Addressing Demographic Differences in Servicescape Influence among Department Stores' Patrons in Malaysia

Zuraini Alias, Mokhtar Abdullah

Faculty of Business and Accountancy, Universiti Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract - While numerous published works have extensively examined servicescape models and its linkage to loyalty, not many have systematically examined the influence of demographic factors specifically on servicescape in the context of department stores. The purpose of this study is to examine whether servicescape of department stores have specific influence on six demographic characteristics (age, gender, income, race, education and occupation). A mall intercept method was conducted by administering 560 questionnaires across 5 regions in Malaysia. The results indicate that age and income are strongly associated with servicescape (differences in perception as well as experiences on servicescape), while gender, race, occupation, education and occupation are not. Additionally, it was found that older consumers possess different motives on servicescape implications compared to the younger consumers. The results indicated that patrons to department stores have different perception on servicescapes especially among the high income and younger age groups. The findings will enable retailers to understand the implications of customers' experiential values and personality in line with the demographic characteristics affecting the servicescape offerings. This could lead to better servicescape development strategies to create unique in-store environments to enhance shopping experiences and therefore, result in more satisfied shoppers.

Keywords - Servicescape, department stores, demographic characteristics, retailing

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I. Introduction

Servicescape as an important contributor to positive service environment was first introduced by Bitner (1992) as a means of enhancing customers' perceptions towards organizations. In applying servicescape in the context of retail environment, it is seen as a possible competitive edge which retailers seek as a means of differentiating their offerings. Traditional shopping experiences lack the pull in drawing customers into the store when technological innovations are getting customers to look for shopping alternatives in the form of non-store based retailing. It is generally agreed that retailers need to do some improvement to their in-store environment as a means of attracting customers into the stores (Bodhani, 2012). A store's servicescape do play a role in creating the pull that is attracting customers into the store (Jobst & Boerner, 2015;Thang & Tan, 2002). Baker et al., (1994) find that store environment influence customers in making conclusion about store merchandise and the service quality of the store and it has been shown to also affect the overall store image. The impact of servicescape on quality perception has been studied by Reimer and Kuehn, (2005) and Lin and Cheng, (2015) who found that servicescape is not only a sign for the expected service quality, but is also impacting on customers' evaluations leading to perceived service quality. Thus, servicescape has a direct and indirect effect on perceived service quality leading to a high overall effect (Huang, Chou, & Wu, 2016).

A pleasing servicescape which offers comfort and gratifications contribute to consumers' sense of wellbeing in the stores which therefore would enhance the quality of their visit and will increase consumer preference for the store. In line with this, Naderi (2011) finds the appropriateness of product-image-store image in predicting purchase intention. The well blended product assortment and store environment can enhance both product quality and image. Kotler (2007) has identified that retailers tend to give the most attention to atmospherics because family buyers are likely to have greater choices in places where they buy and atmosphere is part of the total product offerings. However, what have not been systematically researched is on the significant differences in servicescape influence across demographic factors. Therefore, this paper centers on the significant differences in servicescape influence across demographic factors of patrons that will lead to better servicescape development strategies to create unique in-store environments and therefore enhance shoppers' shopping experiences.

II. Demographic Implications

Demographic factors are important characteristics which need to be considered by managers when developing strategic marketing plans. In this inquiry, there is a need to look at the demographic factors such as income, gender, race, occupation and education level in understanding consumers' perception of servicescape. Demographics input is the most effective method for targeting marketing to groups of people with similar characteristics (Sessoms, 2010) and therefore are deemed to be important for marketing strategic evaluations.

