

# Exploring Territorial Elements in Servicescape: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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## Abstract

This article aims to conduct a comprehensive literature review to delve into the territorial elements within servicescape. In the service industry, customer territoriality can reflect a customer's identification with the business, enhance their purchasing inclination, or, conversely, lead to strong defensive or retaliatory behaviors towards other customers or employees, significantly affecting business operations. Understanding customer territoriality is crucial for comprehending customer behavior. The article begins by introducing the concepts of servicescape and territoriality, followed by the identification of territorial elements within servicescape. The literature review encompasses research on various aspects of servicescape, including physical factors and social factors, with the aim of revealing how territorial elements influence customer behavior and experiences. Through this literature review, we provide profound insights into territorial elements within servicescape, underscoring their importance for service quality and customer satisfaction. These research findings are expected to offer practical information to practitioners and researchers on optimizing servicescape to enhance customer experiences. Finally, we discuss future research directions to advance the understanding of territorial elements in various servicescape.

**Keywords:** servicescape, territoriality, physical factor, social factor

## 1. Introduction

Bhabha (1994) introduced the theory of the "third space," which expanded our understanding of space. This third space transcends physical and mental dimensions, achieving an integration of time, space, and society. The significance of space to individuals has prompted deep reflection among numerous scholars. In research on Starbucks coffee shops, an interesting phenomenon was observed: most customers, after purchasing coffee, choose to

stay in the shop for an extended period in a comfortable spot (Song, 2019). From the perspective of the third space theory, the price of coffee is not solely derived from the cost of a cup. The duration of consumption is not the primary reason either. Instead, the customer's experience is shaped by factors like the spatial ambiance and the quality of service. The need for a territorial space or personal space is considered one of the essential human needs, closely linked to instinct (Casimir, 2021).

Before 2020, congestion was a common phenomenon in daily life. In public transport, shopping malls, and restaurants, we shared public spaces with others. However, even in this sharing, there emerged a sense of “personal ownership” of the public space (Powers, S. L, 2022). For instance, the first customers to arrive at a restaurant might feel a sense of priority over a dining table. In eateries and libraries, patrons use backpacks, books, and other personal items to occupy space on tables and chairs, ensuring a certain distance from others. Customers might signal to a server, saying, “Please come to my table to take my order.” Zoological literature refers to this behavior as territoriality, and its study has gradually expanded into fields like sociology and management (Kaufmann, 1983). Territoriality is a mechanism rooted in ownership, addressing boundaries both spatial and psychological (Agnew, 2020). In the service sector, as customers become involved in the production process, they interact with businesses, employees, and service scenarios, which can lead to a heightened sense of territoriality, directly influencing customer behavior. Customer territoriality can reflect a customer’s identification with a business and enhance purchasing inclination. Conversely, it might also prompt defensive or aggressive behavior toward other customers or staff, severely impacting business operations. Understanding customer territoriality is crucial for businesses to interpret customer behaviors accurately (Babin, 2023). Post-2020, under the influence of the COVID-19 virus, “social distancing” has become part of the new normal (Qian, 2020). To ensure health and safety, social distance has become a vital consideration for both consumers and businesses. We need to reconsider the consumer environment and maintain appropriate density to preserve the consumer experience. Therefore, consumer territorial perception should garner significant attention. Addressing territorial elements in the consumer environment becomes especially crucial (Tapia, 2021).

With the advancement of the economy, thanks to improved living standards and greater conveniences, people have intertwined consumption with leisure (Mansfield, 2020). Some scholars have pointed out that customers also seek to satisfy emotional or spiritual needs (Hindarsah, 2021). Driven by perceptions of territoriality, the servicescape will play an

