

Influences of Servicescape on Customer Loyalty in Resort Hotel Industry: A Stepping-Stone for Future Studies By Expanding Place Attachment as Mediator

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to investigate the importance of servicescape in the context of the hotel industry, based on the holistic perspective, by examining physical servicescape, social servicescape and e-servicescape factors of the resort hotel environment. Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, this study conceptually proposes a theoretical model that investigating the relationship among various elements of servicescape, place attachment and customer loyalty by considering internal and external environment of resort hotel servicescape. In addition, this study extends knowledge of place attachment as a multidimensional construct namely place dependence and place identity that treat as mediation role between servicescape and customer loyalty

Methodology: To analysis the predicted propositions, further study is recommended to employ partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM).

Findings: Centred on the S-O-R and Attachment Theory as theoretical backgrounds, this study proposes eight propositions, positing the relationships between servicescape and its consequences to place dependence, place identity and customer loyalty

Implications for theory and practice: This research will add value to the related literature by filling the void of previous research and will provide practical implications for resort hotels managers on designing and maintain positive customer response with the underlying mechanism of attachment between resort hotel servicescape and customer loyalty

Originality and value: Fulfilling an identified need to further develop the resort environment in hotel industry, this study proposes a conceptual framework of servicescape to investigate its effects on resort hotel customer's attachment and loyalty.

Keywords: Physical Servicescape, Social Servicescape, E-Servicescape, Place Attachment, Customer Loyalty, PLS-SEM and Resort Hotel

Introduction

Review of the literature indicates that many hospitality-related firms are facing hardship in their efforts to increase their market shares not only due to the issue of matured markets and oversupplied but also because of rising global competition, slower growth rates, decreasing growth of the population, and environmental-related risk (Bonaiuto et al., 2016; So et al.,

2013). Focusing on customer retention or loyalty seems to be the ideal marketing approach because, as the industry has already reached its maturity and saturation, the tourism and hospitality industry needs to pursue market-share gains rather than those of market growth (Jarvis and Mayo, 1986; Sharmila, 2020) When customers are lost, new ones need to be captured. However, attracting new customers incurs a cost due to high promotional and customer familiarity programme expenses (Reichheld, 1996). The focus of this study is on customer loyalty rather than revisitation. According to Qu (2017), revisit intentions are the likelihood of visitors returning to a service provider or destination in the future. This implies that the degree to which a visitor performs or not in returning to a place of attraction in some specified future has been linked to time limits and the individual's willingness (Isa et al., 2019). In addition, it's hard for hoteliers to satisfy customers when they seek novelty, and that positively affects short-term revisit intentions (Assaker et al., 2011) but does not directly impact mid- or long-term revisit intentions (Jang and Feng, 2007), which leads to switching behaviour (Lee, 2016).

Therefore, customer loyalty development is one of the most desired marketing objectives, as stated by Huang et al (2017), because loyal customers are less likely to switch to competitors (Petrick, 2004; Yoo and Bai, 2013) and re-patronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts (Oliver, 2010). Hence, the paper, as responded to Rather and Hollebeek (2019) calls for the undertaking of further empirical research that explores the role of different customer loyalty antecedents in the hospitality sector. This present study essentially aims to explain the notion of customer loyalty towards resort hotels, a category of hotel establishment that has not been given enough attention by marketing researchers. The resort hotel category requires special attention because it does not merely provide accommodation, like many other hotels, but also, more importantly, the accompanying leisure activities within its premises. Unquestionably, the most dominant characteristic of a resort hotel that acts as its core competitive advantage is its natural environmental landscape—sea, river, hill, mountain, forest, and many others (Ali et al., 2016). Taking into consideration the vital role played by the physical environment in the marketing of a resort hotel, the framework of this present study is primarily underpinned by the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory (Bitner, 1992), one of the most important theories in the domain of environmental psychology. The theory essentially posits that various environmental factors could act as a stimulus that affects an individual's internal state, which eventually derives the individual's behavioural response (Jacoby, 2002). Customer loyalty is the specific "behavioral response" to be gauged in this present study.

By employing the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory, this present study proposes that customer loyalty in the context of resort hotels could be evidently explained by the construct of servicescape as the independent variable. In other words, servicescape represents the "stimulus" from the environment that influences customer loyalty in the context of resort hotels. Servicescape refers to the overall environmental landscaping in which a service process takes place (Bitner, 1992). Even though the phenomenon of customer loyalty has been widely researched by marketing scholars in various contexts, a continued and extensive effort is required, particularly in the context of the tourism and hospitality industry, due to the gradual and inevitable changes in the business environmental factors (Saifalddin, 2018), particularly those concerning "technology" as well as "social" factors.

Therefore, in order to fully explain the phenomenon of customer loyalty in the tourism industry, such as in the context of resort hotels, at least these two environmental factors (technology and social environment) that significantly affect loyalty must be taken into account. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, none of the previous studies has considered these two important environmental factors simultaneously in a single model to explain customer loyalty in the context of resort hotel consumption behaviour. The construct of "servicescape" is conceptualised not only from the perspective of the physical environment but also based on the technological perspective by incorporating the construct of "e-servicescape," while the social perspective is represented by the construct of "social servicescape." The related research question to be addressed in this present study is, "to what extent do e-servicescape, social servicescape, and physical servicescape play their roles in influencing customer loyalty towards resort hotels in Malaysia?" The findings of this study will offer some new views and insights on how customer loyalty towards resort hotels could be strongly developed from various perspectives, namely technological, social, and physical factors.