Managing atmospherics is a strategic task, affecting success in positioning and differentiation. Likewise, Sherman (1997) proposes that retailers properly train salespeople and to make necessary capital investment for designing the store layout that will appeal to the customers. The service environment or the atmospheric changes will positively influence consumer emotions and it can also stimulate positive purchasing behaviour and therefore, leads to more buying and spending. Shoppers who have pleasant experiences will build a more lasting relationship with the store and seek to return. Sherman (1997) finds that the store environment acts a mediating role of consumer emotions on customer purchasing behaviour. Physical environment is believed to affect purchasing behavior and essentially, a few studies have found how it affects perceived experiential value through both cognitive and emotional evaluations. Bitner (1992; 2000) as well as Harris and Ezeh (2008) have identified that the total configuration of environmental dimensions defines the servicescape and these could be related to the elements of servicescapes as elaborated in the following discussion.

III. Servicescape Elements and the Effects on Retail Environment

1. Ambient Conditions

Baker, Parasuraman and Voss (2002) have defined ambient cues as the non-visual elements of a store's environment such as lighting, smell, music, and temperature. Customer's willingness to buy has a positive relationship with the ambience or environmental cues and social cues. This indicates that ambience interact with the social cues which can influence pleasure and arousal of the customers when he or she is in the store. In addition to the positive relationship, Baker et al., (1992) indicate that when social environment is low, the ambient factors become important, similarly when ambient factor is low, the social factors become important.

2. Music

Morrison (2001) notes that music has been used in consumer behaviour research to determine its effects on behaviour, preferences and moods. Music significantly influences moods in a retail store. In addition, it has been identified that music can stimulate emotions and mood states which will then impact on customers' purchasing behaviour and apart from just emotions and moods, music has also been shown to influence the perception process by its volume, tempo, and types of music, and therefore generate consumer's behavioral intention in terms of avoidance or approach (Sweeney & Wyber, 2002). Thus, both empirical and conceptual studies on the elements of music suggest that "music has become a major component of consumer marketing, both at the point of purchase and in advertising" (Bruner, 1990, p. 94). In numerous other studies, the effect of music on individual's responses has also been shown to influence the speed with which restaurant diners consume their meals as further explained by Jain and Bagdare (2010) who said that music of all types, as a sensory stimulus, has a significant effect on shopping experiences. Musical variables which are both structural (tempo, pitch, volume, mode, genre, and harmony) and affective (liking, familiarity, type, and style) significantly influence shopping experience and can be manipulated to produce desired responses.

3. Aroma

Another servicescape element that has undergone specific scrutiny in the study of servicescape is aroma as it affects the retail shopping environment. Hallett and Silver (2004) discovered that aroma influences moods while Bone and Ellen (1999) as well as Abimnwi and Njuguna (2015) and studied that smell can affect customers in their responses to elaborative image, affective and evaluative responses, purchase intention, and behaviours (Yang, & Chen, 2015). Ambient scents are likely to affect product evaluation as stated by Morrin and Ratneshwar (2000). Morrin and Ratneshwar (2003) identified that retailers practicing environmental fragrancing in the restaurant and other service-oriented business are likely to do well. This becomes common to the retailer because environmental fragrancing can stimulate pleasant scents that encourage customers to spend longer time in the store to enjoy elements of the servicescape. In a restaurant, food smell is believed to be important to arouse customers' appetites. In fact, having the exact combination of music and aroma not only increase pleasure but also induce customers to stay extra-long in the store and is independent from the level of arousal and pleasure, thereby further increasing the positive effects of having the proper mix of atmospheric factors. Michon, Chebat and Turley (2005) discovered that customers will have a positive attitude towards the product and would be willing to pay a higher price when retailers add pleasant fragrance to a product display. This is due to the reason that respiration deepens in the presence of a pleasant aroma whereas an unpleasant aroma halts breathing and even causes physical withdrawal (Levine & McBurney, 1986). All these studies point to the relevance of aroma as a servicescape cue and as such qualify as an important element of servicescape.