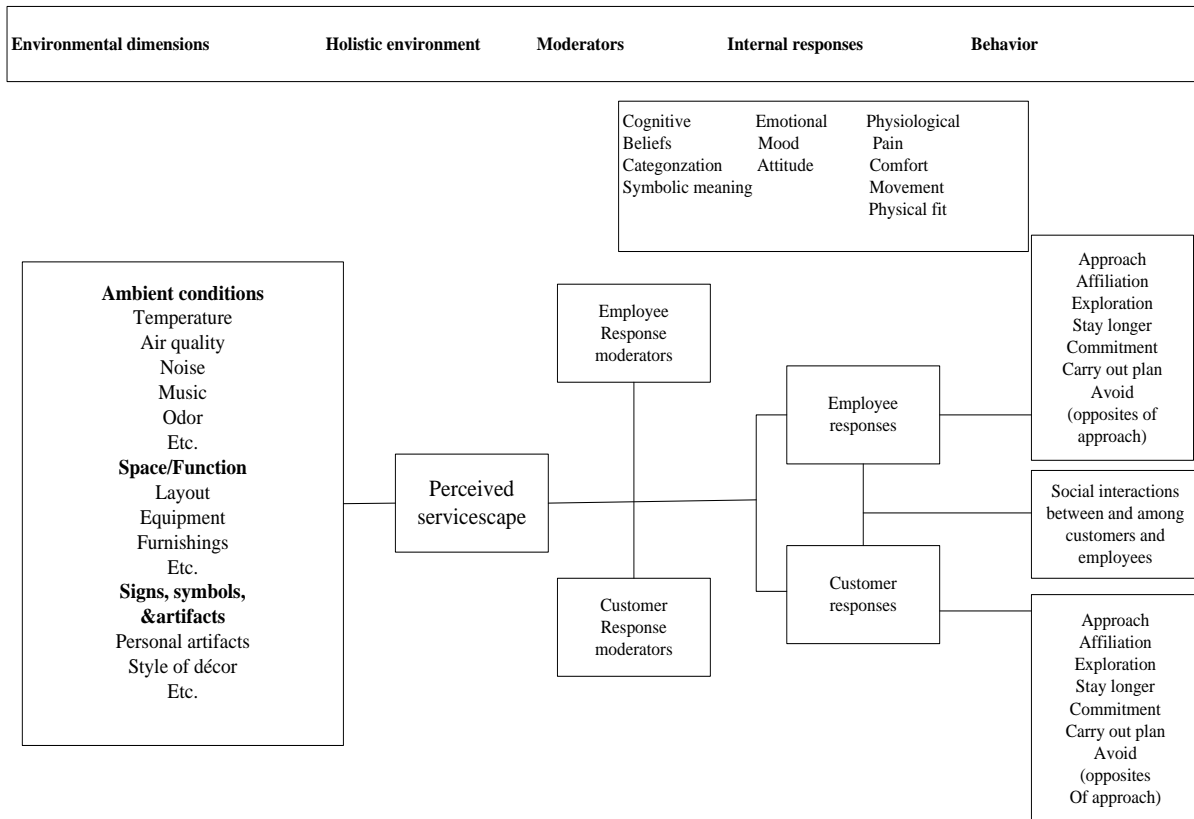
increasingly vital role. Kandampully (2023) believes that the servicescape is an essential tangible component of service, providing customers with cues that shape their perceptual impressions. With the rapid economic growth and changes in people’s lifestyles, consumers’ consumption habits are continuously evolving. Customers spend more extended periods in service venues and pay closer attention to service staff, fellow customers, tangible facilities, and the overall service atmosphere. Impressions of the servicescape influence customer behavior through various factors (Guo, 2022). Consequently, the servicescape is gradually becoming a crucial marketing tool to enhance customer consumption tendencies (Liu, 2023).

## 2. Theoretical Literature Review of Servicescape

The father of modern marketing, Kotler (1973), introduced the concept of the physical environment in 1973. He pointed out that the physical environment offers tangible stimuli to consumers and encompasses visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile sensations. He defined this carefully designed and controlled consumer environment with the term “atmospherics.” Kotler (1973) emphasized that such an environment can evoke specific emotional responses in consumers, enhancing their willingness to make purchases. He was the first to define the ambiance of a consumer setting as “the deliberate control and design of environmental factors” or “the intentional design of the environment to foster specific purchasing outcomes.” In 1984, Davis categorized the physical environment into three main types: tangible constructs, tangible stimuli, and symbols. American service marketing scholar, Bitner (1992), was the first to use the term “Servicescape” to refer to various tangible or intangible environmental elements within service institutions. She defined servicescape as “a physical environment established based on human reliance in the service industry.” She emphasized that this physical environment is a “built environment.” Bitner summarized it into three dimensions (See Figure 1): ① Ambient Conditions: This includes factors such as music, temperature, lighting, and odors. These conditions influence the customer’s perception of the surrounding environment. ② Space and Function: This dimension deals with the layout of equipment, furniture, and other furnishings, as well as their relative spatial relationships. The

spatial layout influences the customer's situational perception of the store. ③ Signs, Symbols, and Artifacts: Elements like guiding signs and artifacts fall under this category. These

are crucial in shaping the first impression of customers. The term "servicescape" has gradually become a common term used in service environment research.



**Figure 1.** Servicescape Model

Source: Bitner, 1992.

Baker (2002) argued that when defining the elements of a servicescape, in addition to considering tangible or intangible physical factors, one should also take into account interpersonal and social factors. By social factors, he refers to all individuals included within the servicescape. Baker highlighted that the appearance of staff in service institutions, the number of other customers in the service location, as well as behaviors that convey friendliness and welcome, can all influence customer perceptions. As a result, he categorized the servicescape into three dimensions: Ambient Cues: These pertain to the atmosphere and setting. Design Cues: Elements related to the physical layout and tangible aspects of the environment. Social Cues: This primarily relates to human elements in the environment, which includes other customers present as well as the employee of the company. In essence, Baker (2002) emphasized that human

interaction, both from the service employee's side and among customers, plays a crucial role in shaping the overall customer experience in a given servicescape.

Subsequently, some researchers expanded the scope of the servicescape from the physical dimension to less apparent dimensions, including social and symbolic dimensions influenced by social/group factors. For instance, Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003), drawing upon behavioral setting theory, introduced a conceptual framework for the "Social Servicescape." They emphasized the significant roles of social and symbolic elements within such social-centric servicescapes. They pointed out that the number of people in the environment and the emotions exhibited by other customers can impact a customer's emotional response, cognitive reactions, and purchasing intent. Their work highlighted the vital role of natural stimuli elements within the

servicescape, especially in the domain of public health. By incorporating natural elements into the servicescape's purview, they further broadened the understanding and implications of the servicescape concept. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) classified the social aspects of the servicescape as employees, customers, social density, and the emotions of others. Pizam and Tasci (2019) introduced the term "Experiencescape" to refer to the service manufacturers enhanced by an organizational culture of hospitality that includes employees and other stakeholders in that environment.

