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The Role of Servicescape in Hotel Buffet Restaurant

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Abstract

All-you-can-eat Buffet is becoming increasingly popular and related concepts are adopted to operate in either hotel restaurants or buffet restaurants. Since catering experiences are highly affected by surrounding atmosphere, its service facilities have an essential impact on its overall customer satisfaction. However, there are no previous research studies on servicescapes and their relationships with customer satisfaction. This research is first to investigate if Buffet servicescapes affect customer satisfaction.

The purpose of this research is to verify the relationship among Buffet servicescapes and customer satisfaction. Apart from this, which dimensions of servicescapes affect satisfaction the most are also examined. We have selected Park Lane Hong Kong Hotel Buffet Restaurant as an example because of its popularity and it is awarded as the best buffet restaurant in Hong Kong by a renowned Dining Magazine. Furthermore, we have also further studying on their effects on positive word-of-mouth since it results from the dining experience and it greatly affects others' purchase decisions.

The results discover that all dimensions of servicescapes have a positive effect on customer satisfaction where Cleanliness has the greatest impact. Finally, implications and recommendations are discussed base on the findings for further improvement to buffet hotel restaurants on various dimensions of servicescapes to enhance customer satisfaction and help spreading positive word-of-mouth under keen competition. Most importantly, this study is a starting point for further research on Buffet Restaurants' servicescapes.

Keywords: Restaurants; Customer satisfaction; Hotel; Servicescapes

Introduction

Services industry

Hong Kong is a well-developed city and having a service-oriented economy, with the services sector contributing 90.7% of the GDP in 2015 and accounting for 86.3% of the labor force in 2015. And service is increasingly important for all types of companies with facing the threat of generalization. Services over the customers' expectation can help to differentiate the offerings from its competitors and contribute to ultimate success for the company.

The catering industry in hotel-all-you-can-eat buffet

Recently, many catering businesses offer buffet as a strategic decision to be more appealing to the customers. The revenue from catering is more and more critical in comprising another major source of profit to hotel industry apart from room services. Consumers prefer to have a buffet in hotels instead of having dinner in normal restaurants, out of comfort atmosphere, high quality food varieties and enhanced self-esteem. Thus hotel management has altered their strategy to respond to customer needs and the competitive catering market. In addition, buffet can bring a positive effect to other catering units within the same hotel by attracting buzz in a positive word of mouth [1,2].

Problem Development and Objectives of the Study

Due to the characteristics of food choices in buffet restaurants, the main consumer decision criteria would be service and price. As a buffet restaurant in hotel, superior service to fulfill customer expectation and consistent with the luxurious image is ultimately important. For a buffet restaurant, services are huge investments, which included its surrounding physical environment as well as its service delivery by the employees [1,2].

Catering industries are becoming more challengeable due to the increasing competition and rising customer expectations of quality.

Service quality and customer satisfaction have long been described as essential role for success in competitive market. Many researches showed that quality and satisfaction have been linked to customer behavioral intentions like loyalty intention, reducing complaints, willing to referral and spread word of mouth. These findings highlight the important relationships between customer service effectiveness and organizational success.

Servicescape has a high overall effect on perceived service quality. And it also has a great importance in determining customers' evaluations of the expected service quality, in terms of influencing the evaluation of the intangible dimensions of service quality (Figure 1).

Thus, service providers should give careful consideration to their servicescape, which not remain limited to tangible elements, but must also consider ambient components such as odors and background music [3] (Figure 2).

However, there are little researches in the context of buffet restaurants about the importance of servicescape. Thus, the main purpose of our study is to examine the role of servicescape that affect customer satisfaction in hotel buffet restaurant. Also, we want to examine the nature and strength of relationships between servicescape, customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth in the context of the buffet industry.

