



The impact of servicescape on hedonic value and behavioral intentions: The importance of previous experience

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the multi-dimensional structure of the hotel servicescape to understand its impact on customer's behavioral intentions through multi-dimensional perceived hedonic value. Data was collected from hotel guests in Turkey. Structural equation modeling (SEM) and multiple group analyses were conducted to test the hypothesized relationships among variables. The proposed research model was largely supported, and the moderating role of previous experience on this model was confirmed. Substantive staging of servicescape was found to be a more important premise for hedonic value perceptions of first-time tourists whereas emotional value is a more effective premise for re-visiting intentions of repeating visitors. In addition, novelty value perceptions were more determinative for behavioral intentions of first-time tourists. Based on the study results, this study offers specific theoretical and practical implications.

1. Introduction

Guests perceive hotels as places to experience rather than as places just to sleep (Carrington, 2016). In fact, hotel guest experiences are not limited to accommodation services. Creating positive experiences for hotel guests remains a key goal for hoteliers because positive experiences serve as an important criterion when a customer chooses a hotel (Kandampully et al., 2017; Mody et al., 2017). Indeed, customers have been found to spend 140% more when they have a positive hotel experience compared to a poor one (Kriss, 2014). Although customers are likely to perceive their hotel experience as a whole (Kandampully et al., 2017; Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; Zomerdijk and Voss, 2010), there are both physical and non-physical components of hotel service that can influence their experiences. Therefore, more research is needed to examine the effects of service environments on the experiences of hotel customers. In this regard, one important research topic is the servicescape, which has been defined as designed places calculated to produce commercially significant actions (Arnould et al., 1998).

Hotels are businesses where consumers spend a great deal of time and, therefore, they are likely to be influenced by the hotel's servicescape arrangement (Emir, 2016; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1999; Xu and Li, 2007). However, despite the importance of servicescape and

value concepts in terms of hotel businesses (Heinonen, 2006; O'Cass and Grace, 2008), there still remains a gap in our knowledge regarding the relationship between the servicescape and its associated value components. To date, research has examined the hotel servicescape in terms of its effects of image (LeBlanc and Nguyen, 1996; Nguyen, 2006), affiliation and social relationship (Zemke and Shoemaker, 2007), satisfaction (Chen et al., 2013), experience (Dong and Siu, 2013; Lucas, 2003) and customer loyalty (Chen et al., 2013; Medabesh and Upadhyaya, 2012). Research is still needed to examine the underlying mechanism of how different components of servicescape influence customer behaviors.

The Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) paradigm (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974) provides a theoretical grounding for the effects of the servicescape. This paradigm suggests that environmental stimuli related to servicescape can have an effect on one's organic states like emotions. In turn, this effect can influence consumers' reactions. Consumers' desire for novelty, arousal, or stimulation can affect their reactions. People may want to experience something new and different every time they encounter a services context (Lee and Crompton, 1992; Lee et al., 2017) and/or they may be influenced by the popular consumption culture. Hence, environmental arrangements (e.g. servicescape components) can lead people to perceive the environment from different

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perspectives. And, these different environmental arrangements and perspectives can be used as strategic tools to influence customer behavior.

Previous research has examined the physical components of the servicescape (the so-called “substantive staging structure of servicescape”), and its effect on the basic expectations of consumers. Physical components are effective in creating and influencing the value that customers gain from products and services (Grönroos, 2006). Since the outlook and comfort of the business environment provide experiential value, it can be expected that servicescapes are effective in nurturing hedonic value perceptions (Rayburn and Voss, 2013). Babin and Attaway (2000) pointed out that a positive value perception of the servicescape’s physical environment creates positive feelings and long-lasting satisfaction for consumers. Also, Mattila (1999), O’Cass and Grace (2008), and Heinonen (2006) suggested that the servicescape is a significant antecedent in terms of value perceptions that visitors have of a business. Minimal research has examined the impact of the servicescape on customers’ value perceptions in terms of emotions or different emotional components (Kim and Moon, 2009). However, they are only a component of hedonic value. In fact, hedonic value represents a construct that is multi-dimensional in nature.

Although previous research has generally examined the servicescape with a focus on its physical components (Baker and Magnini, 2016; Kim and Moon, 2009), less research has examined the human-related interactions and other humanitarian and cultural factors that compose the servicescape environment. In fact, both physical components and non-physical components should be examined. There is limited research on perceptions regarding substantive staging and communicative staging of the servicescape together, and their effects on value perceptions, especially in the hotel context. In view of the aforementioned gaps, this study aims to examine the multi-dimensional structure of servicescape (the substantive staging and the communicative staging of servicescape) in the hotel context to unveil its impact on customer’s behavioral intentions through multi-dimensional perceived hedonic value.