The aforementioned conceptual definitions demonstrate that as research into the servicescape has deepened over time, scholars have incorporated knowledge from diverse disciplines such as environmental psychology, cognitive psychology, organizational behavior, and health studies into the exploration of the servicescape. This interdisciplinary and multifaceted research has enriched the conceptual depth of the servicescape. The servicescape is no longer a concept solely relevant to marketing professionals; it represents an interdisciplinary proposition focused on the relationship between people and their environments (Kandampully, 2023).

### 3. Theoretical Literature Review of Territoriality

The understanding of concepts related to territory originates from existing literature on territoriality. Ardrey (1966) noted that territory implies "inviolability," a characteristic widely applied in studies of animal territoriality. Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1970) found that if an animal enters the territory marked by another animal, it is likely to face eviction or aggression from the "territorial holder," asserting their exclusive rights over that territory. Pastalan (1970) believed that territory is when an individual or group marks a specific limited space as exclusively theirs, prohibiting others from crossing its boundaries. This includes psychological possession of the territory, symbols, markers, and the control and arrangement over the delineated area. By the 1980s, due to similarities between animal group structures and human societal characteristics, territorial studies began to extend into the field of management to better understand behaviors like violence, resentment, and excessive dominance within a societal context. Research on territoriality also evolved from merely

physical spaces to encompass associated social relationships and public functions.

Beginning in 2005, scholars, adopting a perspective of social communication related to territorial behavior, began to recognize that individuals could experience territorial perceptions and behaviors at the organizational life level (Moon, 2020). The field of organizational behavior began to pay attention to employees' territorial behaviors (Monaghan, 2019). Brown (2005) provided a definition for territorial behavior, noting that it is a behavioral expression made by an individual upon recognizing the possessive rights over an object. Attention to customer territorial behavior in the marketing domain has gradually emerged with the deepening of service research, beginning later than in other fields. The increased interaction between customers and the servicescape during the service process, along with changes in customer roles, has directly fostered more in-depth research into customer territorial behaviors. Human territoriality is not limited to physical spaces. It places a stronger emphasis on psychological perceptions and can be influenced by factors such as social culture and group relationships, making its operational mechanism much more intricate.

In the field of service, there are three perspectives on the definition of territory (Antonsich, 2017):

**Scope Perspective:** This view posits that territory refers to an individual's sense of possession over a physical area or a social object. This perspective embodies the origin of the study and reflects the biological foundation of territoriality. Rooted in the origins of animal territorial studies, this viewpoint emphasizes the tangible boundaries or boundary experiences that customers may form during the service process or that employees might establish during production. For instance, early-arriving restaurant customers may have a prioritized feeling of possessing a dining table.

**Behavioral Perspective:** From this viewpoint, territory is understood as the behavioral expression of an individual's sense of possession over a physical or social object. This includes behaviors where individuals construct, communicate, maintain, and restore territories in connection with specific associated objects. In a marketing context, territorial consciousness is rooted in territorial behavior, combining the two



into a unified concept. For example, customers in restaurants or libraries may use personal items like backpacks or books to claim spaces on tables or chairs.

**Relational Perspective:** This perspective believes that territory refers to the demarcation of boundaries concerning physical areas or social objects between an individual and others within a social context. It emphasizes the concept of distinguishing oneself from others—asserting what’s “mine” rather than “yours.” For instance, early-arriving restaurant customers might call a server over saying, “Please come to my table to take the order.” The relational perspective on territory more effectively encapsulates the social and exclusivity factors present in marketing scenarios, aiding in a better understanding of the psychological mechanisms of territoriality. Closely related constructs in the field of management linked to territoriality include territorial consciousness and territoriality, emphasizing an individual’s sentiment in constructing territories. In recent years, due to the continuous development of service marketing and increasing interactions between customers, and between customers and businesses, there has been a growing focus on how territorial behavior impacts customers.

From the perspective of the service process, the delineation between customer relationships is the foundation of territorial behavior. Customers’ territorial feelings are more psychological, lacking a tangible basis (Kirk, 2018). The consciousness of territory is predominantly used for psychological analysis, making territorial behavior a focal point of service research. The definition of customer territory exhibits the following characteristics:

**Emphasis on Social Communication Function:** This stresses the act of marking a controlled range through territorial behavior, such as leaving personal belongings in front of a table or occupying an empty seat. Meanwhile, service processes involve interactions among the enterprise, customers, and other customers. It is challenging to delineate clear territorial boundaries, and the only guiding principle may be mutual constraints. Territorial behaviors also arise in part from discrepancies in understanding the service scope, process, and level of participation among the involved parties (Casimir, 2021).

**Broad Range of Behavioral Objects:** The object of customer territorial behavior might be the allocation process of

service resources or the brand communication process. Any inconsistency in territorial understanding can lead to strong manifestations of customer territorial behavior (Ashley, 2020). Unlike other fields that emphasize tangible ownership, the territorial behavior of customers in the service sector underscores psychological connections. The objects of behavior include brands, products, and scenarios, and territories are usually determined based on multi-party interactions, long-standing practices, and brand perception (Rubin, 1992).

