

Hospitality Review

Volume 31

Issue 4 *FIU Hospitality Review v.31 i.4*

Article 1

May 2014

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Recommended Citation

DiPietro, Robin B. and Campbell, Jeffrey (2014) "The Influence of Servicescape and Local Food Attributes on Pleasure and Revisit Intention in an Upscale-Casual Dining Restaurant," *Hospitality Review*: Vol. 31 : Iss. 4 , Article 1.

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The Influence of Servicescape and Local Food Attributes on Pleasure and Revisit Intention in an Upscale-Casual Dining Restaurant

Abstract

The current study looks at the relationship between servicescape, emotional product involvement, perceived quality of local foods, the positive emotion of pleasure, and revisit intention in an upscale buffet style restaurant on a university campus in the Southeastern U.S. Test results show positive relationships between all of the constructs in the proposed conceptual model. The study also gives practitioners and academics insights into practices that can help to market the use of local foods through the restaurant environment in order to engage emotionally involved customers. This marketing can illicit pleasurable feelings and increase perceived product quality of local foods with the purpose of getting customers to revisit the restaurant. Suggestions for further research on the subject are proposed.

Keywords

Restaurants, local foods, servicescape, emotional product involvement, perceived quality, pleasure, revisit intention

The Influence of Servicescape and Local Food Attributes on Pleasure and Revisit Intention in an Upscale-Casual Dining Restaurant

The interest in purchasing local foods in the United States (U.S.) has been growing over the past two decades and is anticipated to continue to grow (DeWeerd, 2009). The amount of local food markets and farmers' markets have grown from about 2,500 to more than 7,000 over the last 15 years and are expected to produce more than \$11 billion in revenue annually, which shows the increased interest in local foods at the consumer level (Jones-Ellard, 2011). The restaurant industry has been a little slow to follow suit on this trend as the ability to obtain consistent products and the cost and economics of purchasing local foods has not always been a realistic choice for restaurant operators. There are some independent restaurants that have embraced using local foods on their menu, but use by the mainstream has been nearly absent (Sharma, Gregoire, & Strohbehn, 2009).

In a survey of chefs across the U.S., it was determined that of the top ten trends for 2013, the interest in local products (including seafood, meats, and produce) comprised five of those top ten trends (National Restaurant Association, 2013). The restaurant industry is projected to do sales in excess of \$660 billion for 2013 (National Restaurant Association, 2013) and with many consumers becoming more interested in purchasing local foods and being environmentally responsible, it is important for restaurants to study consumer perceptions regarding demand for local foods and how it influences their consumption behavior, including revisit intention.

The restaurant industry is very competitive as consumers determine where to spend their food dollars. There are many factors that consumers take into account when determining where to eat. Design and décor aspects, service quality, and other atmospheric variables can

have a meaningful impact on purchase behavior in that the consumer utilizes these external cues to formulate judgments about the surroundings, servicescape, and the organizations that they choose to frequent (Bitner, 1992; Kotler, 1973; Namasivayam and Lin, 2004; Raab, Zemke, Hertzman, & Singh, 2013; Ryu and Jang, 2008). Similarly, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggested that environmental stimuli can lead to various emotions within consumers that ultimately help to drive responses in behavior. Their stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model is posited to lead to one of three different emotional states: pleasure, arousal, or dominance (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Jang and Namkung, 2009). These states ultimately lead to approach behaviors (e.g. staying in the environment, exploring the surroundings, mingling with others) or avoidance behaviors (e.g. escaping the environment or not communicating with others) depending on the circumstances and the emotional state in which the consumer resides during the consumption act, thus making the environment a key factor in behavioral intention (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2003; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Jang and Namkung, 2009; Raab, Zemke, Hertzman, & Singh, 2013; Ryu and Jang, 2008).

As restaurants struggle to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market, a number of businesses have looked toward the “local” and “fresh” food movements as a way to reposition themselves and connect with their patrons on an emotional level and to create a competitive advantage. The current study will examine a model created to test various constructs in the context of an upscale buffet style restaurant setting that highlights the use of local foods on its buffet line. The current study will assess the relationships between servicescape of the restaurant environment, emotional product involvement with local foods, perceived product quality of the local foods, pleasure, and revisit intention in a restaurant, extending previous research (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2003; Jang and Namkung, 2009). The

current study adds to the literature for both practitioners and academics related to the influence of servicescape and local food attributes.

Research Framework

Local Foods in Restaurants

As has been noted, there has been an increasing awareness of and interest in local foods among consumers. Despite this fact, however, there has been a lack of studies on consumer perceptions regarding the use of local foods on a restaurant menu and how it influences emotions and behavioral intent. This would be important in order to determine the impact that having local foods on menus could have. Previous studies have been done to understand the factors that influence consumer perceptions of local foods in general. Weatherell, Tregear, & Allinson (2003) studied the general consumers' perceptions of local foods in the UK. Applying both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this study revealed that most of the consumers in the UK expressed concerns for food provisioning issues, and also had a positive likelihood of purchasing local foods. This study also provided insights that the practical, nutritional, and socio-cultural dimensions should be a critical focus of the future local foods research.

