

Servicescape and Customer Patronage of Three Star Hotels in Ghana's Metropolitan City of Accra

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Abstract

The study examined the relationship between the multidimensionality of servicescape and customer patronage. Three hypotheses were formulated. To test these possibilities, a survey with 104 participants selected from six hotels in the city of Accra was undertaken. It was found that positive relationship exists between the ambience of the hotels and patronage by customers. Positive relationship was also reported between spatial layout and patronage by customers. It was again found that signs, symbols and artifacts were positively associated with customer patronage. This study presents us with a framework and highlights the potential of physical setting as valuable and appropriate strategy in attracting customers in the hotel industry.

Key words: Servicescape, Customer patronage, Three star hotels, Accra metropolitan city, Ghana

1.0 Introduction

Service setting plays a critical role in shaping expectations, differentiating service firms, facilitating customer and employee customer goals, and influencing the nature of customer experiences (Bitner, 1992). The servicescape is the outward appearance of the organization and thus can be critical in forming initial impression or setting up

customer expectations (Anand, 2008). Consumers seek evidence of the eventual 'quality' of the intangible service from observing the tangible elements – that is, the servicescape (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991).

In spite of the significant role played by the physical setting in attracting clients to hotels virtually nothing has been done to scientifically test its veracity in Ghana. Therefore the aim of this study is to establish relationships among the three dimensions of servicescape (ambient conditions, spatial layout, and signs, symbols and artifacts) and customer patronage. These relationships are examined seeking to add to the limited body of knowledge in the hotel industry in Ghana. Thus, three research hypotheses are formulated for testing: H1. An ambient condition is positively associated with Customer patronage; H2 Spatial layout is positively associated with Customer patronage; H3 Signs, Symbols and Artifacts are positively associated with Customer patronage.

1.1 Servicescape

Servicescape is considered as the environment in which the service is assembled and in which the seller and customer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate performance or communication of the service" (Booms & Bitner, 1981, p. 36). It is important for service organizations, including hospitality entities, to manipulate the servicescape effectively to enhance customer satisfaction and increase repeat business (Namasivayam & Lin, 2008). Similarly, Bitner (1992) defined servicescape as the built environment, which has artificial physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment. Namasivayam and Lin (2008) described servicescape as the physical environment of an organization encompassing several different elements, such as overall layout, design, and décor of a store. The servicescape also includes aspects of atmospherics, such as temperature, lighting, colors, music, and scent (Bitner, 1992; Namasivayam & Lin, 2008). Servicescape is important, since it influences not only consumers' cognitive, emotional, and physiological states but also their behaviors (Bitner, 1992; Namasivayam & Lin, 2008).

Research suggests that the physical setting may also influence the customer's ultimate satisfaction with the service (Bitner 1990; Harrell, Hutt, & Anderson, 1980). In addition, research in organizational behavior suggests that the physical setting can influence employee satisfaction, productivity, and motivation (Becker, 1981; Davis, 1984; Steele, 1986; Sundstrom & Altman 1989; Sundstrom & Sundstrom, 1986). "The way the physical setting is created in organizations has barely been tapped as a tangible organizational resource" (Becker, 1981, p. 130). Management of the physical setting typically is viewed as tangential in comparison with other organizational variables that can motivate employees, such as pay scales, promotions, benefits, and supervisory relationships. Similarly, on the consumer side, variables such as pricing, advertising, added features, and special promotions are given much more attention than the physical setting as ways in which customers can be attracted to and/or satisfied by a firm's services.

In the servicescape marketing literature, services are frequently described by characteristics such as intangibility, inseparability of production from consumption, and the impossibility of keeping services in stock. In services, customers participate in the production process and therefore also influence the flow and outcome of the process. It is often observed the difficulty customers have in evaluating a service before buying it unlike physical goods. In the hospitality industry the tangible component of service quality has the capacity to influence customer behavior and create an image about the firm in the customers mind. In terms of marketing strategies, corporate image is important because it is associated with customers' perceptions of the products/services offered (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000), and, in turn, corporate image can influence customer satisfaction and ultimately customer loyalty (Andreassen & Lindestad, 1998).