**Diverse Behavioral Manifestations:** Customer territorial behaviors range from anger and scolding to physical confrontations. Their expressions might also be subtle, conveyed through body language or verbal communication. Some might not even have explicit behavioral displays, but they can still impact customer satisfaction.

**Dynamic Nature of Territorial Behavior:** Based on psychological experiences, customer territory changes with different consumption scenarios, especially when different enterprises or third-party customers are involved. Territorial behavior evolves with the objects involved and the progression of the service. Establishing customer territories within services is relatively challenging. Especially from a business perspective, managing customer territories to enhance service efficiency involves striking a balance between customer satisfaction and service efficiency. In essence, understanding and navigating customer territorial behaviors are essential for businesses aiming for high service quality and customer satisfaction.

Territoriality, or the attempt to control space, is often described as a fundamental human activity and might serve as a function of evolution (Lyman & Scott, 1967). Past research provides evidence for the role of territoriality in numerous human interactions. While much of the existing studies have focused on how consumers mark territories (Kirk et al., 2017; Ashley & Noble, 2014; Griffiths & Gilly, 2012), current research elaborates on the nuances in their reactions to territorial violations. Territorial behavior primarily refers to actions in the service process related to constructing, communicating, maintaining, and restoring affiliations to certain targets. It can be broadly categorized into marking behaviors and defensive behaviors:

**Marking Behavior:** This refers to the social construction of a target as a territory. Its main function is to communicate

with others and prevent them from entering, using, or violating the designated space. Customers showcase their personal identity, or their control over certain items or spaces, through means such as personal belongings, demarcation of areas, or process setups. If communication through marking behaviors is ineffective, it might escalate to defensive behaviors. Defensive Behavior: This signifies reactions to invasions of one's territory in various forms, emphasizing measures taken in response to territorial violations (Margalit, 2022). To maintain territorial boundaries, customers might intervene against territorial breaches using verbal or non-verbal behaviors, such as language or physical gestures. Marking can be divided into control tags and identity tags.

Control markers emphasize communicating territorial boundaries to others and reaffirming ownership. Examples include behaviors such as leaving signatures in public service spaces and occupying seats. Identity markers stress the transformation or personalization of the affiliated target to reflect one's own identity. Such behaviors include customizing services, reserving exclusive service areas, or designating specific service personnel. Hu & Jasper (2007) found that when service staff personalized their services, not only did customer satisfaction increase, but consumers also preferred patronizing service personnel with whom they were familiar and perceived as friendly. The classification of these four basic territorial behaviors is shown in the table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Four basic territorial behaviors

Behavior Type	Function	Example	Related Theory
Marking behavior			
Identity-oriented marking behavior	Building the Territory	Customized service, reserved exclusive service area, designated fixed service personnel for their own service	Theory of specificity
Control-oriented marking behavior	Declare territory	Take up seats, place personal items such as bags or cups on the empty seats next to them to prevent others from intruding and place empty tables and chairs near their seats to divide them from other customers	Role fuzzy theory
Defensive Behavior			
Anticipatory defensive behavior	Maintaining territory	Claiming that the seat next to is "occupied" and deliberately making "noise" to prevent others from approaching	Self-defense theory
Reactive defensive behavior	Remodeling the Territory	Individuals develop negative emotions after intrusion by others, such as complaints; or even overreactions, such as verbal or physical confrontations	frustration-aggression theory; Attribution theory

Source: Brown, (2005).

#### 4. Related Literature for Territoriality

The existing literature on territorial defenses in

the boundary theory literature suggests customer responses to territory infringements are about regaining control or relinquishing

control (Szlemko et al., 2008; Fraine et al., 2007). Research indicates that the objects of territoriality can be broadly divided into two categories: one is the service enterprise, and the other is other customers. For service enterprises, territorial incidents often arise due to the actions and words of front-line employees, such as deciding whether to let customers enter during the last few minutes before closing. For other customers, territorial events are typically influenced by conflicts over resources when customers are simultaneously availing services, such as sharing a table during meals. Territorial behaviors can easily occur when there are diverging perceptions between the service enterprise and other customers. Individuals often employ symbolic barriers to demarcate their territories, signifying their right to use a specific place (Ruback & Juieng, 1997). For instance, they might place bags or jackets on the seat next to them and might verbally communicate “this seat is taken.” Existing literature on territorial defenses in the boundary theory suggests that customer responses to territorial infringements revolve around regaining control or relinquishing it (Szlemko et al., 2008; Fraine et al., 2007; Mattila, 2014). In a study of territorial responses, (Kirk et al., 2017) demonstrated across a variety of contexts (e.g., restaurant, workplace, retail and public market) that consumers were likely to safeguard personal boundaries from perceived infringement when there was a strong feeling of psychological ownership over a person, object or space and another individual was signaling a similar level of ownership. Previous studies in the context of closing times and other settings found that consumers can respond to territorial infringements in three primary ways (Ashley & Gilbert, 2020; Kirk et al., 2017): retaliation, withdrawal, or abandoning (temporarily or permanently) the territory, with actions of joining or avoiding. Consistent with existing literature on reactive defenses (responses to perceived invasions by others) in boundary theory, potential consumer reactions include: verbally expressing and/or acting in ways to retaliate against and disrupt the intruder’s objectives (retaliatory speech/actions); altering behaviors to genuinely accommodate the intruder (joining/deferential actions); and temporarily or permanently exiting the domain, viewing it as not worth defending (abandonment) (Szlemko, 2008; Ashley & Noble,

2014; Ashley & Gilbert). The concept of psychological ownership is a sentiment, emphasizing “This is mine!” The dark side of psychological ownership may manifest as territorial behavior (Brown, Lawrence, & Robinson, 2005). Some scholars, broadening the scope of their investigations, have expanded the definition of territory from physical spaces to psychological ones.