Despite the fact that previous studies' findings provided similar evidence for the significant relationships between servicescape (primarily the physical servicescape) and customer loyalty, empirical research into the process underlying the relationship between these two variables is still very limited (Balakrishnan, 2017; Goi et al., 2014), particularly in the context of resort hotels. The available literature does not provide enough knowledge with regards to how this direct relationship actually materialises. Examining the mechanism or process is deemed crucial in this study because it will help explain how and why servicescape is related to customer loyalty in the context of resort hotels. In addition, examining a mediation analysis is also important for the purpose of model and/or theory improvement (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Thus, by using the attachment theory, this present study employs the construct of place attachment as the mediator to help explain the mechanism through which servicescape influences customer loyalty for resort hotels. Why place attachments or what is the core research issue this present study attempts to address? Previous studies in different contexts have clearly indicated that place attachment is not only closely associated with customer loyalty (Hanks et al., 2020) but also with servicescape (Tombs et al. 2017). This present study argued that customer loyalty towards resort hotels is best explained by the emotional attachment that exists between tourists and resort hotels. Place attachment in this study refers to the strong emotional ties or bonding between the tourists and the resort hotel (Liu et al., 2017). Place attachment is basically grouped according to several characteristics (Guillan and Feldman, 1993). The group consists of the content of the bond (effective, cognitive, and symbolic), the valence of the bond (positive attachment and negative attachment), and a set of feelings (happy, sad, and angry). Many previous studies used Stimulus-Organism-Response theory to investigate the mediating role of place attachment between servicescape and customer behaviour in a service environment based on the characteristics (Avan et al., 2019; Huang et al., 2017; Ladhari et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2012; Line et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2019; Pizam and Tasci, 2018; Theotokis et al., 2010). To the best of the researcher's knowledge, these previous studies do not fully explore what and how customers come to attach to a place through servicescape, as shown in table 1. According to Williams et al (1992), constructs of place attachment, namely place identity, reflect "an individual's valuing of a setting for more emotional or social factors," whereas place dependence reflects the importance of the place in facilitating a user's activity. These constructs are more

appropriate and clearer to investigate how customers attach due to functionality and social that lead to loyalty towards resort hotels.

Table 1

Application of Servicescape, Place attachment, and Customer Loyalty Constructs in Hospitality and Tourism Sector in The Existing Studies.

References	Independent variables	MED/MOD Variables	Dependent variables
Retail Rosenbaum (2005)	The symbolic servicescape.		Approach behaviour Avoidance behaviour
Johnstone (2012)	Servicescape Social dimension Physical dimension Temporal dimension Service dimension		Places dis or identification Behaviour approach/avoid
Vlachos et al. (2010)	Firm Self Connection Functional needs Experiential needs Emotional needs	The moderating role of attachment anxiety	Consumer firm emotional attachment. Behaviour intention. Loyalty Word-of-mouth
Hotels and Resorts Alexandris et al. (2006) & Ski resort	Service quality Interaction quality Service environment quality Outcome quality.		Place attachment Customer loyalty
Su, Cheng & Huang (2011)	Service quality	Mediating role of Satisfaction	Destination loyalty Place dependence Place identity Behaviour intention Consumer experience
Walls et al. (2011) & Luxury hotel	Physical environment Ambience Multi-sensory Space or function Sign, symbol, artefact Human interaction		
Jani & Han. (2014) & Hotel	Personality Factors Openness Conscientiousness	Mediating variables Satisfaction	Satisfaction Hotel image Overall loyalty

	Extraversion Agreeableness Neuroticism	Hotel image Moderating variables Ambience	
Fakharyan et al. (2014) & Hotel	Social servicescape customer to customer interaction Service atmosphere Personal interaction quality		Satisfaction with the hotel Hotel word of mouth loyalty to the hotel
Suh et al. (2014) & Hotel	Servicescape ambient condition	Overall image customer satisfaction	Repurchase intention Word of mouth
Durna et al. (2015) & Hotel	Substantive staging of servicescape Communicative staging of servicescape		Perceived Overall Image Behaviour intention - Revisiting intention - Word of Mouth intention
Dedeoglu et al. (2015) & Hotel	Servicescape		Perceived value Image Pleasure Behaviour intention
Liu et al. (2017) Hot Spring Resort	Environmental experience On-site self- Related experience On-site Social Interaction		Place identity Place dependence Loyalty
Chiang (2018) & Hotel	Perceived price Service convenience Social servicescape		Functional value Experiential value Repurchase intention E-WOM
Dedeoglu et al. (2018) & hotel	Substantive staging of servicescape Communicative staging of servicescape	Moderating variables of previous experience	Novelty Value Emotional Value Behaviour intention Revisiting intention Word of Mouth intention
Line & Hans (2019) & Full-service hotel industry.	Social servicescape Customer servicescape Employee servicescape	Satisfaction	Customer loyalty Return intention WOM intention EWOM intention

Park et al. (2019) & Hotel	Substantive staging servicescape Communicative staging servicescape	of of	Moderating variable familiarity Mediating variable of positive affect	Satisfaction of Behaviour intention
Avan et al. (2019)	Stimulants		Positive emotion Negative emotion	Behavioural response
Chan et al. (2019) & integrated resort	Customers' experience Servicescape	of	Positive Emotion Negative emotion Pleasant arousal	Customer response Satisfaction Revisit intention
Sun et al. (2020)	Ambient cue Social cue Place arousal			Place attachment
Exhibition Siu et al. (2012)	Servicescape Ambient condition Spatial layout and Functionality Signs, symbols, and artefacts Cleanliness		Moderating variables Customer perceived scarify Customer value for money consideration	Perceived quality of servicescape. Affect Satisfaction Desire to stay
Wei et al. (2017)	Social servicescape - Customer-customer interaction Know-How Exchange Social-Emotional Support		Mediating variable of group identification	Group- Based Self- Esteem Transcendent, Conference, Experience
Yi et al. (2018)	Motivation Push Pull			Exhibition identity Exhibition dependence Exhibition loyalty
Lee et al. (2019)	Servicescape Ambience Spatial layout Functionality of equipment	of		Service experience Loyalty
Restaurant Harris & Ezeh (2008)	Servicescape variable Ambient conditions		Personal factors - Variety seeking behaviour	Loyalty intention

