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## **Modeling Servicescape Aesthetics and Consumer Response Relationships**

### **1. Abstract:**

This research proposes to explore the relationship between servicescape aesthetics and consumer responses and further intends to examine the moderating roles of consumption motives (hedonic vs. utilitarian) in this relationship in the context of facility driven services

This research is expected to contribute to marketing theory by examining hitherto not explored role of aesthetics in service environment on consumer responses such as aesthetic preference.

This research is further expected to broaden the scope of existing literature focused on aesthetics in marketing by moving beyond conventional aesthetics objects (e.g., music, opera) and product aesthetics (e.g., designing, packaging) to service environments by introducing theories and studies from environmental psychology, namely Kaplan's Information Processing model (Kaplan, 1987) and Nasar's Probabilistic model of aesthetic response (Nasar,1994) to service environments as theoretical frameworks to examine patterns of aesthetic responses. A model is proposed along with a set of hypotheses. The findings of the research may have managerial implications on decisions with regard to importance of servicescape aesthetics in various service contexts and also the shared response can serve as a basis for managerial decisions with regard to the design of visual aspects of servicescapes.

**1.1 Keywords:** Visual aesthetics, Servicescapes, Facility Driven Services, Kaplan's Model

### **2. Introduction and Objectives:**

For decades, the term "aesthetics" has been defined and used differently in various domains of inquiry (Schmitt & Simonson, 1997). While the term aesthetics covers a wide range of phenomena and it includes perception through all five senses (Holbrook 1980), in this research the author is confining to visual aesthetics.

Appraisals of aesthetic objects and places play an important role in our life; there is a natural disposition in humans for attraction to what is considered beautiful and delightful and for rejection of what is considered ugly and repulsive (Olascoaga, 2003). Consideration of aesthetics began as a branch of Western philosophy and philosophers continue to dispute the nature of art, the evaluation of beauty and the scope of the aesthetic experience (Dickie 2000; Sibley 2001, as

cited in Charters, 2006). In marketing, some of the earlier aesthetic studies (e.g., Holbrook, 1980; Havlena & Holbrook, 1988; Hirschman, 1983) were confined to aesthetic products like opera, music which attracted criticisms (e.g., Kassarian, 1980), since the focus of these studies being so narrow. Yet, consumer aesthetic studies continued to appear in literature and there was a gradual shift from aesthetic products to other products also (e.g., Veryzer, 1993; Bloch, 1995; Cox & Cox, 2002). The realization that the decisions about the aesthetic aspects of the physical environment can have an impact on human resource goals, operations goals, and marketing goals leads to the development of similar studies in services marketing literature too (Kotler, 1973; Bitner, 1990; 1992).

This research constitutes a study on visual servicescape aesthetics in particular. This research is expected to broaden the scope of existing aesthetics studies in marketing by a) moving beyond conventional aesthetics objects (e.g., music, opera) and product aesthetics (e.g., design, packaging) to service environments; b) by introducing studies from environmental psychology, Kaplan's Information Processing model (Kaplan, 1987) to built environments as theoretical frameworks within which to examine patterns of aesthetic responses. Visual aesthetics is focused in this study. The generalisation of the results of this study to other stimuli (like auditory, olfactory) may be possible, but is left for future research directions. This research is to expand the understanding of the service environments to include a more holistic view of how the visual aesthetic aspects of the physical environment leads to consumer outcome behaviors.

**Research question:** Are variations in visual aesthetic response associated with differences in aesthetics of service environments?

### **3. Aesthetics: A Review:**

Since the objective of the study is to understand the role of visual aesthetics in servicescapes, literature related to consumer aesthetics and servicescapes are reviewed. A brief introduction to philosophy to western aesthetics is presented. This is followed by an account of consumer aesthetic studies in marketing.

The origin of the word "aesthetics" is from the Greek word, "*aesthetika*", (which is translated as that which can be perceived through senses) (Veryzer, 1993). The concept of 'aesthetics' was believed to be first expressed by Plato in his consideration of "beauty" (Plato [n.d.] 1951, as cited in Charters, 2006). The term aesthetics was coined by German Philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, who referred it to the science of sensory cognition, which is autonomous and

possessed its own laws (Nuttavuthisit, 2003; Veryzer, 1993). It is to be noted that “beauty” was one of the central themes associated with aesthetics and the notion of beauty is deeply embedded in the conception of aesthetics and so in this study, beauty is synonymously used for aesthetics. Hence an understanding about the theories of beauty is required for appreciating the discipline of aesthetics. In Marketing, Vacker (1993) has classified several categories of beauty from the history of aesthetic philosophy into two groups; Subjective beauty (mainly Aristotle’s Theory of Beauty) and Objective Beauty (Plato’s and Kant’s Theory of Beauty). Subjective view (also known as psychological measurements of aesthetics prevails in modern aesthetic studies, as objective attributes that are assumed invariant across a population or subset of consumers are not appropriate for aesthetic or ideological products (Hrishman, 1983). Subjectivity, in this study, refers to personal psychological states; one's own way of feeling, thinking or perceiving, which changes according to changing environment (Addis & Holbrook, 2001). This research considers only subjective approach to aesthetics.