Previous research has emphasized control-oriented territorial markings, noting that exerting control over a target sends a clear signal of ownership, and control by others over an object is often the most conspicuous evidence of possession (Furby, 1978). For instance, consumers signal control over spaces by marking their territories using their belongings, such as seats in service scenarios (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012). Territoriality in marketing environments remains underexplored, with existing literature primarily focusing on consumers’ feelings of ownership over the physical spaces of retail stores and public areas. Griffiths and Gilly (2012) posit that servicescapes, or tangible service environments like coffee shops, are especially conducive to fostering territorial behaviors among customers, as these venues encourage customers to linger and carve out their own spaces as extensions of their workspace or home. More conspicuous behaviors include spreading out personal items like coats, bags, and even trash. However, less overt behaviors that can be viewed as territorial claims include speaking loudly on the phone; in such instances, consumers proceed as if they are in their own living rooms. Treating these “third places” as extensions of one’s own home facilitates the satisfaction of key psychological ownership motives for consumers, addressing the need for having a place to call their own (Pierce et al., 2003). Researchers have identified and discussed various themes including: coffee shops serving as domestic or work domains, consumers desiring undisturbed privacy even in public spaces, adaptive and defensive responses to invasions, invaders staking space to assert territory, consumer beliefs in territorial rights and primacy of occupancy, hegemonic beliefs regarding territoriality and precedence, varying views on the permissible tenure over areas, such as a perpetual lease (after purchasing a product) versus a lease until the product is consumed, and the belief conflicts among consumers potentially affecting the organization. In various

retail settings, Ashley and Noble (2014) have pointed out that consumers can exhibit territorial responses not just towards other consumers but also towards front-line service staff.

### 5. Territorial Factors of Servicescape

Since Baker categorized the servicescape into three dimensions: Ambient Cues, Design Cues, and Social Cues, subsequent researchers have expanded the scope of the servicescape from the physical dimension to less apparent dimensions, including social and symbolic dimensions influenced by societal/group effects (Andres et al., 2016). For instance, Tombs and McColl-Kennedy (2003), drawing from behavioral setting theory, proposed a conceptual framework for the 'Social Servicescape,' emphasizing the crucial roles of social and symbolic elements in socially-oriented servicescape. They argued that the number of people in an environment and the emotions displayed by other customers can influence customers' emotional responses, cognitive reactions, and purchase intentions. Rosenbaum (2009) incorporated attention restoration theory to elucidate the pivotal role of natural stimuli elements in the servicescape within the public health domain, thereby integrating natural elements into the servicescape paradigm and further broadening its essence. Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) segmented the social aspect of the servicescape into employees, customers, social density, and emotions of others. Pizam and Tasci (2019) introduced the term 'Experiencescape' to denote an environment enhanced by a hospitality-driven organizational culture that includes employees and other stakeholders. Reflecting on the aforementioned research outcomes related to 'servicescape,' this study, drawing inspiration from Rosenbaum & Montoya, partitions the servicescape into social density, service personnel, and other customers. Social density can be categorized under physical factors, while service personnel and other customers can be grouped under social factors. Through an extensive literature review, territorial elements were identified and examined.

#### 5.1 Physical Factors (Social Density)

A plethora of literature focuses on the influence of various physical environmental variables in a setting (such as music, lighting, temperature, odor, noise, color, flooring, wall materials, aisle

width, product categorization, and foot traffic design) on cognitive evaluations (e.g., satisfaction, perceived service quality, emotions, attitudes, trust, and store impressions). Moreover, this research also examines their impact on an array of behaviors (like dwell time, purchase quantity, impulsive buying, and revisit intentions). Smith & Curnow (1966) posited that loud music is detrimental for extending customers' in-store dwell time and increasing sales volume. Smith & Burns (1996) discovered that in warehouse-style grocery stores, displaying vast quantities of just a few products on both sides of an aisle can foster a perception of low pricing among consumers. They found that the presentation of many units of a few product varieties was significantly more effective than displaying a lesser quantity of a wide variety of products. Some scholars have noted that abundant in-store signage can profoundly influence consumer behavior. It has been observed that people are far more sensitive to changes in ceiling height than changes in room width or length. Rooms with higher ceilings convey a sense of spaciousness, whereas rooms with lower ceilings are more conducive to activities or behaviors that are cozy and intimate. It's been found by some researchers that overcrowding can induce feelings of anxiety, anger, and boredom, with different situations or individuals evoking varied emotions. In daily life, individuals often maintain a certain comfortable physical or interpersonal distance from others. However, in crowded environments, this sense of comfortable distance is disrupted. Individuals are forced into close proximity with others, resulting in perceived intrusions into their personal space. When judging crowdedness and density, individuals are influenced by both spatial and social dimensions. For instance, in a retail environment, factors like the quantity of merchandise, the number of interior fixtures, ceiling height, and aisle width can enhance or suppress physical stimuli that contribute to perceptions of crowding. On the other hand, the number of individuals present and the level of social interaction between them can also influence perceptions of crowdedness. For the same physically crowded environment, individuals' perceptions of crowdedness can vary. Under spatial constraints, both physical and social crowding can make individuals feel that their personal territory has been invaded (Worchel &



Teddle, 1976).

