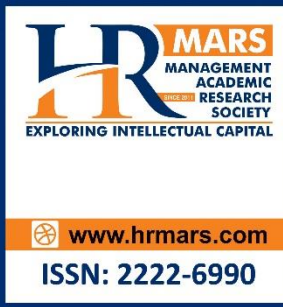




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## The Role of SERVICESCAPE in Fostering Customer Satisfaction and Positive Emotion Among Shopping Mall Patrons

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### Abstract

In today's competitive business environment, delivering customer satisfaction and positive emotion are vital to maintain long term relationship with the customers. Due to this notion, this study was conducted to investigate the influence of SERVICESCAPE on customer satisfaction and positive emotion among shopping mall patrons in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Building on Bitner's model of physical surroundings, this paper discusses four vital components of SERVICESCAPE (ambient, spatial layout / functionality, signs / symbols / artefacts, and cleanliness) that should be considered by shopping mall operators in ensuring customer satisfaction and positive emotion could be achieved. A non-probability convenience sampling method was used to distribute questionnaires to 180 respondents who visited three shopping malls in Klang Valley. However, only 160 questionnaires were usable for further analysis after preliminary data analysis. The results of data analysis lend support to all the hypothesized relationships. Implication for research and managerial practices were also discussed in this study.

**Keywords:** SERVICESCAPE, Customer Satisfaction, Positive Emotion, Shopping Mall

### Introduction

The mushrooming of shopping malls across Malaysia especially in Klang Valley has posed a lot of challenges despite Malaysia is always known as shopping paradise by the locals and tourists. For locals, shopping mall is a place for them to shop and spending quality time with friends and family. The shopping mall's rapid transformation has kept up the worldwide trend of meeting the increasingly sophisticated demands of modern-day shoppers. Today's mall facilities are not limited to shopping activity only but have been extended to included abundant of options such as dining, recreation and entertainment that enhance overall experience for shoppers.

According to Choe (2016), recently the shopping mall business has experienced tremendous pressure due to various external factors. For instance, oversupply of retail space, lower tourist arrivals, weakness in domestic retails spend, intense competition for tenant and changing consumers' preference and behaviour. In order to sustain and remain competitive, mall operators need to be more creative and innovative. In line with passage of time, the changing lifestyle and new shopping behaviour has reshaped the landscape of the shopping industry (Phang, 2016).

In a study conducted by Siu, Wan and Dong (2012), SERVICESCAPE has been recognized as antecedents in enhancing customers' evaluations and behaviours during consumption experience. Nowadays, shopping mall is not only a place to shop, however it is also a lifestyle centres that create urban experience for the patrons to live up their life. Thus, mall's environment plays an important role to boost up the experience. According to Phang (2016), there are a number of factors that could be used to accentuate the overall experience such as comfortable common space and ambience, good connectivity, destination sightlines, exciting store design and unique layout. Based on the aforementioned discussion, the aim of this study is to assess the effect of SERVICESCAPE on customer satisfaction and positive emotion among shopping mall patrons in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

### **SERVICESCAPE**

The concept of SEVICESCAPE has been established in the area of marketing since the past few decades. SERVICESCAPE has been employed in various context of studies such as restaurant, hotel, airport, convention centre, shopping mall, theme park and casino. According to Jeon and Kim (2012), the study about SERVICESCAPE was originated from environmental psychology, which focuses on the inter-relationship between physical environments and human behaviours. The long history of environmental psychology should not be disregarded when discussing about SERVICESCAPE. The studies on environmental psychology was introduced by Kotler (1973). Kotler (1973) proposed the concept of atmospheric as a marketing tool and defined it as the design of buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his or her purchase intention. In the present study, the dimensions of SERVICESCAPE that was used consists of ambient, spatial layout / functionality, signs / symbols / artefacts, and cleanliness (Siu et al., 2012; Ali, Kim & Ryu, 2016). Each dimension of SERVICESCAPE will be discussed further in the subsequent sections of this paper.

### **Ambient, Customer Satisfaction and Positive Emotion**

Ambient is the component of SERVICESCAPE that concerns with temperature, lighting, music, aroma, and air quality (Bitner, 1992). In today's business, the aspect of ambient should be regarded as important due to the rapid establishment of shopping malls in the metropolitan areas of Malaysia especially in Klang Valley. Customers do not only come to mall for shopping, but they also would like to enjoy the atmosphere. Consonant with Lam, Chan, Fong and Lo (2011), it was found that the ambience of a premise significantly affects the cognitive satisfaction of customers. Furthermore, it also delivers a hidden hint to customers that they are choosing right place for shopping. In a study conducted by Jeon and Kim (2012) at Incheon International Airport, it was stated that customers' negative emotions tend to be higher if the level of ambience is lower. Thus, it demonstrates the vitalness of ambient is determining customers' level of emotions. Due to this notion, the following hypotheses were derived:

H1. Ambient positively affects customer satisfaction among shopping mall patrons.