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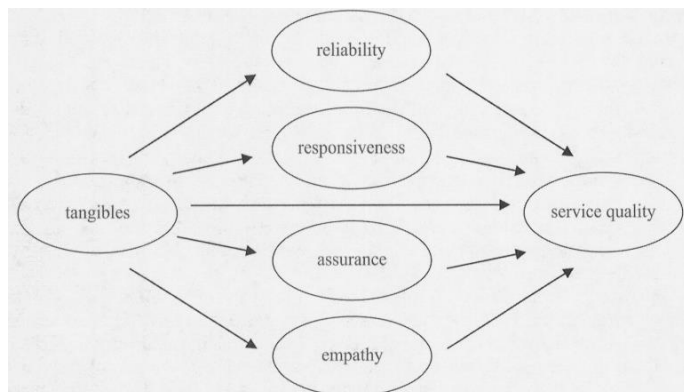
Figure 1: Conceptual model including direct and indirect effects of tangibles on the perceived service quality.
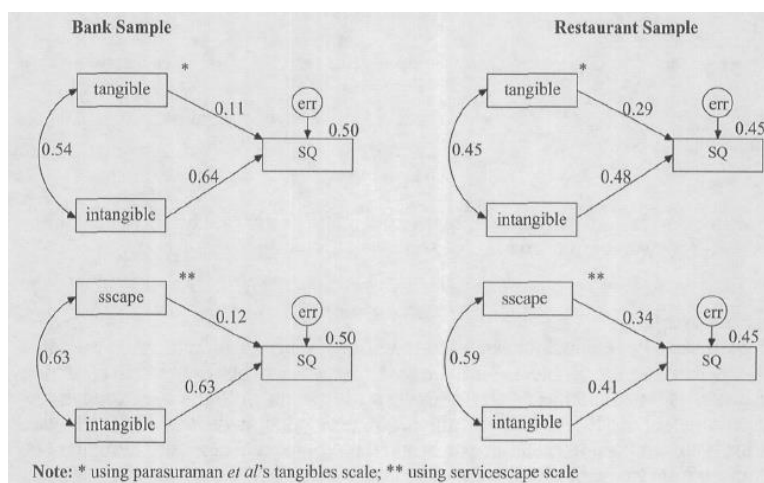

Figure 2: Structural model for two-factor structure.

Literature Review

Servicescape

Booms, et al., define Servicescape as "the environment in which the service is assembled and in which seller and consumer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service".

Three important aspects of servicescape are suggested by Bitner, refer to (a), they are:

1) Ambient Conditions (e.g. temperature, air quality, noise, music, odor, etc.),

2) Space/ Function (e.g. layout, equipment, furnishings, etc.),

3) Signs, Symbols, and Artifacts (e.g. signage, personal artifacts, style of décor, etc.),

Apart from this, Wakefield and Blodgett's model have studied the effect of Servicescape on customers' behavioral intentions in leisure, referring to (b) (Figure 3).

Source: Adapted from Bitner's Framework for Understanding Environment-user Relationship in Service Organizations (Figure 4).

Sources: Wakefield and Blogett "The effect of the servicescape on customers' behavioral intentions in leisure service settings".

A research has also highlighted the importance of cleanliness in restaurants for attracting and retaining customers, and indicated that restaurant hygiene is to the bottom line for customer satisfaction to a restaurant. Thus, our conceptual framework in this research would basically develop with the reference on Bitner framework and Wakefield and Blodgett's model, incorporating the factor of Cleanliness hence it would be appropriate for the context of hotel buffet restaurant.

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a "post consumption" experience which compares perceived quality with expected quality. An important determinant of customer satisfaction and subsequent behavior is the physical environment when services are consumed primarily for hedonic purposes and customers spend moderate to long periods of time in the physical surroundings. An example of this phenomenon would be in an upscale restaurant setting [4]. It was also suggested that there is a positive effect of consumers' perceptions of the servicescape on the level of satisfaction with a service provider [5]. As customer satisfaction act as an important linkage with servicescapes, so we have use customer satisfaction as one of the variables in our conceptual framework in studying the role of servicescape in the context of buffet industry.