	Design factors	- Perceived	
	Staff behaviour	sacrifice	
	Staff image	Environmental factor	
		- Perceived economic turbulence	
		- Perceived competitive intensity	
Han & Ryu (2009)	Physical servicescape	Mediating variables	Price perception.
	- Decor and Artefacts	Price perception.	Customer satisfaction.
	- Spatial layout	Customer satisfaction.	Customer loyalty.
	- Ambient Condition		
Line et al. (2015)	Physical servicescape		Place attachment
	Facility attractiveness		- Place dependence
	Ambient conditions		- Place commitment
	Seating comfort		Company identification
	Layout		Word of Mouth
	Social servicescape		
	- Perceived demographic similarity		
	- Perceived psychographic similarity		
Hanks et al. (2017)	Perceived Similarity to other Customers	The moderating effect of consumers' need for status	word of mouth
	Self-Image Congruence	The mediating effect of self-image congruence	Return intention
	Self-Brand Congruence		
	Attitude		
Hans & Line (2018)	Social Servicescape		Customer attitude.
	Customer servicescape		Experience satisfaction.
	- Perceived similarity		Customer loyalty
			- Return intention.
			- WOM intention.
			- E-WOM intention.

	- Physical appearance		
	- Suitable behaviour		
	Employee servicescape		
	- Perceived similarity		
	- Physical appearance		
	- Suitable behaviour		
Line et al. (2018)	Social servicescape		Place attachment
	Perceived psychographic similarity		- Place identity
			- Place dependence
			- Place commit
			Corporate social responsibility
			- Attitude to offer
			- Willingness to donate
Lin et al. (2019)	Social servicescape	Interaction experience	Reappraisal of overall experience
International Journal of Hospitality Management	-customer-customer interaction	-think	-Evolution
	*functional	-sense-feel	
	*Hedonic	-relate	Future Interaction Intentions
	*Expressive		-act
Hanks et al. (2020)	*Perceived similarity	Place attachment as moderating role	-avoidance
	*Social servicescape		Atitude and return intention
Shopping			
Rosenbaum et al (2016)	Restorative Stimuli	Perceived restorativeness of a shopping centre	Shopper satisfaction
	-Fascination		Intention to recommend the mall to others (WOM)
	-Being away		Intention to return to the mall (loyalty) Net Promoter Score
	-Coherence		Planned shopping expenditure
	-Scope		
	-Compatibility		
	Physical servicescape Stimuli		
	-ambience		
	-sign. Symbols, artifacts		

-space function

Yalinay et al. (2018)	Negotiation intention. Recreational shopping identity. Social shopping orientation.		Servicescape Overall shopping value -Hedonic value -Utilitarian value
Demoulin & Willems (2019) Journal of Business Research Recreation	Servicescape -ambient factors -design factors -social factors	Moderating -shopping motivates -involvement	-irritation -satisfaction
Theodorakis et al. (2009)	Service quality -interaction -Physical environment quality -outcome quality	The mediating role of -Place attachment -Place dependence -Place identity	Customer loyalty
Ong & Yap (2017)	Servicescape dimension -physical dimension -social dimension -socially-symbolic dimension -natural dimension	Emotion -pleasure -arousal	Individual behaviour
Website Roy et al. (2014)	E-servicescape -aesthetic -Interactivity -Navigability Web-site quality -System quality	-Stickiness -Loyalty	Word of mouth

		-Informational quality -Service quality		
Huang et al. (2017)	E-servicescape	-Flow experience -Positive affect		Behaviour intention
	-Aesthetic appeal -Layout and Functionality -Financial Security			
March (2018)	E-servicescape			-Perceived service quality -satisfaction -customer return intention Customer loyalty
Tran & Strutton (2019)	E-servicescape			-trust -e-WOM -customer loyalty
FESTIVAL				
Patwardhan et al. (2019)	-Place dependence -Place identity	-Welcoming nature -Emotional closeness -Sympathetic understanding Perceived safety		Destination loyalty
Lee et al. (2012)	Festival satisfaction	Place attachment -Place identity/place bonding -Place dependence		Destination Loyalty -word of mouth -Revisit intentions -destinations
DESTINATION				
Prayag & Ryan (2011)	-Place attachment -destination image	Mediating variable -satisfaction		Customer Loyalty -revisit intention -recommendation intention
Journal of Travel Research	-personal involvement -Satisfaction			
Ladhari et al. (2017)	-Perceived service quality -perceived service environment	Emotional satisfaction		-behavioural intentions -product perceptions
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, utilitarian service setting				
Line, Hanks & McGinley (2018)	Destination social servicescape	-Place attachment		Return Intention

