An Evaluation of Moderating Variable of "Physical Distance" among Customers on Social Servicescape and Place Attachment: Impact of Customer Loyalty in the Context of Hotel Indusrty

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Abstract
Customer loyalty is undeniably a significant issue in service organizations. The retention issues, especially in the hotel, are becoming challenging due to the postbreak pandemic of Covid-19. Even though Malaysia is recognized as one of the countries in the fastest recovery from this pandemic, it has given a massive impact on the hospitality industry in the coming years. The widespread movement order control (MOC) and social distance initiatives to minimize the transmission of fast spread virus in the neighboring countries, including Malaysia, have changed how the service organization operates and how customers behave that created uncertainty in future tourism. Hence this study is attempting to develop on customers' loyalty framework for the hotel industry by considering how physical distance moderates the relationship between people's indirect interaction (social servicescape) and emotional attachment (place identity). Also, how this emotional attachment mediates the relationship between social servicescape and customer loyalty, overall, this conceptual paper could demonstrate the critical elements of social servicescape in contributing customer loyalty even in the existence of physical distance among people. In a further study, the PLS-SEM method is appropriate to analyze the proposed relationships.
Keywords: Physical Distance, Place Identity, Customer Loyalty, Hotel Context, PLS-SEM

Introduction

The hotel sector in Malaysia grows completely linked between the hospitality and tourism industries (Ahmad et al., 2019; Shamsudin et al., 2019). With the introduction of low-cost airlines and related price wars, as well as warm hospitality facilities, the hotels in Malaysia offer a wide range of options for tourists (Shamsudin et al., 2019) and make Malaysia the leading tourist destination (Karim et al., 2020). The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic left a massive threat to the tourism and hospitality industry. The drastic increase in Covid-19 cases in neighbouring countries caused the cancellation of several tours, which resulted in a significant drop in the number of visitors to Malaysia. Customer cancellations for both lodging and activities, where a vast majority of business establishments, including airlines, tourist attractions, and hotels have been closed (Foo et al., 2020). The hotels are running at a

considerable loss and, depending on the outcome of the Covid-19 situation, this could continue for the next six to eight months or longer. The Malaysian Hotel Association (2019) forecasted the rise of the hotel occupancy from 59.99% (2019) to 65% by 2020. Nonetheless, it is expected to hit just 30 percent in 2020. This caused the overall estimation of hotel loss in revenue about RM 560.72 million and loss as reported by local hotels about RM75.69 million in the first quarter of 2020.

Practicing this new norm such as social distancing might be considered as the most important environmental changes in modern marketing history, which could impact the customer's attitude, behavior, and decision-making process in the future (He and Harris, 2020) which creates uncertainty in the service consumption. Not only in the consumer perspective but how service organisations approach their strategic marketing efforts also impact. Social distancing measures imposed by Malaysia health authorities to reduce the transmission of Covid-19 has restricted direct interaction among people in the consumption environment, working place, neighbourhood, and leisure space that change the way people work, travel, eat, shop, and play. For instance, people tend to make online purchases while walking into retail stores. A limited number of people are allowed in the consumption area. People are utilising food delivery services, such as food panda and food grab instead of eating outside.

Given this market situation, for the long-term success of the hotel industry in the countries through customer loyalty enhancement is undeniably becoming fundamental (Berezan et al., 2013; Han et al., 2020). Customer loyalty is one of the crucial strategies for practitioners to implement. Since those customers are high in loyalty, they deeply hold commitment to patronise or seek the same product or service consistently in the future, regardless of situational influences and marketing efforts that could cause switching behavior (Oliver, 1999). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the appropriate potential independent variables that could contribute to customer loyalty in the context of the hotel industry in Malaysia. Since this current pandemic has challenged practitioners to manage and sustain their business with restriction in interactions among customers and employees, the study on passive interaction or indirect interaction among people that involve is more appropriate. Therefore, this study intends to explore how passive interaction of social servicescape influences loyalty among customers through emotional elements or place attachment by moderating the role of physical distance among people in the context of a hotel.