Word-of-Mouth

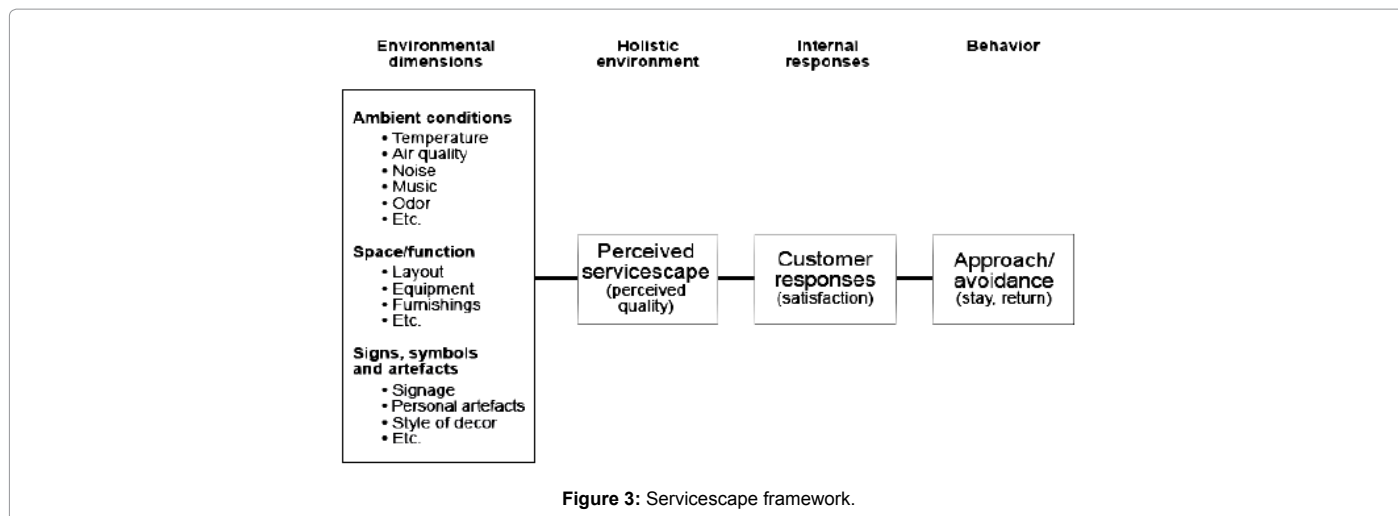Service quality factors had a positive impact on overall customer
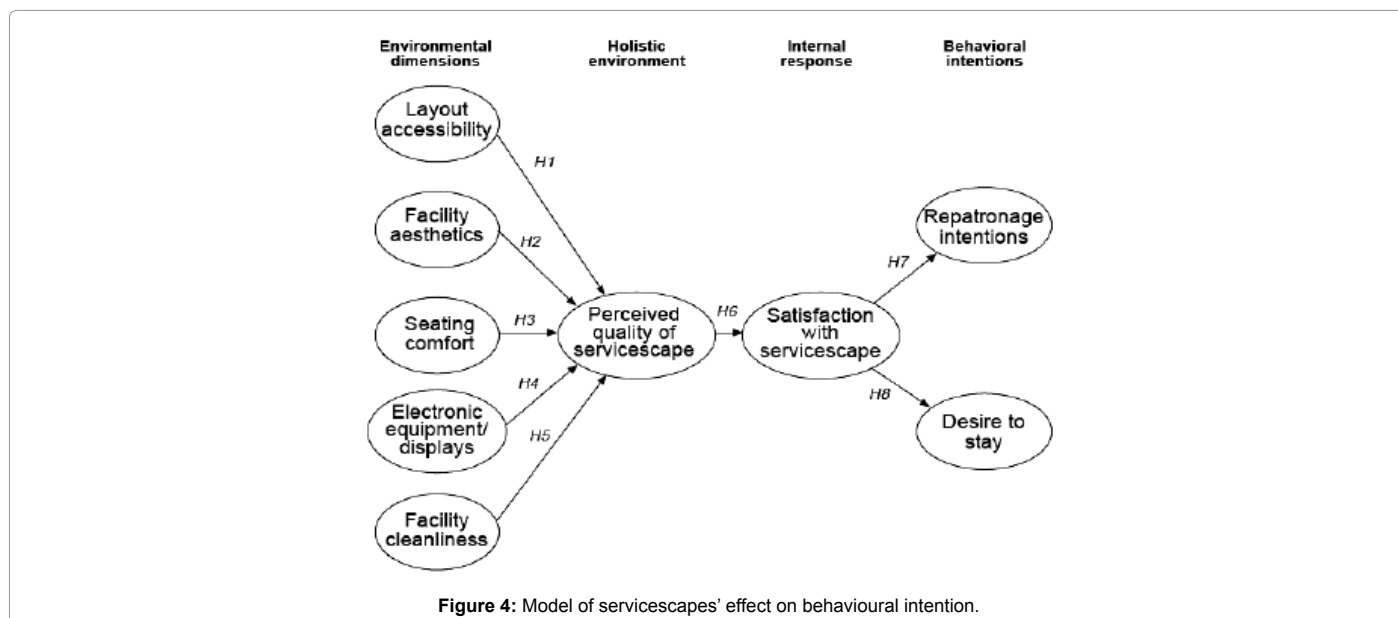
Figure 3: Servicescape framework.

Figure 4: Model of servicescapes' effect on behavioural intention.

satisfaction. In turn, customer satisfaction is likely to increase customer loyalty, including word-of-mouth endorsements and repurchase intention dining restaurants environment [6]. And according to a study by Jang et al. [7] positive word-of-mouth has a bigger impact on a restaurant consumer's word-of-mouth experience and word-of-mouth search effort influence the consumer's restaurant service or product purchase decision. Therefore, with respect to the importance of its impact on restaurant service industry and relationship with customer satisfaction, word-of-mouth would be included in one of the hypotheses in our research.