In a fast food restaurant setting, Vieregge, Scanlon, & Huss (2007) did an exploratory study to measure the perception of patrons of a McDonald's restaurant regarding locally grown food products used in standard menu items in Switzerland. The results revealed that local customers perceived the local food products as an extension of the brand value. Customers expressed the idea that if they had been aware of the use of local food products, they would have visited the restaurant more often in the past. This indicates a potential market for the local food products in McDonald's restaurants in Switzerland. Moreover, no statistically

significant differences were found between local and non-local visitors on their perceptions of local food products, showing a general demand among consumers. An implied benefit of local product use should be an improvement of brand image and extension of brand value. In a study with different results by DiPietro, Gregory, & Jackson (2013), 260 fast food customers in the U.S. were surveyed and it was found that local product offerings were not even 'somewhat important' in the ratings of sustainable practices in restaurants.

From the producer's perspective, Nummedal and Hall (2006) investigated the relationship between local produce and the bed and breakfast (B&B) industry, within the geographical context of New Zealand. The results indicated that the B&B sector showed a great overall interest in local foods. Not only did the majority of respondents (B&B owners) indicate that they use a lot of local produce in their cooking, but also indicated high likelihood to increase usage. Respondents also found it important to support local food producers. The study concluded that respondents also undervalued their own role as promoters of local food towards visitors, and found there was a need to "educate" members of local food networks, including the B&B sector, about the positive benefits of food and tourism relationships to all sectors, with respect to increased visitor interest and satisfaction as well as the development of longer-term promotional and purchase relationships as part of the consumer value chain.

Restaurants as providers play an important role in purchasing and marketing local foods. Inwood, Sharp, Moore, & Stinner (2009) used mixed methods to examine the characteristics of chefs and restaurants that have adopted local foods to understand the perceptions of local foods from restaurants' perspectives. The results have found that early adopting and high volume users of local foods are more likely to operate moderately and higher priced restaurants. In terms of important attributes valued by restaurants, taste was the

most important criterion when considering purchasing local foods. In addition, convenience and price were also found to be important factors in the local food attributes, with higher volume users more willing to purchase local foods at higher prices. Chefs were most interested in intrinsic food qualities, such as taste and freshness, and less interested in production standards, indicating a need to engage chefs in supporting local foods systems.

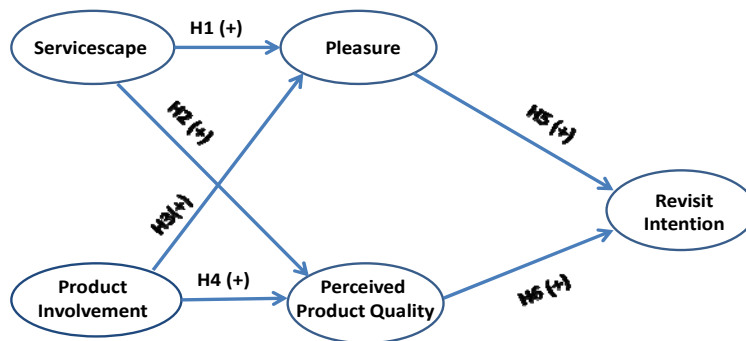
The research in the area of the use of local foods by restaurants and the research on customer perceptions of local foods is inconsistent and lacking a study specifically looking at the emotional response of customers and the product involvement with local food as it relates to perceived product quality and the behavioral intention of the customer through revisit intention.

The proposed model (Figure 1) seeks to test and explain in more detail the various attributes of local foods and restaurants, and the emotions that lead to or determine a consumer's revisit intention related to a restaurant that uses local foods. The servicescape of a restaurant can be influenced by whether a restaurant uses local foods and markets their local food products on the menu or signage for the restaurant. Because the servicescape of an environment often impacts consumer perception of the quality of an organization and their products, and because of the influence of emotional product involvement and perceived product quality, emotion and feelings of pleasure can ultimately influence whether a consumer would be willing to revisit a restaurant.

This study presents a proposed framework that consists of four predicting variables/constructs in relation to a consumer's revisit intention for the restaurant. More specifically, the main goals of this study are, to: 1) evaluate the direct effects of pleasure and perceived product quality of local foods on revisit intention, 2) assess the relationship between

servicescape on perceived product quality of local foods and pleasure, and 3) assess the relationship between emotional product involvement with local foods on pleasure and perceived product quality of local foods. The key constructs that comprise the conceptual model will be reviewed along with the extant literature and research that describe the relationships in the proposed model.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework with hypotheses



Atmospherics and Servicescape

The origination of looking at atmosphere and the surrounding environment as a marketing tool can be traced specifically back to the field of retailing. Kotler (1973) was perhaps the first to recognize that when making a purchase decision, consumers respond to more than just what a product or service has to offer, instead factoring in the product as a whole—including such attributes as packaging, advertising, imagery, and other components that coincide with the product’s positioning. In some specific circumstances and scenarios, Kotler (1973) argued that the atmosphere of the place where a product is sold can be more

influential than the actual product itself when a consumer is making a purchase decision. It is within this concept of using a place or atmosphere as a marketing tool that Kotler coined the term 'atmospherics'—or “the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability” (Kotler, 1973, p. 50).

