Discussing the Relationships between Servicescape, Trust and Customers’ Choice of Restaurant in Taiwan.

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ABSTRACT

While literature focusing on the constructs of the environmental factors of servicescape and trust are relatively common in Western countries, the empirical studies which focus on the Chinese context of the restaurant service sector are rather limited and need to be expanded. The purpose of this study is to fill in some of this gap in research by analysing the relationships between servicescape, trust and customers’ choice of restaurant within the Chinese cultural society in Taiwan. This study concludes that trust has a very strong positive association for customers’ choice of restaurant in Taiwan. On the other hand, although empirical findings have shown that servicescape is a very important factor in affecting customers’ intentions and purchasing behaviour, this study reveals that servicescape is not an important element for customers’ choice of small Chinese restaurants in Taiwan. Consequently, this study suggests that for different customers from different countries with different eating cultures, the servicescape elements may not apply to all of these customers.

Key words: Servicescape, Trust, Cultural diversity, Chinese Restaurant.

Introduction

Since Kolter (1973, p.61) indicates that “atmospheres may become the chief form of competition. People will become as concentrated with how the store or office ‘feels’ as they will be with the goods that are offered”, the concept of a servicescape was therefore subsequently provided by Booms and Bitner (1982) to emphasise the impact of the physical environment in which a service process takes place. The physical environment will influence customers’ purchasing behaviour and create an image particularly apparent for service industry (Bitner, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 1985; Booms and Bitner, 1982; Kotler, 1973). According to Bitner (1992), the term servicescape consists of three dimensions. These are ambience; special layout; and signs, symbols and artifacts (as shown in Figure 1). In fact, there are considerable of studies have examined the effects of general servicescape factors within the service environment. For example, Turley and Milliman (2000) indicate that the music played in shops is the most extensively studied element, and that the background music in a retail store has a significant impact on a variety of consumer behaviours; such as consumptions and time spent in the shops and so forth (e.g. Milliman, 1986 and 1982; Areni and Kim, 1994; Yalch and Spangenberg, 1990; Hui et al., 1997). Baker et al. (1994) examine the relationships between store environment and store image. Their study reports that ambience has a greater influence on store image than the design factors. Likewise, a study of restaurant customers conducted by Ward et al. (1992) indicates that “customers’ inferences about the prototypicality of restaurants were strongly influenced by environment cues” (Baker et al., 1994, p.329). Hirsch (1995) even expresses that the aroma in a casino may enhance the gambling mood of casino patrons.

In addition, in the areas of management and marketing, trust has been suggested as an important element in the business environment (e.g. Harris and Goode, 2004; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Hess, 1995; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust is based on the belief that some behaviours will take place as expected (Knoll and Jarvenpaa, 1998). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p.23) define trust as “confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity.” There are further descriptions of trust; for example trust leads to higher customer loyalty (Agustin and Singh, 2005); trust urges lower opportunism (Rindfleisch and Moorman, 2003); trust creates more service usage (Maltz and Kohli, 1996); trust is a potentially important factor that influences consumer behaviour (Bredahl, 2001); and trust provides greater commitment (Jap and Ganesan, 2000). Overall, Grayson et al. (2008) contend that trust has a positive influence on the behaviours and attitudes of a company’s customers.
According to the above exposition, it can be found that foregoing studies concerning environmental factors or servicescape are relatively common in Western countries. However, the empirical studies which focus on Chinese societies are rather more limited (e.g. Liu and Jang, 2009; Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008; Hwang, 2007), or focus on a retailing environment within a traditional Western shop (e.g. Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008). They may ignore the factors of cultural and organisational diversities. Ezeh and Harris (2007) strongly claim that servicescape research should consider the concept of cultural diversity and the need for this to be expanded. Furthermore, trust indeed plays a very important role and has been studied to a great extent in Chinese society. However, according to the previous literature on trust in Chinese society, it is largely limited to trust and business behaviour (Lui, 1998); or trust in family matters or personal relationships (Ip, 2008; Kopnina, 2005).