Social servicescape reflects a combination of social entities in an environment of consumption in terms of similarity, appearance, behaviour and the number of other people in the phenomenon (Miao et al., 2011; Hanks & Line, 2018). The perceived similarity positively related to the customer to customer interaction and positively impact consumer behavioural reaction, such as the desire to stay (Zgolli & Zaiem, 2017). The more fabulous customers' evaluation of staff physical attractiveness and staff image positively influenced customer loyalty (Harris & Ezeh, 2008). Where customers' perceptions of their service worker's credibility and benevolence contribute to a positive relationship with the level of personal loyalty (Bove et al., 2009). The traditional attire of staff in the represents and strengthens images and has a positive impact on customer loyalty (Sulartiningrum et al., 2016). Also, a very recent study by Kim & Baker (2019) reveals that employees' deep acting, such as smiling even though they deal with uncivil customers, promotes employee loyalty.

The principle is well accepted if visitors do not feel they are welcomed or do not feel some degree of connection to the place and its people, the likelihood of returning may be

drastically compromised (Ribeiro et al., 2018). One construct by which we can understand the relationships between people and location is place attachment. Place attachment is formed based on the meaning given to the place through interactional processes with people (Chen et al., 2014). To a certain extent, the individual's beliefs, emotions, and behaviors resonate with the place (Yi et al., 2018). If an individual perceives the other customers and employees in a service setting with the same psychographic characteristics and demographic self-similarity, then the level of personal identification will increase (Han & Back, 2008). Line et al (2018) revealed that demographic similarities perceived by customers and psychographic similarities have a positive relationship with restaurant place identity. Prayag & Lee (2019) clarified that the professionalism, attitude, friendliness and helpfulness, attentiveness, and courtesy of hotel employees towards customers and their families had a positive impact on the place's attachment. Huang et al (2018) studied the impact of social crowding on brand attachment and found participants becoming more attached to a brand that they often used when the store crowded in. In turn, this strong sense of attachment can result in positive downstream outcomes, such as a positive attitude toward the company and the customer behaviour, namely revisit intention, recommendation and loyalty (Line et al., 2018a,2018b,2018c).

Even though, people tend to like similar others more than dissimilar ones (Byrne et al. 1966; Newcomb 1956) and are typically more emotionally invested in closeness with others (Andersen et al., 1998; Aron et al., 1991). However, awareness of importance in distancing among others might change customers' expectation to be close with people in the service environment and therefore, customers might act differently. Therefore, the factor of passive interaction might not always be equivalent to offering a significant contribution to emotions or a place of identity as proven earlier based on existing studies. The close distance and far distance might moderate or make customers to impact emotions differently (). Therefore, in this study, the researcher would like to propose that the combination of social servicescape (perceived similarity, physical appearance, suitable behaviour and density), psychological distance, place identity and customer loyalty; How psychological distance moderates the relationship between social servicescape and place identity; how this moderation result impact the mediating role of place identity between social servicescape and customer loyalty. Where, the result of this study helps hoteliers on how to foster customer loyalty through emotions as well as identify the important elements of social servicescape that contribute much to emotion to foster loyalty in the existence of psychological distance.

Literature Review
Social Servicescape
According to Jani and Han (2013), social servicescapes are defined as the people who are present and shared space in service consumption, including focal customers, other customers, and employees. The perceptions and evaluation of the focal customer experience influence by other people's behaviour, appearance, characteristics and crowdedness of the space without direct interaction among customers and employees (Kim and Lee, 2012; Miao and Mattila, 2013; Hanks et al., 2017a,2017b; Tse et al., 2002). The relationship between customers and the service environment also forms the activity in the shared space where fostering attachment and loyalty (Johnstone 2012). Hence, this attachment and loyalty are depending on the quality of the products and the service.