			-Affective Destination Image	
Liu et al. (2018) Journal of Business Research & different service setting	Servicescape of Shape surrounding -Circular angular shapes	of vs.	Moderating servicescape busyness cue	-warmth -competence -Satisfaction -loyalty
Pizam & Tasci (2018)	Experiencescape Sensory component Functional component Social component		Mediating analysis - positive/negative cognitive response - positive/negative affective response	Positive/negative conative response
Zhang et al. (2019)	Tourscape Physical Social Social symbolic Nature Sensation seeking		Moderating analysis -personal /situational Mediating analysis Emotional arousal Control variable Destination familiarity	Liminal experience Romance and relaxation Chance encounter Sense of loose Aberration
Lin et al. (2019)	Physical environment Social servicescape Personal interaction			Satisfaction Revisit intention
Lee et al. (2019)	Travel environment Natural attractions Entertainment and event			Place identity Place dependence Loyalty intention Pro-environment behavioural
TEAM PARK Plunkett et al. (2019)	Behavioural loyalty Place attachment			Place attachment Behaviour loyalty
Kim & Baker (2019)	Social servicescape		Moderating variable of	Customer loyalty to the employee

Observing employee's emotional strategy	an labor	service consumption critically	Tipping
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By employing the Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory as the underpinning theory supported by the Attachment theory, this present study strives to propose the relationships of the servicescape-attachment-loyalty link that would help enhance the long-term competitiveness or sustainability of resort hotels in the global marketplace in general and the Malaysian market. Strong place attachment undeniably results in repeat visitations, longer stays, spending more, positive words of mouth and many other positive behavioural responses in the marketplace (Isa et al., 2019; Tsai, 2012). This present study posited that thorough understanding of how the various dimensions of servicescape (physical servicescape, social servicescape, and e-servicescape) and place attachments towards a resort hotel could be integrated and enriched would undoubtedly lead to loyalty.

Literature Review in this section, as theoretical backgrounds of this study, two fundamental theories: The S-O-R theory and Attachment theory will be reviewed. Based on these theoretical foundations, a study's conceptual framework will be discussed along with propositions. In this framework, this study will examine potential relationships between constructs.

The S-O-R Model

Originated from environmental psychology, Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) S-O-R Paradigm explains how environmental stimuli (S) lead to customers' emotional reactions (O) and this emotional reaction influences consumers' behavioural responses (R). The stimulus is the factor or environmental cue that influences consumers' psychological states (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The theoretical foundation of this study was grounded in the application of the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model by (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). The stimulus is an independent variable in this theory (servicescape), the organism is a mediator (place attachment), and the response is a dependent variable (customer loyalty), Dedeoglu et al (2018) explained this underpinning theory, implying that servicescape (or environmental factors) could impact consumers' emotions (place attachment) and determine their reaction to the organisation or hotel. Consequently, environmental arrangements such as the servicescape component could determine consumer behaviour and affect their perception of the environment. This study is apprehensive about understanding how the resort and its surrounding area could foster customer loyalty through place attachment. To the best knowledge of the researcher, for the first time in hospitality marketing, linkages among physical servicescape, social servicescape, and e-servicescape or website servicescape as independent variables, place attachment that is measured based on place dependence and place identity mediating variable, and customer loyalty as a dependent variable have been integrated into a single model. Figure 1 visualises the outline of the theoretical framework of this study based on stimuli-organism-response theory, showing the process of how customers' attachments are formed through various servicescape factors between customers and resort hotels as well as their surrounding areas, and how these servicescape and attachments influence their perceptions of customer loyalty to the resort hotels.

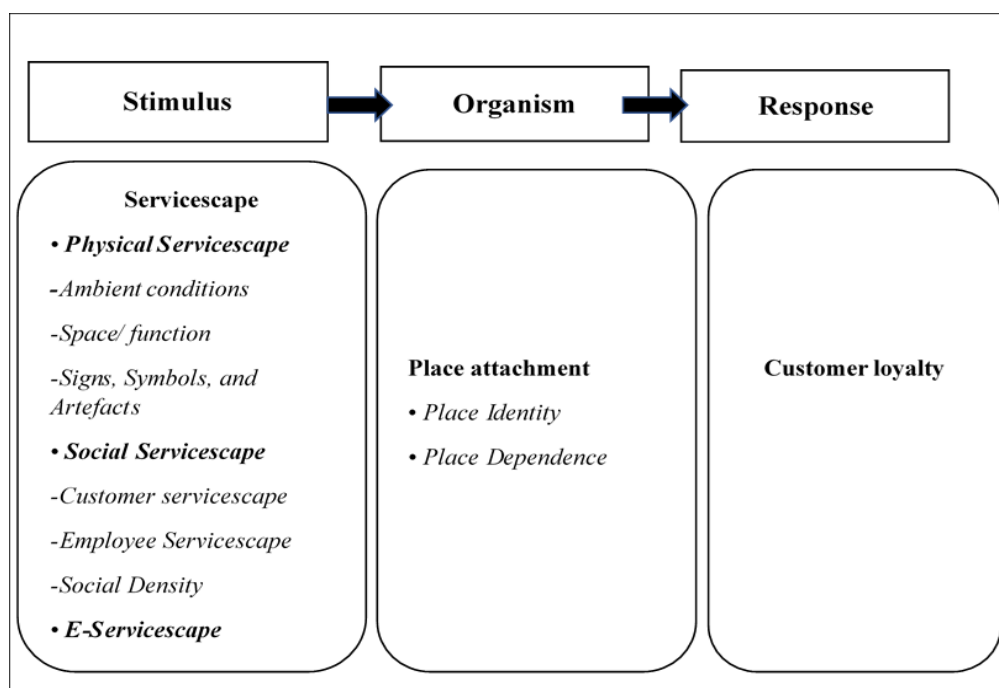


Figure 1. The Relevance of Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) in this Current Study.