This study concentrated on the importance of servicescape and trust on customers’ choice of small Chinese restaurant which relies on customers’ own experience within a Chinese society in Taiwan. The reasons for the selection of small Chinese restaurants are, firstly, that there are numerous small Chinese restaurants found on the streets of Taiwan. Customers find it easy to discover different restaurants in a short time. Different restaurants provide different services, servicescape, and may have differing trust levels based on customers’ views. Secondly, the restaurant industry has increased competition and greater expectations from customers (Lee and Hing, 1995). Kotler (1973, p58) also said “restaurants provide a physical product, foods, and the culinary services of cooking, serving, and cleaning up”. They may therefore have many potential benefits that could emerge from conducting customer-based evaluations of trust and servicescape. We consequently employed the small Chinese restaurants as the target sample due to not only ease of access in collecting the data, but also due to the fact that restaurants are a single function activity, unlike for example hotels or shopping malls.

The outcome variable, customers’ choice of restaurant which relies on customers’ own experience (CCRRE), represents the extent to which factors arise from servicescape and trust scales, because customers select restaurants on the basis of their own past experience. For restaurant customers, a significant relationship was found from customers’ perceived experience to re-consumption in the restaurants (Clark and Wood, 1999). More specifically, customers’ perceived experience can connect to customers’ satisfaction or dissatisfaction (e.g. Walsh et al., 2009; Anderson and Mittal, 2000). At the same time, customer satisfaction has a positive relationship with customer loyalty (Walsh et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2005). Hence, the dependent variable (CCRCE) can infer that customers’ satisfaction or loyalty arises from independent variables. Therefore, a question was designed to incorporate ‘my choice of restaurant depends upon my own experience’, from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree.
Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Based on the review of pertinent literature as noted above, a conceptual framework was established (as presented in Figure 2).

Figure 2: A Framework of Servicescape, Trust and CCRCE.

![Diagram of Servicescape, Trust and CCRCE](image)

H1: Servicescape has a positive influence on CCRCE.

Next, trust is conceivably an important factor that influences consumer behaviour. The importance of trust is manifested in the high number of studies (e.g. Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Rindfleisch and Moorman, 2003; Hess, 1995; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) which directly connect trust with customers’ attitudes (Grayson et al., 2008; Agustin and Singh, 2005; Bredahl, 2001; Jap and Ganesan, 2000). Although there is no doubt of the importance of trust within Chinese society, as already described previous studies of trust were largely limited to the relationship between trust and business behaviour, or trust in family matters or personal relationships. Furthermore, Walsh and Beatty (2007) also found that existing studies put more emphasis on industrial customers or multiple stakeholder groups (e.g. Walsh et al., 2006; Fombrun et al., 2000), and largely ignored the end user. For the food industry, trust is potentially an important factor that influences consumer behaviour (Frewer and Salter, 2003; Bredahl, 2001). Hence, it can be hypothesised that:

H2: Trust has a positive influence on CCRCE.

In addition, we also included trust as a moderating variable (M.V). Although linear relationships (correlation and linear regression) may provide useful information in exploring potential associations between independent variable (I.V) and dependent variable (D.V), “what if an independent-dependent
variable relationship is affected by another independent variable?” (Hair et al., 2010, p.180). In statistics, moderation occurs when the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable is reliant on a third variable. The third variable is referred to as the moderator variable or simply the moderator (Cohen et al., 2003). Thus, a moderator (moderating variable) could have an effect on the relationship between I.V and D.V; and an interaction emerges from the relationship between the variables, otherwise known as the moderation effect (Preacher et al., 2006; Irwin and McClelland, 2001). This is also known “as an interaction effect and is similar to the interaction term found in analysis of variance and multivariate analysis of variance” (Hair et al., 2010, p.180).