Brocato et al (2012) described the physical appearance as other customers' and employees' characteristics and looked within the service surroundings that were perceived by the focal customers. People generally choose to act and share consumption environments with others whom they find attractive (Dion and Stein, 1978; McGrath and Otnes, 1995). The response to the others' appearance is an essential part of a customer's holistic perception of the service environment since people within the servicescape are a tangible and observable part of the service surroundings (Trampe et al., 2010).

Appropriate behavior is the extent to which others act within the service consumption as perceived by the focal customer needs to be suitable based on the service context (Brocato et al., 2012). Evaluating appropriate behaviour depends on the type of service consumption and the interpretation of other behaviour that might change according to the time of day, place, and form of business (Martin and Pranter, 1989). The appropriate behaviour of employees and other customers that is consistent with the situation will enhance the focal customer experience. Conversely, the misbehavior of them might have a negative impact on service evaluation (Grove and Fisk, 1997; Miao et al., 2011).

The perceived similarity is the degree to which the focal customer believes he is in a service setting like the others and thinks he can interact with them (Brocato et al., 2012). Individuals seem to enjoy engaging with people who are similar to them (McPherson et al., 2001), and social identity theory implies participation in groups of like-minded others is an integral part of an individual's self-identity (Tajfel, 1982). In the customer perspective, customers tend to share the service atmosphere with those with whom they feel similar and gravitate to business in service contexts where they have a high degree of similarity to others and where they feel the most comfortable (Hanks et al., 2017a,2017b).

Existing social servicescape studies have identified factors such as the behavior, appearance, characteristics, and density of other people's spaces that influence consumers, approach/avoidance behaviors, and satisfaction (Lin and Mattila, 2010). For example, loyalty behaviors such as experience value assessment (Wu and Liang, 2009), repatronage and mouth-to-mouth (Bitner, 1990; Martin and Pranter, 1989; Yang and Mattila, 2014), and stay longer (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2010) also influenced by the attention of others from social services.

However, these previous references might not be applicable and appropriate to refer to by the hoteliers to form marketing strategy due to the uncertainty of tourism in the future. According to Tombs et al (2017) a bond formed by the individual with a place or organisation depends on the one's evaluation and attitude towards a place based on previous knowledge and experience. It is important to note, how far this social distancing approach has changed the customers perception and expectation on the basic approach in the service environment and especially in the hotel services where the number of people are high. Therefore, the service providers should concern how this social servicescape is still important in impacting the emotions and behaviour among customers in the hotel sector while maintaining distance among people.

The passive interaction of social servicescape may impact the perceptions and behaviors of the focal consumer, according to Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) model of stimulus –

organism – response (S – O – R). This model suggests that environmental stimuli (S) on the part of the organism lead to an emotional response (in this case, the consumer (O), and that this emotional reaction precipitates a behavioral response (R). In this conceptualization, the stimuli (S) consist of environmental and atmospheric elements such as lighting, music, decoration, and other consumers (in the present research). The organismic response (O) consists of internal processes on the part of the consumer, in the form of emotional reactions in response to stimuli. Such emotional reactions fall within three spheres: pleasure, excitement, and dominance. While it has shown that dominance has a non-significant impact on consumer behavior (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Russell & Pratt, 1980), enjoyment and anticipation showed to contribute to behavioral responses (R), which categorized as behaviors of approach or avoidance (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Approach behaviors characterized by a desire to participate, look around, explore, linger longer, and communicate with the world and those within it, whereas the opposite behavior characterizes avoidance behaviors.

In these terms, the purpose of this study is to examine how the social stimuli, composed of the perceived similarity, appearance and suitable behaviour. A number of others impact the emotions and behavioral responses in the context of a hotel. Also, Therefore, this study would like to investigate how the close and distant physical distance moderate the relationship between passive interaction and place identity.