### **3.2. Aesthetics in Marketing:**

Aesthetics, as a topic of discussion started appearing in Marketing literature in 1980s (Holbrook, 1980). As stated, in Marketing, aesthetic studies were initially associated with objects like arts, music, opera, which are essentially ‘aesthetics products’ (Charters, 2006). Later, Hirschman & Holbrook, (1982) came up with the concept of hedonic consumption, which refers to those facets of consumer behavior that relate to the multi sensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products. In the same year, the concept of experiential aspects of consumption was also introduced by Holbrook & Hirschman (1982). Hirschman (1983) discussed the limitation in the Marketing concept to address two broad categories of producers (and their products), namely artists and ideologists. Hence, consumer researchers started viewing consumers not just as information processors to make buying choices; instead they also engage in imaginative, emotional, and appreciative consumption experiences. Much of the studies in consumer aesthetics have addressed mainly the design aspects of products, as how design factors influence the consumer perceptions (e.g., Veryzer, 1993; Bloch, 1995; Cox & Cox, 2002). Over all, it has been observed that most of the consumer aesthetic studies are done in the case of products, and for services it is underappreciated (e.g., Bitner, 1992; Turley & Milliman, 2000; Hightower, Brady & Baker, 2002) and hence, this study focuses more on the applicability of aesthetics in services. For services, aesthetics can have a major role, perhaps even more

prominent than that of products due to the intangibility of services, which makes services difficult to evaluate than products. Another reason why aesthetics is relevant in the case of the services is that unlike products, the production and consumption happens simultaneously in the same environment. So far, the focus was on explaining consumer aesthetics and how it matters in marketing studies. The next section explains the definition taken in the study.

### **3.3 Aesthetics Definition for the study:**

Holbrook (1980; 1982 & 1996) has reviewed the literature related to aesthetics in consumer research and has proposed definitions for “consumer aesthetics” from a Marketing perspective. Consumer aesthetics deals with customers cognitive, affective and behavioral responses to products and services primarily appreciated for its own sake as objects for itself (Holbrook, 1980; 1982). The appreciations for its own sake, as objects for it selves refers to the non-utilitarian aspect of the aesthetic experience, which qualitatively, ranges in intensity from the simplest hedonic pleasure to the most profound ecstatic rapture, an exultant feeling of being more deeply moved (Holbrook, 1980; Baisya & Das, 2008). Studies suggest that aesthetically likable products can excite all sensory perceptions and give pleasure, while at the same time; an aesthetically inferior one can produce distaste (Lawson, 1983 as cited in Baisya & Das, 2008).

### **3.4 Consumer Aesthetic Responses:**

Aesthetic response has a broad range of meanings within a number of domains from art and design to psychology to marketing (O'Connor, 2008) and it varies according to individuals, time and situations and hence what constitutes responses in this research is limited to those set of variables detailed in this research. Aesthetic Response is defined as the (reaction) response arising from the perception of an object's appearance (i.e., characteristics and configuration) by the perceiver (Veryzer, 1993; 1995), and which is a "deeply felt experience that is enjoyed purely for its own sake without regard for other more practical considerations" (Holbrook & Zirlin , 1985 as cited in Bloch, 1995). In general, aesthetic response to built environment is considered a complex interface involving affective appraisal and cognitive judgements (Nasar, 1994; Stamps, 2004). Precise definitions of the terms affect and cognition do not exist in literature, as definitive theories of these processes have yet to be formulated (Murphy & Zajonc, 1993). Also, a separation between affect and cognition is rare, both in practice and laboratory experiments

(Zajonc, 1980). However, separating cognition from affect, and having a separate representation of affect with response taxonomy, seems to be particularly valuable for modeling consumer behavior in service settings (Wirtz & Bateson, 1999). Also, debate exists in literature regarding the order of affect and cognition (Zajonc, 1980; Lazarus, 1982). However, this study considers affect to precedes cognition, as rapid emotional responses to environmental characteristics can occur independently and before cognition (Nasar, 1994). The following definitions are important from the perspective of the study.

Affect is defined as a “valenced feeling state” (Cohen & Areni, 1991 as cited in Erevelles, 1998); emotion expressed in language, and affective quality of physical environment, as the emotion-inducing quality that persons verbally attribute to that place (Russell & Pratt, 1980). This study considers Arousal and Pleasure as the two dimensions of affect. Cognitive responses are considered to involve the processing of visual information along with a level of categorization and inferential processing that may or may not be conscious (Kaplan, 1992; Ulrich, 1983 as cited in O’Connor, 2008). Most of the studies related to servicescapes have ignored the cognitive processes, and have examined the effects of environmental stimuli directly on individuals’ affective (emotional) responses and behaviors (Lin, 2004), though cognitive responses have been acknowledged in many studies (e.g., Bitner, 1992; Bloch, 1995). Hence, this study is considering the cognitive responses too.