Moderated multiple regression (MMR) is a frequently used technique for detecting complex and non-linear relationships (e.g. Homburg and Giering, 2001; Aguinis, 1995; Cohen and Cohen, 1983). Moreover, due to the nature of MMR, “it employs what are known as moderator or interaction effects within the regression model that allows for the slope of one or more of the independent variables to vary across values of the moderator variable” (Goode and Harris, 2007, p.522). Accordingly, MMR allows for greater flexibility when designing and testing a wide range of relationships between I.Vs and D.Vs through moderators. Aguinis (1995) demonstrated that much previous research has adopted moderators and concluded that moderating effects play critical roles in theories of management, social and behavioural sciences. For marketing research, MMR is a widely accepted technique (Homburg and Giering, 2001) due to MMR allowing a moderating effect to occur between I.V and D.V. Irwin and McClelland (2001, p.100) even indicate that “moderated relationships are central to marketing”.

As can be seen from Figure 2, trust was defined as a moderating variable in the current study to test whether it affects the relationship between servicescape and CCRCE. This study provides two points to explain the reasons for adopting trust as a moderator.

1. Trust is an “internal” factor which emerges from customers’ themselves. For example, “the variable most universally accepted as a basis of any human interaction or exchange is trust” (Gundlach and Murphy, 1993, p.41). Trust is intangible, but it can be experienced by every customer.

2. Trust encourages higher customer loyalty (Agustin and Singh, 2005; Doney and Cannon, 1997) and is potentially an important factor that influences consumer behaviour (Bredahl, 2001). Trust therefore has a strong effect on customers’ intentions (Goode and Harris, 2007; Harris and Goode, 2004; Jones et al., 2000).

Accordingly, this study employed trust as a moderating variable to investigate whether it affects the relationships between independent variables and CCRCE. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that:

\[ H_3: \text{Trust moderates the relationship between servicescape and CCRCE.} \]

**Questionnaire Design**

This section was divided into two parts; questions relate to servicescape (Bitner, 1992) and trust (Hess, 1995).

**Servicescape**

Bitner’s (1992) model was employed for the questionnaire design in this study. Bitner’s model “gave us the first clear view of the servicescape as a whole, and the components of the servicescape” (Cockrill et al., 2008, p.193). This model has also been used by numerous recent studies (e.g. Harris and Ezeh, 2008; Cockrill et al., 2008; Reimer and Kueha, 2005). The questions for the servicescape was gathered by retrospective experience sampling, that is, customer were asked to answer the questions that that restaurants’ reputation caused by the servicescape issues. The part of the questionnaire included a set of closed-ended questions. The ambience was measured using a five-item scale developed from the studies of Wakefield and Baker (1998), Wakefield and Baker (1996), Harris and Ezeh (2008). The questions on the layout were also adopted from previous studies; such as those by Wakefield and Baker (1998) and Wakefield and Baker (1996). All items used a Likert-type
five-point response scale. This ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

**Trust**

Seven items relating to ‘trust’ that were designed by Hess (1995) were used in the questionnaire for this research survey. The Hess measure was originally established to judge customers’ trust in car sales. Harris and Goode (2004) reviewed the available trust measures and found that the Hess measure is the most applicable for customers’ emotions, due to both the measure being explicitly perceptual in nature and the scale being designed to measure customers’ trust. Consequently, the Hess measure can be seen as the most appropriate and straight-forward method in testing the trust from customers towards the service industry. For this study, this measure may be the best to adopt as customers can easily understand the ‘trust scales’.

It needs to be noted that some of the original items of servicescape adopted by Wakefield and Baker (1998 and 1996); Harris and Ezeh (2008), and trust used by Hess (1995) were omitted and replaced by other items. Although there are many previous research into servicescape and trust has been undertaken, in order to gauge these concepts in a restaurant context, there was a requirement for scale development and adaptation. Therefore, the items used in this survey were identical; with the exception of a change of industry and other re-wordings.