Place Attachment
Research on tourism and hospitality has centered growing attention on place attachments (Brown et al., 2016; Hammitt et al., 2006; Lewicka, 2011), indicating the importance of developing place attachments for tourism marketers (Kaplanidou et al., 2012). After a long debate over what place attachment implies and how best to interpret it (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001), scholars now conclude that place attachment refers to as the psychological bond that one feels with a place (Kyle et al., 2004), or as the cognitive and emotional relationship of human experience with a specific place (Lalli, 1992). In summary, place attachment is determined by an interplay of place-related affections and emotions, knowledge, beliefs, and behaviors (Low & Altman, 1992). Accordingly, place attachment could be more emotional (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001) or more evaluative (Moore & Graefe, 1994), as various factors can contribute to place attachment formation, e.g., direct experience (Hammitt et al., 2004) or social interactions (Rubinstein & Parmelee, 1992), participation (Graefe et al., 2003; Hou et al., 2005; Hwang et al., 2005) motivation (Kyle et al., 2004), and destination image or attractiveness (Hou et al., 2005; Kaplanidou et al., 2012) and social servicescape (Hanks et al., 2020).

Customers who feel firmly attached to a place will highly invest in the venue, go out of their way to patronize the business, feel a sense of pride in the company's performance, and tell others about the location (Line et al., 2018a). Over time, place attachment develops after a series of positive interactions and experiences with both staff and other customers (Tumanan and Lansangan, 2012). Attachment levels are particularly high in third places, since the customer spends much time there, develops meaningful relationships with others in the social services field, and incorporates third place into his identity, such as hotels. The identity of the place found influencing the behavior of the guests and revisit intentions (Loureiro, 2014; Stylos et al., 2016) as well as future loyalty in the hotel context (Alexandris et al., 2006,

Liu et al., 2017; Io, 2017). However, by using the influential variable of social elements, how strong the impact on customer loyalty is to rely on place identity level and form.

Although place attachment was widely acknowledged as a key element in tourism research, its extant contributions were rather ambiguous in terms of its measurement (Scarpi, 2019). For example, certain studies modelled place attachment as consequence of servicescape and (Line et al., 2015; Chou et al., 2018) and customer loyalty (Plunkett et al., 2019) while other studies conceptualised place attachment as a predictor of customer loyalty (Prayag and Ryan, 2012; Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Gunawan, 2018; Lee at al., 2019). The rationale of such disagreement appeared to lie in the methodology used in these studies—most studies employed structural equation modelling (SEM), which can be rather insensitive to the direction of causality; the path of A to B and the path of B to A may reveal the same fit despite the logically opposite paths (Chin, 1998; Iacobucci, 2009; Hair, Hult, et al., 2017; Scarpi, 2019). Furthermore, there were no further analyses to validate the obtained SEM results; the relevance of these findings may not detract, but the external validity of their findings was questionable (Garver and Mentzer, 1999; Koufteros, 1999).

Hence, this study addressed place attachment as a mediator in the relationship with servicescape and customer loyalty following the recommendation by Lee et al (2012)—the study recommended place attachment to be treated as mediator in order to clarify its relationship with revisit intention, as it is conceptually similar to psychological commitment—a component of attitudinal loyalty (Park, 1996; Kyle et al., 2004).

Psychological Distance
Psychological distance refers to a subjective distance between an actor and other people in temporal, spatial, and social dimensions (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Temporal distance (short vs. long) is time between announcements and duration of announcement. Social distance (in-group vs. another group) is the perception that others are "like us"? Spatial distance or physical distance (close vs. distant) also refers to the degree of spatial proximity to an object or event (Fujita et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2008). Based on the definitions, the researcher suggests the right term can be used when people distance themselves from each other as introduced by the government should be physical or spatial distance instead of social distance. It is also strengthened by Abel and McQueen (2020), based on biological and epidemiological data, spatial distance means physical extent about 2m, when distance occur between individual or objects addressed.

Since consumption of a service can be defined along two main dimensions, time and space (Keh & Pang, 2010), we focus on the effects of temporal and spatial distance from other customers and employees. Therefore, in this research, we use the notion of *psychological distance* to define and operationalize the social environment. Specifically, this research examines how physical distance from other customers and employees moderate a focal customer's attachment responses to the behavior of others and how such responses influence encounter loyalty. Feelings of belongingness and identity have been found to stem from phyical closeness between people and social closeness between people (Brown et al., 2003; Hammitt et al., 2004) and to drive attitudes and behavior (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Finally, literature in psychology has established a correlation between psychological perceptions of closeness and objective measures of distance, so that objects more physically

distant from the evaluating self are usually also perceived as more psychologically distant (Henderson et al., 2011; Liberman et al., 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010).