Theory of Attachment

According to Bowlby (1977), attachment refers to "the propensity of people to build strong affection bonds with others". The basic tenet of attachment theory is that the attachment system motivates us to seek proximity to others in order to protect us from physical and psychological risks, foster healthy environmental exploration, and promote affect regulation. Actual interactions with people are stored in memory as mental representations of their responses as well as representations of the self's efficacy and value. Numerous studies have followed Bowlby's seminal work on attachment style (Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991; Hazan and Shaver, 1987). An attachment style is a systematic pattern of relational expectations, emotions, and behaviours that cause attachment experiences. This notion has led to various research efforts to explore its applicability to consumer products or brands (Choi, 2013). On the other hand, a growing number of studies have proven that attachment theory can be underpinned and used in the service marketing perspective (Choi, 2013; Hwang and Hyun, 2017; Lavy, 2016). Tran et al (2017) the concept of place attachment is essentially developed from the attachment theory, whereby a visitor's attachment to a place serves to interpret his or her experience and guide expectations and behaviours. When consumers are psychologically attached to a place of establishment, they will feel "at home" and experience comfort and a sense of belonging (Rosenbaum and Montoya, 2007; Yuksel et al., 2010). Therefore, they are likely to invest in a continuing relationship and exhibit loyalty, regardless of the situational conditions (Story and Hess, 2006). Therefore, the notion of servicescape considered in this study is expected to invoke or create a psychological people-place bonding or place attachment towards the resort hotels and is subsequently linked to customer loyalty towards the resort hotels.

Effect of Servicescape on Place Attachment

Environmental psychologists have suggested that individuals' attachment to a place is formed through the vehicle of physical characteristics of an environment (size, scale, decoration, color, odor, noise, temperature) (Hashemnezhad et al., 2013; Steele, 1981). In the hospitality

field, the external environment, such as scenery, recreational activities, surrounding area, and public spaces, significantly influences guests' attachment to a hotel Dedeoglu et al. (2018). The relationship between physical servicescape and place attachment/place dependence has also been validated in various service sectors (Cox, 2013; Dedeoglu et al., 2018; Line et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Servicescape has been defined in different ways in different contexts (Harris and Ezeh, 2008). People respond to environmental factors in both emotional and holistic ways (Mehrabian and Russel, 1974). Because the servicescape is an overall or holistic structuring of environmental dimensions rather than a single component, it is critical to focus on other elements of the servicescape. well as help explain cognitive responses that affect people's opinions about a place, other people, and/or services (Bitner, 1992). The connection between the people (resort guests and employees/other guests) would make the place (resort) unique and more meaningful to the hotel guests (Williams and Vaske, 2003). Furthermore, the role of the website is critical because it can present intangible elements or the physical environment of the service itself, which is especially important in the hotel industry (Pan et al., 2013). To reveal this influence, he suggested the emotional states caused by the servicescape should be examined by separately addressing the effects of each variable of the main element of the servicescape to determine the emotional states that a servicescape leads to in individuals (Avan et al., 2019). Therefore, this study proposes that each dimension of the physical servicescape is likely to influence each dimension of the customers' attachment to a resort hotel. As such, the following propositions regarding these expected relationships have been developed:

Proposition 1: There is a positive relationship between physical servicescape and place dependence.

Proposition 2: There is a positive relationship between social servicescape and place identity.

Proposition 3: There is a positive relationship between E-servicescape and place dependence and place identity.

Servicescape and Customer Loyalty

The concept of "servicescape," developed by Bitner (1992), has been extensively used to examine the relationships among physical environment elements in service organizations. More recently, researchers have expanded Bitner's (1992) model by including a human element in the conceptualization of the overall servicescape (Line et al., 2018; Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003, 2010). In general, the servicescape concept focuses on the impacts of the physical environment of a service organisation (ambience, spatial layout, signs, symbols, or artifacts) on behavioural responses (Chen, 2015; Jani & Han, 2014). Like the physical servicescape (Bitner, 1992; Kim & Moon, 2009; Kincaid et al., 2010; Ryu & Jang, 2008), aspects of the social environment, such as the compatibility of the people in a given space, can result in behavioural responses to the service environment such as customer loyalty (Hwang & Han, 2017; Miao & Mattila, 2013; Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). In this era of the digital world, most of the evaluation as well as reservations for travel and accommodation need to be done online (Lv et al., 2020). Therefore, the overall quality of a company's e-servicescape, including its website servicescape, might have an impact on purchase intention (Harris and Goode, 2010) and, subsequently, on customer loyalty. Websie servicescape is defined as visual stimuli that portray the hotel's physical environment and influence customer loyalty and, subsequently, influence customers to make online reservations. Therefore, Chahal et al

(2015) have proposed that the servicescape creates a favourable experience and is important in enhancing customers' loyalty. Servicescape influences consumer behaviours and creates a specific image, especially in service businesses such as hotels, theme parks, banks, restaurants, healthcare services, and hospitals (Dong & Siu, 2013; Kim & Moon, 2009; Surendran et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2019). Chang (2016) examined a service firm and identified a positive relationship between the servicescape and customers' behavioural intentions. Based on Oliver (1997), customer loyalty is conceptually defined as a deeply held commitment to repurchase products or services from a similar brand, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that have the potential to cause switching behaviour in the customer. It is operationalized in this present study as the extent to which an individual is satisfied with a resort hotel, as well as intends to recommend and revisit the resort in the future. This present study anticipates that the attractiveness of the resort's servicescape has a positive impact on the loyalty of its customers. This is particularly true for the physical servicescape, where an abundance of evidence from the literature could be extracted to confirm its strong influence on customer loyalty. But what about social servicescape as well as e-servicescape, which also exist as parts of the overall servicescape in the context of resort hotels? Do they influence the hotel guests' loyalty significantly? The significance of a particular servicescape dimension is likely to vary across different service settings (Kotler, 1973; Bitner, 1992). Therefore, this study proposes as follows:

Proposition 4: There is a positive relationship between servicescape (physical servicescape, social servicescape, and E-servicescape) and customer loyalty.