Statement of Hypotheses

Remarks (Figure 5):

Perceived Quality of Servicescapes=Ambient Conditions+Spatial Layout and Functionality+Signs, Symbols and Artifacts+Cleanliness of Servicescapes

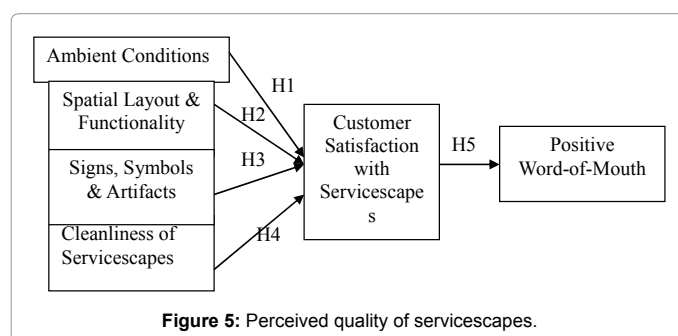H1: Ambient Conditions will have positive effect on satisfaction with the servicescape,

Figure 5: Perceived quality of servicescapes.

H2: Spatial layout and Functionality will have a positive effect on satisfaction with the servicescape,

H3: Spatial signs, symbols and artifacts will have a positive effect on satisfaction with the servicescape,

H4: Cleanliness will have a positive effect on satisfaction with the servicescape,

H5: The perceived quality of servicescape will have a positive effect on positive word-of-mouth.

Methodology and Procedure

Research design

This research will have both qualitative and quantitative research. In the first stage, a pilot survey was conducted as qualitative research to gain understanding of the buffet restaurant industry and the underlying factors that might affect consumers' responses toward the restaurant. Questionnaires were distributed to all people who have been to the Park Lane to enjoy its buffet. It included open-ended questions about respondents' perceptions about the restaurant, and their reasons behind.

In quantitative research, the questionnaire consisted of 29 statements for Servicescapes, Customer Satisfaction and Intention to spread positive word of mouth (WOM). For those 6 closed-end questions, they were used for finding consumers' characteristics and consumption background. All of the statement questions were 5-point Likert Scale questions which represent respondents' agree or disagree level towards buffet restaurant servicescapes.

The questions of servicescapes were developed base on the extracted dimensions of Bitner's servicescapes framework (refer to Appendix Figure 3). Ambient Conditions were examined by questions form 4 to 8; Spatial Layout and Functionality were tested by questions form 9 to 13; Signs, Symbols and Artifacts were presented by questions form 14 to 19; and questions form 20 to 25 represented Cleanliness of Servicescapes.

In terms of the questions testing respondents' satisfaction level, pervious scales had been used as part of the questions. As pervious scales were not suitable for this research structure very well, some more new questions were added eventually. Questions form 26 to 32 illustrated Customer Satisfaction, and Intention to spread word of mouth was tested by question 32 [8].

Sampling

Structured questionnaires were distributed to 207 customers by face-to-face person administrated survey format outside hotel restaurants to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Our target respondents of this research are those who have just consumed the buffet in the restaurant. Convenience sampling of non probability sampling will be carried out. So respondents will be selected by our convenience. And the respondents will be interviewed right after patronized the buffet so that they can have a fresh memories about the servicescapes they had just experienced.

Data analysis method

The program of SPSS will be used for analyzing the collected data. We will collect demographic data to show the characteristics of the respondents. Factor analysis and reliability test will be used for evaluating the validity and reliability of the statements. Also, multiple regressions will be used to determine the relationship of the servicescapes dimensions (independent variable) with customer satisfaction (dependent variable). And we want to further investigate about which dimensions of servicescapes will influence customers' satisfaction most. At last, correlation test will be applied to determine the relationship between customer satisfaction and their willingness to spread word of mouth.

Data Analyses

Demographic and consumption characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics and consumption background of the respondents. We totally interviewed 207 respondents, 64.7% is female and 35.3% is male. People from age 21 to 25 (72.5%), dominated a large percentage of our sample. Monthly salary below $2,000 was 36.7%, and other 31.4% was ranged from $2,001 to $6,000. Only a total of 18.3% of our sample earned more than $10,000 per month. Respondents who patronized Park Lane buffet restaurant less than one time averagely in a month were 59.9% while 29.5% of them at least visit one to two times per month. Total of 10.6% respondents patronized Park Lane buffet restaurant more than twice a month. For their spending time in every time, 39.1% of respondents stayed about one to two hours. Most people (54.6%) normally stayed around three to four hours and only 5.3% of them even stayed longer for more than four hours. The data indicated that the respondents at least stayed in the buffet restaurant for more than 2 hours.