**Findings and Discussion**

The data was collected in Southern Taiwan. Overall, 214 questionnaires were eventually included for data analysis; 135 of the respondents were male (63%) and 79 (37%) were female. Next, the principal component analysis (PCA) with Direct Oblimin rotation was undertaken. Only the factor loadings above 0.5 will be displayed, making the output easier to interpret (Hair et al., 2010).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. PCA of Servicescape</th>
<th>Pattern Component1</th>
<th>Coefficients Component2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambience A</td>
<td>0.571</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambience B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambience C</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambience D</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambience E</td>
<td>0.762</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout A</td>
<td>0.573</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout B</td>
<td>0.760</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout C</td>
<td>0.888</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout D</td>
<td>0.832</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalues</td>
<td>3.991</td>
<td>1.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Variance</td>
<td>39.906</td>
<td>12.976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative %</td>
<td>52.882</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KMO</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bartlett's Test of Sphericity</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Suppress absolute values less than 0.5
** PCA with Direct Oblimin rotation
*** Two components were extracted
According to Table 1, for the servicescape scale, there were two components with eigenvalues over 1, 3.99 and 1.30, explaining 39.91% and 12.98% of the variance respectively. The PCA output of the servicescape factors gave a very clear result. Each of the variables loaded strongly in the expected components, and each component was represented by a number of strongly loaded variables. For further analysis therefore, two new variables were obtained; Layout scale (LS) and Ambience scale (AS). Furthermore, for ‘trust’ there was only one eigenvalue that exceeded 1, in turn explaining 92.60% of the variance. Both of the two results of the PCA above, the KMO and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity were passed (Pallant, 2007). Hence, the factors were accepted.

Table 2. Reliability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambience scale</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout scale</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, as shown on Table 2, the values of Cronbach’s α were higher than 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978), or higher than 0.60 (Peterson, 1994). In general, the values of Cronbach’s α in the Table 2 are higher than the generally agreed value 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010; Pallant, 2007; Nunnally, 1978). Although one value of alpha is lower than 0.70 in the subgroup for layout scale, the value is 0.61 and adopted by Horng and Chen (1998), and Nunnally (1967), this can be considered acceptable.

The convergent validity and discriminant validity tests were also undertaken. The convergent validity was tested by the correlations between latent variables given by the PCA and each of the related items (Hair et al., 2010). The values of correlations were high and in the expected direction, suggesting an acceptable level of convergent validity. Table 3 shows the correlations between latent variables obtained from PCA and each related items. The values in the table are high and in the expected direction, suggesting an acceptable level of convergent validity.

Table 3. Summary of Convergent Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent variables</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Item-total correlation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(1)0.71 (2)0.78 (3)0.84 (4)0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(1)0.65 (2)0.80 (3)0.81 (4)0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(1)0.94 (2)0.97 (3)0.98 (4)0.93 (5)0.98 (6)0.97 (7)0.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Correlation Between Constructs and Summary of AVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>LS</th>
<th>AS</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>0.45**/0.20</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>0.14/0.02</td>
<td>0.11/0.01</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The level of discriminant validity of the servicescape was gauged via the adoption of the test suggested by Ryu et al. (2008), and Fornell and Larcker (1981). Ryu et al. (2008) indicates that discriminant validity exists because the within-construct item correlations are generally higher than the between-construct item correlations. The correlation coefficients presented in this Tables 5.3 and 5.4 suggest that discriminant validity exists because the within-construct item correlations (see Table 5.3) are generally higher than the between-construct item correlations (see Table 5.4). Specifically, “correlation patterns within constructs differ from the correlation patterns among constructs,
suggesting the measures have acceptable level of discriminant validity” (Ryu et al., 2008, p.465).

Average Variance Extracted (AVE), another alternative factor-based method for assessing discriminant validity was proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). “The AVE (the average variance shared between a construct and its measures) measure should be greater than the variance shared between the construct and other construct in the model, for example, the squared correlation between two constructs” (Hulland, 1999, p.200). As can be seen from Table 4, the AVEs, as marked in bold, were higher than the squared inter-construct correlations. For example, 0.20, the squared inter-construct correlation between LS and AS. In addition, Hair et al. (2010, p.709) also suggest that “an AVE of 0.5 or higher is a good rule of thumb suggesting adequate convergence”. The values of AVE are larger than 0.5 and therefore discriminant validity is established. Consequently, it was concluded that the servicescape scale used in the study is acceptable in terms of reliability and validity.