Atmospherics, which are components of the servicescape, is sensory by nature, as the atmosphere (or one's surrounding physical environment) is grasped through the senses. Though the elements of atmosphere can range considerably in variety, the main sensory channels are visual (includes colors, shapes and brightness), auditory (sounds, volume, pitch), olfactory (scent and freshness) and tactile (temperature, texture, etc.) (Namasivayam and Lin, 2004; Raab, Zemke, Hertzman, & Singh, 2013).

Atmosphere can affect purchase behavior in many ways, as it can help create attention, deliver or communicate a message, or create affect (by triggering senses which can heighten or create a desire or appetite for an item, service or experience) (Kotler, 1973). The general concept that guides the connection between atmosphere and purchase decision is that a consumer will first apprehend and perceive the sensory qualities of a given space, which will therefore modify the information and affective state of the consumer ultimately impacting their probability of making a purchase and possibly influence their revisit intention to a location (Namasivayam and Lin, 2004; Raab, Zemke, Hertzman, & Singh, 2013).

Bitner (1992) described in more depth how a servicescape (or the built environment of a service establishment) can affect the behaviors of both consumers and employees of a given service organization. Generally, it incorporates the ambient conditions (such as temperature, air quality, noise, smells, etc.), the spatial layout (including furnishings and equipment) and signs, symbols and artifacts (décor, signage, etc.). The underlying concept

of servicescape is that any individual who is exposed to a particular setting (whether it be an employee or a customer) responds cognitively, emotionally, and physiologically to that environment. Subsequently, the individuals' response to the atmosphere or servicescape can directly influence their behavior, affecting (among other things) approach and avoid decisions, social interactions between and among the customers and the employees, purchase decisions, and revisit intention (Bitner, 1992). It has also been shown that the influence of the physical factor or the environment influences how consumers perceive the quality of the service or product that they are purchasing (Bitner, 1990, 1992; Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Tsiotsou, 2006; Wakefield and Blodgett, 1999; Wall and Berry, 2007).

A study by Namasivayam and Lin (2004) posited that servicescape influences customer perception in both the pre- and post- visit to a restaurant. It helps consumers to determine if they believe that the service and food will be of appropriate standards. It helps to reassure the consumer before the visit that the management of the restaurant is performing well. If consumers are repeat visitors, servicescape can be more of a neutral component of the restaurant visit as the history related to the environment causes increasing comfort and confidence in the restaurant environment.

In a study of middle and upscale full-service restaurants in Hong Kong, Heung and Gu (2012) sought to identify and categorize the elements of restaurant atmospherics and investigate the influences of atmospherics on patrons' satisfaction and behavioral intentions (specifically intent to return). Five dimensions of restaurant atmospherics were identified: facility aesthetics, ambience, spatial layout, employee factors, and view from the window. Heung and Gu's (2012) research supported findings from prior literature that restaurant atmospherics have a significant influence on patrons' dining satisfaction and intentions to

revisit, as well as their likelihood to spread positive word-of-mouth and willingness to pay more for the restaurant products.

In a study by Sulek and Hensley (2004) of an Irish-pub-style restaurant, they found that the restaurant atmosphere was one of the key reasons for return intention. There had to be a certain level of food quality as well, but once the atmosphere of the restaurant and the fairness of the seating policies were accounted for, these three factors explained about half of the variability in overall customer satisfaction. This shows that atmosphere has an influence on satisfaction of consumers as well as return intention for the restaurant.

The perceived service or product quality that people receive when they go to a restaurant or another business is an overall judgment that is based on the perception of the product or service based on specific quality attributes (Steenkamp, Benedict, & van Trijp, 1989). This definition refers to the fact that people create an overall judgment of a product based on the perception of certain quality attributes. This perception is based on an evaluation of certain criteria in relationship to the quality of the product or service. The physical cues that are present in a location influence the positive feelings of a person and this may influence their perception of the overall product quality of the location (Kim and Moon, 2009). Wakefield and Blodgett (1999) reviewed the impact of servicescape on perceived service quality and found that there was a positive relationship. This perceived service quality also influenced tangible factors such as perceived product quality.

The concept of servicescape has been expanded by Kim and Moon (2009) as they tested the relationship between servicescape and the feeling of pleasure by customers and the relationship between servicescape and perceived service quality of a restaurant visit within the themed restaurant classification. They found that servicescape positively influenced

customers' feelings of pleasure during a visit to a restaurant. They found as well that servicescape positively influenced customers' perception of perceived service quality of the overall restaurant visit. They also found that pleasure feeling had a mediating effect on the relationship between servicescape and revisit intention. These findings show that if managers pay attention to the environment, they can positively influence positive pleasure feelings and therefore influence behavior intention.

