

Servicescape: people-place relationship after Covid-19

Supervisors: [Dr Xia Zhu](#) and [Professor Elizabeth Daniel](#), Department of Strategy and Marketing, The Open University Business School

Project Description:

Servicescape is originally defined by Booms and Bitner (1981) as the environment and contextual landscape where service providers and customers interact, and service is performed. In addition to the importance of physical elements (e.g. space, ambient conditions and signs etc.) (Bitner, 1992) and the cleanliness of the facility (Wakefield and Blodgett, 1996), factors such as social density (i.e. crowding) and the displayed emotion of others are found significant in affecting customer behaviour and experience in service environment (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy, 2010). An expanded servicescape framework has been proposed to encompass physical, social, socially symbolic, and natural environmental dimensions (Rosenbaum and Massiah, 2011). At the same time, servicescape needs to be adapted for virtual spaces in order to support interactions in the digital age (Nilsson and Ballantyne, 2014). Servicescape not only impacts on customers' cognitive, affective and behavioural responses (Siu, Wan and Dong, 2012; Liu, Bogicevic and Mattila, 2018), it is also critical to employee satisfaction and productivity, for instance, a convenient, safe and pleasant servicescape significantly affect the job stress and satisfaction of nurses (Parish, Berry and Lam, 2008). Overall, servicescape contributes to people's health and societal wellbeing (Frumkin, 2003).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries set the social-distancing rule which has greatly reduced people's social interactions and changed human–environment norms. It is imperative to understand servicescape and people-place relationship after Covid-19. We welcome proposals that explore service providers and customers' expectations and perceptions of servicescape in a changing world, how servicescape may be adapted or reconfigured in a world after the pandemic, the reinterpretation and redesign of servicescape, and how architects, facility designers and organisational decision makers may be assisted in designing a place that would appeal to both customers and employees in a world after the Covid-19.

We encourage developing this topic with inter-disciplinary perspectives. The successful candidate will demonstrate a good understanding of related studies to their proposed research.

Proposed Theory and Methodology:

A qualitative research approach (e.g. case studies, focus groups, in-depth interviews and participant observation) are encouraged to be employed in this project. However, we are open to proposals that incorporate other methods as appropriate to research questions and strengths of the candidate.

About the supervisors:

Dr Xia Zhu's main research areas are services marketing and business-to-business marketing. She is interested in investigating and understanding service experience, interactions (e.g. people-people, people-place) and relationships in both consumer and industrial contexts. Servicescape is a crucial part of services marketing and situated centrally in Xia's research area and interests.

Professor Liz Daniel's research includes exploring the affordances and challenges of alternative business locations including home based businesses and those in premises such as self-storage. Her work includes the opportunities offered by IT to allow effective operation in such locations including the provision of high levels of customer service.

References:

- Bitner, M. J. (1992), Servicescapes: the impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. *Journal of Marketing*, 56 (April), 57–71.
- Booms, B. H. and Bitner, M. J. (1981), Marketing strategies and organization structures for service firms. In: Donnelly, J.H., George, W.R. (Eds.), *Marketing of Services*. American Marketing Association, Chicago, IL, 47–51.
- Frumkin, H. (2003), Healthy place: exploring the evidence, *American Journal of Public Health*, 93 9, 1451-1456.
- Liu, S. Q., Bogicevic, V. and Mattila, A. S. (2018), Circular vs. angular servicescape: "shaping" customer response to a fast service encounter pace, *Journal of Business Research*, 89, 47-56.
- Nilsson, E. and Ballantyne, D. (2014), Reexamining the place of servicescape in marketing: a service-dominant logic perspective, *Journal of Services Marketing*, 28, 5, 374 – 379.
- Parish, J. T., Berry, L. L. and Lam, S. Y. (2008), The effect of the servicescape on service workers, *Journal of Service Research*, 10, 3, 220-238.
- Rosenbaum, M.S. and Massiah, C. (2011), An expanded servicescape perspective, *Journal of Service Management*, 22, 4, 471-490.
- Siu, N. Y., Wan, P. Y. K. and Dong, P. (2012), The impact of the servicescape on the desire to stay in convention and exhibition, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 31, 236-246.
- Tombs, A. and McColl-Kennedy, J. R. (2003), Social-servicescape conceptual model, *Marketing Theory*, 3, 4, 447-75.
- Wakefield, K. L. and Blodgett, J. G. (1996), The effect of the servicescape on customers' behavioral intentions in leisure service settings. *Journal of Service Marketing*, 10 (6), 45–61.