and destination image (Klinmalai & Kaewlai, 2024; Crouch, 2011).

Recent research has highlighted that the destination readiness in terms of MICE is not only limited to physical infrastructure but also includes governance capability, stakeholder coordination, and quality of services (Klinmalai and Kaewlai, 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). Nevertheless, current readiness frameworks have mostly failed to consider accessibility as a competitive advantage of persons with disabilities (Erfinda et al., 2024; Sujarwadi and Thea Monika, 2023). This is noteworthy considering that the available tourism market has a population of more than one billion prospective travelers around the world (World Health Organization, 2023; Darcy and Buhalis, 2011).

2.3 Accessible Tourism: Concepts and Dimensions

The concept of accessible tourism, also known as barrier-free tourism or inclusive tourism, is intended to help people with disabilities and older adults to access tourism settings without assistance, in an equitable and dignified manner (Buhalis and Darcy, 2011; Darcy et al., 2020). The notion has broadened the understanding of access in the form of wheelchairs to a comprehensive conceptualization of the physical, informational, attitudinal, and institutional dimensions (Farkas et al., 2026; Poria et al., 2010).

Physical accessibility is the use of the built environment in a way that allows free movement and its safe navigation. Such important aspects are: step-free access, accessible parking, ramps with suitable gradients, the size of elevators, accessible toilets, and walkway surfaces that do not cause slips (Jung and Yang, 2023; Ko and Lim, 2023). The accessibility of information includes accessibility-related information that is available via websites, signage, alternative forms (large print, braille, electronic) and accessible reservation systems (Gassiot-Melian et al., 2018; Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013). Attitudinal accessibility is associated with the knowledge of the staff, communication and readiness to help without patronizing attitude (Darcy and Pegg, 2011; Gassiot-Melian et al., 2018). Institutional accessibility includes organizational policies, certification schemes, and regulatory frameworks that mandate and incentivize inclusive practices (Ko & Lim, 2023; Darcy et al., 2020).

Although there has been an increasing interest in the significance of accessible tourism, studies have mainly been conducted in the context of leisure, including beaches, museums, and national parks (Jung and Yang, 2023; Poria et al., 2010). The MICE industry with its time-limited timetables, dense crowds, and professional networking requirements has distinct accessibility issues that have not been empirically studied (Farkas et al., 2026; The Business of Events and ICC Wales, 2026).

2.4 Physical Accessibility and Business Event Satisfaction

Accessibility of MICE venues physically has a direct impact on the participation of attendees with disabilities in business events. Attendees who are unable to move between sessions are frustrated, requiring assistance, and unable to access other venues that have inaccessible entrances, parking, restrooms, and elevators (Jung et al., 2023; Poria et al., 2010). On the contrary, accessible environments designed well can help people move independently, decrease anxiety and enable the attendees to concentrate on their professional goals and not logistical obstacles (Darcy and Buhalis, 2011; Ko and Lim, 2023).

Physical accessibility and satisfaction have been confirmed to have a positive association as evidenced by empirical evidence of leisure tourism contexts. The researchers Jung and Yang (2023) discovered that such barrier free features as access to public transportation, parking, main entrances and rest facilities were significant predictors of tourist satisfaction in Jeju among 149 commentators who experienced cultural tourism. Equally, Ko and Lim (2023) found the physical environment enhancement as the most important policy intervention (40.6 percent weighting) to activate barrier-free tourism through AHP methodology involving 17 experts.

In the context of the MICE, physical accessibility is especially important as business events include the quick shifting of the sessions, exhibition halls, and networking zones. Slow or trouble with navigation have a direct effect on the amount of professional connections formed, the amount of sessions attended, and the overall payback of the investment of participation (Klinmalai and Kaewlai, 2024).

Therefore:

H1. Physical accessibility of MICE venues has a positive direct effect on business event satisfaction.

2.5 Information Accessibility and Business Event Satisfaction

The availability of access to information allows attendees with disabilities to plan well, move around and access event content fairly (Gassiot-Melian et al., 2018; Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013). The most important dimensions are the accessibility of the pre-event websites, the booking systems to support special needs, the presence of clear in-venue signage, and provision of alternative format to printed sources.

Previous studies show that information barriers are one of the most important limitations to tourists with disabilities. The survey of 248 Spanish tourists with disabilities conducted by Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018) revealed that information and communication constraints were a particular structural barrier that has a strong negative impact on the participation in travel. The report established that the inaccessibility of information creates an element of uncertainty and anxiety and many people with disabilities would not even think of going to new destinations.

The accessibility of information is especially consequential in the MICE context since business events tend to be associated with a complicated timetable, various locations and time limits. Visitors who are not informed about available routes, restrooms, or emergency protocols beforehand have an increased level of stress and less capacity to enjoy the event in full (The Business of Events & ICC Wales, 2026). Availability of booking procedures whereby accommodation and dietary needs can be specified improve the satisfaction further by eliminating end-of-time inconveniences.

Therefore:

H2. Information accessibility of MICE venues has a positive direct effect on business event satisfaction.