**Hypothesis testing**

After having established reliability and validity of the constructs used in this research, the next stage is to undertake formal testing of hypotheses of this study. The results of the correlation analysis conducted to determine the magnitude and direction of the associations between the independent variables and the dependent variables are depicted in Table 5. As presented, the relationships between the servicescape (LS and AS) and the dependent variable were investigated using a Pearson correlation coefficient. Although they have positive relationships, the correlations were very low in value and thus are not shown as being statistically significant factors. On the other hand, there was a very strong and positive correlation between trust and CCRCE, r = 0.89, n =214, p < 0.001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CCRCE</th>
<th>LS</th>
<th>AS</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCRCE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.45**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.89**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**P<0.01 level (2-tailed)**

Table 6 shows a significant overall model between the independent variables and CCRCE where F (5, 218) = 200.28, p < 0.001, R² = 0.83, B= 2.68 and t-statistic = 42.21. Assumptions of multiple regressions of multicollinearity, linearity, and heteroscedasticity were passed. Only the variable of Trust was presented as being significant in this model, the same as the correlation model. Accordingly, hypotheses 1 and 3 were rejected, while hypothesis 2 was accepted. The important result that emerged from this study is similar to that found in previous research conducted by Frewer and Salter (2003), and Bredahl (2001); trust is potentially an important factor that influences consumer behaviour. In this study, trust has a strong and positive relationship with customers’ choice of restaurant which relies on customers’ own experience. An inference can be drawn that trust may contribute to customer satisfaction (Walsh et al., 2009; Anderson and Mittal, 2000), and then further affect customers’ loyalty (Walsh et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2005). On the other hand, the results of servicescape (LS and AS) show that servicescape factors are not statistically significant elements in the models. This finding is very unusual compared with much of the American and British literature. This may be because this study focuses on ‘small’ Chinese restaurants or on the different eating cultures between that of Chinese society and Western countries, with the most relevant literatures coming from Western cultures. The importance of servicescape is very dependent on culture and may be applicable only in Western high-income economies. This study therefore provides few potential reasons as to why servicescape is not an important factor for a Chinese restaurant in Taiwan or Greater Chinese society.
Table 6. Summary of MMR for CCRCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>t-statistics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direct linkages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Layout scale (LS)</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambience layout (AS)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 2:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td><strong>31.35</strong>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderated linkages</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesis 3:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LS x Trust</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS x Trust</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Diagonal statistics**

- $R^2 = 0.83$
- Multicollinearity: Passed (checked via Tolerance and VIF)
- Linearity: Passed
- Heteroscedasticity: Passed

***Statistical significance at the 0.001 level;

- Multicollinearity: Passed (checked via Tolerance and VIF)
- Singularity: Passed
- Normality: Passed
- Outliers: checked by Residuals: Passed
- checked by Mahal. Distance: Passed (over critical value)
- Cook’s Distance: Passed (less than 1)

**Further group activity** - A description from Chow et al. (2007, p.706) that “in hospitality services, socially oriented activities and exchanges often provide the primary impetus for visiting one hospitality establishment over another, and this is particularly true of the restaurant industry in the Chinese context”. Chinese people engage in most consumption activities, such as having a meal with family, friends, and colleagues in ‘frontstage’ or public (Eckhards and Houston, 1998; Becker et al., 1999) also conclude that. Another research study conducted in Hong Kong by Kivela (1997) indicated that the role or importance of ambience in restaurants changed with different restaurant styles. For example, in Hong Kong only those from engineering/technical groups or business-occasion respondents selected ambience as being an important factor for restaurant selection. On the other hand, when dining out with family or for convenience, ambience and comfort level in the restaurants were not seen as determinant factors in their choice of restaurant. In the ethnic Chinese or Taiwanese eating culture, people like to go to a restaurant with people they know, and to sit at a round table conversing and eating together. Thus, the built environment or the ‘atmospherics’ of the restaurant may not be an important point for the attention of customers when choosing a restaurant.