Hence, in this study, the element of social servicescape is also known as social distance in psychological distance. Past research has found that people tend to like similar others more than dissimilar ones (Berscheid 1985; Byrne 1971; Byrne et al., 1966; Newcomb, 1956) and are typically more emotionally invested in close then distant others (Andersen et al., 1998; Aron et al., 1991). Therefore, in this study, the researcher would like to employ social servicescape as an independent variable and investigate how spatial distance moderate the relationship between social servicescape and place identity and contributes to customer loyalty in the context of hotels.

Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is referring to the strong commitment to repurchase a preferred product or service in the future, despite situational impacts and marketing efforts that may cause switching behaviour (Oliver, 1997) which is widely debated topics in management and marketing research. A growing number of hotels and other types of accommodation facilities around the world push hotels to step up their offering to compete and keep their current customers loyal to the hotel (Jani and Han, 2016). The importance of customer loyalty in a hotel is showed by continuing research (Han and Hyun, 2013; Han et al., 2011; Kandampully and Hu, 2007; Kandampullyet al., 2011; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000) and ever booming loyalty programs in the hotel industry (Xiong et al., 2014).

To the best of our knowledge, existing empirical research in the hotel industry did not investigate the influence of passive interaction of social servicescape on consumer loyalty through incorporating the mediation effects of place identity. Furthermore, the moderating effects of psychological distances on the link between social servicescape, place identity, and loyalty are examined yet. No study examines the antecedents of customer loyalty presented here into a single study.

There is no general agreement on what builds loyalty to a hotel (Mason et al., 2006). Many existing researchers have studied the impact of social servicescape on customer loyalty (Zgolli & Zaiem, 2017); however, there is a minimal understanding of the indirect relationship between social servicescape and customer loyalty. Scarpi et al (2019) have stated that certain mediation variables could clarify how social servicescape and behavioural outcomes are related, this will allow hotel managers to carry out and develop strategies that improve customer loyalty in this context.

Social servicescape, place identity, physical distance and customer loyalty

There is much evidence to suggest a strong relationship among social servicescape, place attachment, and consumer behaviour. A significant relationship between customers and employees linked to outcomes such as satisfaction (Adelman and Ahuvia, 1995), increased customer confidence in the establishment (Gwinner et al., 1998), voluntary customer performance (Bailey et al., 2001), positive word of mouth (Hosany et al., 2017), willingness to pay more (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2007), and customer trust, loyalty (Cardinale et al., 2016). Existing research has found a similar result when examining the influence of passive interaction of customer's and employee's relationships. Place identity positively related to

the length of stay in the place, loyalty, and experiential outcomes (Johnstone, 2012). Whenever the focal customers feel similar, connectedness and belonging to other customers become an essential part of his overall experience with the service environment. When these relationships are more reliable, engaging and supportive can positively impact emotions, such as happiness and belonging, reflected in positive attitudes toward the establishment and an intent to return to the location in order to have more of such experiences in the future (Rosenbaum, 2006).

Relationships with others in the social servicescape are a defining factor of the hotel industry. Hotel guests' attitudes about social servicescape elements strongly influence emotional attachment and word of mouth intention. Where the emotional attachment mediated the relationship between their beliefs about social servicescape elements and their WOM intentions (Sukhu et al., 2018). The respectful behaviour of employees in treating customers in the leisure hotel indirectly impacts repurchase intentions and referral intentions through positive emotion (Su et al., 2015). Customers develop strong levels of place attachment towards service organisations on the strength of the relationships with others in that location (Oldenburg, 1990, 2001). However, prior research in this area has proved to be ambiguous (Hank et al., 2020). The perception of similarity to others, appearance, and suitable behaviour directly impacted place attachment (Line et al., 2018). Appositively, company identification mediated the relationship between similarity, appearance, and suitable behaviour as well as place attachment (Line et al., 2018). It is important to note that there is a meaningful relationship between similarity, appearance and suitable behaviours, place attachment, and downstream outcomes; the exact nature of these interactions warrants further investigation (Hank et al., 2020).