Customers’ hedonic value perceptions related to particular products and services can be an important factor for determining their behavioral intentions (Dedeoglu et al., 2016; Ryu et al., 2010). However, such effects may vary across different market segments. For example, the hedonic benefits that first-time or repeating visitors experience from products and/or services are likely to affect their future intentions in different ways. Whether a consumer is a first-timer or a repeating visitor creates an important segmentation for marketing departments, and, therefore, these two segments of the population should be examined in further detail (McKercher et al., 2012). In this regard, it would be beneficial to examine the determinative effects of servicescape stimuli on two groups: consumers experiencing the hotel’s servicescape for the first time (i.e., first-timer) and consumers that have previously experienced the hotel’s servicescape on more than one occasion (i.e., repeat customers). Therefore, the current study aims to examine the relationship among the servicescape, hedonic value, and behavioral intention by taking into consideration the moderating effect of customers’ previous experiences.

2. Conceptual framework

2.1. Servicescape and perceived value

Services are difficult to assess because they are intangible in nature (Reimer and Kuehn, 2005). Hence, the consumption of services creates a challenge for service firms. The place where services are provided (i.e. the servicescape) is an important influence and helps to facilitate customers’ experience assessments (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991; Lee et al., 2017; Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). According to Mehrabian and Russel (1974), people respond to environmental factors in both emotional ways and holistic ways. Moreover, emotional responses given to

physical and social stimuli can play a mediating role between the environment and behaviors. From this point of view, the importance of the servicescape should be better understood.

Servicescape has been defined in different ways and in different contexts (Harris and Ezech, 2008). As defined by Bitner (1992), the servicescape is an overall or holistic structuring of environmental dimension rather than a single component. Bitner (1992) also suggested the servicescape can help explain cognitive responses that affect people’s opinions about a place, other people, and/or products. Turley and Milliman (2000) indicated that the atmosphere, as a component of the servicescape, could create cognitive responses. Kotler and Levy (1971) described the atmosphere as a purchasing environment designed to stimulate the emotional responses to increase the purchasing probabilities of customers (Kotler, 1973). Heide et al., (2007) argued that atmosphere, composed of such conditions as heat, scent, voice, music, and lightning, is just one of the three antecedents of ambiance.

As suggested by previous research, concepts such as atmosphere, ambiance, and servicescape are merely physical components of the environment often used in wider or narrower scopes and usually related to the substantive staging of the servicescape (SSoS). However, the servicescape can also include humanitarian clues, as suggested by Hartline and Jones (1996), Arnould et al. (1998), Heide et al. (2007), and Dong and Siu (2013). Heide et al. (2007) evaluated these humanitarian clues within the context of a social factor. Harris and Ezech (2008) emphasized that other human-related interactions besides physical properties should be included when conducting customer service-based experiments. More recently, Dong and Siu (2013) conceptualized humanitarian clues within the scope of the communicative staging of the servicescape (CSoS), and service companies have recognized the importance staff for customers (Bilgihan et al., 2016).

Bitner (1992) developed a framework of the servicescape to describe the mix of internal responses that are influenced by environmental factors and the external behaviors of employees and customers. In particular, interactions between customers and employees are a critical part of the social aspect of servicescapes (Arnould and Price, 1993; Cockrill et al., 2008). Studies on the interaction between employees and customers have suggested that employees are essential for customer satisfaction (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Lam and Lau, 2008; Oh and Kim, 2017; Pizam et al., 2016). Thus, servicescape can be described as containing both humanitarian factor-based stagings and different substantive stagings of businesses, such as organization, design, and décor, which affect consumer behavior, as well as their cognitive, affective, and psychological states. Substantive staging is important for assessing and providing services while communicative staging of the servicescape represented by humanitarian and cultural factors is important for businesses to gain a competitive advantage because it can differ from business to business (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995; Khan and Rahman, 2017). In this regard, it is expected that both substantive stagings and communicative stagings regarding the servicescape of a business or a region would likely influence customers’ evaluations.

According to Wakefield and Blodgett (1999), customers’ hedonic and utilitarian consumptions may differ for each service type. For instance, an individual going to a school or hospital may demonstrate more utilitarian consumption behavior, whereas an individual going to a hotel or entertainment park may demonstrate more hedonic consumption. Research has suggested that customers who benefit from holiday services tend to be more oriented toward hedonic and affective consumption behaviors, which evoke fun and fantasy (Bilgihan and Bujisic, 2015). The hedonic value, in turn, helps to generate long-lasting relationships with customers (Carpenter, 2008), and it is important for developing loyal customers and in building close emotional links with target customers (Butz and Goodstein, 1996).

Due to the importance of both hedonic consumption and utilitarian consumption, servicescapes should be designed to take into consideration the dimensions from service-related experiments (Echeverri and

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