Hypotheses Development

Based on the servicescape research and positive emotions related to pleasure and on perceived service/product quality, the following hypotheses have been developed:

Hypothesis 1: *Customer perception of servicescape has a positive effect on pleasure perception.*

Hypothesis 2: *Customer perception of servicescape has a positive effect on perceived product quality of local foods.*

Emotional Product Involvement. The definition of emotional product involvement used in the current study is perceived relevance of the object or product based on inherent needs, values, and interests of the customer (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984). Product involvement can occur through watching advertisements for products, using the actual products themselves, or in making the decision to purchase the product itself (Zaichkowsky, 1985). This involvement can be categorized as low or high and can help to determine how consumers will make decisions regarding products that they purchase now and in the future. Involvement with products has been hypothesized to lead customers to a greater perception of attribute differences, perception of greater product importance, and greater commitment to brand choice (Zaichkowsky, 1985).

In a study by Eroglu et al. (2003) involvement was found to moderate the relationship between atmospherics related to an online website and the level of pleasure felt by a shopper. By getting customers to be more involved with products, services, or brand name, they will be more likely to feel positive emotions about those things. Product involvement by a customer can influence a positive emotion in them, thus impacting pleasure feelings. Through this positive emotion, research has shown that behavioral intentions are more positive (Kim and Moon, 2009). Also, when customers have a higher emotional involvement with a product, it can influence their perception of product quality through their perception of attribute differences.

There are three areas of involvement that have been found to be categories that affect a person's product involvement level (Bloch and Richins, 1983; Houston and Rothschild, 1978). These areas are personal (inherent interests, values, or needs); physical characteristics that cause differentiation or interest; and situational (something that temporarily increases relevance or interest toward the object). These areas have been determined to cause different levels of involvement by a person with a product. It has been found that the level of product involvement means that the product has high personal relevance to the consumer (Greenwald and Leavitt, 1984). This personal relevance also can positively influence their positive emotions that are derived from the product.

For local foods, involvement can also take on a number of meaningful dimensions to consumers such as creating a proximity with the products, the geographic location, or even the producers (e.g., local food purchasing helps small producers to make a living and we should help them) (Aurier, Fatiha, & Sirieix, 2005). Local food involvement may also be reflected through consumer experience with food safety issues or civic/community support (Born and

Purcell, 2006). Given that the current study considers the customer's involvement with local foods, and from the above information related to emotional product involvement, we can draw the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: *High consumer product involvement has a positive effect on pleasure perception.*

Hypothesis 4: *High consumer product involvement has a positive effect on perceived product quality.*

Pleasure. The concept of the primary positive emotion of pleasure as it relates to the service industry is introduced in the stimulus-organism-response model of Mehrabian and Russell (1974) and then further discussed in Eroglu et al. (2003) and Kim and Moon (2009). Pleasure is the degree to which one has favorable feelings towards a situation. Studies have shown that emotional responses predict approach and avoidance regarding certain environments. It has been shown that pleasure found from a service environment induces people to approach that situation more often and to influence customer behavior in a positive manner (Ang, et al., 1997).

The concept of pleasure is one that looks at the emotional state of a consumer based on the external environment within which one shops or purchases. Consumers are largely cued by the tangible environment and subsequently respond through various emotions. Managers of service businesses would be wise to investigate whether the product or service that they sell produces feelings of pleasure, as this could determine whether a customer returns to a location or wishes to continue purchasing products from that business as it has been shown that pleasurable feelings or emotions induce approach behaviors (Ang et al., 1997; Eroglu et al., 2003; Kim and Moon, 2009; Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

The Mehrabian and Russell (1974) model assessing approach and avoidance behavior was mediated by emotional state. This emotional state of positive pleasure feelings was related to purchase intention and revisit intention. The pleasure construct has been demonstrated in past studies to be a good predictor of customer behavior in a number of settings, including the retail and banking sectors. Within the restaurant and hospitality domain, Kim and Moon (2009) also suggested that there was a significant positive direct relationship between pleasure feeling and revisit intentions. With this background in mind, the following hypothesis has been developed for the current restaurant setting of upscale-casual dining:

Hypothesis 5: *Customer perceptions of positive feelings of pleasure have a positive effect on revisit intention.*

Perceived Product Quality. Perceived product quality is basically a judgment by the consumer regarding their perception of the overall quality attributes of a product. It is an evaluation of a product based on general expectations about what the quality of the product should be and how it actually compares to those preconceived ideas (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). It is a cognitive evaluative judgment regarding the quality of a product.