2.6 Staff Training as a Moderator

Staff training is the willingness of the venue staff to interact with, support, and keep attendees with disabilities safe. Staff trained to make a physically accessible venue a true inclusive experience, whereas poorly trained staff can undo the advantages of physical infrastructure (Darcy & Pegg, 2011; Gassiot-Melian et al., 2018).

The moderating force of staff training is based on the fact that physical and information accessibility are both necessary but not enough to be satisfied. Attention to attendee satisfaction is compromised even in the presence of ramps and elevators when staff do not know where to go, cannot effectively communicate, or feel uneasy in assisting guests with disabilities (Gassiot-Melian et al., 2018; Ko and Lim, 2023). On the other hand, some of the physical limitations can be addressed by hiring staff that is well trained to offer personalized help and problem-solving.

Ko and Lim (2023) listed human service education as the third-highest priority (17.4 percent weighting) to the barrier-free tourism policy as infrastructure cannot work alone on inclusion. Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018) discovered that interpersonal barriers, such as perceived staff incompetence and negative attitudes, have a significant mediating effect on the association between physical accessibility and travel participation. Within the MICE environment, employees capable of converse in sign language, leading visually impaired people, or helping wheelchair users without embarrassing them can create a direct benefit to the attendee experience.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that staff training will enhance the positive correlation between accessibility and satisfaction. Physical and information accessibility impact more on satisfaction when the staff is

well-trained. Even accessible venues cannot provide high levels of satisfaction when staff is not well trained.

H3. Staff training moderates the relationship between MICE venue accessibility and business event satisfaction, such that the positive effect of accessibility on satisfaction is stronger when staff training is high.

2.7 Venue Reputation as a Mediator

Venue reputation denotes a perceived quality, reliability, and image of inclusion of the MICE venue to the attendees of the business event. Reputation is a good intangible asset that indicates organizational quality and social responsibility (Connelly et al., 2011; Taj, 2016). In the accessible tourism setting, facilities which are characterized by inclusive operations receive a regular client base and demand a higher price (Darcy & Buhalis, 2011).

The mediation of reputation is given through signaling theory. Investments in observable infrastructure and staff training when made by a venue are observable indicators of unobservable organizational qualities (quality, inclusion, social responsibility). Such signals are not easy to counterfeit (e.g. building ramps, training the whole staff), and so they are believable to the prospective attendees (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973). Reputation is an independent source of satisfaction as people gain value not only based on direct experience but also on the trust of the ability to attend a reputable venue (Bergh et al., 2014; Taj, 2016).

The mediating role of reputation in service settings is in support of empirical evidence. Klinmalai and Kaewlai (2024) discovered that the correlation between the quality of infrastructure and satisfaction of event organizers in Thailand was strongly mediated by MICE destination reputation. In their sample of 550 MICE stakeholders, reputation was able to explain 34 percent of the variance in the satisfaction beyond direct effects on the infrastructure.

Mediation in reputation in the context of accessible MICE works in the following manner: Physical and information accessibility is directly related to the satisfaction improvement (H1, H2). Secondly, accessibility investments would improve the reputation of venues because visitors would view inclusive venues as of higher quality and more reliable. This reputation in turn leads to an increment in satisfaction since people will feel pride, confidence and less risk when they select a reputable venue.

Therefore:

H4. Venue reputation mediates the relationship between MICE venue accessibility and business event satisfaction.

2.8 Comparative Strength of Accessibility Dimensions

Although both physical and information accessibility should positively influence the satisfaction, theoretical and empirical evidence indicate that information accessibility will exert a greater overall

impact. To begin with, information access can happen before the event and throughout it, influencing expectations and making planning possible, whereas physical access can have an impact only on the experience on site (Gassiot-Melian et al., 2018; Michopoulou and Buhalis, 2013). Second, physical barriers are not always the main factor that makes people with disabilities not visit new locations at all, and information barriers are a more fundamental limitation than physical ones (Gassiot-Melian et al., 2018). Third, online booking systems and website accessibility are the initial point of contact during the digital age and influence the formation of an initial impression that will shade the further experience (Klinmalai and Kaewlai, 2024).

In their empirical results, Jung and Yang (2023) discovered that access to homepages was in the "possibly overkill" section, which indicated that important but it might not be as urgent as physical access, which is needed in certain situations. Nevertheless, they concentrated on leisure tourism in a local Korean setting. Information accessibility is probably of more significance in the international MICE tourism, where the attendees reserve it remotely without visiting the site.

Therefore:

H5. Information accessibility has a stronger total effect on business event satisfaction than physical accessibility.

2.9 Conceptual Framework

Based on the theoretical premises and assumptions, Fig. 1 indicates the conceptual framework. Independent variables are physical accessibility and information accessibility. Training of the staff buffers the connection between every accessibility dimension and satisfaction (H3). The mediating variable is venue reputation between each of the two dimensions of accessibility and satisfaction (H4). Business event satisfaction is the dependent variable. The control variables are demographic characteristics.