Moreover, a company's image contributes to value addition and increases customer satisfaction during the consumption of products/services (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Also, a company's image evokes service experiences and memories after the consumption of products/services (MacInnis & Prices, 1987). A study in the hotel services showed that corporate image and customer satisfaction are positively related to customer loyalty (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Nguyen (2006) tested the impact of cues related to service workers and servicescape in hospitality services in the context of corporate image.

One of the main reasons customers attend leisure service is to experience excitement and stimulation previous research (Mano & Oliver, 1993; Russell & Pratt, 1980) indicates that the degree of arousal or excitement which customers experience while consuming the leisure service may be a major determinant of their subsequent pleasure or satisfaction with the service experience. The servicescape is important because it can either enhance or suppress these emotions. Some customers (e.g. roller-coaster lovers, food connoisseurs, movie enthusiasts, video game junkies, baseball fans) are highly involved with the primary leisure service itself, while others are only moderately, or even passively, involved with the leisure service. Enduring involvement is generally not an issue for services consumed for utilitarian purposes, such as banking, dry-cleaning, pest control, car repair, etc., and has not been considered in previous services marketing research; however, it is important for marketers of leisure services. Because not every patron is highly involved with the leisure service itself, the servicescape takes on increased importance. Individuals who are inherently less involved with the leisure service itself may experience greater levels of excitement if the servicescape is designed so as to be pleasing and stimulating.

A complex mix of environmental features constitutes the servicescape and influence internal responses and behaviors. Specifically, the dimensions of the physical surroundings include all of the objective physical factors that can be controlled by the firm to enhance (or constrain) employee and customer actions. Those factors include an endless list of possibilities, such as lighting, color, signage and textures, quality of materials, style of furnishings, layout, wall decor, and temperature.

Environmental psychologists contend that people respond to their environments holistically. That is, though individuals perceive discrete stimuli, it is the total configuration of stimuli that determines their responses to the environment (Bell, Fisher, & Loomis, 1978; Holahan, 1982; Itelson et al., 1974). Hence, though the dimensions of the environment are defined independently here, it is important to recognize that they are perceived by employees and customers as a holistic pattern of interdependent stimuli.

Bitner (1992) identifies three primary dimensions of the servicescape that influence customers' holistic perceptions of the servicescape (i.e. perceived quality) and their subsequent internal (i.e. satisfaction with servicescape) and external responses (i.e. approach/avoidance, staying, the repatronage). The three dimensions are: Ambient conditions; Spatial layout and functionality; Signs, symbols and artifacts.

1.1.1 Ambient Conditions

Several authors have identified ambient conditions as a factor that affects perceptions of and human responses to the environment (Baker, 1987; Baker, Berry & Parasuraman, 1988; Becker 1981; Darley & Gilbert, 1985; Russell & Snodgrass, 1987; Sundstrom & Sundstrom 1986; Wineman, 1982). Ambient conditions include background characteristics of the environment such as temperature, lighting, noise, music, and scent. As a general rule, ambient conditions affect the five senses. However, sometimes such dimensions may be totally imperceptible (gases, chemicals, infrasound), yet may have profound effects (Russell & Snodgrass 1987), particularly on employees who spend long hours in the environment. A very limited number of empirical studies in consumer research confirm that ambient factors may influence customer responses. For example, in studies of restaurants and supermarkets, it has been illustrated that music tempo can affect pace of shopping, length of stay, and amount of money spent (Milliman, 1982, 1986).