4. Cleanliness

The relationship between cleanliness and pleasantness has not been empirically tested. However, cleanliness was found to boost customers' feelings of pleasantness (Gilboa & Rafaeli, 2003). In general, there have been a number of empirical studies that have proven the influence of servicescape elements (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994; Reimer & Kuehn, 2005) and particularly on cleanliness (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996) as a basis for perceived service quality. Specifically, cleanliness is also found to be related to customer trust (Lewis & Soureli, 2006). This also concurs with Fitzsimmons (2003) whose study has highlighted the importance of cleanliness within the service environment extensively. Marinucci (2002, p. 7) contends that "marketing-wise, cleanliness makes perfectly good sense". More specifically, Wakefield and Blodgett (1996, p. 49) assert that "cleanliness is an important part of the servicescape". In relation to this, Rosenquist (2005) notes that consumers in developed economies pursuing hedonistic or leisure activities are likely to want (and expect) high standards of cleanliness, while Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) interprets that cleanliness as part of a leisure servicescape, which can affect customer satisfaction as they stay longer at the site, experienced the quality of the service and have intentions to come back to the site. Lucas (2003) in the study of servicescape satisfaction proves that cleanliness relate to customers' servicescape satisfaction.

5. Design Factors

Store design is complex and comprises various elements (Vazquez & Bruce, 2002). Interpersonal service quality is confirmed to influence the components of design (Baker et al., 2002). Customers feel confident with the store which is convenient for movements, has relaxing space design, and delicate layout (Huang, Chou, & Wu, 2016). Customers assume the store's reliability by seeing the store exterior layout. Often, the overall image of a store is connected with consumer's behavior responses. It has been highlighted that a well-designed layout would help the efficient flow of store occupants and decrease the perception of crowding (Aylott & Mitchell, 1999) which in turn eliminates the psychic costs (Baker, et al., 2002) and diminishes the perceived prices. On the other hand, inconvenient layout design is likely to cut down on shopping efficiency, elicit anger and impatience in customers, and reduce repurchasing intention (Baker et al., 2002). Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) have mentioned that tangible physical environment often appears emotionally, especially when involving hedonic consumption during which customers are highly sensitive to aesthetic quality. In Malaysia, Voon (2011) found that servicescape of restaurants have high impact for young customers on the patronage of fast food restaurants but not for food courts and fine dining restaurants. The study also finds that shopping mall aesthetic factors are highly valued by Malaysian students. Statements related to interior design of malls including music, decorations, and lighting were found to have high preference scores (Ahmed et al., 2007) and therefore is deemed to influence the consumption behaviour of shoppers.

6. Implicit Communicators/Aesthetic

Bitner (1992, p.66) has defined implicit communicators as "visual elements related to aesthetic appeal". It is also highlighted that implicit communicators are de'cor (for example the quality of materials used in construction, artwork and floor coverings) and they give implicit cues to customers on the norms and expectations for their behaviour towards the servicescape. Nguyen and Leblanc (2002) looked at de'cor as a

visual symbol used to create an appropriate atmosphere within the servicescape. Variations in de'cor have profound effects on human behaviour, particularly in influencing social intimacy in the social setting of restaurants. It has also been found that de'cor can affect customer's trust on whether a firm is trustworthy or untrustworthy, expensive or affordable and successful or unsuccessful (Nguyen & Leblanc, 2002), thereby providing the customer with an intrinsic cue on servicescape and loyalty intentions. To further strengthen the effect of aesthetic, it has been found that aesthetic and exploration exert the strongest motivation on customers to patronize particular shopping malls (Ahmed et al., 2007). Brunner-Sperdin et al. (2012) as well as and Dong and Siu (2013) agree that a favourable experience in a service environment can delight visitors and consequently elicit the feelings of fun which therefore lead to favourable memories. A poor service experience, on the other hand, will create the opposite and may leave visitors with a feeling of disappointment (du Plessis, Saayman & Potgeiter, 2014).