Source: Adapted from Jung and Yang (2023); Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018); Ko and Lim (2023); Klinmalai and Kaewlai (2024).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design used in this study was a quantitative, cross section survey to test the hypothesized relationships between physical accessibility, information accessibility, staff training, venue reputation and business event satisfaction. The quantitative method was chosen due to the existing measurement scales of all constructs and the purpose of the study to test, but not create theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target group involved people with disabilities or mobility issues who had participated in any of the MICE events (conference, exhibition or business meeting) during the last 12 months. Due to the challenges of accessing this population by using random sampling, purposive sampling strategy was adopted (Etikan et al., 2016).

The data were obtained during 12 weeks based on three sources: on-site data sampling during the MICE events in Tashkent and Samarkand, online data sampling through the disability business networks and snowball data sampling through the initial respondents. There were 300 questionnaires handed out and 262 usable questionnaires were returned, that is, a response rate of 87.3. This is larger than the minimum needed of 200 to perform moderated mediation analysis with PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022; Fritz and MacKinnon, 2007).

Informed consent

was given by all participants beforehand. It was guaranteed that anonymity is guaranteed, and the respondents were told that they could pull out at any point in time without any repercussions.

3.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the sample are given in Table 1. Among the 262 respondents, 53.8 percent were males and 46.2 percent females. The largest age group was 31–45 years (44.3 percent), followed by 46–60 years (26.0 percent), 18–30 years (19.8 percent), and 60 + years (9.9 percent). In terms of disability status, 71 respondents (27.1 percent) indicated that they had a disability or a mobility limitation. Mobility impairments were the first (52.1 percent) and then hearing (21.1 percent), visual (15.5 percent), cognitive (7.0 percent), and multiple disabilities (4.2 percent).

Regarding the MICE event attendance, 38.9 percent of the respondents had attended 3–5 events within the last 12 months, 29.0 percent had attended 6–10 events, 18.3 percent had attended 1–2 events, and 13.7 percent had attended over 10 events. In terms of role during events, the largest proportion was attendees (62.6 percent) then exhibitors (18.3 percent), organizers (11.5 percent), speakers (5.3 percent) and media (2.3 percent).

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 262)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	141	53.80%
	Female	121	46.20%
Age	18–30 years	52	19.80%
	31–45 years	116	44.30%
	46–60 years	68	26.00%
	60 + years	26	9.90%
Disability status	Yes	71	27.10%
	No	191	72.90%
Type of disability (n = 71)	Mobility	37	52.10%
	Hearing	15	21.10%
	Visual	11	15.50%
	Cognitive	5	7.00%
	Multiple	3	4.20%
MICE events (past 12 months)	2-Jan	48	18.30%
	5-Mar	102	38.90%
	10-Jun	76	29.00%
	10+	36	13.70%
Role at event	Attendee	164	62.60%
	Exhibitor	48	18.30%
	Organizer	30	11.50%
	Speaker	14	5.30%
	Media	6	2.30%

3.4 Measurement Instruments

The constructs have been measured based on 5-point Likert scales (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Items were based on scales that had been previously tested.

The barrier-free environment attributes by Jung and Yang (2023), including entrances, parking, restrooms, elevators, and walkway surfaces, were used to measure physical accessibility (10 items).

Information accessibility (8 items) was modified based on the tourism constraints scale of Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018): the emphasis was on the access to information on the websites, signage, alternative formats, and booking procedures.

The interpersonal constraints dimension of Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018) was used to measure staff training (8 items) with the addition of human service education priorities found by Ko and Lim (2023). Questions evaluated the communication skills, methods of assistance, and emergency training.

Venue reputation (6 items) was based on the MICE destination selection criteria of Klinmalai and Kaewlai (2024), which included image and competitiveness, inclusive.

Business event satisfaction (8 items) was based on Kim (2023), and common tourism satisfaction scales, which included overall satisfaction, expectation, networking focus, recommendation, and future attendance.

3.5 Pilot Testing

A pilot test was done on 30 MICE attendees before full data collection, and when they met the inclusion criteria. According to the feedback of the participants, some wordplay changes were implemented to three items to make them more comprehensible (e.g., use of simpler words instead of the terms turning radius). The analysis of reliability revealed that Cronbach 8 values of all constructs were in the range of 0.79 to 0.88 which is higher than the acceptable value of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). There were no items that were dropped. The questionnaire in the end had 44 questions.

3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done with the help of SPSS version 28 and PROCESS Macro version 4.2 (Hayes, 2022). The descriptive statistics and the reliability analysis (Cronbach 0) were calculated on all the constructs first. Second, Pearson correlation analysis to test bivariate relationships was used. Third, a moderation test (H3) was conducted with the help of the PROCESS Macro Model 1, where staff training served as a moderator. Fourth, PROCESS Macro Model 4 (with 5,000 bootstrap resamples) was utilized in the mediation analysis (H4). The statistical significance was predetermined to $p < 0.05$ and the indirect effects were deemed significant when the bootstrap 95% interval did not include the null.