Kivela, Inbakaran, & Reece (1999) found in their study of restaurants that food quality explained dining satisfaction and behavioral intentions of customers. They found that customers were more likely to have revisit intention if the perceived food quality was good. Food quality was a significant predictor of overall satisfaction and positive return intentions. Within a service setting, Boulding, Kalra, Staelin, & Zeithaml (1993) also found the same relationships that the perception of good quality positively affected the behavioral intentions of customers.

It was shown in Kim and Moon's (2009) study regarding perceived service quality, revisit intention, and pleasure feeling emotions that there was a positive relationship between perceived service quality and pleasure feeling, but the direct relationship between perceived service quality and revisit intention was not fully supported. The findings did show however that if the relationship between perceived service quality was mediated by pleasure feeling, that it was positively related to revisit intention. Their study looked at themed restaurants that were either strongly or weakly themed and whether the perceived service quality had an impact on revisit intention and pleasure emotion regarding that type of restaurant. Perceived quality is often a combination of factors such as the product (food in the case of restaurants), the service, and the overall atmosphere (Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Wall and Berry, 2007).

In a study done by Namkung and Jang (2007) using five mid- to upper-scale restaurants in the U.S., they found that there was a significant positive relationship between food quality and behavioral intentions. People who believed that the food quality of the restaurant was positive were likely to return to that restaurant.

Through the various research studies done regarding perceived product quality, the following hypothesis has been drawn.

Hypothesis 6: *Customer perception of perceived product quality has a positive effect on revisit intentions.*

Revisit Intention. Revisit intention tends to be the positive end result of doing things right in a business. Um, Chon, & Ro (2006) found in their study of Hong Kong as a tourist destination that overall satisfaction with the destination was a moderator to explain revisit intention. They also found that the perceived value for the money was also one of the factors to explain revisit intention. Han, Back, & Barrett (2009) found that in a restaurant setting, the

emotions that were derived from a visit to a restaurant impacted the overall perception of the visit by a customer. They further found that positive emotions that were derived from a visit caused increased satisfaction with the restaurant and overall that the satisfaction influenced the revisit intention of the customer to the restaurant. Overall, revisit intention is a good predictor of positive behavioral actions. When a customer wants to revisit a location, they tend to have a positive affiliation with that location and they tend to follow through on purchasing the products and services of that business. The study is further discussed and described in detail below.

Study Methodology

Data Collection

The research hypotheses were tested with data collected via surveys at an upscale casual buffet restaurant on a university campus in a mid-sized Southeastern city. The restaurant was open to the general public Tuesday-Friday for the lunch hours of 11:30am-1:30pm, and every customer that dined at the restaurant was asked to complete a survey immediately following their meal. The study was done over 8 weeks in spring 2013. The researcher obtained approval for the survey administration by the manager of the restaurant. The researcher trained the manager and the servers on how to properly administer the survey. The survey was administered by each of the servers that were taking care of the tables. Respondents completed the survey on site and returned them to the hostess stand. The completed surveys were collected at the hostess stand in a plain manila envelope each week and then were collected by the researcher and coded into SPSS version 20. Respondents were offered the chance to win a free lunch if they completed the surveys, and one survey was randomly drawn each week.

The survey was administered to 3515 total customers and there were 750 surveys returned for a response rate of 21.34%.

Instrument Development

To empirically test the hypotheses, a total of nineteen items previously validated and found reliable in other studies were identified and modified to fit the current study setting. A survey was designed that contained the items to test the constructs of perception of servicescape, pleasure, product involvement, perceived product quality, and revisit intention. Adapted from the Kim and Moon (2009) and Eroglu et al. (2003) studies related to the servicescape and foodservice operation, five survey items measured interior restaurant décor, the color and lighting of the restaurant interior, and the overall restaurant environment. These items were evaluated on a 7 point Likert scale that had 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. Three questions that related to feelings of pleasure by the respondents were developed from Kim and Moon (2009) and Eroglu et al. (2003). These items asked about how happy, pleased and delighted the respondents were with the overall feeling of the restaurant. The survey items were rated on a 1-7 Likert scale with 1=unhappy, annoyed, or disappointed and 7=happy, pleased or delighted. Four items used to measure emotional product involvement were adapted from Zaichkowsky (1985) and asked about locally produced foods and how important, of concern, appealing, and relevant local foods were on a 1-7 Likert scale where 1=unimportant to me and 7=important to me. Next, three items were related to perceived product quality and were adapted from the Kim and Moon (2009) study. These items asked the respondents about their perception of the quality of the food, rating it on a 1-7 Likert scale where 1=poor or much worse than expected or not at all what it should be and 7=excellent or much better than expected or just what it should be. Revisit intention items were developed

from the Kim and Moon (2009) study. Four items assessed whether a person had an intention to return to the restaurant again and whether they had an intention to bring others to the restaurant. The items were rated on a 1-7 Likert scale with 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The Kim and Moon (2009) study had coefficient alphas for all of the constructs of more than .70 for reliability. Finally, standard demographic questions were asked that related to gender, highest education level completed, and age.