The application of social density in the marketing field has a 'double-edged sword' effect. Existing research has found that the population density in crowded stores doesn't always negatively impact consumers. Crowded stores often stimulate consumers' sense of identification, competitive emotions, and the desire to continue shopping (Park, 2019). In restaurants with a high volume of patrons, some customers may adopt the idea that 'the more people there are, the more popular it is.' The more crowded the place is, the more they feel that the restaurant's offerings, be it taste or service, will be satisfactory. Therefore, in such situations, crowdedness has a positive impact on the store's reputation (Khan, 2021).

Similarly, in settings like bars or concerts, a more crowded environment can heighten consumers' levels of excitement, evoke emotions, and lead them to form higher evaluations. On the other hand, numerous studies have shown that crowded environments can elevate negative emotions among in-store customers, adversely affecting them (Hwang, 2012; Anninou, 2018). Saegert (1973) found that crowding can also reduce consumers' ability to recall details about products and store layouts, leading to decreased store satisfaction. Under highly crowded conditions, consumers may feel they lack control over their surroundings, feel an invasion of their personal space, and thus, exhibit avoidance behaviors (Wei, 2019). The loss of this sense of control can easily place them in a tense, pressured, and confused state, potentially leading to low evaluations of the store and its products. Moreover, consumers often perceive crowded stores as venues for lower-class activities and interpret less crowded stores as spaces for upper-class activities. This leads them to assume products in crowded settings are of low price and quality, associating them with lower-class consumption behaviors. As a result, some luxury stores prevent in-store crowding by having people queue outside, providing a more comfortable and pleasant shopping environment (Alazzawi, 2012).

## 5.2 Social Factor

Kim (2018) provided a meticulous and scientific categorization of the physical cues in service scapes, but their research on cues within these scapes was limited to physical ones, neglecting interactions and communication between

individuals present. For many consumers, the pursuit during consumption extends beyond monetary value. It also encompasses experiential values such as the degree of fun or aesthetic appeal. Moreover, shopping is a notably social activity often undertaken with friends and family (Griffith, 2003). This means that customers seek to satisfy their social needs during consumption. Such social motivations for shopping include experiences outside the home and communication with others. It's evident, therefore, that in addition to physical cues in a service environment, there are also social cues, such as service staff and other customers. These cues cater to the various motivations customers might have during their consumption experience.

Baker (2002) believed that when defining elements of the servicescape, in addition to considering tangible or intangible physical factors, one should also take into account interpersonal and social aspects. The social factors primarily pertain to human elements, denoting aspects related to individuals within the environment, including other customers and company service employee. Baker (2002) highlighted that the sense of crowding in a shopping environment, specifically the number of other customers present, can significantly influence consumers' perceptions of that setting. Following this, the importance of social elements in servicescape has increasingly been recognized. It is posited that the contact between front-line service employee and customers plays a crucial role in shaping perceived service quality (Line, 2019). The language, demeanor, attitude towards customers, responsiveness of the service employee, and influences from other customers can all impact the emotional and cognitive reactions of consumers, which in turn determines their purchasing behaviors and willingness to return. Other customers in a retail setting are a vital component of the overall scene (Söderlund, 2011). The quantity, type, and behavior of other customers, coupled with the presence of service employee, form the social cues within the environment. Upon analyzing and reviewing the primary literature on social cues, the author observed that these cues largely center around service employee and other customers.

### 5.2.1 Service Employee Factors

Research on service employees' role in the S-O-R relationship primarily examines the

impact of service employee performance on customers at the individual level (Mattila, 2018). Language, as the most fundamental symbol of information and means of communication, plays a crucial role in interpersonal interactions and conveying information. Early research mainly focused on the linguistic communication between service employee and customers, such as conveying product or service information, persuading purchases, and so on. In service encounters, the verbal behaviors of service employee (like friendly greetings) can convey their friendliness to the customers and enhance the customers' perception of interpersonal communication quality (Zolfagharian, 2018). The interaction and communication between employees and customers also form a part of the service quality. In introducing product/service information, observing customers' intentions, and persuading purchases, interpersonal communication between the employee and customers is ever-present. Communication between service employee and customers can quickly convey accurate information and timely obtain relevant feedback from customers (Goodman, 2019). Thus, in marketing areas like advertising persuasion and customer complaints, the use of language is particularly frequent. Sundaram & Webster (2000) point out that from a managerial perspective, it's not only crucial to understand how the non-verbal communication of service employee affects consumers' perceptions of service quality. What's more important is analyzing how the non-verbal communication of service employee influences consumers' evaluations of them (in terms of friendliness, trustworthiness, reliability, and capability). This understanding allows managers to train and enhance employees' non-verbal communication skills with clear intent and direction, thereby positively influencing customers' perceptions of service quality and their judgments of the service employee. The study further suggests that both the verbal and non-verbal communications of customers can influence the non-verbal communication cues of service employee, and both can affect the interpersonal interactions and communication between customers and service employee.