Single-factor test conducted by Harman was done to measure common method bias. A common method bias was not a significant issue because the unrotated factor solution only explained 34.2 percent of the variance, which is considerably lower than the 50 percent mark (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

4. Results

4.1 Preliminary Data Screening

Before the actual analysis, the data were filtered with regard to missing values, outliers, and normality. Out of the 262 questionnaires sent back, 8 were rejected because they had incomplete information (over

10 percent missing data) resulting in the final sample of 254 valid ones. The Little's MCAR test showed that missing data were entirely random ($\chi^2 = 124.56$, df = 118, p = 0.32). Listwise deletion was used to deal with missing values.

The standardized z-scores were used to evaluate the existence of univariate outliers, and any score that was greater than either + 3.29 or less than − 3.29 was deemed an outlier (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019). There were no univariate outliers. Mahalanobis distance ($p < 0.001$) was used to measure multivariate outliers. There were four cases that were above the critical value and were eliminated to give 250 respondents as the final analytical sample.

Skewness and kurtosis were used to measure normality. The skewness values of all items were within the range of -1.12 to 0.87 and kurtosis values within the range of -0.94 to 1.23, which is within the acceptable range of + 2 (Hair et al., 2022). Therefore, the data are close to a normal distribution.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables in the study. The respondents rated physical accessibility (M = 3.78, SD = 0.82) and information accessibility (M = 3.65, SD = 0.79) moderately high. The mean scores of staff training were 3.52 (SD = 0.85), and the mean score of venue reputation was 3.71 (SD = 0.76). The mean of business event satisfaction was 3.84 (SD = 0.81).

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (n = 250)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Physical Accessibility	3.78	0.82	0.87				
2. Information Accessibility	3.65	0.79	.58**	0.84			
3. Staff Training	3.52	0.85	.49**	.52**	0.83		
4. Venue Reputation	3.71	0.76	.62**	.59**	.54**	0.81	
5. Business Event Satisfaction	3.84	0.81	.67**	.64**	.61**	.71**	0.89

Note: $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed). Cronbach's α reliability coefficients are shown in parentheses on the diagonal.

4.3 Reliability and Validity

Cronbachs 7 was used to measure internal consistency. Table 2 illustrates that all constructs had a value above the desired value of 0.70, with a range of 0.81 to 0.89 (the highest being venue reputation) meaning that all the constructs were good to excellent in reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994).

The evaluation of convergent validity was through average variance extracted (AVE). All AVEs were over 0.50: physical accessibility (AVE = 0.62), information accessibility (AVE = 0.58), staff training (AVE = 0.55), venue reputation (AVE = 0.60), and business event satisfaction (AVE = 0.64). The square root of

each construct AVE was compared to their correlations with other constructs and was determined as discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

4.4 Common Method Bias

Due to self-reporting of all data, Harman single-factor test was used to evaluate common method bias. The unrotated exploratory factor analysis yielded six eigenvalues of more than 1.0, and the first factor explained 32.7 percent of the total variance, which is far below the 50 percent mark (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This implies that there is no severe concern of common method bias in this research.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

4.5.1 Direct Effects (H1 and H2)

H1 and H2 were tested by using hierarchical multiple regression. In Step 1, control variables (age, gender, disability status, event frequency) were typed in, and in Step 2, physical accessibility and information accessibility were typed. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3
Regression Results for Direct Effects (n = 250)

Variable	**Step 1 β**	**Step 2 β**	**T**	**p**
Age	0.08	0.05	1.12	0.26
Gender	0.04	0.03	0.76	0.45
Disability status	-0.11	-0.08	-1.89	0.06
Event frequency	0.14*	0.10*	2.34	0.02
Physical Accessibility (H1)		0.42**	7.45	< 0.001
Information Accessibility (H2)		0.38**	6.89	< 0.001
R^2	0.04	0.52		
ΔR^2		0.48**		
F	2.56*	44.23**		
Note: p < 0.05, *p < 0.01. Standardized coefficients (β) reported.*				

H1 hypothesized that the physical accessibility has a positive direct impact to business event satisfaction. The results support H1 (β = 0.42, p < 0.001). The H2 hypothesis was that information accessibility positively directly influences the satisfaction of business events. The results support H2 (β = 0.38, p < 0.001). The two dimensions of accessibility measured 48 percent of the variance in satisfaction over and above the control variables.

4.5.2 Moderation Effect (H3)

H3 hypothesized that training of the staff has a moderating effect on the correlation between MICE venue accessibility and business event satisfaction. The moderation was evaluated by the use of PROCESS Macro Model 1 (Hayes, 2022) with 5,000 bootstrap samples. The physical accessibility and information accessibility were separately modeled. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4
Moderation Analysis Results (PROCESS Model 1)