Effect of Place attachment on Customer Loyalty

Place attachment" is often described as "an emotional link between the self and the place" in psychology (Gross and Brown, 2008). There is abundance of studies that investigate the relationship between place attachment (place dependence and place identity) and customer loyalty (Lee et al., 2012; Lopez-Mosquera and Sanchez 2013; Su et al., 2011; Patwardhan et al., 2019). According to Scannell and Gifford (2010) and Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), place attachment is typified by "proximity-maintaining" behaviour to maintain closeness to a place. In a similar vein, place attachment will motivate an individual to visit the place as frequently as possible, and perhaps as long as possible (Korpela et al., 2001; Morgan, 2010). In the leisure literature, this construct has been conceptualised as comprising four dimensions: place identity (Kyle et al., 2003; Tsai, 2012; Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989; Yuksel et al., 2010); place dependence (Gross and Brown, 2008; Kyle et al., 2003; Tsai, 2012; Williams et al., 1992; Yuksel et al., 2010); affective attachment (Kyle et al., 2003; Ramkissoon et al., 2012; Tsai 2012; Yuksel et al., 2010); and social bonding (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; Ramkissoon, and Mavondo, 2015; Kyle et al., 2004). While emotion is central to social connections to place, many studies exist on the psychological dimensions of place experience under various subgroups such as sense of place, place dependence, community sentiment, sense of community, community identity, and place identity (Ram et al., 2016; Rollero and Piccoli 2010; Su et al., 2011; Woosnam et al., 2014). However, given the interdependence of the dimensions of place attachment, the use of two subdimensions of place dependence and place identity to assess place attachment has been repeatedly supported in the literature (Bricker and Kerstetter, 2000; Gross and Brown, 2008; Ram et al., 2016; Williams et al., 1992; Woosnam et al., 2018). Studies have found a significant relationship between place attachment and customer loyalty in the context of resort hotels (Alexandris et al., 2006;

Yuksel et al., 2010; Lee and Shen, 2013; Liu et al., 2017; David, 2016; Yi et al., 2018). Visitors' ability to conduct their activities in the destination increases place dependence and has a significant impact on destination loyalty. David (2016) summarised that the consonance between expectations and reality in the host place of the festival improves a sense of belonging and contributes to destination loyalty to the place. This study posits that place attachment, especially place dependence and place identity, positively impacts customer loyalty.

Proposition 5: There is a positive relationship between place attachment (place dependence and place identity) and customer loyalty.

Effects of Servicescape, Place Attachment, and Customer loyalty

Research on the effects of servicescape on behavioural intentions suggests that service environments can produce pleasant emotions and overall impressions in the service environment (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Jani & Han, 2015). Although the direct effects of servicescape on emotion and behavioural responses were to be addressed, there is a substantial body of literature demonstrating that servicescape influences behavioural responses such as loyalty via emotions (Avan et al., 2019; Chang, 2016; Jani & Han, 2015; Ryu & Jang, 2007). However, studies addressing the mediating role of place attachment or emotional attachment in the interaction between the service environment and behavioural responses are rather limited. Furthermore, the S-O-R model is regarded as a valuable theoretical model for investigating the impact of environmental settings on place attachment; however, current knowledge does not provide adequate support or justification for how different environmental stimuli affect emotions and, as a result, stimulate changes in behaviour (Xu and Gursoy, 2020), particularly in the context of resort hotels of literature indicated that the physical servicescape of a place or destination primarily facilitates specific activities or programmes to be effectively performed at that place (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981; Cheng and Kuo, 2015). In the context of skiing resorts, Theodorakis, Tsigilis, and Alexandris (2009) clearly asserted that the relationship between the physical environment (physical servicescape) and customer loyalty was mediated by the extent of attachment developed towards the ski resort. Isa, Ariyanto, and Kiumarsi (2019) also found similar results in the context of a tourist destination.

Prior research has suggested that customers can become highly attached to some businesses due to the strong social relationships they form with employees and other customers (Hanks et al., 2020). When a customer becomes attached to a place, he recognises that in addition to providing practical services, such as facilities and other related services, the business also provides him with a community and a network of relationships (Line et al., 2018). Isa et al (2019) found that social bonding or place identity that happens due to people in the service environment is the most important factor for revisit intentions. In the case of special interest tourism like resort hotels, it can be argued that tourism encounters are service relationships with an emotional attachment through a level of enduring involvement on the part of the customers. The involvement is developed through sharing "like-minded" people in the social surroundings of the place (Trauer and Ryan, 2005). Within the literature, it has been argued that a place is largely socially constructed (Stokowski, 2002; Williams, 2002) and governed by a number of factors, including the attribution of meaning by the customers. The meaning attributed by the customers to the place will, in turn, affect their behavioural outcome (intention to return) towards the place. This is because the "special place" facilitates

distinctiveness from other places or affirms the "specialness" of one's social group (Scannell and Gifford, 2010). It is posited that the attributes of the social servicescape, particularly indirect interaction such as physical appearance and similarity, as well as social density or crowdedness, have a positive effect on their emotions while in the service environment. These emotions will then contribute significantly to their loyalty (Nguyen and Melewar, 2016; Kim, 2018; Simanjuntak, 2020).