7. Furnishing

The visual interpretation of the furnishing that customers convey will ultimately provide the overall assessment of the service encounter (Arneill & Devlin 2002). Evaluations of furnishings also include issues of personal space and crowding. Thus, Aubert-Gamet (1997, p. 28) states that "the internal layout of buildings may either ease or restrict movement, thereby evoking a sense of crowding or spaciousness". Environmental psychology studies find that the extent of crowding of personal space affects humans' moods and behaviours. Hence, Lin and Liang (2011) in relation to the environmental psychological effect implications, stress that physical environment do play an important role in enhancing customers' emotions and satisfaction. The task of managing experiences is however quite challenging because there are many factors beyond the control of the marketers as essentially customers' perceptions of the service which are based on their prior experiences and cultural backgrounds, are the ones that may be critical to their acceptance (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007; Pearce, Filep & Ross, 2011; Pullman & Gross, 2004).

IV.Hypotheses Development

Generally, demographic characteristics have not been given much emphasis by marketing researchers in studies relating to servicescapes as such characteristics are deemed as less meaningful in interpreting servicescape implications. Nevertheless, it is postulated that demographic characteristics do have its significance when relating to aspects of experiential values or personality attributes as these involve a more comprehensive interpretation of the findings. As such, demographic implications should be given more scrutiny in the context of retail marketing as customers' diversity need to be explained within the contextual settings. Given such a scenario, this study addresses specific demographic factors in explaining the implications and effects of servicescape initiatives carried out by the department stores. This assertion concurs with the study by Hashima, Haqueb and Hasima (2015) that looked at the relationship between service environment and customers' behavioral intention as moderated by income in the Malaysian property industry. They found that the relationship between ambient conditions and customers' behavioral intention are significantly moderated by those in the lower income group and is not significant to other levels of income. Such studies therefore substantiate the need to also focus on demographic dimensions when addressing servicescape and loyalty intention. Specific demographic characteristics may well have distinct influence in the postulated model. Therefore, the following hypotheses are to be tested:

- H1: There is a significant difference in servicescape between male and female shoppers.
- H2: There is a significant difference in servicescape across regions in Malaysia.
- H3: There is a significant difference in servicescape across income groups.
- H4: There is a significant difference in servicescape across occupations.
- H5: There is a significant difference in servicescape across age groups.
- H6: There is a significant difference in servicescape across education level

V. Methodology

A mall intercept method was carried out in approaching respondents at the cash registers of selected department stores and asking them to complete the questionnaire after they have made a purchase. The reason why the researchers were stationed near the cash register was because it was assumed that the customers who

have made the purchase have already enjoyed or experienced the department store's environment and therefore would be appropriate target to answer the questionnaire (Orth, Heinrich, & Malkewitz, 2012). The researchers looked for every department store in Malaysia which had the characteristics that have been set as follows:

- i) The department store must be an anchor store for the mall and located in the mall,
- ii) There must be at least three branches of the store in Malaysia,
- iii) They must be located in the city.

Damian, Curto, and Pinto, (2011) have interpreted that an anchor store is a store built-in within a shopping centre unit with a variety of store to boost the mall's appeal. The criteria of an anchor store are that it must be huge with more than 600m2 GLA, multiple chain with at least three stores, has strong brands, gives traffic, has extensive appeal, and benefits from a privileged position with regard to rent and service charges. There were 52 department stores in Malaysia that qualified to be the sampling frame for this study. The selection of the states and the department stores were based on the percentage of the department stores in that particular state. The states that have the highest number of department stores represented the region. The department stores chosen were based on the largest number of the particular brand of department store in the state selected. The researcher found that Penang represented the northern region and the department store selected was Parkson. In the central region, Selangor was the state and Aeon Jaya Jusco was the department store. In the eastern region, the state was Kuantan and Parkson was the department store. Johor was selected to represent the southern region and Aeon Jaya Jusco was the department store chosen. While in Borneo, Sabah was the selected state and Parkson was the department store. Table 1 below shows the selected department stores in the respective regions.