Experimental research shows that people have a greater level of liking for individuals who they perceive to be similar to themselves than those who they think they have little in common with (Chan et al., 2017). However, research in social psychology has demonstrated that cues of social distance "perceived similarity" can affect and be affected by participant's processing of the spatial location of a target stimulus (Bar-Anan et al., 2007). Past research has found that people tend to like similar others more than dissimilar ones (Berscheid 1985; Byrne 1971; Byrne et al., 1966; Newcomb, 1956) and are typically more emotionally invested in close than distant others (Andersen et al., 1998; Aron et al., 1991). While, So & Xie (2019) found that spatial distance significantly moderates the negative effect of social distance on the likelihood of repeat purchase in the peer-to-peer accommodation (sharing economy). A study done by Miao & Mattile (2013) found that psychological distance from other customers moderates the effect of other customers' negative behaviours on a focal customer's spontaneous emotional responses, such as that the effect is more pronounced in the close (rather than distant) distance condition. Some studies emphasized that an excessive density environment can excite customers. Huang et al (2018) studied the impact of social crowding on brand attachment and found that participants become more attached to a brand they often used whenever the store was crowded.

As prior research has demonstrated that people have an affinity for others that are social servicescape, it is expected as important in a setting where the customer feels high levels of place attachment, due to the relationships he is forming there. However, the positive impact in close distant might be change in the future due to the social distancing. The physical distance and temporal distance might moderate the relationship between social servicescape and place identity and the impact the mediating impact of social servicescape, place identity

and customer loyalty. Therefore, we would expect that other peoples and their numbers are important, since meaningful relationships are not being formed in this context (see Fig. 1). Thus, it is predicted that physical distance will moderate the relationships between perceived similarity in appearance, suitable behaviour, and social density and place identity. Extrapolating from these, we proposed the following:

Proposition 1. *Other customers' and employees' (a) perceived similarity, (b) appearance (c) and suitable behaviour and human density positively impact place identity among focal customers.*

Proposition 2. *Place identity positively impacts customer loyalty.*

Proposition 3. *The effect of other customers' and employees' (a) perceived similarity, (b) appearance (c) and suitable behaviours on a focal customer's place identity will be greater in the close distance conditions than in the far distance conditions.*