Factor analysis

Factor analysis on servicescapes: The principle component factor analysis with varimax was conducted on 32 statements. After running it, there were four factors: Ambient Conditions, Spatial Layout; Signs,

Demographic			Consumption Characteristics		
Item	**Data**	**%**	**Item**	**Data**	**%**
Gender	Male	35.3	Average Patronage Frequency per month	Less than 1 time	59.9
	Female	64.7		1-2 times	29.5
Age	15-20	9.7		3-4 times	8.2
	21-25	72.5		More than 4 times	2.4
	26-30	5.8			
	31-35	4.3			
	36-40	4.3			
	above 40	3.4			
Monthly Salary	below $2,000	36.7	Spend Time	Less than 1 hour	1
	$2,001-$6,000	31.4		1-2 hours	39.1
	$6,000-$10,000	13.5		3-4 hours	54.6
	$10,001-$14,000	5.8		More than 4 hours	5.3
	$14,001-$18,000	4.8			
	$18,001-$22,000	5.3			
	above $22,000	2.4			

Table 1: demographic characteristics and consumption background of the respondents.

Symbols and Artifacts, and Cleanliness. The value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) is higher than 0.6 (KMO=0.865), and the Barlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (Sig. value=.000), therefore factor analysis is appropriate.

The total variance of the items was 64.04% and the overall reliability of the factors was 0.670. All factors had eigenvalue greater than 1.0 so that the subsequent analysis which was multiple regressions and correlation could be conducted (Table 2).

Each of the items in for the 4 factors extracted is presented in Table 2, with their respective loadings and mean scores. Factor means indicates respondents' attitude towards different dimensions of servicescape. The four items in descending order of the mean score are Cleanliness of Servicescapes (3.99), Signs, Symbols and Artifacts (3.69), Ambient Conditions (3.58), and Spatial Layout (3.29).

Factor 1, known as Ambient Condition, contained of five items. The items were the air quality in the restaurant (0.754), temperature in restaurant (0.708), the background music/sound (0.702), sufficient lighting (0.628) and the overall comfortable condition in the restaurant (0.831). Their reliability alpha was 0.807 and explained variance was 31.277%. The factor mean of 3.58 meaning that Ambient Condition

was the third dimension of servicescapes which respondents perceived was good.

Factor 2 namely Spatial Layout consisted of five items. The items about the Layout of Rooms were easy to get to parking areas (0.852), easy to go to smoking areas (0.767), easy to the food areas (0.620), easy to the restrooms (0.448) and the restaurant's overall layout (0.630). The reliability alpha was 0.816 while variance explained is equal to 12.134%. This factor mean was scored the fifth high score (3.29) meaning that the respondents were almost neutral towards the quality of Spatial Layout.

Factor 3 consisted of six items and regarded as Signs, Symbols and Artifacts. The signage gives you a clear direction (0.711), easy to be understood (0.700), sufficient signage (0.644), large signage (0.531), appropriate artifacts and decorations (0.631), easily find each zone (e.g. hot dishes, desert) (0.627). The reliability alpha was 0.872 and explained variance was 10.368%. This factor owned the second highest factor means (3.69) so that respondents regard Park Lane has doing quite good in this factor.

Factor 4 was about Cleanliness of Servicescapes with six items. Clean corridor (0.819), clean utilities on the table (0.790), clean exits (0.779), clean restrooms (0.772), clean food service areas (0.754) and