Table 1: Selected Regions and Department Stores

District	State	Mall	Department Store
Northern	Penang, Perak, Perlis, Kedah	Prangin Mall Plaza Gurney	(anchor store) Parkson
Central	Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan	ÆON Bukit Tinggi Shopping Centre	Jaya Jusco
Eastern	Terengganu, Kelantan, Pahang	Berjaya Mega Mall East Coast Mall	Parkson
Southern	Johor, Melaka	Jusco Permas Jaya Shopping Centre	Jaya Jusco
Borneo	Sabah, Serawak, Labuan	Borneo Shopping Mall	Parkson

Initially, servicescape was measured based on those developed by Bitner (1990) and later enhanced by Wakefield and Blodgett (1996). However, the importance of servicescape elements across different service organizations varies (Kotler, 1973; Bitner, 1992) and the common model of servicescape can be explored, but the relevant dimensions of servicescape need to be separated (Bitner, 1992). Baker's (1987) typology of ambient factors, design factors and social factors were adopted for this study. This typology for the most part is interrelated because of its sociological implications which recognized the impact of human attributes in forming the service experience. This is agreed by Harris and Ezeh (2008) and they have applied this typology in their research. In this study the researcher adopted the dimensions of ambient condition, design factors, staff behaviour and staff image by Harris and Ezeh (2008) and the researcher added one more element called interactive service, which was deemed relevant as it had not been researched extensively. A total of 29 items were used in a standard six-points Likert scale that ranged from "Extremely disagree" (1) to "Extremely agree" (6).

VI. Findings and Analyses

The demographic characteristics measured in this study were gender, age, race, level of education and level of income of the respondents. The final number of respondents who participated in this study was 558 and their profiles are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Profiles (N=558)

Variables	Table 2. Demographic	Frequency n=558	Percent (%)
, uriuores	18-24 years	88	15.8
	25-34 years	167	29.9
	35-44 years	173	31
Age	45-54 years	85	15.2
	55-64 years	40	7.2
	>65 years	5	0.9
	•		•
	Females	368	65.9
Gender	Males	190	34.1
	Malay	212	38
	Chinese	298	53.4
	Indian	22	3.9
Race	Kadazan	5	0.9
	Dusun	3	0.5
	Murut	1	0.2
	Others	17	3

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	Professionals	151	27.1
Occupation	Non-professionals	138	24.7
	Housewives	54	9.7
	Unemployed/retired	19	3.5
	Students	42	7.5
	Others	154	27.6
	A Level/Diploma	166	29.7
	Bachelor Degree	162	29
Education	Master Degree	54	9.7
	Doctoral Degree	16	2.9
	Others	161	28.8
	Less than RM3000	269	48.2
	RM3000-RM5000	169	30.3
Individual	RM5001-RM7000	65	11.6
Income	RM7001-RM9000	25	4.5
	Above RM9000	30	5.4
	Total	558	100

A descriptive analysis and ANOVA were performed for the purpose of hypotheses testing. From the result of the analysis, only two hypotheses are supported which are age and income groups in terms of their influence on servicescape. This is indicated in Table 3.

Not Supported

Hypotheses Significant Difference at 5% sig. level H1: There is a significant difference in servicescape between male and female t value = 0.67p value = 0.544Not Supported p value = 0.22H2: There is a significant difference in servicescape across regions in Malaysia Not Supported H3: There is a significant difference in servicescape across income groups p value = 0.009Supported H4: There is a significant difference in servicescape across occupations p value = 0.66Not Supported H5: There is a significant difference in servicescape across age groups p value = $0.\overline{009}$ Supported H6: There is a significant difference in servicescape across education level p value = 0.51