In another study, familiarity of music played perceptions of how long they spent shopping; when the music was unfamiliar to subjects, they believed they had spent more time shopping (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1988). Hundreds of studies of the workplace spanning in a department store setting was found to affect shopper's many decades have shown that lighting, temperature, noise, music, and color can all influence employee performance and job satisfaction (Sundstrom & Sundstrom, 1986). It is often recognised that when a guest visits a restaurant, he would like an environment, which would make him feel comfortable and relaxed during the duration of his stay. Temperature can be a factor, which can be unpleasant if not controlled adequately. Extreme hot or cold can produce negative emotional states in customers. Thus it is an important part of the ambience. The type of lighting in an environment directly influences an individual's perception of the definition and quality of the space, influencing his or her awareness of physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the space (Kurtich & Eakin, 1993). Light

influences the perceptions of form, color, texture, and enclosure (Ching, 1996). Environmental psychology has assessed the relationship between light intensity and task productivity, revealing that people's perceptions of light influence their perceptions of the environment. Researchers have found that participants perceived tasks more positively and reported decreased boredom in a room with windows, in contrast to a room without windows (Kim, 1998; Stone & Irvine, 1994).

Wohlfarth (1984) investigated the effect of color and lighting on disciplinary incidents in elementary schools and reported similar findings. Results suggested that in some classrooms the use of natural light significantly reduced reported incidents of aggressive, disruptive, and destructive behavior. Furthermore, Gifford (1988) researched the influence of lighting level and room decor on interpersonal communication, comfort, and arousal. Results indicated that general communication was more likely to occur in bright environments, whereas more intimate conversation occurred in softer light. Areni & Kim (1993) investigated the interaction between customer activity and type of lighting on shelf level, sampling behavior, amount of time spent, and total sales in a store environment. The results of their study revealed that brighter stores prompt more handling and examination of products, but do not influence sales or time spent in the store. Steffy (1990) suggested that environments in which the lighting is designed to harmonize with furniture and accessories are perceived as more pleasant than environments in which lighting does not harmonize with other elements of the room.

In a servicescape, guests take note of music and noise as auditory components of their evaluations. Studies on music and consumer behavior have demonstrated that music can be used as an effective tool to minimize the negative consequences of waiting in any service operation (Hui et al., 1997). Music can also be a positive auditory cue stimulating specific consumer behaviors and emotions, as many research studies have discovered. Yalch & Spangenberg (1988) found that younger shoppers reported spending more time shopping when background music was played and that music had a significant effect on arousal. Another study conducted by Areni & Kim (1993) demonstrated the differing effects of classical and top-forty music on wine shoppers. Playing classical music resulted in significantly higher sales because it led consumers to buy more expensive items. Dube et al. (1995) similarly found that music appears to influence buyer-seller interaction. Milliman (1986) reports that music tempo influences customer time at tables and bars, but does not influence service time, instances of leaving before being seated, or purchase. Perhaps music itself has a direct impact on an individual's physiological, arousal response. However, when evaluating a servicescape, researchers should perhaps combine music with other environmental cues, because as discussed above, when we evaluate a servicescape, we tend to view an environment holistically prior to making specific judgments. A piece of music that does not fit the surroundings will not contribute positively to customers' evaluations.

Noise and loudness of sound have usually been perceived as irritating and annoying. Two components of amplitude or height of sound waves, and pitch, which is the frequency of sound waves (Kryter, 1985). Loudness is perceived as negative stimulation, especially when the sound is unexpected or is subjectively perceived as undesirable (Kryter, 1985). Too much sound may result in decreased concentration, increased activity, irritability, and tension (Kryter, 1985). On the other hand, constant sound, quiet, and silence may be equally problematic. A balance of loud and constant sound is the key to creating a pleasant sound environment (Kryter, 1985).

Hirsch (1995) tested the effects of two ambient odors on the amount of money spent on slot machines in a Las Vegas casino. One odorant significantly increased the amount of money gambled, while the other did not. The effective odorant apparently enhanced the casino patrons' desire to gamble. Hvastja & Zanuttini (1991) found that an olfactory cue can 'heighten the awareness; it alerts the organism to existence of agents in the air, to check their quality for guidance of behavior on the basis of previous encounters, to avoid or approach certain substances.' Ambient odors may also simply influence a consumer's mood (Bone & Ellen, 1999). Mood and affect shifts are the most frequently suggested mediators of olfactory effects on individual's perception and behaviors (Bone & Ellen, 1999). Scent should be evaluated with other environmental cues when examining the impact of a servicescape on customer behavior. Individuals do not evaluate a specific servicescape based on only one environmental stimulus. All discrete pieces combine to form a holistic picture. In this case, it is through various environmental cues that

individuals receive input through their sensory systems to form a mental picture, which then stimulates an emotional response.