Factor 1 Ambient Condition	Loading	Mean	Factor Mean
6. The background music/sound is appropriate	0.702	3.62	3.58 (3rd)
8. Overall, the ambient condition in the facility	0.831	3.60	
7. Sufficient lighting in restaurant	0.628	3.59	
4. Temperature of restaurant is appropriate	0.708	3.57	
5. The air quality in the restaurant is good	0.754	3.49	
Reliability Coefficient Alpha=0.807			
Eigenvalue=6.881, Variance explained=31.277%			
Factor 2 Spatial Layout	Loading	Mean	Factor Mean
9. The restaurant layout makes it easy to the food you want	0.620	3.84	3.29 (4th)
13. Overall, the restaurant's layout makes it easy to get to where you want to go	0.630	3.46	
10. The restaurant layout makes it easy to get the restrooms	0.448	3.34	
12. The restaurant layout makes it easy to get to parking areas.	0.852	2.95	
11. The restaurant layout makes it easy to get to smoking areas.	0.767	2.86	
Reliability Coefficient Alpha=0.816			
Eigenvalue=2.670, Variance explained=12.134%			
Factor 3 Signs, Symbols and Artifacts	Loading	Mean	Factor Mean
18. You can find each zone (e.g. hot dishes, desert) Easily	0627	3.90	3.69 (2nd)
19. Artifacts and decorations in the restaurant are appropriate	0.631	3.74	
17. The signage gives you a clear direction	0.711	3.73	
16. The signage is easy to be understood	0.700	3.71	
14. There is sufficient signage in the restaurant	0.644	3.58	
15. The signage in the restaurant is large enough to see clearly	0.531	3.49	
Reliability Coefficient Alpha=0.872			
Eigenvalue=2.281, Variance explained=10.368%			
Factor 4 Cleanliness of Servicescapes	Loading	Mean	Factor Mean
22. The utilities on the table are clean	0.790	4.04	3.99 (1st)
23. The restaurant maintains clean food service area	0.754	4.02	
25. In general, the restaurant is clean and tidy	0.803	4.01	
21. Corridor is clean and hygiene	0.819	3.98	
20. The restaurant maintains clean restrooms	0.772	3.97	
24. The restaurant maintains clean exits	0.779	3.95	
Reliability Coefficient Alpha=0.931			
Eigenvalue=1.207, Variance explained=5.488%			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=0.865			
Test of Spericity=2103.944			
Significance=0.000			
Overall Reliability Coefficient Alpha=0.670			

Table 2: Factors extracted of servicescapes.

the overall clean and tidy environment in the restaurant (0.803). It gained the highest score of factor mean (3.99) reflect Park Lane was doing the best in this factor. The factor reliability alpha was 0.754 and explained variance was 5.488%.

Factor analysis on overall customer satisfaction: The principle component factor analysis with varimax was applied on 6 items as servicescapes did. The factor Overall Customer Satisfaction was shown in Table 3. The result of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.859, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 692.556 and Significance was 0.000. These results implied that the data was adequate for conducting factor analysis and the results were significance. Hence, factor analysis method was appropriate. The total variance of the items was 65.557% and the overall reliability of the factor was 0.923. The factor had eigenvalue greater than 1.0. So, the subsequent analyses which were multiple regression and correlation could be conducted (Table 3).

The factor was Customer Satisfaction consisting of six statements which satisfied with this restaurant (0.871), enjoy the physical environment (0.847), enjoy the food (0.819), excellent restaurant (0.808), willing to spend longer (0.758) and the overall quality of this restaurant higher than expected (0.749). The overall reliability alpha was 0.923 and explained 65.557% of the variance. The factor mean was 3.80 denoted that Overall Customer Satisfaction level was quite high.

Reliability test

Reliability test was conducted in both servicescapes dimensions and overall customer satisfaction in order to prove their reliability for further analysis. Apart from the servicescape dimensions discussed above, Customer Satisfaction (0.923) was also considered to be reliable and internally consistent, with Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.7.

Multiple regressions

Multiple Regressions was used to test the interrelationship of variables. The result can be used to find out the relationship among eight servicescapes dimensions (independent variable) and Overall Customer Satisfaction (dependent variable). Their relationship with Customer Satisfaction and willingness to spread positive word of mouth (WOM) would further investigate.

Relationship among eight servicescapes dimensions and overall customer satisfaction: Multiple regressions were conducted by using eight servicescapes dimensions as independent variables to investigate which servicescapes have strongest influence. The result shown in Table 4 the eight servicescape dimensions explained 65.9% of the total

variance in the dependent variable of overall customer satisfaction (Adjusted R Square=0.659), thus the relationship between servicescape dimensions and overall customer satisfaction is strong [9].

The results have implied that all dimensions are very significant (Sig. T=0.00). Signs, Symbols and Artifacts of Servicescapes scored highest (Beta=0.644) among other dimensions. The second high score was Layout and Functionality (Beta=0.391) and then Cleanliness (Beta=0.385). Therefore, Signs, Symbols and Artifacts of Servicescapes owned the strongest relationship with Overall Customer Satisfaction (Table 4).

Relationship between overall customer satisfaction and positive WOM: Multiple regressions were conducted by using overall customer satisfaction as independent variables to investigate how strong the influence on positive WOM is. The result shown (Table 5) the overall customer satisfaction dimension explained 36.8% of the total variance in the dependent variable of positive WOM (Adjusted R Square=0.368), thus it can see that overall customer satisfaction has a certain degree of influence on positive WOM (Table 5).