H2. Ambient positively affects positive emotion among shopping mall patrons.

### **Spatial Layout / Functionality, Customer Satisfaction and Positive Emotion**

Spatial layout concerns with the size, shape, and arrangement of machinery, equipment, and furnishings whereas functionality refers to the ability of these items to fulfil customer needs (Ali et al., 2016). According to Lam et al. (2011), customers may feel more contented which indirectly can increase their level of satisfaction when the spatial layout and functionality are well designed because customers can navigate the business premise better and have greater perceived control over the environment. These factors are crucial in influencing customers' comfort in many service settings such as theatres, retail stores, concerts, and upscale restaurants (Shashikala & Suresh, 2013). On the other hand, it was also found that spatial layout and functionality can directly affect customers' positive emotion in a study conducted by Jeon and Kim (2012). Therefore, the following hypotheses were established based on the above discussion:

H3. Spatial layout / functionality positively affects customer satisfaction among shopping mall patrons.

H4. Spatial layout / functionality positively affects positive emotion among shopping mall patrons.

### **Signs / Symbols / Artefacts, Customer Satisfaction and Positive Emotion**

Moon, Yoon and Han (2015) stated that signs / symbols / artefacts as tools that can provide customers with information about the facilities provided by the business premise. A clear signage with large font will ease customers to find their ways around the premise. The same perspective was shared by Siu et al. (2012) denoting that a clear signage can help customers to find section of interest without the need to wander around the whole floor in the premise. Meanwhile, Lam et al. (2011) considered signs and direction as navigation. The result from existing studies demonstrate that navigation can influence customer satisfaction in the premise. Such finding indicates the importance of signs / symbols / artefacts towards customer satisfaction and the same outcome may be derived from shopping mall patrons. Furthermore, a study by Newman (2007) found that positive emotion can be generated through service setting with legible signage arrangement. Thus, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H5. Signs / symbols / artefacts positively affects customer satisfaction among shopping mall patrons.

H6. Signs / symbols / artefacts positively affects positive emotion among shopping mall patrons.

### **Cleanliness, Customer Satisfaction and Positive Emotion**

Cleanliness is crucial as it is considered as the first impression by the customers in any business premise. Consonant with Zemke, Neal, Shoemaker and Kircsch (2015), their study emphasized on the importance of cleanliness towards guests' satisfaction and subsequent behaviour. According to Vilnai-Yavetz and Gilboa (2010), cleanliness is the tidiness, orderliness, and sense of neatness in the business premise. Shashikala and Suresh (2013) indicate that cleanliness is vital as customers normally spend several hours in a business premise. Cleanliness also plays a crucial role in determining customers' positive emotion when they visit any business premise (Vilnai-Yavets & Gilboa, 2010). Furthermore, previous studies also concur that customers' pleasure can positively

impact by cleanliness of the business premise (Moon et al., 2015). Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses were established:

- H7. Cleanliness positively affects customer satisfaction among shopping mall patrons.
- H8. Cleanliness positively affects positive emotion among shopping mall patrons.

### Conceptual Framework

Based on the objective of this study which is to examine the role of SERVICESCAPE on customer satisfaction and positive emotion among shopping mall patrons in Klang Valley, the following conceptual framework was developed (Figure 1). In overall, eight hypotheses were established based on past literature and the proposed conceptual framework. The conceptual framework has been supported in various studies related to SERVICESCAPE.