Jung & Yoon (2010) conducted a study in five family restaurants in Seoul, the capital of South Korea, to examine the relationship between customers' perceptions of service employee's non-verbal communication, customers'

emotional responses, and their satisfaction levels. The research results indicated that the service employee's body language (Kinesics) and interpersonal spacing (Proxemics) significantly affected customers' positive emotions. In contrast, the service employee's body language (Kinesics) and auxiliary language (Paralanguage) had a significant impact on customers' negative emotions. The emotional reactions of customers ultimately influenced their satisfaction levels with the service venue. Concluding their research, Jung & Yoon offered suggestions for family restaurants, where frequent interpersonal interactions between employee and customers occur. They believe that non-verbal communication can influence customers' emotions just as much as verbal communication. Managers should intensify the management and training of service employee's non-verbal communication to enhance the delightful dining experiences of customers.

Conversely, in the interaction between employees or service staff and customers, inappropriate intrusions can lower the customers' evaluation of the service personnel and lead to changes in the customers' purchasing intentions. Service encounters refer to the face-to-face interaction process between customers and service staff. The interpersonal communication during these encounters can significantly influence various service outcomes, including customer satisfaction. Donelda, Mckechnie & Vishal (2007) conducted a study in Dubai, exploring the listening behaviors of staff during service encounters. Their research examined whether employees demonstrated listening behaviors and the frequency of such behaviors. Sundaram & Webster (2000) studied employee-customer contact from a nonverbal perspective, and they concluded that nonverbal communication between the two included body movements, tone of voice, physical distance, and facial expressions. The study also showed that employees' nonverbal communication behaviors in the contact could affect customer satisfaction. Winsted's (2000) research indicates that, under different cultural backgrounds, employee behavior during service encounters affects satisfaction differently, implying that cultural context influences customer perceptions in these encounters. Since service encounters are a bidirectional interaction process, the behavior and experience of service providers and customers are interdependent and mutually

influential. Due to the interactive nature of service encounters, both service employees and customers co-create service value. In the process of co-creating value, the behaviors of both parties influence each other and, in turn, affect the service process and its outcomes. According to the "S-O-R" (Stimulus-Organism-Response) model, the behavior of service employee acts as an environmental stimulus leading to an emotional reaction in customers. This emotional response further leads to either an approach or avoidance behavior in the customer. Therefore, it can be inferred that positive service behavior by the staff will elicit positive emotional responses from customers, leading to approach behaviors (including engagement). In contrast, negative service behaviors will trigger negative emotional reactions, resulting in avoidance behaviors by customers.

Service intrusion refers to instances when, for various subjective or objective reasons, a business provides services that are not accepted or approved by the customer or even disrupt the customer's normal consumption process. It happens when service employee act inappropriately towards a customer, causing the customer to feel disturbed or annoyed. Some businesses adopt a "zero-disturbance service" approach, ensuring that while providing sales services, customers are not interrupted or hindered, guaranteeing timely and appropriate service. In real-world consumer environments, some customers encounter service employee who disrupt the consumption process. Examples include staff cleaning tables before customers leave, reminding customers of store closing times, or chatting and discussing at inappropriate distances. Such intrusive behaviors by staff can affect the time a customer spends in the establishment.

### 5.2.2 Other Customer Factors

The influence of other customers on customer emotional perception and behavior in service scenarios is also an important aspect actively explored by scholars. In real life, there are many situations where we have to share a consumption scenario with other customers, such as shopping in a mall, dining in a restaurant or watching a movie in a cinema, and at the same time we will also interact with other customers. Tombs & McColl. Kennedy (2004) proposed a conceptual model of social service scenario and pointed out that based on the division of service scenario cues proposed by

Bitner (1992), other customers should also be included in the scenario cues, and the social factors in the service scenario were divided into three dimensions: social density (crowding), other customers and consumption context. The impact of social density (crowding), other customers and consumption context on customers' emotional responses and purchase behavior was explored by means of an empirical study. They argue that many services are generated in the presence of other customers, that previous research on other customers has focused on crowding, and that many studies have concluded that inappropriate crowding has a detrimental effect on the consumption experience of other customers. Rosenbaum (2014) through his research on the consumption behaviors and psychology of minority groups (such as Jews and homosexuals), found that these customers are not only seeking to satisfy their consumption needs but also striving to fulfill their desires for friendship and emotional connections. They seek acceptance and a sense of belonging. Many restaurants, coffee shops, and other service venues hold special significance in these consumers' daily lives. In these places, they often encounter other customers who belong to the same group, deriving emotional support from their shared experiences. Some studies have indicated that many service dissatisfactions stem from the inappropriate behaviors of "problem customers," known as Dysfunctional Customer Behavior. Bitner, through a critical incident survey, found that 22% of customer dissatisfaction incidents were caused by problem customers. In Harris (2013)'s in-depth interviews with customers, front-line employees, and managers in hotels, restaurants, and bars, it was discovered that inappropriate behaviors, such as loud disturbances and unfounded complaints from customers, can spread among other patrons, creating a domino effect. The contagion of negative behaviors results in adverse behavioral responses detrimental to the service business. Wu Jintao and Jiang Shengda (2011) believe that when customers do not adhere to the norms that most consumers follow in a consumption setting, it disrupts the normal order of consumption and directly affects the emotions and service experiences of other customers present. Therefore, the inappropriate behaviors of problem customers can potentially ruin the service experience for other customers,