1.1.2 Spatial layout and functionality

Because service encounter environments are purposeful environments (i.e., they exist to fulfill specific needs of consumers, often through the successful completion of employee actions), spatial layout and functionality of the physical surroundings are particularly important. Spatial layout refers to the ways in which machinery, equipment, and furnishings are arranged, the size and shape of those items, and the spatial relationships among them. Functionality refers to the ability of the same items to facilitate performance and the accomplishment of goals.

Much of the empirical research in organizational behavior and psychology has illustrated effects of the spatial layout and functionality dimension, always from the employee's point of view (Davis 1984; Sundstrom & Sundstrom 1986; Wineman, 1982, 1986). With the exception of some research on retail store layout, crowding (Harrell & Hutt 1976; Harrell, Hutt, & Anderson, 1980; Hui & Bateson, 1990, 1991), and use of orientation aids (Levine, Marchon, & Hanley 1984; Seidel, 1983; Wener, 1985).

Previous research has also indicated that a sense of belonging will influence the spatial layout of customers within the environment (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003a) and identification with a service provider. Little has been published about the effects of spatial layout and functionality on customers in commercial service settings. Logic suggests that spatial layout and functionality of the environment are highly salient to customers in self-service environments where they must perform on their own and cannot rely on employees to assist them. Similarly, if the tasks to be performed are very complex, efficiency of layout and functionality will be more important than when the tasks are mundane or simple. When either the employees or customers are under time pressure, they will also be highly conscious of the relative ease with which they can perform their tasks in the environment.

The furnishings in a servicescape link the space with its occupants and convey the personality of the servicescape through form, line, color, texture, and scale. The furniture placement may convey a sense of enclosure, define spatial movement, function as walls, and communicate visible or invisible boundaries. Recognizable changes in ceiling heights affect spatial perception more than a similar change in room width or length. High ceilings convey feelings of spaciousness, whereas low ceilings are associated with coziness and intimacy (Ching, 1996). All of these elements help individuals form a mental picture prior to affective response and judgments toward a specific servicescape.

Within the leisure service context, layout accessibility refers to the way in which furnishings and equipment, service areas, and passageways are arranged, and the spatial relationships among these elements (Bitner, 1992). An effective layout will provide for ease of entry and exit, and will make ancillary service areas such as concessions, restrooms, and souvenir stands more accessible. Just as the layout in discount stores and banks facilitates the fulfillment of functional needs (Baker *et al.*, 1994; Rinne & Swinyard, 1992), an interesting and effective servicescape layout may also facilitate fulfillment of hedonic or pleasure needs. That is, by making ancillary service areas more accessible customers are able to spend more time enjoying the primary service offering.

Facility aesthetics refers to a function of architectural design, along with interior design and decor, all of which contribute to the attractiveness of the physical environment (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). Facility aesthetics are a function of architectural design, as well as interior design and décor, both of which contribute to the attractiveness of the servicescape. From an external viewpoint, as customers approach or drive by restaurants, casinos, stadiums and other leisure services they are likely to evaluate the attractiveness of the exterior of the facility. Once inside the service facility, customers of leisure services often spend hours observing (consciously and subconsciously) the interior of the facility. These evaluations are apt to influence their attitudes toward the place (Baker *et al.*, 1988; Kerin *et al.*, 1992). In addition to the appeal of the facility's architectural design, customers may be affected by the color schemes of the facility walls, façades, floor coverings, and seats. Unpainted or dull colored facades, seats, and steps may be relatively unattractive compared with brightly colored walls, seats, and steps (Tom *et al.*, 1987). Other aspects of interior design, such as ornamental signs, banners, pictures, and other fixtures, may also serve to enhance the perceived quality of the servicescape. Color is one of the obvious visual cues in a servicescape. According to

Eiseman (1998), color is a strong visual component of a physical setting, particularly in an interior setting. Research has shown that different colors stimulate varying personal moods and emotions. In evaluating a servicescape, this visual sensory input includes forming a mental picture through cognitive processing prior to affecting individuals' personal moods and emotions.