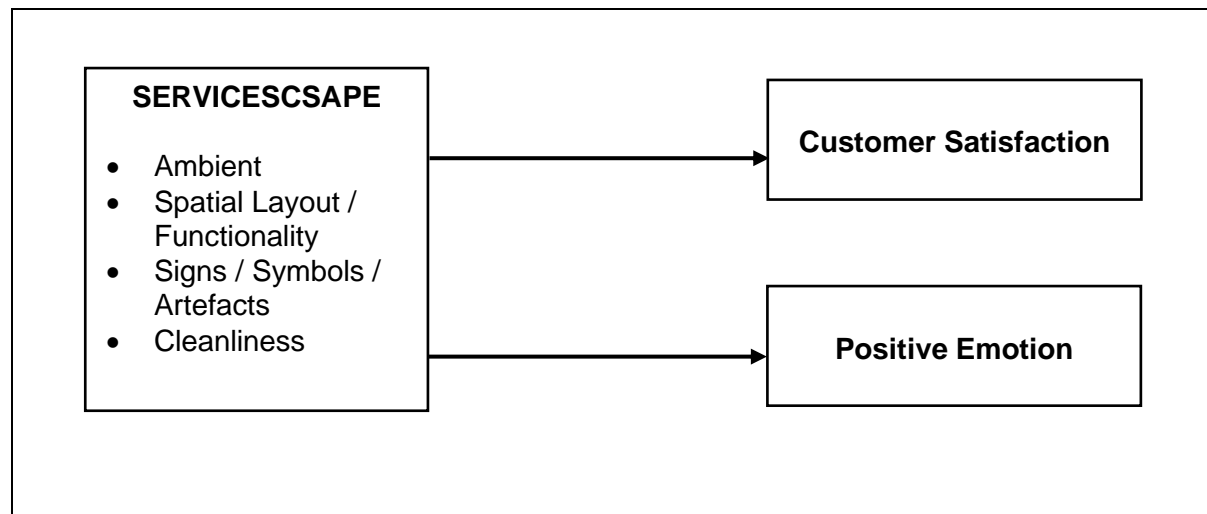


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

### Research Methodology

The design of this study is correlational in nature. Correlational design was appropriate since the aim of this study is to assess the relationship among variables namely ambient, spatial layout / functionality, signs / symbols / artefacts, cleanliness, customer satisfaction, and positive emotion. The variables were measured using research instrument adapted from previous studies as displayed in Table 1 and the data gathered was analyzed using statistical procedures (IBM SPSS Statistics). The research instrument was validated by two experts with doctoral qualification to ensure the questionnaire items are measuring the correct variable, understandable, and free from error.

**Table 1: Instrument Development**

| Variable                       | Number of Items | Source                                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Ambient                        | 5               | Siu et al. (2012)                      |
| Spatial layout / functionality | 6               | Siu et al. (2012)                      |
| Signs / symbols / artefacts    | 6               | Ali et al. (2016)<br>Siu et al. (2012) |
| Cleanliness                    | 4               | Siu et al. (2012)                      |
| Customer satisfaction          | 3               | Ali et al. (2016)                      |
| Positive emotion               | 5               | Tsaur et al. (2015)                    |

The questionnaires were distributed to 180 customers who had visited three selected shopping malls in the area of Klang Valley, Malaysia. Convenience sampling technique was employed, and data was collected on weekend due to high traffic of patrons during such period. 20 questionnaires were discarded after preliminary data analysis leaving 160 questionnaires for further analysis. Nonetheless, 160 responses were still considered sufficient as Sheridan (2013) stated that a researcher should ideally have twenty (20) times more cases than variables for standard multiple regression. In total, there are six (6) variables in this study and therefore, the number of sample size must be at least 120 respondents (6 variables x 20 cases) which the researchers had surpassed this number.

## **Analysis and Findings**

### **Demographic Information**

Descriptive analysis was performed to understand the profile of the respondents. Based on the frequency analysis, it was found that most of the respondents were female (68.1%). In terms of race, the highest number of respondents were Malay (84.4%) followed by Chinese (9.4%) and Indian (5.6%). The data in Table 2 indicate that a majority of the respondents were between the age of 26 - 35 years old (56.3%). The findings from descriptive analysis also signify that most of the respondents received monthly income below RM 3000 (42.5%). It is closely followed by respondents who received monthly income between RM 3001 – RM 5000 (41.9%).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

| Profile        |                    | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender         | Male               | 51        | 31.9       |
|                | Female             | 109       | 68.1       |
| Race           | Malay              | 135       | 84.4       |
|                | Chinese            | 15        | 9.4        |
|                | Indian             | 9         | 5.6        |
|                | Others             | 1         | 0.6        |
| Age            | Below 25 years old | 38        | 23.8       |
|                | 26-35 years old    | 90        | 56.3       |
|                | 36-45 years old    | 21        | 13.1       |
|                | Above 46 years old | 11        | 6.9        |
| Monthly Income | Below RM3000       | 68        | 42.5       |
|                | RM 3001 – RM 5000  | 67        | 41.9       |
|                | RM 5001 – RM 7000  | 18        | 11.3       |
|                | More than RM 7000  | 7         | 4.4        |

### Reliability and Correlation Analysis

Reliability analysis was employed using SPSS during preliminary data analysis. The purpose of reliability analysis is to examine the degree of consistency across the various items in the questionnaire (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 2010) and to ensure that the instrument measures the theorized concept (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Recommended by Hair et al. (2010), the following criteria were used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire:

- The item-to-total correlation ( $> 0.50$ ) and the inter-item correlations ( $> 0.30$ )
- The Cronbach's Alpha value ( $> 0.70$ )

Cronbach's Alpha was computed for all the variables involved in the study. Values higher than 0.7 are considered acceptable, however values higher than 0.8 are preferable (Pallant, 2013). The following Table 3 presents the values for Cronbach's Alpha followed by Table 4 that shows the values for correlation analysis. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha's values were all above 0.7 indicating very good internal consistency reliability for all the variables. Furthermore, the values for inter-item correlation were greater than the minimum values suggested by Hair et al. (2010). Hence, it proves the reliability of all the variables for further analysis which is multiple regression.