Measurement

Prior to any model testing, an analysis of internal consistency and discriminant validity was first completed by reviewing the constructs and items purported to measure each through the use of statistical package SPSS 20.0. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was calculated for each of the five proposed constructs, and ranged between .71 and .84, thereby exceeding Nunnally's (1978) suggested cutoff of .70 for reliability of the measures. Similarly, the composite reliabilities of the constructs were tested with values (.73 to .85) also suggesting good reliability and consistency of the measures. To assess discriminant validity, the squared correlations between each pair of latent constructs were compared against the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) as outlined by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Anderson and Gerbing (1988). As noted in Table 1, the AVE estimates exceeded the squared correlations of each pair within the five proposed latent constructs, thereby suggesting that the five latent constructs adequately discriminated from one another.

Table 1. Construct validity tests

Construct		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Servicescape	.75				
2.	Product Involvement	.05	.70			
3.	Pleasure	.10	.10	.70		
4.	Perceived Product Quality	.11	.08	.60	.73	
5.	Revisit Intention	.19	.07	.31	.27	.80

Diagonals reflect the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct
 Off-diagonal entries reflect the variance (squared correlations) shared between constructs

There were a total of 3515 customers that were asked to complete a survey and a total sample of 750 responses were collected during the study for a response rate of 21.33%. From that sample, 721 respondents reported their gender with 222 responses (30.8%) as male and 499 (69.2%) as female. Not surprising given the location of the data collection on a university campus, of the 701 respondents who reported their highest education level completed, 66.9% (N = 469) had a Bachelor's Degree or Graduate Degree. Only 56 respondents (8.0%) reported completing High School as their highest level of education, and the remaining 176 respondents (25.1%) had either some college or an Associate's Degree. Finally, of the 636 respondents who reported their age, 85 (13.4%) were less than 25 years old, 66 (10.4%) were 25-34 years old, 83 (13.1%) were 35-44 years old, 68 (10.7%) were 45-54 years old, 126 (19.8%) were 55-64, and the remaining 208 (32.7%) were 65 years or older.

Data Analysis

As part of the data analysis, the two-step approach employed by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was conducted by first completing Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) on each of the constructs. From this, a final measurement model was created. Part two of the two step process included creation of a structural model that tested the proposed path

relationships (H1 – H6). Structural equation modeling was completed using AMOS 20.0 and Maximum Likelihood Estimation, following Byrne's (2010) methodology. To assess how well the conceptual model fit the data collected as an entirety, a number of fit statistics were utilized. Tools such as the chi-square statistic (χ^2), a test of the ratio of chi-squares to degrees of freedom in the model (χ^2 / df), the comparative fit index statistic (CFI), the goodness-of-fit index statistic (GFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were considered.

Study Results

During the confirmatory factor analysis process, one measurement item for the construct servicescape (*Restaurant décor, including signage, influences my decision where to dine*) and one measurement item for the construct revisit intention (*This restaurant would not be my first choice over other available options*) reflected low standardized loadings (.29 and .18) on their respective constructs and therefore were removed from further analysis. The final measurement model suggested that a five latent factor solution fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 231.65$; $\chi^2 / df = 2.18$; CFI = .98, GFI = .97, RMSEA = .04) using a total of 17 measurement items. All measurement items reflected standardized regression weights greater than .40 and the regression weights, construct variances, and construct covariances were all statistically significant @ $p < .05$.

Upon completion of the final measurement model, a structural model was run to test the proposed path relationships (H1 – H6). The final structural model also reflected good overall fit ($\chi^2 = 311.36$; $\chi^2 / df = 2.86$; CFI = .97, GFI = .95, RMSEA = .05) with each of the regression path weights statistically significant as were the construct variances and covariances. Using the squared multiple correlation values, the overall model was shown to explain 17.9%

of the variance in pleasure, 16.5% of the variance in perceived product quality, and 34.8% of the variance in revisit intention. As reflected in Table 2, all six of the proposed hypotheses were supported and found to be significant. Of the six hypotheses, H5 (Pleasure → Revisit Intention) indicated the strongest relationship ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$) while Hypotheses H4 (Product Involvement → Perceived Product Quality) indicated the weakest relationship ($\beta = .21$, $p < .001$).