Many researchers assume, contrary to this model, that environmental cues within a servicescape directly stimulate people's emotional response without being cognitively processed first. For example, Bellizzi & Hite (1992) found that consumers react more favorably to a blue environment in retail settings, and that warm-colored backgrounds seem to be more capable of eliciting attention and attracting people to approach store. Their findings showed that blue stores had higher simulated purchase rates. They also determined that colors influence people's emotional pleasure more strongly than arousal or dominance. Boyatzis & Varghese (1994) found that children often related positive emotions with light colors and negative emotions with dark colors. Hamid & Newport (1989) studied the effect of color on physical strength and mood in preschool children. They found that children exhibited greater strength and positive mood when in a pink room than when in a blue room. However, the above cited studies did not examine individuals' cognitive processing. Cognitive activity causally precedes an emotion in the flow of psychological events, and subsequent cognitive activity is later affected by that emotion (Lazarus, 1999). In other words, the cognitive activity precedes and continues into the emotional response itself as an integral feature.

The impact of furnishing can be evidenced through the affective response of comfort. For instance, seating comfort is likely to be a particularly salient issue for customers of leisure service settings who must sit for a number of hours observing or participating in some form of entertainment. Seating comfort is affected by both the physical seat itself and by the space between the seats. Some seats may be comfortable or uncomfortable because of their design or condition (new vs. deteriorating, padded vs. nonpadded, bench seats vs. seats with backs). Seats may also be comfortable or uncomfortable because of their proximity to other seats; customers may be physically and psychologically uncomfortable (Barker & Pearce, 1990) if they are forced to sit too close to the customers next to them. Indeed, previous research related to perceived crowding (Eroglu & Michelet, 1990; Hui & Bateson, 1991) suggests that cramped seating quarters are likely to be perceived as displeasing and of poor quality. The amount of space between rows of seats is also an important dimension, in that it affects the ease with which customers may exit their seats to use ancillary service areas (i.e. restrooms, concession areas, etc.). Furthermore, when rows are too narrow other customers are frequently forced to stand or shift in their seats to let other customers pass by.

1.1.3 Signs, symbols, and artifacts

Many items in the physical environment serve as explicit or implicit signals that communicate about the place to its users (Becker, 1977, 1981; Davis, 1984; Wener, 1985; Wineman, 1982). Signs displayed on the exterior and interior of a structure are examples of explicit communicators. They can be used as labels (e.g., name of company, name of department), for directional purposes (e.g., entrances, exits), and to communicate rules of behavior (e.g., no smoking, children must be accompanied by an adult). Signage can play an important part in communicating firm image. Signs have even been found to reduce perceived crowding and stress in a jail lobby setting (Wener & Kaminoff, 1982).

Other environmental objects may communicate less directly than signs, giving implicit cues to users about the meaning of the place and norms and expectations for behavior in the place. Quality of materials used in construction, artwork, presence of certificates and photographs on walls, floor coverings, and personal objects displayed in the environment can all communicate symbolic meaning and create an overall aesthetic impression. Restaurant managers, for example, know that white table cloths and subdued lighting symbolically convey full service and relatively high prices, whereas counter service, plastic furnishings, and bright lighting symbolize the opposite. In office environments, certain cues such as desk size and placement symbolize status and may be used to reinforce professional image (Davis, 1984; McCaskey, 1979; Peters, 1978; Pfeiffer, 1981; Sundstrom & Sundstrom, 1986).

Studies of faculty office design indicate that desk placement; presence of diplomas on the wall, and tidiness of the office can influence students' beliefs about the person occupying the office (Campbell, 1979; Morrow & McElroy,

1981). In another study of faculty offices, certain environmental cues were found to be symbolically associated with personality traits of the faculty member believed to occupy the office (Ward, Bitner, & Gossett, 1989). Such symbolic and aesthetic communication is extremely complex—it maybe intentionally conveyed or it may be accidental, it may be subject to multiple interpretations, and it may have intended and unintended consequences (Becker, 1977; Davis, 1984).