#### **4. Servicescapes:**

Bitner (1992) proposed ‘servicescapes’ in reference to the physical surroundings as fashioned by service organizations to facilitate the provision of service offerings to customers. Since it is decided to focus upon the service environment for this study, a review of servicescape literature is done to a) understand the theoretical frameworks available, b) to understand the various contexts covered, c) to understand the dimensions proposed and d) to understand the aesthetic aspects already studied.

##### **4.1. Servicescapes Studies: A Chronological Review**

While tracing the genesis of studies related to service environments in Marketing, it is observed that most of the studies are in the context of retail stores. The term “atmospherics”, taken from “atmosphere”- the air surrounding the space (also the quality of surrounding spaces) was

introduced by Kotler (1974). Though, Kotler's paper is often cited as the pioneer one in service environment studies, there were a few studies in psychology and marketing which were contemporaneous, and some prior to this, which discussed about various environmental aspects of retail stores. effect of point of purchase advertisements (in-store advertisements) on sales Davis (1984) talked about the need of an organizing framework that puts together all features of physical environment for researchers and practitioners and proposed three main elements: (a) physical structure, (b) physical stimuli, and (c) symbolic artifacts. Kotler (1974) has proposed four environmental dimensions for developing the concept. Baker (1987) introduced a typology for atmospherics, as an extension of Kotler's work on atmospherics. Bawa, Landwehr & Krishna (1989) proposed that, in retail context, the total store environment is composed of physical environment and marketing environment. Some studies addressed the role of physical environment and its influence on service satisfaction (e.g., Baker, Berry & Parasuraman, 1988; Bitner, 1990) and have tested a model which explains how the appearance of the physical environment can influence customer's satisfaction (Bitner, 1990).

The term "servicescapes" was introduced by Bitner (1992) to integrate the theoretical and empirical findings from diverse disciplines to develop a framework that describes how the built environment affects both consumers and employees in service organizations. Though the term servicescapes was by Bitner, as already stated, the same concept, (in part and whole) has been discussed in various names in literature. A few key terms that have appeared in literature are; "shelf space" (Cox, 1970) "atmospherics" (Kotler, 1973), "the physical environment" (Baker, 1987), "marketing environment" (Turley and Milliman, 2000), "economic environment" (Arnould, Price & Tierney, 1998), "interactive theatre" (Mathwick, Malhotra & Rigdon, 2001), "musicscapes" (Oakes, 2000), "store environment" (Roy & Tai, 2003), "social-servicescape" (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2003), and "cyberscapes" (Williams & Dargel, 2004). Bitner, (1992) proposed a typology, which classifies the servicescapes based on who (customer or/and employee) perform the actions within the servicescapes and physical complexity of servicescapes.

Turley & Fugate (1992) proposed the term facility driven services to denote those services where the service facility plays a major role in service delivery than the social factors. Baker, Grewal & Parasuraman (1994) studied the linkages between store environment, merchandise quality and store image. New study contexts also started appearing in literature. A few studies have

attempted the study of servicescape in leisure settings (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994; 1996). This was followed by many studies in leisure settings like sporting events (Hightower, Brady & Baker, 2002); museum (Kottasuz, 2006); heritage tourism (Bonn, Joseph-Matthews, Mo Dai & Cave, 2007); hedonic services (Joseph-mathews, Bonn & Snepenger, 2009). Wagner (2000) proposed a model of aesthetic value by incorporating both subjective and objective aspects of aesthetics. Turley & Milliman, (2000); Ezeh & Harris (2007) consolidated the various empirical studies in atmospherics and suggests a few research directions. Hoffman, Kelley & Chung (2003) investigated service failures related to management of servicescapes.

In the review, it has been observed that majority of the studies were in the context of retail settings.