leading to dissatisfaction with the service encounter or even the service business itself, and in extreme cases, causing retaliatory actions. Grove and Fisk's (2010) investigation into interactions among tourists waiting in line for services revealed that, of all interaction incidents, 57.4% were etiquette-related, such as cutting in line, loud talking, children crying, smoking, stepping on feet, etc., and 51.2% were social incidents, like unfriendly attitudes or rude behaviors, which led to customer dissatisfaction. Yin Chengyue (2017) and his team utilized the critical incident technique to conduct an exploratory categorical study on the interactive behaviors of park visitors during service encounters. Their research found that other customers' issues with "dressing," "body odor," occupying space, cutting in line, noise-making behaviors, unsanitary behaviors, rude behaviors, and causing discomfort to other customers can lead to dissatisfaction with the overall service experience.

When discussing the impact of other customers' behaviors on clients, Huang and others (2014) found that, in instances where problematic customers exhibited inappropriate behaviors, high-brand strength enterprises faced lesser negative impacts on customer satisfaction compared to those with low brand strength. E. Deanne Brocato and Clay M. Voorhees (2015) discovered that sharing a facility with other customers could either elevate or diminish one's evaluation. When other customers are viewed as a part of the environment, the impact stems from the observed characteristics of these consumers. Further research indicates that the presence and behavior of other customers might influence an individual's perception of service quality more than interactions with front-line service staff. For example, some entertainment venues explicitly manage the appearance of their clientele to elevate the quality of service, reflecting the ideal image of their target market's consumers. Appropriate customers can enhance the comfort level of their fellow patrons. In many scenarios, customers learn from each other about how to behave in a service environment. If someone witnesses another customer violating proper etiquette, it can influence their evaluation of the staff in that venue.

## 6. Conclusion

In an attempt to deepen understanding of the relationship between servicescape and customer

behaviors, some scholars have taken a comprehensive view, considering both cognitive and emotional responses triggered by the environment. They have established a more holistic model for the mechanism of action of servicescape, forming the third theoretical path in servicescape research (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003; Ezeh & Harris, 2007; Kim, 2015). Previous research has largely been based on Bitner's (1992) servicescape model to explore the impact of servicescape on customer behavior. The core conclusions derived are that a positive servicescape can evoke pleasant emotions in customers, foster favorable attitudes towards the servicescape, facilitate communication between customers and service employee, enhance perceived service quality, increase customer satisfaction, raise perceived value, prolong customer stay duration, boost purchasing intentions, induce approach-avoidance behaviors, increase customer spending, and even assist in customer health recovery, among other outcomes. Existing studies on servicescape have mainly focused on the impact of physical environmental variables in the service setting on customers. Some research has delved into the influence of social factors within the servicescape (including service employee and other customers), albeit in limited quantities. Most existing studies on territoriality are concentrated in the field of organizational behavior. The concept of customer territoriality in services is just beginning and hasn't received sufficient attention. However, the behaviors resulting from territorial perceptions can have significant implications for businesses. Hence, understanding and addressing behaviors arising from consumers' territorial perceptions in servicescape is crucial for enterprises.

## 7. Discussion

From the perspective of service marketing research, studying the territorial factors in the servicescape provides meaningful insights for the construction of interaction norms and the cultivation of brand culture in service enterprises.

First, in the service industry, there is an increased emphasis on clearly defining norms among customers, other customers, and businesses, reflecting a multi-faceted coordinated relationship. Second, territorial elements in the servicescape are not static, especially during the service process. Third,



perceptions of territorial elements in the servicescape are modulated by variables such as context, culture, and customer personality. Fourth, the behaviors driven by territorial factors in the servicescape are not solely negative. By satisfying customers' psychological needs for control and a sense of identity, they can also have a positive impact.

Looking at the overall research, studies related to territorial elements in the servicescape are still in a developmental phase, and there is still a significant room for exploration. Going forward, deeper investigations into the following areas can be pursued:

We can delve into the segmentation of territorial elements in the servicescape. Looking at customer needs such as privacy and belonging, territorial factors in the servicescape can influence customer behaviors.

Discuss the impact of territorial elements in the servicescape during service failures. Service failure is a focal point of service research. Exploring reasons for failure from the perspective of territorial elements in the servicescape can help shape better service standards.

Post-addition studies on the value of service branding need attention. Building a service brand, without the foundation of a tangible product, relies on establishing service norms. It's essential to understand whether the impact of territorial elements in the servicescape correlates with brand value.

The influence of cultural factors needs deepening. In an era of frequent international service exchanges, differences in power distance across cultures can affect individuals' perceptions of space control, possibly impacting the construction of territorial boundaries.

Measurement tools (scales) and experimental designs for territorial elements in the servicescape, many of which originate from employee territory research, still need further validation in the service sector.

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