1.1.4 Customer behaviour

Bitner (1992) asserted that human behavior is influenced by the physical setting and the organization's physical setting influences customer and employee behaviors. Customers seek evidence of the ultimate quality of the intangible service by observing the tangible elements (physical surroundings), called servicescape (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991). Service products are unique because they are generally produced and consumed simultaneously (Bitner, 1992). However, the service environment where the service is provided consists of both tangible and intangible elements (Namasivayam & Lin, 2008). The assertion that human behavior is influenced by the physical setting in which it occurs is essentially a truism. Interestingly, however, until the 1960s psychologists largely ignored the effects of physical setting in their attempts to predict and explain behavior. Since that time, a large and steadily growing body of literature within the field of environmental psychology has addressed the relationships between human beings and their built environments (Darley & Gilbert, 1985). Environmental psychologists suggest that individuals react to places with two general, and opposite, forms of behavior: approach and avoidance (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Approach behaviors include all positive behaviors that might be directed at a particular place, such as desire to stay, explore, work, and affiliate (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Avoidance behaviors reflect the opposite, in other words, a desire *not* to stay, explore, work, and affiliate.

In a study of consumers in retail environments, Donovan & Rossiter (1982) found that approach behaviors in that setting (including shopping enjoyment, returning, attraction and friendliness toward others, spending money, time spent browsing, and exploration of the store) were influenced by perceptions of the environment. Milliman (1982, 1986) found that the tempo of background music can affect traffic flow and gross receipts in both supermarket and restaurant settings. In actual service settings, examples of environmental cues being used to change behavior are abundant. At one 7-11 store, the owners played "elevator music" to drive away a youthful market segment that was detracting from the store's image. Cinnamon roll bakeries commonly pump the wonderful fragrance of their freshly baked products out into mall traffic areas to entice customers into the store.

While repatronage is obviously vital to the ongoing success of the leisure service provider, the length of time customers stay in the servicescape should also be a fundamental consideration for management, because in most leisure servicescape settings, the longer one stays in the facility the more money one is likely to spend. Indeed, research in retail shopping has found a positive relationship between time spent in the facility and money spent (O'Neill, 1992). Similarly, an important goal for leisure service management is to create and maintain a satisfying environment to influence customers to want to stay as long as possible.

Prior research suggests that the length of time that customers will desire to stay in the leisure service setting, and whether they will repatronize the service provider, is in part a function of their satisfaction with the servicescape (Bateson & Hui, 1992; Hui & Bateson, 1991). Based on Bitner's framework and on previous service quality research (Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1994), we expect the same quality satisfaction, behavioral intentions relationship to hold in regard to servicescapes.

Different service environments provide guests with different functions. For example, a hotel guestroom and a hotel lobby each has its own purpose. A hotel guestroom is considered a private environment, while a hotel lobby is considered a public space. Because these two locations play different roles in the mind of hotel guests, understanding consumers' evaluating processes and the different purpose of private and public space will enable service providers to make better decisions increasing a pleasant servicescape for specific service settings. According to Rutes *et al.* (2001), a private setting such as a hotel guestroom has a greater influence on guests' overall hotel experience than a public setting. Hotels aim to adopt a "home-like style" (Siguaw & Enz, 1999) in order to provide a harmonious and comfortable environment where guests can feel like they are at home. Siguaw and Enz also noted

that the best hotel design organizations emphasize the importance of creating a residential feel. Ultimately, a guestroom environment is a place where a guest will want to relax and rest. Therefore, service providers should understand the function or purpose of the environment from a consumer's perspective in order to adopt the right color combinations, music, and decor to create a pleasant servicescape. A public space such as a hotel lobby or a restaurant usually creates the first and most lasting impression in customers. It is also a primary source of information for the subsequent evaluation of the entire service organization. Rutes et al. (2001) suggest that the overall layout and design of a hotel lobby must provide guest circulation from the entrance to the front desk to elevators in a logical and convenient fashion.

