



Discussion paper

Theme restaurants' servicescape in developing quality of life: The moderating effect of perceived authenticity

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to investigate the role of servicescape, customer emotion, satisfaction, and perceived authenticity (PA) in the generation process of theme restaurant customers' quality of life. We employed a survey methodology that used the data collected from theme restaurant customers, conducted structural analysis, and tested for metric invariance. Results showed that our theoretical model explained a sufficient amount of variance in overall quality of life; the hypothesized relationships in our research framework were generally supported; and customer emotion, satisfaction, and subjective well-being were significant mediators. Moreover, the proposed moderating impact of PA was partially supported. Overall, our empirical findings provide a significant contribution toward advancing the knowledge of how servicescape dimensions, customer emotion, satisfaction, subjective well-being, and quality of life are related. Finally, we share insight into how these relationships are affected by PA in the formation of theme restaurant customers' quality of life.

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1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of the human being is to maintain a certain level of subjective well-being or quality of life (Kim et al., 2015; King et al., 1998). Tourism literature has indicated that excellent service experiences have direct and indirect positive social benefits, such as quality of life (Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011; Neal et al., 2007), subjective well-being (Filep, 2014) and happiness (Nawijn, 2011). Researchers agreed that these benefits are useful concepts for understanding the potential impact of services (Dolnicar et al., 2012; Su et al., 2015). Increasing one's subjective well-being does not conflict with the financial goal of an organization; rather, it may be the most relevant outcome of the consumption process (Dagger and Sweeney, 2006). In this sense, service marketers should seek to "deliver superior value to customers in a way that maintains and improves the consumers' and the society's well-being" (Kotler et al., 2003, p.20), and thus, the strategies that lead to the formation of well-being or higher quality of life should be developed to achieve this goal.

In response to this trend, a great number of restaurants differentiate themselves from other competitors by theming the

servicescape of their restaurants (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Wood and Munoz, 2007). With various themes in servicescape, restaurants revolve around narrating a specific culture (e.g., Lego et al., 2002; Munoz et al., 2006; Salamone, 1997). The service encounters usually connect customers to a specific theme, creating a sense of "travel" to the exotic or innovative experiences outside of their neighborhood (Wood and Munoz, 2006). Previous studies have highlighted the role of servicescape in determining variables, such as emotional responses that may lead customers to continue visiting a specific service provider (Hoffman and Turley, 2002; Harris and Ezech, 2008). The dimensions of servicescape include substantive staging (e.g., color, music, scent, and layout and design) and communicative staging (e.g., employees' personal performance; cultural atmospherics of service encounter) (Arnould et al., 1998; Bitner, 1992; Chang, 2016; Dong and Siu, 2013; Gwinner et al., 1998; Brannen, 1992). Through the process of both substantive staging and communicative staging, individuals would ideally respond to a servicescape (e.g., emotion aroused, or to be satisfied), form their consumption experiences, and make decisions to revisit this place (Kotler, 1974; Kim and Moon, 2009; Lin and Mattila, 2010). Nevertheless, this psychological process has been thoroughly examined from the perspective of financial outcomes (i.e., whether customers' behavior contributes to the profit of a certain service organization or not). Contrarily, the studies that explore this process from a perspective of social outcome (i.e.,

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whether individuals' quality of life has been improved or not) are rare. In other words, the studies that explore the effects of servicescape life on the formation process of quality of life have been ignored.

Additionally, previous studies indicated that authenticity is the key element to succeed and is moreover a useful variable explaining customer consumption behaviors in the theme restaurant industry (Tsai and Lu, 2012). The perception of authenticity contributes toward satisfying people's desire to seek authentic experiences (Kozinets, 2001; MacCannell, 1976). Therefore, the environments that reflect a certain theme in restaurants would satisfy customers' own experiences (Wood and Muñoz, 2009). The role of authenticity within the context of theme restaurants was also proven to be strong, as shown in previous studies, as it provides a unique experience that mediates customers' dining experiences (Ebster and Guist, 2004; Germann-Molz, 2003; Lego et al., 2002; Lu and Fine, 1995; Wood and Muñoz, 2009). These studies point to the role of authenticity in influencing customers' visiting behaviors, which can inevitably generate profit for an organization (Chang, 2016). However, studies are seldom carried out to examine the effects of authenticity on the formation of social outcome, or to show how authenticity influences the process of quality of life formation, which still remains unknown.