Table 2. Hypotheses testing (N = 750)

Hypothesis	Structural Path	Standard Estimate	Standard Error	t-value	Result*
H1(+)	Servicescape → Pleasure	.29	.02	7.04	Significant
H2(+)	Servicescape → Perceived Product Quality	.31	.02	7.46	Significant
H3(+)	Product Involvement → Pleasure	.25	.02	5.53	Significant
H4(+)	Product Involvement → Perceived Product Quality	.21	.03	4.64	Significant
H5(+)	Pleasure → Revisit Intention	.39	.15	4.87	Significant
H6(+)	Perceived Product Quality → Revisit Intention	.23	.11	2.90	Significant

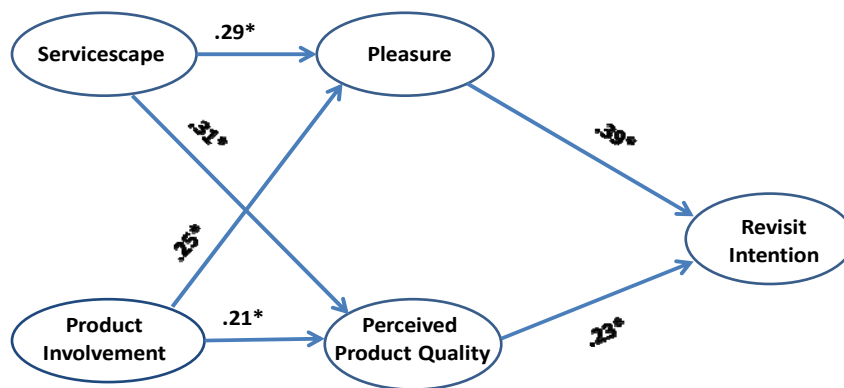
$\chi^2 = 311.36$, $df = 109$, $\chi^2 / df = 2.86$; CFI = .97, GFI = .95, RMSEA = .05
 *Significance at $p < .05$

Discussion of Findings

The current study suggests that a number of factors may be salient to consumers when considering future visit intentions to their restaurants of choice related to the local foods used by the restaurant. Specifically, the study considered a combination of product-related factors (e.g., product involvement, perceived product quality), emotional response (pleasure), and physical environmental effects (servicescape) and whether these factors had an indirect or

direct relationship with revisit intentions. Our findings, based upon the conceptual model, supported that two factors (pleasure and perceived product quality) had significant positive direct relationships with revisit intentions. Similarly, servicescape and product involvement had significant positive relationships with both pleasure and perceived product quality, and could influence revisit intention indirectly through these two factors. These findings indicate a strong influence of servicescape on the dining experience and how its perception by consumers can have a positive effect on restaurants seeking to create a loyal and repeat customer base.

Figure 2. Modified Structural Model with Data



*Significance at $p < .05$

Of particular note is the significant positive relationship of servicescape to perceived product quality ($\beta = .31$), which was stronger than its relationship with pleasure ($\beta = .29$). This supports the notion that customers also take a number of factors into determining product

quality that are external to that of the product itself; using cues from the environment to make quality inferences. High-end restaurants, such as the one used in the current study, are especially effective in using this technique to cue customers into evaluating their menu choices and the restaurant overall as high quality, even though a more objective approach to quality evaluations (e.g., taste, texture, visual or olfactory cues) might suggest that the products offered reflect little difference from mid-tier or lower-end options considering that the restaurant in the current study is a buffet. This concept of cuing customers has not gone unnoticed to grocers, either. A recent advertising campaign by Wal-Mart whereby Wal-Mart steaks are substituted into high-end restaurants with patrons commenting on the high-quality does, at first glance, support the relationship of servicescape to positive product evaluations (Buss, 2012). Similarly, the significant positive relationship of servicescape with pleasure confirms the previous results of Kim and Moon (2009) that evaluated these factors and found servicescape to be highly important within theme restaurants ($\beta = .64$, t -value = 8.18). For existing restaurants and new ones in particular, both exterior and interior décor must match the expectations of the patrons and not allow for any disconnect with the product offerings. An inferior dining environment might easily influence patrons in such a way that, even with a strong product offering, overall evaluations of the restaurant may negatively impact any future revisit intentions. As part of the overall strategy, therefore, restaurant owners and managers need to recognize that the servicescape in some cases can be more important than the food itself in creating an emotional attachment and positive pleasure feeling for the customer. Spending more resources in this area of the business may ultimately provide a sustainable competitive advantage over the long term.

The importance of product involvement to both pleasure ($\beta = .25$, t -value = 5.53)

and perceived product quality ($\beta = .21$, t -value = 4.64) should also be highlighted. Although the strength of the relationships was less than that of servicescape to either pleasure or perceived product quality, it should be noted that consumers are becoming more and more emotionally involved with the food in which they consume, as evident by an increased demand for more locally produced items, healthy options, and continued fears of food related illnesses (Strohbehn and Gregoire, 2003; Vieregge, Scanlon, & Huss, 2007). Restaurant patrons may evoke different and more positive evaluations to the dining experience if the restaurant offers not only the item selections they desire, but also products that can be locally sourced and supportive of the communities in which they reside. This may prove more difficult for some smaller restaurants that cannot obtain adequate quantities of locally sourced items, but somehow wish to help connect the consumers with their food choices. In this regard, signage is one way that restaurants and even grocers utilize to communicate offerings. Large scale fast-food operations such as Chipotle highlight their use of locally produced, non-hormone, and free-range products that serve to not only inform their patrons, but also provide a sense of security in the *process* of where and how their food is obtained as well as the product itself. Small scale restaurants may offer “specialty” dishes prepared with locally sourced products and use table tents or point of sales promotional cards with pictures of farms or farmers to also help create appeal and relevance of place as it relates to product offerings.