2.0 Method

2.1 Participants

A survey research design was used to study the relationship between the multidimensionality of servicescape and customer patronage. Participants for the study were 104. A convenience sampling approach was used, this method was useful in this study given the difficulty encountered in obtaining the list of customers from the five hotels and most importantly the policy of hotels to protect and keep the privacy of their clients.

2.2 Instruments

The questionnaire used had two Sections. The first section measured servicescape dimensions. It came with three domains: Domain I asked participants to answer questions in relation to Ambient Conditions of the Servicescape with 10-items; Domain II asked questions relating to Spatial Layout and Functionality with 13-items, and Domain III asked questions relating to Signs, Symbols and Artifacts of the hotel Servicescape with 19-items. The second section measured patronage by customers with 5-items. Participants were asked to rate each statement or item using a 7-point Likert Scale where: 1 –Extremely Disagree, 2-Strongly Disagree, 3-Somewhat disagree, 4-Neutral, 5- Somewhat Agree, 6-Strongly Agree, 7-Extremely Agree). The questionnaire was pre-tested on 30 patrons of two hotels

The reported Cronbach alpha for ambient conditions was .68, spatial layout was .61, signs, symbols and artifacts was .74 while customer patronage was .74. The coefficient values were all above .60, thus meeting Cronbach's recommendation of $> .60$ as the acceptable reliability level. The overall alpha value was .75. The final questionnaire had a total of 47 items measuring four constructs (three independent and one dependent).

2.3 Procedure

Self-administered questionnaires were given to both receptionist and night managers of the six hotels in the city: Airport West Hotel and Continental Plaza Hotel located at Dzorwulu; Mensvic Palace Hotel, Erata, and Aristocrat Hotel located at East Legon; and His Majesty Hotel located at Trade fair for them to administer to their customers. They were briefed on the purpose of the study. Questionnaires were collected as and when it was filled. Customers prior to filling the questionnaire were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Completed questionnaires were deposited with receptionists of these hotels. These filled questionnaires were personally collected by the researchers and collated for analysis. The Pearson's correlation was used to establish the relationship between Servicescape factors and Customer Patronage.

3.0 Results

All three research hypotheses were tested using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation for the three factors of Servicescape (ambient conditions, spatial layout, and signs, symbols and artifacts) and Customer patronage. Results from the study shows a significant positive relationship exists between ambient conditions and customer patronage ($r(104) = .45, p < .01$). This is an indication that improved ambience leads to an increase in customer patronage. Again in the table, it is shown that spatial layout scores were significantly correlated with customer patronage ($r(104) = .55, p < 0.1$). This also means that an improved spatial layout leads to an increase in customer patronage. It is also shown in the results that signs, symbols and artifacts is significantly related to customer patronage ($r(104) = .55, p < 0.1$), following the same trend where improvement in signs, symbols and artifacts leads to an increase in customer patronage.

4.0 Discussion

The results supported all three hypotheses. In the first instance, it was found that an ambient condition of the hotels was positively associated with customer patronage. This finding is consistent with previous studies. For example, servicescape influences not only consumers' cognitive, emotional, and physiological states but also their behaviors (Bitner, 1992; Namasivayam & Lin, 2008). Additionally, it is important for service organizations, including hospitality entities, to manipulate the servicescape effectively to enhance customer satisfaction and increase repeat business (Namasivayam & Lin, 2008).

Perhaps this is captured more succinctly by Bitner's framework, he suggests that positive responses (e.g. satisfaction) to overall perceptions of servicescapes (e.g. perceived quality) will result in approach behavior (attraction, stay/explore, spend money and return). Two crucial concerns for leisure services managers are, first, how long consumers will desire to stay in the establishment once they enter, and second, whether they will want to repatronize the establishment in the future. Customers may initially patronize the establishment because of their interest in the primary service offering, but may not return if they are not satisfied with the physical surroundings of the leisure setting. Indeed, research in retail shopping has found a positive relationship between time spent in the facility and money spent (O'Neill, 1992). Similarly, an important goal for leisure service management is to create and maintain a satisfying environment to influence customers to want to stay as long as possible.