Predictor	Coeff	SE	t	p	95% CI
Model: Physical Accessibility × Staff Training					
Constant	3.84	0.05	76.8	< 0.001	[3.74, 3.94]
Physical Accessibility (PA)	0.42	0.06	7	< 0.001	[0.30, 0.54]
Staff Training (ST)	0.31	0.05	6.2	< 0.001	[0.21, 0.41]
PA × ST (Interaction)	0.18	0.04	4.5	< 0.001	[0.10, 0.26]
$R^2 = 0.58$, $F(3,246) = 112.34$, $p < 0.001$					
Model: Information Accessibility × Staff Training					
Constant	3.84	0.05	76.8	< 0.001	[3.74, 3.94]
Information Accessibility (IA)	0.38	0.06	6.33	< 0.001	[0.26, 0.50]
Staff Training (ST)	0.33	0.06	5.5	< 0.001	[0.21, 0.45]
IA × ST (Interaction)	0.14	0.05	2.8	0.006	[0.04, 0.24]
$R^2 = 0.54$, $F(3,246) = 96.45$, $p < 0.001$					

The interaction term was important in both regards to physical accessibility ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) and information accessibility ($\beta = 0.14$, $p = 0.006$) and favored H3. Simple slopes were computed at low (-1 SD), mean and high + 1 SD level of staff training in order to interpret the interaction.

Table 5
Simple Slopes Analysis

Moderator Level	Physical Accessibility → Satisfaction	Information Accessibility → Satisfaction
Low Staff Training (-1 SD)	$\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$	$\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$
Mean Staff Training	$\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$
High Staff Training (+ 1 SD)	$\beta = 0.56$, $p < 0.001$	$\beta = 0.50$, $p < 0.001$

4.5.3 Mediation Effect (H4)

H4 was that the relationship between the MICE venue accessibility and business event satisfaction were mediated by venue reputation. PROCESS Macro Model 4 (Hayes, 2022) with 5,000 bootstrap resamples was used to test mediation. Table 6 shows the results.

Table 6
Mediation Analysis Results (PROCESS Model 4)

Path	Effect	SE	95% CI	p
Physical Accessibility → Venue Reputation → Satisfaction				
Total effect (c)	0.67	0.06	[0.55, 0.79]	< 0.001
Direct effect (c')	0.39	0.06	[0.27, 0.51]	< 0.001
Indirect effect (a × b)	0.28	0.05	[0.19, 0.38]	-
Information Accessibility → Venue Reputation → Satisfaction				
Total effect (c)	0.64	0.06	[0.52, 0.76]	< 0.001
Direct effect (c')	0.35	0.06	[0.23, 0.47]	< 0.001
Indirect effect (a × b)	0.29	0.05	[0.20, 0.39]	-

The indirect influence via venue reputation was 0.28 (95% CI [0.19, 0.38]) to be physically accessible. For information accessibility, the indirect effect was 0.29 (95% CI [0.20, 0.39]). H4 is supported since both the confidence intervals did not include zero. The relationship between accessibility and satisfaction is mediated by venue reputation, which explains about 42 percent (physical) and 45 percent (information) of the overall effect.

4.5.4 Comparison of Accessibility Dimensions (H5)

H5 assumed that the overall impact of information accessibility on the satisfaction of business events is greater than that of physical accessibility. To test H5, overall effects (direct and indirect) in Table 6 were compared. The overall effect of physical accessibility was 0.67 and information accessibility was 0.64. The difference (0.03) was not statistically significant as per overlapping confidence intervals. Thus, H5 is not acceptable. The impacts of physical and information access on satisfaction at business events are similar.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This paper has discussed the relationship between physical and information accessibility and business event satisfaction among MICE attendees with disabilities with staff training as a moderator and venue reputation as a mediator. Four out of five hypotheses were proven right. Both physical accessibility and information accessibility had positive direct impacts on satisfaction that were significant (H1, H2). These relationships were moderated by staff training, i.e. the positive effects of accessibility were significantly greater with high levels of staff training (H3). The relationship between accessibility and satisfaction was partially mediated by the reputation of the venue, which explained about 42–45 percent of the overall effect (H4). Nonetheless, the total effect of the information accessibility was not greater than that of the physical accessibility (H5 not significant); the two dimensions produced similar impacts.

5.2 Direct Effects (H1 and H2)

The conclusion that accessibility as determined by physical factors has a positive influence on business event satisfaction is consistent with the previous studies on leisure tourism. According to Jung and Yang (2023), characteristics such as entrance, parking, and rest facilities, which did not include barriers, were significant predictors of tourist satisfaction in 149 commentators on cultural tourism in Jeju. Likewise, Ko and Lim (2023) found the physical environment improvement to be the policy intervention with the greatest priority (40.6 percent weighting) to activate barrier-free tourism. The current research applies these results to the MICE scenario, showing that not only leisure travelers but business event participants also need to have physical accessibility due to their professional goals in the form of efficient navigation and freedom of movement.

The high impact of information accessibility on satisfaction supports the study by Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018) who have found information and communication limitations as a specific structural obstacle with considerable adverse impacts on travel participation among 248 Spanish tourists with disabilities. The current research builds on this observation by demonstrating that access to information works in the same way in the MICE context, where pre-event planning, intricate schedules, and time-related deadlines increase the relevance of accessible information. In contrast to leisure tourists that might explore the destination on their own, MICE attendees usually make reservations months before at international destinations without visiting the location and, thus, the availability of digital information becomes a crucial factor in contrast to physical infrastructure.