Several studies have confirmed that e-servicescape is an important factor influencing and emotional consumers' behaviour in various service contexts (Hopkin et al., 2009; Lai et al., 2014; Tran et al., 2012). The extent to which the website was capable of creating positive psychological effects on users mediated the effects of website design on purchasing intention (Harris and Goode, 2010; Hsu et al., 2012; Gefen et al., 2003; King et al., 2016; Wakefield et al., 2004; Zhou et al., 2000). The physical appeal of the websites in terms of the attractiveness or uniqueness of the place helps evoke or trigger the affective responses (Proshansky, 1978) such as memories, joy, or love (Hammit et al., 2009), which result in the expression of identification (place identity) or emotional attachment with the place. The congruence between the attributes of the place and the individual's identity will lead to a sense of belonging and emotional connection with a place (Cheng and Kuo, 2015; Poria et al., 2004). The appeal of the websites in terms of the attractiveness or uniqueness of the activities portrayed helps induce the functional need to be personally involved in a particular activity (place dependence). From this point of view, we postulate that place attachment mediates the servicescape-behavioural response relationship in the resort hotel servicescape. Hence, we propose the following

Proposition 6: Place dependence mediates the relationship between physical servicescape and customer loyalty among resort hotel customers.

Proposition 7: The relationship between social servicescape and customer loyalty is mediated by place identity.

Proposition 8: The relationship between e-servicescape and customer loyalty is mediated by place dependence and place identity.

Discussion

This study makes a significant contribution to the theory development, to new knowledge, to the body of knowledge, and literature in the field of servicescape, place attachment and customer loyalty. The volume of research concentrating on the prediction of customer loyalty in the context of tourism as a whole is considered very large (Tartaglione et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the extent of literature provides a very limited understanding of the antecedents of customer loyalty in the specific context of resort hotels. By employing the concept of stimulus-organism-response as the underlying theory, this present study proposes the three constructs of servicescape, namely physical servicescape, social servicescape, and e-servicescape as the antecedents of customer loyalty (response) in the case of resort hotel from the "stimulus" context. It is also proposed in this present study that the above direct relationships are mediated by the construct of place attachment. The construct of place attachment consists of two related but distinctive variables, namely place dependence and place identity representing the "organism" component of the SOR theory. By advancing the understanding of how the various elements of servicescape and place attachment influence customer loyalty in the context of resort hotels, this study also contributes to theoretical advancement in the field of marketing, tourism, and hospitality research streams.

Secondly, this study brought together the theory of stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) and attachment theory in a single research framework. To the best of a researcher knowledge, a review of existing literature shows that none of the previous studies have integrated with the theory of attachment and SOR theory in a single model to predict customer loyalty particularly in the context of resort hotels (Martinez and Bosque, 2014; Rather and Sahrma, 2017). As such, by refer attachment theory, this study examined the construct of place attachment consists of two related but distinctive variables, namely place dependence and place identity representing the “organism” component of the SOR theory. Tourism research mostly concedes that place attachment is a key predictor of consumer loyalty, but others perceive it to be a result of loyalty. This opposing view due to the methodology used. For instance, many studies used methodologies, namely structural equation modelling (SEM), which are insensitive to the direction of causality. By responding Lee et al (2012) who recommended future research to use place attachment as a mediator in explaining revisit intention, a construct in which loyalty is considered as an important element in it. As a result, this study will be contributed by utilise and will be examined with PLS SEM method to explain how organism of place attachment could mediates the relationship between stimulus of servicescape and response of customer loyalty.

On the other hand, the findings of this study provide a novel comparative views and distinctive insights on the loyalty towards resort hotels to be compared with those of the conventional hotels. The existing literature offers very little information on how the consumption behaviour towards resort hotels is significantly different from conventional hotels particularly in the aspect of customer loyalty, which is regarded as the ultimate aim of marketing. By incorporating resort-specific elements in the conceptualization of the antecedents of customer loyalty such as in the servicescape and place attachment. For conventional hotels, the overall attractiveness of hotel environment, hotel services, internal elements of ambient conditions, employee services and direct interaction of employees and customers found as factor that influence customer emotions and behaviour (Jasinskas, 2016, Ivan et al, 2019; Choi, and Kandampully, 2019; Jani and Han, 2015). However, resort hotel in this study includes that external environment of resort hotel namely, location of resort hotels and additional recreational activities and passive interaction or indirect interaction of social servicescape playing an import role to influence customers attachment and behaviour.

Therefore, inclusive of the conceptualization and measurements of the three various constructs of servicescape in this study namely physical servicescape, social servicescape, and e- servicescape contribute substantially not only to the body of knowledge in hotel marketing but also tourism destination research streams. Since this study is focusing on the antecedents of customer loyalty in the context of resort hotels, the factors related to the influence of the focal destination of the hotels are playing extremely crucial roles. As discussed in the previous paragraph, including the servicescape elements of location or place or external elements of resort hotels. The three variables of servicescape proposed as the antecedents of customer loyalty in this present study are conceptualized and measured by taking into consideration the influences of destination attributes of the resort hotels.

This study also contributes to the methodological advancement particularly on the measurement development of the variables related to servicescape. The literature shows evidence of many studies that have examined the concept of servicescape, further extending it to various fields, and giving rise to ‘scape’ literature, which covers diverse products and

service settings such as winescape, sportscape, musicscape, healthscape, dinescape, and shipscape. However, no study has yet been done on the servicescape of resort hotels. Therefore, the examined measurement of servicescape this study contributed to developing the resort hotel servicescape termed as “resortscape” in the future.