Rutes et al. (2001), reports that a private setting such as a hotel guestroom has a greater influence on guests' overall hotel experience than a public setting. Hotels aim to adopt a "home-like style" (Siguaw & Enz, 1999) in order to provide a harmonious and comfortable environment where guests can feel like they are at home. Siguaw and Enz also noted that the best hotel design organizations emphasize the importance of creating a residential feel. Ultimately, a guestroom environment is a place where a guest will want to relax and rest.

Research also shows that spatial layout of the hotels was positively associated with customer patronage. Previous research has also indicated that a sense of belonging will influence the spatial layout of customers within the environment (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003a) and identification with a service provider. High ceilings convey feelings of spaciousness, whereas low ceilings are associated with coziness and intimacy (Ching, 1996). Other research corroborate this finding as the layout in discount stores and banks facilitates the fulfillment of functional needs (Baker *et al.*, 1994; Rinne & Swinyard, 1992), an interesting and effective servicescape layout may also facilitate fulfillment of hedonic or pleasure needs. That is, by making ancillary service areas more accessible customers are able to spend more time enjoying the primary service offering.

Signs, symbols and artifacts were positively associated with customer patronage. In office environments, certain cues such as desk size and placement symbolize status and may be used to reinforce professional image (Davis 1984; McCaskey 1979; Peters 1978; Pfeiffer 1981; Sundstrom & Sundstrom, 1986). Studies of faculty office design indicate that desk placement; presence of diplomas on the wall, and tidiness of the office can influence students' beliefs about the person occupying the office (Campbell 1979; Morrow & McElroy, 1981). In another study of faculty offices, certain environmental cues were found to be symbolically associated with personality traits of the faculty member believed to occupy the office (Ward, Bitner, & Gossett, 1989).

The present study provides an empirical perspective to the potential of physical setting (ambient conditions, spatial layout, signs, symbols, and artifacts) as valuable and appropriate strategy in attracting customers for the hotel industry in the metropolitan city of Accra.

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Table1

Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (r) among the Servicescape factors (ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, and signs, symbols and artifact) and Customer Patronage

Variable	Customer Patronage	Ambient conditions	Spatial layout	Signs, Symbols and Artifacts
Customer patronage				
Ambient conditions		.456**		
Spatial layout			.558**	
Signs, Symbols and Artifacts				.552**

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed), N=104

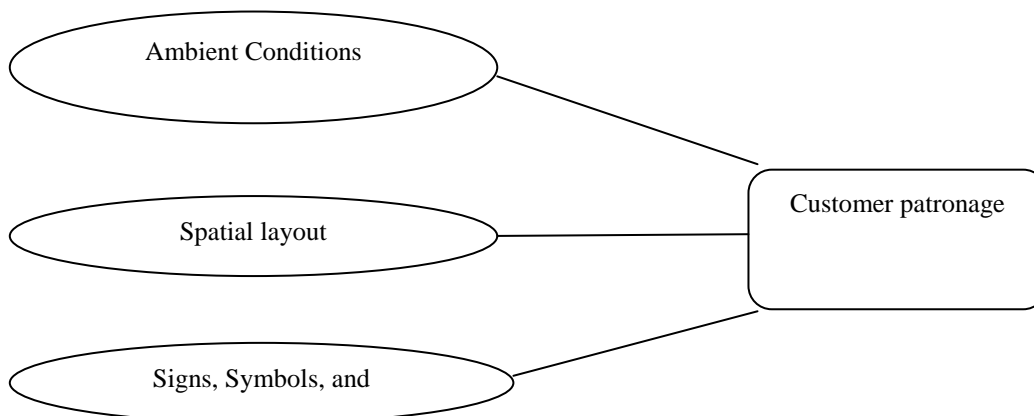


Fig.1: Conceptual model of the present study

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