5.3 Moderation Effect (H3)

The finding that staff training moderates the accessibility-satisfaction relationship is a key contribution of this study. The high level of interaction ($\beta = 0.18$ in terms of physical accessibility and $\beta = 0.14$ in terms of information accessibility) implies that the positive influence of accessibility is increased in case the staff is well trained. Simple slopes analysis showed that as the level of staff training rose, the impact of physical accessibility on satisfaction rose by $\beta = 0.28$ to $\beta = 0.56$—a 100 percent.

The results are a continuation of Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018) who found interpersonal constraints (such as perceived deficiency of staff skills) to be a major obstacle to travel participation. The current research goes beyond the findings of staff training as a limitation and proves its mediating effect-staff training does not just influence the satisfaction but it essentially transforms the way accessibility converts into satisfaction. It is theoretically significant as it implies that the conditions of accessibility of physical and information are necessary yet not sufficient. Even the most physically accessible venue can not be of high satisfaction without trained staff.

This result is also consistent with that of Ko and Lim (2023), who ranked human service education as the third-highest priority (17.4 percent weighting) to barrier-free tourism policy. The current paper presents empirical evidence to this policy priority by demonstrating that an investment in staff training has multiplicative returns in terms of increasing the efficiency of investments in physical infrastructure. To venue managers, the implication of this is that staff training should not be considered a standalone project but rather as a facilitator which can realize the potential of accessibility investments.

5.4 Mediation Effect (H4)

Another main contribution is the finding that the accessibility-satisfaction relationship is mediated by venue reputation. The indirect effects (0.28 physical accessibility, 0.29 information accessibility) had a substantial effect, with venue reputation explaining about 42–45 percent of the overall effect. This shows that over two-fifths of the effects of accessibility on satisfaction are mediated by improved reputation of the venue.

This observation confirms Signaling Theory (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011) that states organizational investments are signals of invisible attributes. By investing in the quality, inclusion, and social responsibility of the organization, MICE venues can make it known through investment in accessible infrastructure and staff training. These cues are summed up into reputation, which in turn promotes satisfaction since the attendees will get value by selecting a reputable venue. The mediation effect was a little greater with information accessibility (45 percent) than with physical accessibility (42 percent) indicating that digital accessibility cues might be especially salient when forming reputations in the digital era.

This result builds on previous studies that showed that reputation played an important mediating role between the quality of infrastructure and event organizers satisfaction in Thailand (Klinmalai and Kaewlai 2024). The current research recreates this mediation effect in the context of accessible tourism and with individual attendees as opposed to organizers which implies that reputation mediation is a multilevel phenomenon. In destination marketing, it means that accessibility certifications and credentials can be used in marketing communications to increase reputation, which is a virtuous cycle where accessibility investments yield reputation dividends to attract more attendees.

5.5 Non-Supported Hypothesis (H5)

The fact that the accessibility of information is not found to have a higher overall impact than that of physical accessibility (H5 not supported) should be interpreted cautiously. Although the overall impact of the physical accessibility (0.67) was a bit bigger than the impact of the information accessibility (0.64), the difference did not prove to be significant. This suggests that both dimensions are equally important in the MICE context.

This observation goes against the original theoretical assumption that information access would prevail because of its pre-event role. A reason could be that since the attendees with disabilities of MICE might have developed information barrier coping mechanisms (e.g., calling venues directly, using peer networks) that are less so of physical barrier coping mechanisms. The other reason is that the physical environment is more instantly salient in the on-site experience that it may outweigh the significance of information pre-event. A third reason is that the sample used in the study, consisting of those who made it to the venue, might not be representative of those who were completely discouraged by information barriers- the archetypal selection bias.

This has also been contrary to Jung and Yang (2023), who established that the accessibility of homepages belonged to the possible overkill domain in their leisure tourism research. This difference can be attributed to MICE and leisure travel. In contrast to leisure tourists who might find some destinations by chance, MICE attendees most often reserve months before, in other global destinations, and do not visit sites beforehand, so the availability of digital information is essential in such a situation.

5.6 Theoretical Implications

The paper has three theoretical contributions. First, it develops literature on MICE destination through the conceptualization of accessibility as a strategic competitiveness factor and not a social liability. The previous MICE studies were oriented towards the economic impact, destination competitiveness, and environmental sustainability, without paying much attention to accessibility. The current research shows that the accessibility has a direct influence on the satisfaction and an indirect influence on the satisfaction through the reputation, indicating that accessibility must be included in the general framework of MICE competitiveness (Klinmalai and Kaewlai, 2024).

Second, the research generalizes Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) to available MICE situation. The study illustrates that SET is applicable to marginalized communities by revealing that perceived benefits increase with access to environments over costs incurred by attendees with disabilities. The moderation result, in which staff training enhances the accessibility-satisfaction relationship, indicates that the perceived benefits are not merely based on physical infrastructure but also on the quality of human interaction.