Relationship between eight servicescapes dimensions and positive WOM: Multiple regressions were conducted by using eight servicescapes dimensions as independent variables to investigate which servicescapes have strongest influence on positive WOM. The result shown (Table 6) the eight servicescape dimensions explained 29.9% of the total variance in the dependent variable of positive WOM (Adjusted R Square=0.299), thus the relationship between servicescape dimensions and positive WOM is moderate.

The results have implied that all dimensions are highly significant (Sig. T<0.035). Spatial Signs, Symbols and Artifacts of Servicescapes scored highest (Beta=0.274) among other dimensions. The second high score was Spatial Layout and Functionality (Beta=0.168) and then Cleanliness (Beta=0.159). Therefore, Spatial Signs, Symbols and Artifacts of Servicescapes owned the strongest relationship with Positive WOM (Table 6).

Factor Overall Customer Satisfaction	Loading	Mean	Factor Mean
30. I enjoy the food in this restaurant	0.819	3.88	3.80
31. I am willing to spend longer in this restaurant	0.758	3.87	
29. I enjoy the physical environment in this restaurant	0.847	3.86	
27. I am satisfied with this restaurant	0.871	3.83	
26. I think this restaurant is excellent	0.808	3.80	
28. The overall quality of this restaurant is much better than I expected	0.749	3.55	
Reliability Coefficient Alpha=0.923			
Eigenvalue=3.933, Variance explained=65.557%			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy=0.859			
Bartlett's Test of Spericity=692.556			
Significance=0.000			
Overall Reliability Coefficient Alpha=0.923			

Table 3: Factors extracted of customer satisfaction.

Relationship among Eight Servicescapes Dimensions and Overall Customer Satisfaction			
Dimensions	B	Beta	Sig.T
Ambient Conditions	0.446	0.363	0.000*
Spatial Layout and Functionality	0.421	0.391	0.000*
Spatial signs, symbols and artifacts	0.704	0.644	0.000*
Cleanliness of Servicescapes	0.399	0.385	0.000*
Adjusted R Square=0.659		*p<0.05	

Table 4: Relationship among eight servicescapes dimensions and overall customer satisfaction.

Relationship between Overall Customer Satisfaction and positive WOM			
Dimensions	B	Beta	Sig.T
Customer Satisfaction	0.539	0.609	0.000*
Adjusted R Square=0.368		*p<0.05	

Table 5: Relationship between Overall Customer Satisfaction and positive WOM.

Relationship between Eight Servicescapes Dimensions and positive WOM			
Dimensions	B	Beta	Sig.T
Ambient Conditions	0.154	0.142	0.020*
Spatial Layout and Functionality	0.160	0.168	0.017*
Spatial signs, symbols and artifacts	0.265	0.274	0.002*
Cleanliness of Servicescapes	0.146	0.159	0.035*
Adjusted R Square=0.299		*p<0.05	

Table 6: Relationship between Eight Servicescapes Dimensions and positive WOM.

Correlation

According to Table 7, Customer Satisfaction had a positive relationship with Willingness to spread positive word of mouth (Pearson Correlation=0.723). And it was significant (Sig.<0.01) (Table 7).

Discussions and Recommendations

Dimensions of servicescapes

After running factor analysis, there were 4 factors. As mentioned before, customers spend more time in the buffet restaurant than other restaurants, therefore their experience is greatly affected by the facilities and surrounding environment in the restaurant. However, Spatial Layout scored the highest among the dimensions [10]. It implied that customers dissatisfy with interior design of Park Lane restaurant. Spatial Layout includes restaurant interior design of different food zones, washrooms, parking areas and other areas, was perceived by consumers as the dimension of worst performance in Park Lane buffet restaurant. It indicates that accessibility to different areas in the restaurant may either be inconvenient or inappropriate. In order to improve the situation, the following suggestions are made,

1.   All food zones should be more concentrate instead of scattering around the dining area; therefore it can prevent the customers in being confused in searching the food.

2.   Washrooms should be designed nearer to the exit or dining area instead of locating in the dead corner, hence it can avoid the experience of being annoying in the process of finding the restrooms.

3.   Various types of food should be arranged in a more reasonable order, for example, the appetizers zone is better to follow by the Japanese sushi bar; then the mains course or hot dishes; while the desserts bar can be either act as an isolated zone or come to the last in the area. Thus such layout would be more appropriate for the habits of dining.