Table 3: Reliability Analysis

| Variable                       | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Ambient                        | 0.80             |
| Spatial layout / functionality | 0.73             |
| Signs / symbols / artefacts    | 0.81             |
| Cleanliness                    | 0.91             |
| Customer satisfaction          | 0.91             |
| Positive emotion               | 0.93             |

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

|                                | Ambient | Spatial layout / functionality | Signs / symbols / artefacts | Cleanliness | Customer satisfaction | Positive emotion |
|--------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Ambient                        | 1       |                                |                             |             |                       |                  |
| Spatial layout / functionality | .62**   | 1                              |                             |             |                       |                  |
| Signs / symbols / artefacts    | .58**   | .61**                          | 1                           |             |                       |                  |
| Cleanliness                    | .62**   | .55**                          | .63**                       | 1           |                       |                  |
| Customer satisfaction          | .65**   | .69**                          | .66**                       | .68**       | 1                     |                  |
| Positive emotion               | .62**   | .63**                          | .65**                       | .63**       | .83**                 | 1                |

### Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression was used to test the hypothesized relationships between all variables. The hypotheses were derived based on the review of past literature. The results of multiple regression indicate that all hypothesized relationships were supported as shown in Table 5. The highest strength of relationship was found for H3 (Spatial layout / functionality positively affects customer satisfaction among shopping mall patrons). In overall, the results demonstrate that only H3 can be considered to have moderate relationship while the other hypotheses signify small coefficient.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Analysis

| Hypothesis | Beta | t-value | Sig. | Decision  |
|------------|------|---------|------|-----------|
| H1         | 0.17 | 2.46    | 0.02 | Supported |
| H2         | 0.17 | 2.29    | 0.02 | Supported |
| H3         | 0.31 | 4.68    | 0.00 | Supported |
| H4         | 0.24 | 3.33    | 0.00 | Supported |
| H5         | 0.20 | 2.85    | 0.01 | Supported |
| H6         | 0.25 | 3.39    | 0.00 | Supported |
| H7         | 0.28 | 4.03    | 0.00 | Supported |
| H8         | 0.23 | 3.10    | 0.00 | Supported |

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that SERVICESCAPE can have the potential to foster customer satisfaction and positive emotion among shopping mall patrons. This study has enhanced the current stock of knowledge as limited studies were found to examine the effect of SERVICESCAPE towards customer satisfaction and positive emotion simultaneously particularly in Malaysian context. This study demonstrates the importance of paying special attention towards the physical environment of the shopping malls in attracting potential customers and retaining existing customers. The findings



suggest the important of emphasizing on spatial layout / functionality as it was found to have the highest effect towards customer satisfaction. This is consistent with a study conducted by Lam et al. (2011) highlighting the importance of spatial layout / functionality as it can influence customer satisfaction. A practical layout can enhance the experience of the visitors especially in avoiding congestion inside the shopping mall. Careful consideration with regards to layout and functionality are also critical to cater the needs of senior citizens and person with disabilities who visited the shopping mall. Similarly, Desectasari and Ristianti (2019) indicated that friendly layout and sufficient visual information / directions are the key components in designing public spaces so that it is not harmful to everyone. Nevertheless, attention should also be directed to the other three dimensions of SERVICESCAPE although the findings indicate their strength were not as high as spatial layout / functionality towards customer satisfaction and positive emotion. This is because the other three dimensions were still a significant contributor to customer satisfaction and positive emotion in this study.

Despite the extensive review of extant literature, robust analysis, and noteworthy findings arose from this study, it is not without limitations. Similar to other empirical studies, this research could be suffering from the limitations which may be overcome by future researchers. Future researchers are suggested to expand the conceptual framework used in this study by integrating either a moderator or mediator as it may enhance the body of knowledge related to SERVICESCAPE. A consideration to conduct this study in different settings should also be considered as it may lead to different findings. Future researchers may utilize the same framework to be tested in settings such as restaurant, hotel, airport, and government agencies.

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