Table 3: Comparative Analysis using ANOVA

VII. Discussion and Implications

All the hypotheses in this study are focused on demographic variables of age, gender, income, people across the region, occupation and education level. According to Lea and Worsley (2008) demographic variables may directly affect values, attitudes or behaviours. These hypotheses are important in order to infer the trend in relation to demographic analysis, used as a market segmentation input and they also give useful information for guidelines related to macro marketing (D 'Souza, Taghian, & Khosla, 2007). In addition, the demographic analysis result can help marketers to identify relevant competitive advantage because they will understand the consequence of changes relating to their markets (Pampel, Fost & O'Malley, 1994). Out of all the causes that influence customers' decision making behaviour, one of the most distinct demographic factor is gender. Gender has an essential role in consumer behaviours. A number of previous studies on gender found that there are significant differences between men and women in specific environmental views (Brown & Harris, 1992; Tikka, Kuitunen, & Tynys, 2000). Moreover, Chen and Chai (2010) have discovered that in relation to the attitude towards the environment, women have less negative attitude than men. But in this study, there is insignificant difference in servicescape between male and female shoppers. This concurs however with Bahram Kheiry and Arezoo Nakhaei (2012) who discovered that there is insignificant differences in ecological purchase decision across gender groups. For this study there appears to be no differences between men and women on how they perceived the servicescape of the department stores as well as how they experienced it.

Additionally, there is also insignificant difference in servicescape across regions in Malaysia. This means that Malaysians across the regions have similar responses in experiencing the servicescape of department stores. This result is similar with the study by Ahmad, Ali, Grigore, and Stancu (2012) for the case of Malaysian consumers' ecological consciousness. They found that Malaysians across the geographic region have insignificant differences in consumer ecological knowledge. Income hoever, is the most important demographic factor that affect consumption patterns of consumers in terms of their choice of the retail store and their amount of purchase (Iqbal, Ghafoor, & Shahbaz, 2013). According to Solomon, Bossy, Askegaard, and Hogg (2006) a good occupation makes good income which eventually influence buying intention. In this study, H3 envisages that servicescape have significant difference across income groups. This result is in contrast with Karim, Kumar, and Rahman, (2012) in their research there is insignificant difference in the hedonic values among consumers with diverse income groups. For hypothesis H3, there is significant difference among the income groups toward the servicescape. Post hoc test shows that the income group greater than RM9000 has a significant effect on servicescape between the groups except for group income of RM7001- RM9000. However, if based on a 10% significant level, these two group differences become significant where the significance level is 0.081. This result is similar with Souza, Taghian, Lamb and Pretiatko, (2007) and Jamilah, Suriati, Hamidah, and Hasrina (2010), where they discover that consumers with higher incomes are more reactive and are concerned with environmental contrast than those who have lower incomes.

For hypothesis 4, in terms of significant differences in servicescape across occupations, it is shown that there is no significant difference across occupations. As with Iqbal, Ghafoor, and Shahbaz's, (2013) finding it is indicated that different occupation may choose different selection of stores to shop. Age is another important demographic factor. Hypothesis 5 predicts the significant differences in servicescape across age groups. Whilst for this hypothesis the finding is significant. Hypothesis 5 forecasts that there is a significant difference in servicescape across age groups. It is significantly proven that there is a difference in servicescape acceptance across age groups. Essentially, age groups do show significant differences with regards to the way the servicescape has been set up, the lay out, lighting, music and the services offered by the store. In this case, ages between 18-24 and the rest of the age groups, have different perception on servicescape than those aged 35-44 and above 65. It appears that the different age groups have different opinions on the presentation of the store's servicescapes. This result concurs with Lee (2011) although there was no significant difference between age and perceptions with servicescapes relating to accessibility. Lee's (2011) study was conducted on patient-centred servicescape criteria following a patient's possible journey in the facility. Kim (2006) found that consumers with higher level of education are more hedonic compared to consumers with lower level of education. However, for this study (H6) level of education was found to have no significant difference on servicescape. This result is in contrast to the earlier assumption that education level would have a significant effect on this variable.

VIII. Conclusion

The outcome of the study indicates that there are demographic differences in the influence of servicescape among department store's patrons in Malaysia, especially among the high income and younger age groups. Those in the higher income bracket and the younger patrons of department stores are likely to appreciate more the store environment as seen through the servicescape offerings. From a practical viewpoint, this study provides important guidance to the retailers. In general, the findings can help retailers understand further the implications that servicescape has in influencing customer's income group and age when shopping at their store. Thus, it is pertinent that retailers understand the influence of servicescape as they focused on their target segment's demographic characteristics when planning their in-store retail strategies.

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