Ambient condition was the other dimension that scored low rankings among respondents. In the buffet restaurant, consumers are willing to spend longer time than in other restaurants, so they will pay more attention on ambient condition of the restaurant. Proper lighting and music can therefore enhance their mood in the prolonged stay there. In order to enhance the ambient conditions, the following suggestions are made,

1.   Non-uniform lighting mode and peripheral wall lighting decoration are suggested to reinforce subjective impression of spaciousness and relaxation. And warm color appearance or temperature of lighting can also be used to express a feeling of warmth and relaxation. In addition, as buffet dining room is a sort of interior occupied for longer periods and also require some visual tasks required for some perceptions of details, 300 lux of maintained illuminance are recommended

2.   Careful selections of Mood Music which can particularly induced intending mood and atmosphere are advocated, since studies shown that Mood Music can vastly improve the restaurant experience for dining.

Correlation Items	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Overall Customer Satisfaction and willingness to recommend	0.723	0.000*
*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level		

Table 7: Correlation between Customer Satisfaction and Willingness to spread positive word of mouth (WOM).

Signs, Symbols & Artifacts was ranked the second satisfy dimension meaning that customers were satisfied with the signage in the Park Lank restaurant. Consumers think that signs are big and clear enough to give them a clear direction to go to different areas in the restaurant. Even though they were satisfied with this factor, it was not ranked high among the others. Most importantly, the beta of signs, symbols and artifacts is the highest one in the multiple regression model. That means this factor affects customer satisfaction most among 4 dimensions in customer's perception. Therefore, Park Lane should improve this factor and try to give more clear direction such as showing more arrows to guide customers.

The most satisfy factor was cleanliness. Its factor mean was 3.99 represented that customers satisfied with this factor. They agreed that facilities and utilities were clean and in a high hygiene. Consequently, Park Lane should maintain its cleanliness to impress customers.

The role of servicescapes play in customer satisfaction

The case of Park Lane buffet restaurant showed that there is a strong correlation between the servicescapes and customer satisfaction, especially for buffet industries. When consumers enjoy the buffet, most of the activities are self-serviced. So the role of servicescapes becomes more important than intangible service performed by front line staffs. And servicescapes were included in the services encounter and even affect the entire customer service. Recently most of the firms continuously improving their staff quality, but they neglected controllable factors which were actually easy to achieve and satisfy customers. Servicescapes were considered as controllable factors than the services quality performed by staff. Servicescapes is the preliminary factor to affect customer's expectation on the restaurant after they entered it. Bitner also suggested that perceptions of the servicescapes might simply helped people to distinguish a firm by affecting how it was categorized. If firms do better in servicescapes which can make customers have better satisfaction and impression which they are willing to recommend to their relatives and friends and spread positive word of mouth.

Importance of customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction was very important for many businesses. This relationship had been proved in this study. Once customers satisfy with the servicescapes, they will also satisfy the overall services. Then, their repurchased intention will be enhanced. After they satisfied, they are willing to spread positive WOM to other people. It can enlarge the profit and market share of the company. And the cost of keeping a loyal customer is cheaper than attracting a new customer. So satisfaction can help firm to reduce its cost and increase its revenue in the long run. That is why maintaining customer satisfaction is so important.

Implications for research

This research has provided meaning insights of servicescape in buffet industry, and it determined which servicescapes were essential for the customer satisfaction. It also proved that previous construct about the relationship between servicescapes and customer satisfaction was established and part of the hypotheses was satisfied. Likewise, the relationship between customer satisfaction and willingness to spread positive WOM has also been studied.

Limitations

First of all, we collected data through convenience sampling that the potentially large and unmeasured bias might deteriorate accuracy

of the results. Since populations of various nationality and age group could not be reached sufficiently, some opinions from other groups might have been neglected in turns distort the representative of the results. Thus, further analysis of differences among guests different types of customers are also not possible.

Regarding to the instrument used in this research, 5-point Likert Scale questions were used in questionnaire design. Hence, this might trigger a potential problem of central tendencies in response that affect the precision of the results.

In addition, as no precedent research on Servicescape has been conducted to study the role of servicescape and its effect with customer satisfaction and word-of-mouth in Buffet industry, the conceptual model of this research was based on similar research on normal dining restaurants. Thus, further research is needed to support the applicability of the model.

Conclusions

The dimensions of servicescapes have a strong correlation with the customer satisfaction. In our research, it showed that signs were the most important dimension among the four in the buffet restaurant. As most of the activities in the buffet are self-serviced, having clear and easy to understand signs can help customers to do the things effectively and efficiently. Apart from signs, cleanliness was the second important factor. So cleanliness environment should be maintained in the restaurant. It is worthwhile to channel more resources for giving a clear direction and keeping the environment clean as they had a great effect on customer satisfaction. Although there were some limitation in

this research, the servicescapes model could be further investigate and examine in the future. Results would be useful for all buffet restaurants to provide excellent services and servicescapes to strengthen the position of catering industries in Hong Kong.

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