**Similarity and functional design** - Most small Chinese restaurants in Taiwan are similar. The internal decoration is designed for function, not for comfort. For example, Chinese restaurants in Taiwan mostly provide rounded tables and stools. This type of furniture makes it easier for customers to converse with each other, as well as to eat and drink. The furniture is also easy to clean and long-lasting.

**Cost consideration** - In providing a positive and interesting servicescape within a restaurant, the owner-manager of the restaurant requires the expenditure of time and effort. Accordingly, the price of meals will increase and customers will have to pay more for food. However, as discussed above, the eating culture in Taiwan constitutes customers enjoy a cordial atmosphere with family or friends.
rather than the ‘atmospherics’ of a restaurant. In other eating cultures, for example the French culture or some luxury market customers, they would be longing for comfort in a restaurant and the ambience or atmosphere of the restaurant may be key factors for them when choosing a restaurant.

**Culture concern**- Watson (1997) describes the influences that American fast-food restaurant chain McDonald’s has had on local markets in Southeast-Asia. For example in Taiwan, French fries (chips) have become the snack food for young people. Interestingly, Taiwanese customers may prefer to stay longer in restaurants such as McDonald's or KFC than they would do in a traditional Chinese restaurant on the weekend or during holidays, because they enjoy the cheerful atmosphere and air conditioning that is provided in the summer. Another piece of research conducted by Venkatraman and Nelson (2008) indicates the existence of a ‘New China consumer’ (Thomson, 1997). These are consumers that have recently received a degree from a prestigious Beijing university. They tend to appreciate the built environment or servicescape of the Starbucks chain in Beijing. There are four reasons that Starbucks have captured these ‘New China consumers’ (Venkatraman and Nelson, 2008), two of these relate to servicescape which are as follows:

1. Starbucks as ‘Home’: the furniture provided inside allows customers to feel comfortable, free, to relax and be at peace, in contrast to the noise and crowds on the outside.
2. Starbucks as a ‘Constellation’ of personal space: inside Starbucks they feel they have a ‘personal world’ and a ‘personal space’, and they can have conversation with friends. In addition, they can do homework, read books, conduct business, surf the internet with their own laptop; etc. These ‘New China consumers’ are captured deeply by this ‘private world’ and ‘world brand’.

This eventually can be concluded that when Chinese or Taiwanese consumers want to enjoy a restaurant with good servicescape, they may look for restaurants from different cultures.

**Conclusions and Implications**

Although previous studies suggested that servicescape or atmospherics is an important factor and has a positive relationship with customers’ behaviours in the various service environments (e.g. Harris and Ezch, 2008; Turley and Milliman, 2000; Hirsch, 1995; Areni and Kim, 1994; Baker et al., 1994; Bitner, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 1985; Booms and Bitner, 1982; Kolter, 1973), this study concludes that servicescape is not a critical factor in customers’ choice of restaurant in Taiwan. This result reflects on Ezch and Harris (2007), in that servicescape research cannot neglect the aspect of cultural diversity. This study also provides some potential reasons as to why servicescape is not an important factor when customers are selecting a restaurant in Taiwan.

It should be noted that this study was limited to Chinese restaurants in Taiwan. There have been only a few pieces of academic research emphasising the areas of servicescape and trust conducted in Taiwan. We could not find many related subjects from Taiwan for reference. Further research should be conducted on the role played by, or the importance of, the factors of servicescape and trust in different service sectors within Chinese society; such as shopping malls, hotels and other leisure industries in which customers may have to consider the servicescape when making their choice. Moreover, it is suggested that female customers’ purchasing behaviours are easily influenced by the people that they know (Slama and Tashchian, 1985). This indicates when female customers are selecting a restaurant; they may be affected eventually by recommendations from people they know. Also, man and woman may have different expectations of servicescape in a service environment (Hwang, 2007). Hwang (2007) also suggests that the male-oriented service products need to meet females’ expectations. Therefore, for further servicescape research it not only has to consider the regional differences but also the gender.
Reference


Zeithaml, V. A, Parasuraman, A. and Berry, L. L (1985), Problems and Strategies in Service