In the perspective of practical implication, the findings of this study provide a valuable implication in the development of applied strategies and tactical plans to policymakers and executives at the tourism-related ministry such as the Malaysian Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the related governmental agencies, managements of resort hotels, and hotel associations. Firstly, this study provided inputs for Strategic Marketing Plans for resort hotels to build a strong sentiment of loyalty among its existing customers and new hotel guests. In addition, the results also help the resort hotels management to attract tourists from all over the world to visit and stay longer in a resort hotel.

In order to build strong loyalty intention towards the resort hotels, this study suggests the management of resort hotel to strategize the design of the resort hotel servicescape by incorporate physical, social as well as the digital environment to build strong emotional bonding or attachment towards the brands. This innovative idea will guide the resort hotel management to create a memorable staying experience for the resort hotel guests. Therefore, the hoteliers are enabled to foster customer loyalty with zero investment by focusing on the aspect of place attachment. This research makes it clearer for resort hotel managers to zero in on the emotions that are important in creating customer attachment to the location of the resort hotel. Since attachment is an emotional bond with a place, marketers can emphasis on this emotion when creating promotional materials.

On the part, the results of this study can help destination marketers to better understand how to manage tourism destinations. Physical elements of servicescape investigated in this study were ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, as well as sign, symbol and artefacts, which were found to positively influence place dependence. Correspondingly, destination marketers can shape these environmental stimuli to stimulate a preferable destination tourism experience. An important result of this study is that emotional arousal mediates the relationships between servicescape and customer loyalty. Thus, destination marketers could improve the probability of destination experience by changing a destination's environment, which could elicit customer attachment. In order to shape a tourist's destination experience, destination marketers should monitor their emotions derived from their subjective perceptions of exogenous characteristics, like physical conditions, socially elements, and website of destination. Understanding servicescape attributes that contribute to emotional arousal allows destination marketers to make improvements in areas that lead to favorable emotions. From this point of view, destination marketers are advised to shape tourists' positive emotions, as positive emotions are factors influencing tourists' loyalty.

Conclusion

This study examined place attachment as a two-dimensional construct. Where these two constructs are the critical elements that foster functional attachment and social attachment. Previous studies have also introduced other dimensions of place attachment namely place memory and place expectation (Chen et al., 2014). Future studies should incorporate these

dimensions into the model to better understand the psychological mechanism underlying the relationship between servicescape and loyalty. This further analysis should investigate what and how the various elements of servicescape are enhance customers memory and expectation of service they receive.

As explained earlier in the chapter, the concept “scape” was developed for sports encounter ‘sportscape’, restaurant encounter ‘dinescape’ and hospital experience ‘healthscape.’. There is no “scape” has been developed for resort hotel specifically. Due to the time and money constrain this study limits to only adapts and investigate the elements of internal and external servicescape element from previous studies of resort hotel in influencing place attachment and customer loyalty. Therefore, future study needs to focus on developing new measurements, in the process, contribute the term “resortscape” to the literature.

The concept of place attachment in the research was measured as construct with relevant indicators reflected by functional element, social element, and virtual element of internal and external of resort hotel. However, to further investigate place attachment, the aspects of the psychological distance or physical distance (Liberman & Trope 2003) which refer to a subjective distance between an actor and other people in temporal, spatial, and social dimensions which will contribute to the concept of customer emotions and behavior. The current Covid-19 pandemic create an uncertainty in hospitality and tourism industry. Likewise, customer expectation and behavior might inconsistent due to the implementation of new norm of life, especially 2-meter distance among people. Therefore, it is highly suggested, further study should be investigated spatial distance as moderate between servicescape and place attachment. This analysis could worth attention on how this distance among people in the service environment moderates the level of attachment and customer behavior while receiving the services.

In conclusion, studying resort hotels can be beneficial for individuals who aim to understand the tourism and hospitality industry's dynamics. This study explores how studying resort hotels from a general perspective can lead to a better understanding of the industry as a whole. The current work reveals that the influence of physical and social conditions and a virtual environment have the same potential to evoke customer attachment and behavior in the context of resort hotels. Therefore, this study contribute to the theory development, new knowledge, and literature in the field of servicescape, place attachment, and customer loyalty. Furthermore, it discusses how the insights gained from this research can help resort hotels develop strategies to attract more tourists and improve their offerings. Resort hotels play a significant role in the tourism industry, as they are responsible for providing tourists with an array of services and amenities. Studies suggest that resort hotels can help to attract more tourists by providing high-quality facilities, various recreational services, attractive locations and pleasant people which create unique experiences that contributes in attachment and loyalty. This also enhanced by Huang, Wang, and Chen (2019), the provision of quality services, amenities, facilities, and various recreational activities is critical in attracting and retaining tourists. This shows that resort hotels should aim to offer unique experiences that go beyond the traditional offerings of a typical hotel. To be more in depth, existing research suggests that the success of resort hotels is often linked to their ability to create a place identity/brand identity/place attachment and maintain a positive reputation. For example, resort hotels can invest in upgrading their physical factors, social factors, or intangible factor “website” to provide high-quality offerings that align with the preferences of their target customers. A strong identity can help resort hotels differentiate themselves

from their competitors. Resort hotels can achieve a strong identity by offering unique experiences that align with the preferences of their target customers and finally foster loyalty among customers (Avcikurt and Timur, 2018).

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