Proposition 4. *Place identity mediates the relationship between (a) perceived similarity, (b) appearance (c), suitable behaviour, and human density and customer loyalty.*
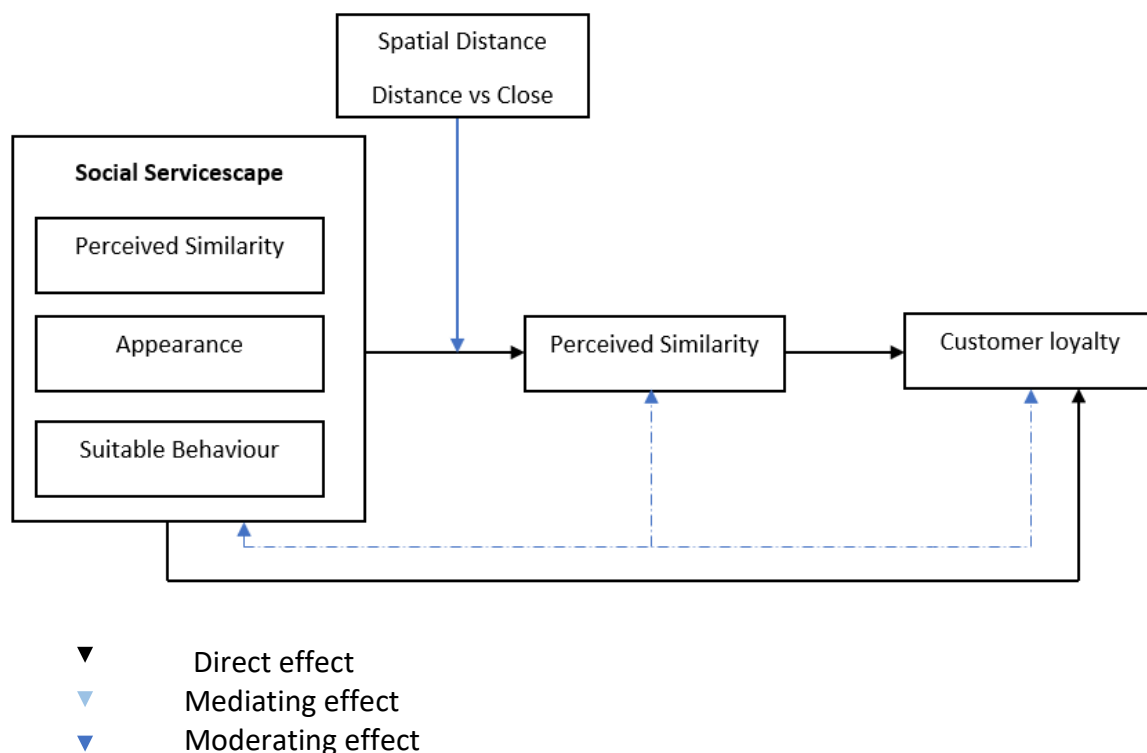

▼   Direct effect
▼   Mediating effect
▼   Moderating effect

Fig. 1. Conceptual relationships.

Method
To analyze the predicted propositions, further study is recommended using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM). As narrated by Hair et al (2017), this study fulfil the requirements of choosing PLS-SEM as appropriate method such as large number of variables (Ten variables), to identifying relationship among variable (Relationship between servicescape and place attachment, relationship between servicescape and customer loyalty,

and relationship between place attachment and customer loyalty), an early stage of research, and have a mediation role (mediation role of place attachment, namely place identity and place dependence). Due to the several discrepancies in SEM applications such as problems of perspective, design, and strategy to mechanical aspects of model specification, data analysis, and presentation which can have a substantial impact on the quality of the information produced in SEM application as well as on the validity of the interpretations and conclusions (MacCallum and Austin, 2000) that can be overcome by employ PLS-SEM without assumptions method since, this method comprehensively discussed these issues (Ali et al., 2017).

Conclusion
Table 1
Conclusion

IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY	• Studying the impact of social distancing measures on customer loyalty in hotels is essential in the current global health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, examining how people distance among customers positively moderates the relationship between social servicescape and place attachment can provide valuable insights into how hotels can improve customer loyalty during this challenging time.
	• Research done by Chen and Chen (2020) found that social distancing measures positively moderated the relationship between servicescape and customer loyalty in the hotel industry. Specifically, when customers perceive that social distancing measures are implemented effectively, they are more likely to feel a sense of attachment to the hotel and exhibit greater loyalty.
	• Furthermore, the study by Kim, Park, and Jeong (2020) found that customers' perception of social distancing measures was positively related to their level of trust in hotels, which in turn positively influenced their place attachment and loyalty.
	• Research has shown that social servicescape plays an important role in influencing customer behavior and attitudes towards a service setting (Bitner, 1992). When customers perceive a positive social environment, they are more likely to develop an emotional attachment to the place and become more loyal to the service provider. However, the effect of social servicescape on customer loyalty can be moderated by factors such as the distance among customers.
	• For example, a study by Kim, Lee, and Uysal (2017) found that the distance among customers positively moderates the relationship between social servicescape and place attachment in a hotel setting. The study found that when customers perceived a positive social