Third, the research offers empirical evidence of the Signaling Theory (Connelly et al., 2011) in the domain of accessible tourism. The mediation result indicates that the accessibility investments serve as plausible quality and inclusion indicators of organizations, improving reputation and consequently

satisfaction. This extends signaling theory to a new context (accessible MICE tourism) and a new signal type (accessibility infrastructure and training).

5.7 Practical Implications

To the MICE venue managers, the findings suggest that physical and information accessibility investments can directly yield attendee satisfaction. Nevertheless, the moderation result is also significant: the training of staff is not a choice but a necessity. All guest-facing employees should be subjected to compulsory disability awareness training by managers, including communication and assistance strategies, and emergency evacuation plans. Genuine, as opposed to mere compliance with regulations, the attendees with disabilities will find the venue as friendly and accommodating to them when staff is confident and competent.

To destination marketing organizations, the mediation result indicates that the investments in accessibility increase the reputation of the venue. DMOs are encouraged to encourage accessibility credentials in their marketing communications, pursue international standards (e.g., ISO 21902:2021), and provide testimonials by attendees with disabilities. The notion of accessibility ought not to be a niche issue but rather an indicator of quality and professionalism.

To policymakers especially in emerging economies, the fact that the issue of physical and information access has the same level of importance, points to the fact that policy interventions should aim to alleviate both aspects at once. The accessible design in the building codes must be obligatory, however the accessible websites and booking systems are also necessary. Accessibility improvements are among the expenses that should be subsidized or tax deductible, including staff training. Ko and Lim (2023) established the physical environment improvement to be the highest priority policy, yet the current study indicates that the information accessibility and staff training could be given more relative importance since they have a significant impact on satisfaction.

5.8 Limitations and Future Research

There are a few limitations which should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow any causal inferences. Longitudinal designs or quasi experiments that are used in future will enhance causal claims. Second, the sample consisted of participants who made it to the events, which may have underestimated the actual impact of accessibility. Research in the future must sample those who are completely discouraged by barriers to access. Third, the research was carried out in one emerging destination setting; there is need to repeat the research in other settings. Fourth, the research failed to draw the line between various types of disabilities. The future studies should focus on defining whether the model will work in the same way if it is mobility, visual, hearing, and cognitive impairments. Fifth, the research concentrated on satisfaction on an individual level and not on organizational results like repeat bookings or word of mouth referrals. Future studies need to associate accessibility with such downstream outcomes.

6. Conclusion

This paper formulated and investigated a moderated-mediation model to understand the effect of physical accessibility and information accessibility in determining business event satisfaction among MICE attendees with disabilities with staff training as a moderator and venue reputation as a mediator. The study used a combination of Social Exchange Theory and Signaling Theory to explain these relationships on the basis of data involving 250 respondents in an emerging destination setting. These results reveal that physical and information accessibility positively influence the satisfaction in a strong direct relationship, staff training does moderate these effects such that the gains of accessibility are twice as strong with high training levels, and the venue reputation partially mediates the relationship between accessibility and satisfaction, which explains about 42–45 percent of the overall effect. Surprisingly, information accessibility was not more influential than the physical one; the two dimensions showed similar impacts in the context of MICE.

Theoretically, the present study contributes to the MICE tourism literature by conceptualizing the idea of accessibility as a strategic element of competitiveness and not a social fringe. Previous MICE studies have mostly concentrated on economic contribution and environmental sustainability; the current research indicates that accessibility has a direct and indirect influence on attendee satisfaction that should be included in mainstream MICE competitiveness guidelines. The paper further applies Social Exchange Theory to the marginalized communities within the MICE framework where it is found that the perceived benefits are not only affected by the physical infrastructure but also by the quality of human interaction. Also, the mediation result presents the Signaling Theory of accessible tourism with empirical evidence that accessibility investments are credible signals of organizational quality that boost venue reputation which in turn leads to satisfaction.

In practice, the results show that the staff training should be perceived as a necessity, not as an option by the managers of the MICE venues. Physical accessibility investments do not provide as good returns without trained personnel. Included in the basic operations of the managers should be a mandatory disability awareness training (communication, assisting techniques, emergency protocols). In the case of destination marketing organizations, the accessibility credentials must be made to reflect the overall quality, but not a niche issue, and the certifications like ISO 21902:2021 can be used to build the reputation of the destination. To policymakers in developing economies, the similar impacts of the availability of physical and information imply that policy interventions should be made in both dimensions at the same time, with building codes, web access regulations and employee training needs as co-ordinated policy bundles.

There are a number of limitations to this study. Cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference, longitudinal or quasi-experimental designs are required. The sample did not include those who were repelled by accessibility barriers and this might be underestimating real effects. The single-country scenario is limited to generalizability; it is necessary to replicate across countries. The research failed to differentiate between types of disabilities; future studies must evaluate model invariance between mobility, visual, hearing and cognitive disabilities. Lastly, the research concentrated on personal

satisfaction and not the performance of the organization; it is still up to the future research to determine the correlation between accessibility and repeat bookings and return on investment.