Based on the discussion above, we articulated a few research problems and questions, as follows. First, many theme restaurants attempt to create a new cultural environment by theming themselves to stay competitive and thereby retain more regular customers. Therefore, the categories and contexts of the restaurant that can suitably fit the corresponding theme should be generalized—for instance, in amusement parks such as Disneyland (Dong and Siu, 2013), in restaurants with ethnic elements (Ha et al., 2010), and in restaurants with nature-based elements such as Victoria Falls Restaurant (Mkono, 2012). Second, the relationship between servicescape and theme restaurants needs to be theoretically and empirically examined. In theme restaurants, which differ from general restaurants, the importance of servicescape, as well as its role and functions, require empirical investigation; however, few studies have examined those relationships (Lego et al., 2002; Wood and Munoz, 2007). Third, although servicescape is a critical aspect in a theme restaurant, existing measures of servicescape are seldom applied to theme restaurant settings. Therefore, studies should be carried out to develop measures of servicescape dimensions that are suitable to theme restaurants (Chang, 2016; Dong and Siu, 2013). Fourth, the moderating role of PA in customers' decision-making processes should be examined. Theme restau-

rants differentiate themselves from general restaurants by their characteristic service content. For example, characteristics relating to authenticity are required in a restaurant's atmosphere, facilities, and equipment layout, as well as in the employees' attitudes and presentation (Wang, 1999; Jang et al., 2010). Hence, empirical studies are needed to examine whether the sensitivity of customers' perceptions of authenticity are more involved in their decision making in choosing a theme restaurant. Fifth, researchers agree that the high level of individuals' subjective well-being and quality of life can be generated from an excellent service experience (Andereck and Nyaupane, 2011; Neal et al., 2007). This conclusion should be empirically tested in theme restaurants, which provide colorful cultural aspects and high-quality service experiences. More specifically, in targeting theme restaurant customers, it is meaningful to test the relationships among servicescape, subjective well-being, and overall quality of life.

In order to solve the above research problems and question, this study aimed to develop a model explaining the formation of individuals' subjective well-being and overall quality of life (OQL) by integrating servicescape variables (i.e., substantive staging and communicative staging), customer affective variables (i.e., emotion, satisfaction, and subjective well-being), and individuals' perception (i.e., PA) into one theoretical framework. Specifically, the present study attempted to: (1) identify the relative criticality of research constructs in generating individuals' overall quality of life; (2) examine the relative importance of servicescape dimensions on customer emotion; (3) test the mediating impact of customer emotion, satisfaction, and subjective well-being in the proposed theoretical framework; and (4) identify the moderating impact of customers' PA on the intricate associations among study constructs that exist. This study contributes to a better understanding of individuals' quality of life formation process, and examines how authenticity interacted with customers throughout the process under the context of theme restaurants.

2. Literature review

To explain the formation of quality of life, we attempted to develop a conceptual model (Fig. 1) with two dimensions of servicescape—substantive staging and communicative staging—that contribute to the formation of subjective well-being and overall quality of life through customer emotion and satisfaction. In the model, customers' emotion and satisfaction mediate servicescape and quality of life, while their perceptions of authenticity moderates the causal relationship within proposed model.

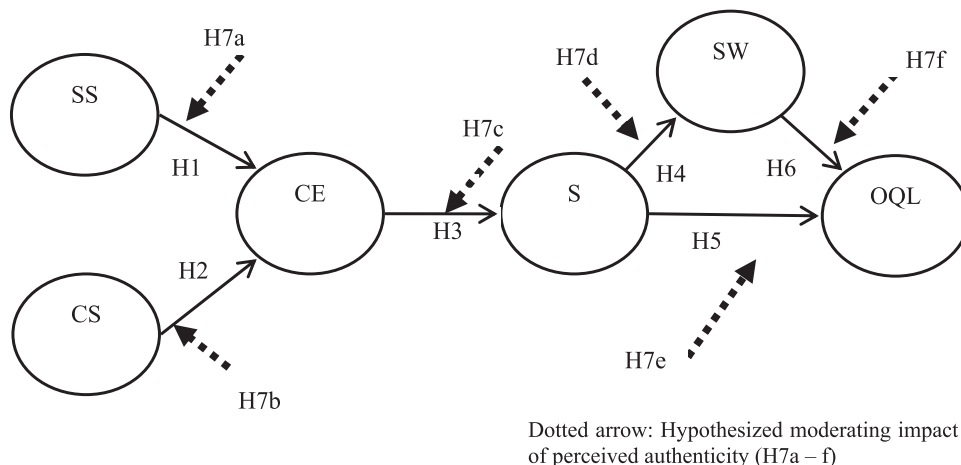


Fig. 1. Proposed model.

Note. SS = Substantive staging, CS = Communicative staging, CE = Customer emotion, S = Satisfaction, SW = Subjective Well-being, OQL = Overall Quality of Life.

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