	environment and were seated in close proximity to other customers, they were more likely to develop a stronger emotional attachment to the place and become more loyal to the hotel. • Therefore, understanding the role of customer distancing in the relationship between social servicescape, place attachment, and customer loyalty is important for hotels to create a positive customer experience and increase customer loyalty.
CONTRIBUTION THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION	• This study could make several contributions to the field of hospitality and tourism research. Firstly, it could shed light on the importance of physical distancing measures in hotels, which have become increasingly relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also could provide insights into the factors that influence customer loyalty, which is a crucial component of business success in the hospitality industry. Specially, it could add to our understanding of the role of place attachment in shaping customer behaviour and attitudes. • This is also contributing in terms of Servicescape Theory. This theory suggests that physical environment plays an important role in shaping customer behaviour and attitudes. By studying how physical distance among human in hotel moderates the relationship between social servicescape and place attachment, researchers can gain a better understanding of how the physical environment "physical distance among human" affects customers' emotional connection with the hotel and their loyalty towards it. • Thirdly, this study contributes in terms of Social Identity Theory. This theory proposes that individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from their membership in social groups. By studying how people distance among customers moderates the relationship between social servicescape and place attachment, researchers can explore how customers' perception of the social environment in a hotel affects their sense of identity and belonging, and how this influences their loyalty towards the hotel. • Moreover, this study contributes in the Customer Loyalty Theory: This theory proposes that loyal customers are more likely to continue to use a product or service, and to recommend it to others. By studying how people distance among customers moderates the relationship between social servicescape and place attachment, researchers can explore how customers' emotional connection with a hotel affects their loyalty towards it, and

	how this can be leveraged to improve customer retention and acquisition.
	• This study also contributes to the theory of psychological distance by examining the moderating role of physical distance and temporal distance in the relationship between tourist social servicescape and place attachment. Although the number of studies conducted to investigate psychological distance in the context of hospitality is limited, the findings of this study confirm and reinforce the importance of psychological distance in understanding customer's attachment and loyalty.
	• As a whole, it is among the first to examine the effects of social servicescape dimensions on customer loyalty by incorporating the mediation effects of place identity variables (place identity and secure attachment) along the path from social servicescape dimensions to customer loyalty as well as the effects of psychological distance on social servicescape and place attachment. This investigation of the addressed variables in a single study especially in the context of the hotel industry will provide valuable insights of customer loyalty formation.
MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTION	• This study intends to provide the basic understanding that existing studies ignored the indirect impacts of passive interaction "social servicescape" on customer loyalty and the influence of psychological distances towards emotions in the context of the hotel industry, especially in developing countries. Analysing intense empirical research on mediating and moderating effect is required in between social servicescape and place attachment in a hotel setting, as identified in the literature.
	• The findings of this present study is expected to provide valuable inputs in the development of applied strategies and tactical plans to be put together by the various related stakeholders particularly the policymakers and executives at the tourism-related ministry such as the Malaysian Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the related governmental agencies, managements of resort hotels, as well as hotel associations. Firstly, to provide inputs for Strategic Marketing Plans for resort hotels with the main aim to build a strong sentiment of loyalty among its existing as well as new hotel guests. The findings of this study are also useful in attracting tourists from all over the world to visit and stay longer in a resort hotel. Secondly, to offer new insights on the specific destination attributes to be used as the Value Proposition Statement as well as Positioning Strategy in the context of resort hotels. Indirectly, the

analysis of data from this study could also provide the answer to the question of "What first comes to the hotel guests' mind when they hear of the resort hotel?" in the perspective of destination servicescape and experiences. • The result for the current investigation on the issue of "the importance of the social servicescape in the existence of psychological distance in influencing place attachment and building loyalty among tourists towards hotels" will offer guidelines for hotel managers to optimize the appropriate element of the passive interaction of social servicescape. The managers could use this information to appeal to their specific target market, besides adding value to their offerings, as well as assisting them to remain competitive. Therefore, the hoteliers are enabled to foster customer loyalty with zero investment by focusing on the aspect of place attachment. This research makes it clearer for hotel managers to zero in on the emotions that are important in creating customer attachment to the location of the hotel. Since attachment is an emotional bond with a place, marketers can emphasize on this emotion when creating promotional materials.

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