Customer pleasure having a significant positive relationship with future revisit intention also creates an opportunity as well as potential pitfall for restaurant owners and managers. Keep customers happy and feeling emotionally good about the visit and the likelihood of return visits remains high. Conversely, unhappy customers in an age of social media can quickly turn a profitable restaurant into one that struggles for business. The

difficulty lies between keeping some customers happy at the potential expense of others. From a strategic perspective, therefore, a balance must occur between offering the right products at the right price using the right servicescape, with restaurant owners and managers continually monitoring and gathering information from both customers and employees to foster a pleasurable dining experience.

Finally, the current study confirms the notion that as long as customers continue to perceive products as high quality, they may continue to revisit their favorite restaurants. Objectively, quality may be difficult to measure. However, measures such as freshness and food temperature (Andaleeb and Conway, 2006) or taste, food portion, and healthy options (Ha and Jang, 2010) that have been tested in previous academic studies may be important determinants to customer evaluations of the quality construct and should be considered as important for any restaurant or chef within the meal presentation. These measures may also be weighted differently for consumers based upon restaurant format; fine dining patrons potentially weighing taste and healthy options as most important in quality assessment whereas mid-tier and lower-tier restaurant patrons, being more value conscious, focus on portion size and price of the menu items as a determinant of quality. Limited financial resources of the restaurant owner and manager may also favor a focus on product quality to ensure the business as an ongoing concern, until such time as profits can be reinvested into décor or other atmospheric variables that help to support a positive dining experience and future revisit intentions.

Although a number of key findings were highlighted through the study, the researchers acknowledge that limitations must be addressed. First, the construct of servicescape was limited to questions relating to overall décor and signage and overall

environment, which may not fully encompass the concept and exclude other dimensions such as lighting, olfactory, or customer service that often play an important role in how customers perceive dining experiences. To this end, it should be also noted that the restaurant type used for data collection (a buffet style, upscale casual dining restaurant on a university campus) may not fully generalize to other restaurant types or restaurant sizes. It is plausible that fine dining patrons have different a priori expectations regarding servicescape dimensions such as customer service or ambient features within the restaurant than those patrons of other restaurant types such as fast food or small family-owned restaurants. Similarly, buffet style restaurants such as the one used in this study may support a greater focus on the meal rather than the atmosphere surrounding the meal, as customers would not spend as much time waiting for their food to arrive at their table.

The sample demographics may also limit the generalization of the findings. Almost 70% of the respondents were female, and two-thirds of the sample were well educated, achieving a bachelor's degree or higher. Almost a third (32.7%) of the respondents were 65 years or older, which also may limit the findings when considering other restaurant types such as theme restaurants or those where there is entertainment that may not be captured by the older patron. Familiarity of the establishment may also have been a factor for these customers, given that the location of the restaurant is on a university campus and that a number of repeat customers frequent the establishment. With this in mind, it would be necessary when replicating the study across various restaurant types to inquire of customers whether they had visited the restaurant at any time prior. Although a large sample was collected, the ethnicity of the respondents was not taken into account for this particular study and may yield different results when applied to ethnic dining restaurants or other specialty locations.

Finally, results of the hypotheses testing, while indicating significant positive relationships of the constructs, only supported that 34.8% of the total variance in revisit intention was explained by the proposed model. Other factors that affect revisit intention (price, menu selection), not considered as part of the current study, may ultimately provide a more thorough explanation and should be included in any future study.

Along with the inclusion of additional factors that may positively impact revisit intentions, future studies should consider potential moderating variables to the proposed model. For example, while servicescape has been considered an important part of the restaurant dining experience, not all customers respond to servicescape factors in similar ways. Some may be more positively affected when a restaurant changes the décor or ambiance, while other patrons may not notice these changes at all. A measure of atmospheric ‘responsiveness’ to servicescape may be necessary to fully determine the effectiveness of any décor, signage, or other service quality changes that could increase the likelihood of repatronage intentions.

Although the current study utilized a survey methodology, an experimental design might also be useful in future studies to determine which specific servicescape variables might induce greater levels of pleasure or product involvement and possible revisit intention. For example, would signage that included pictures of the farms or farmers from which the products were sourced, particularly those locally produced, create an increased level of product involvement and subsequent revisit intention? A better understanding of individual servicescape factors might help restaurant managers become more focused on enhancing these to sustain future business.

Finally, it would be important to replicate the study across a number of dining formats, including fine dining, fast food, casual, and other self-service buffet style restaurants

to ensure that the findings hold true given a larger and more diverse sample. Although constrained to one specific restaurant type, the current study provides a roadmap for helping restaurant owners and managers better understand the key importance of servicescape and product involvement as part of revisit intentions when creating a pleasurable dining experience for their customers.

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