MICE industry cannot boast of being sustainable and leave out one billion people with disabilities to be fully involved. This paper will show that accessibility is not just a compliance concern but a strategic opportunity. Physical facilities, information systems and personnel training are a system of interdependence in that one aspect reinforces another. Facilities that acknowledge this will gain popularity, capture the available MICE market and competitive edge. The ones that fail to will be abandoned.

Declarations

Ethical Approval:

The study protocol, including the survey instrument and consent procedures, was approved by the AJOU University in Tashkent Ethics Committee (Approval Reference No, AUT-2025-098). The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Consent to Participate:

Before completing the survey, each participant in this study gave their informed consent. Participation in the study was entirely optional, and its objective was described. At any moment, participants could leave without incurring any penalties.

Consent to Publish:

Not applicable.

Competing Interests Statement:

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Author Contribution

A.Xusanov Chari Kadirovich: Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing.B.Nurullaeva Malika Samadjon qizi: Investigation, Validation, Writing – review & editing.C.Amir Shahzad Ahmad Shah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft. D.Muhammad Ramzan Ali: Formal analysis, Software, Validation. Project administration. E.Vokhidova Mehri Khasanovna: Validation, Writing – review & editing, Project administration.

Data Availability Statement:

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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Figures

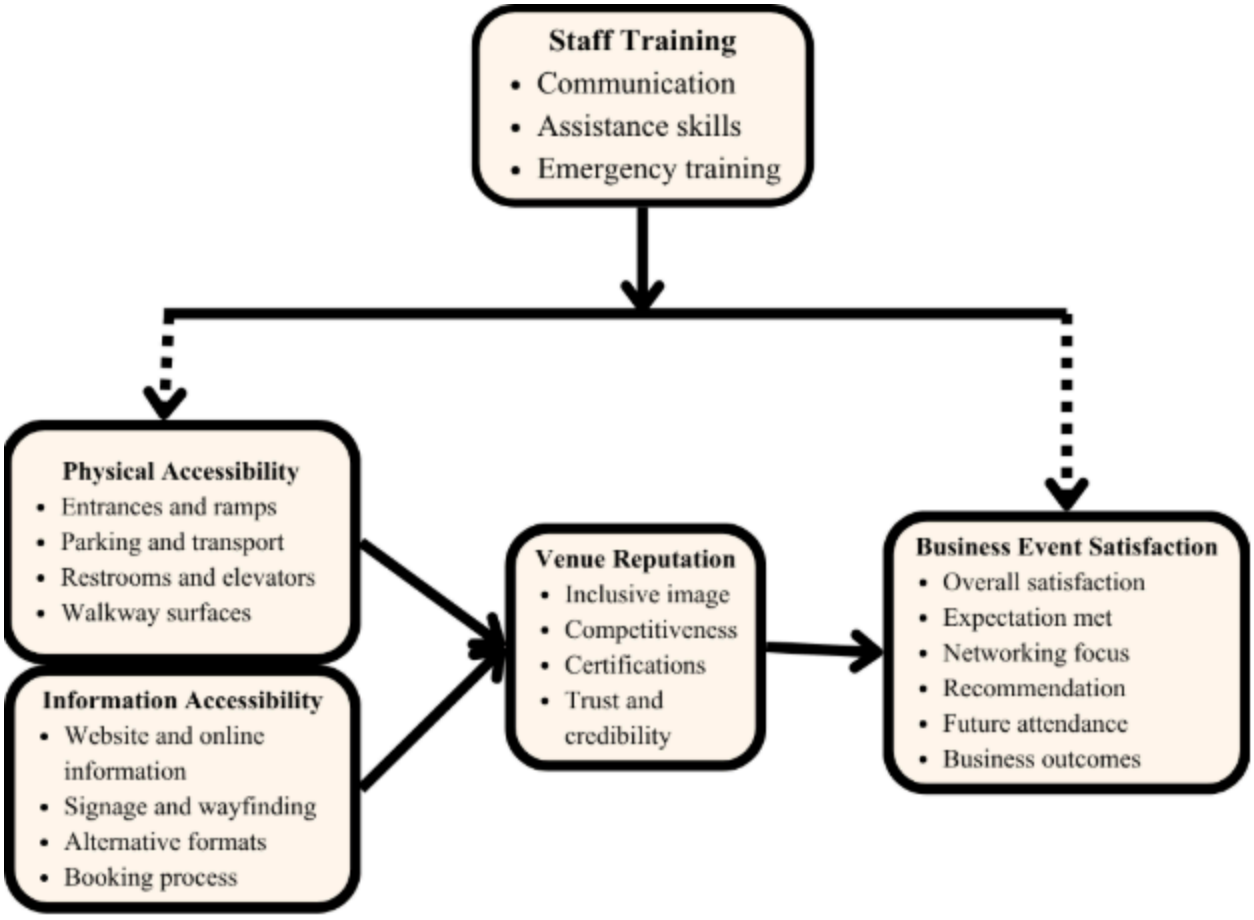


Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Source: Adapted from Jung and Yang (2023); Gassiot-Melian et al. (2018); Ko and Lim (2023); Klinmalai and Kaewlai (2024).