#### **4.2. Theoretical Developments in Servicescapes: A Critique**

In servicescape literature, various models (frameworks) were proposed like Framework for understanding environment-user relationships in service organizations (Bitner, 1992), Model of consumer responses to product form (Bloch, 1995), Model of aesthetic value in servicescapes (Wagner, 2000), Influence of retail atmospherics (Turley & Milliman, 2000), model of the impact of physical artifacts on emotions (Rafaeli & Vilnai-yavetz, 2004), and some of them were empirically tested (partly/wholly). From the focus of this research, all these models show certain handicaps. Of all these frameworks, Kotler's dimensions are more conceptual in nature and the conceptualizations were not so robust (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982) and hence various authors developed more concrete dimensions. It doesn't provide any measurable variables to any kind of aesthetic stimuli, including visual. Also, no indication regarding the response variables are provided. Baker's (1986) dimensions are wider in scope and are more popular in literature (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Grayson & McNeill, 2007) and was the first comprehensive classification for applied use. But, the design factors are more objective in nature (Wagner, 2000) and testing the design factors holistically is difficult. Also, the model has not been empirically tested to verify the propositions given. Though Bitner's framework is better preferred in studies, as it provides the various stages of consumer response (affective, cognitive and physiological), leading to behavioral outcomes, the same issues related to Baker's model applies here too. Again, Bitner's Model has never been tested globally (Dauce & Rieunier, 2002 as cited in Godey, Lagier & Pederzoli, 2009). From the perspective of the current study, the aesthetics aspects and its synergy of the (visual) environmental factors are not provided in the



dimensions. Often the combined effects of the various tangible elements present in the environment give rise to a holistic image of the servicescape that shapes consumers experiences (Verhoeven, Van Rompay & Pruyn, 2009). Bloch's model is more objective in nature ("product form"), in terms of the dimensions and has not been empirically validated. Though Wagner's model (2000) is specific to aesthetic value, the approach adopted is by considering individual elements, and not as the combined atmosphere. Also, there was no empirical validation to this. Turley & Milliman's (2000) work was just an extension of Bitner's (1992) framework with a few additional dimensions, which from the perspective of this research, shares all shortcomings mentioned for Bitner's Model. Rafaeli & Vilnai-yavetz's (2004) study were on physical artifacts and may not be adaptable in the context of service environments and is not specific to aesthetic attributes. Also, the possible interactions between the various aesthetic characteristics make the direct measurement very difficult. Hence, to develop a model to measure the customer's aesthetic responses to servicescape visual aesthetics, a review of some of the prominent theories in environmental psychology studies are made.

### **5. Theoretical Views on Preference Models in Environmental Psychology:**

Environmental Psychology deals with scientific studies on effects of the environment on human behaviour (Loomis, 1976 as cited in Tai & Fung, 1997). Four basic environmental assessment research paradigms exist in literature; expert paradigm, psycho-physical paradigm, cognitive paradigm and experiential paradigm. Since, the focus of the study is on subjective assessment of beauty, this research considers Cognitive paradigm. Several cognitive research frameworks are available in environmental psychology literature and of the major theoretical frameworks on environmental preference available in cognitive paradigm, the most widely referred (Scott, 1993) frameworks are 1). Mehrabian & Russell Model, 2). The evolutionary prospect-refuge theory of Appleton (1975), and 3) the information processing model developed by Stephen Kaplan (Kaplan, 1987).

Both Mehrabian and Russell Model and prospect-refuge theory of Appleton has certain limitation, as far as this research is concerned, hence Kaplan's Model is used.

### **6. Kaplan's Model of Information Processing on Environmental Preference:**

Stephen Kaplan's theory explains environmental preference from an evolutionary perspective of information processing (Kaplan, 1987). Information-processing theory, one of the most

significant and well-studied theories in landscape visual preference research (Cheng, 2007; Hagerhall, 2001; Stamps, 2004) has been found to have substantial practical and theoretical influence (Herzog & Kropscott, 2004). The evaluative judgments about the environment humans make may be conscious or unconscious (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982 as cited in O'Connor, 2008). Some environments are perceived to be more attractive than others by people (Kaplan, 1985). Humans, in the course of evolution required the construction and use of cognitive maps for survival, and hence being attracted by information would seem thoroughly adaptive. They should be enticed by new information, by the prospect of updating and extending their cognitive maps. This is depicted in the first category of Exploration dimensions. However, they cannot stray too far from the familiar, as they may be caught by situation in which they may be helpless due to lack of necessary knowledge. This is depicted in the second category of Understanding dimensions (Kaplan, 1987).

#### **Kaplan and Kaplan's Information-Processing Framework**

<i>Availability of</i>	<i>Needs</i>	
<i>Information</i>	Understand	Explore
Immediate	Coherence	Complexity
Inferred	Legibility	Mystery

Source: Kaplan, 1987:12

Information can be derived immediately from an environment, or it can be inferred. These two dimensions (human needs and information availability) were used by Kaplan to compose a preference matrix which has four key information variables: complexity, coherence, mystery, and legibility, which are predominantly a function of design and layout of the environment. The definitions of each of the dimensions, for this study are as given;

a) **Complexity**: this concept was first introduced by Berlyne (1960) has received maximum attention in experimental aesthetics (Berlyne, 1972; Kaplan, 1987). Berlyne explicitly asserted that the hedonic value of a stimulus was not directly determined by objective complexity features, but by subjective complexity (Holbrook, 1980). Complexity is defined as the elements present in the atmosphere; how intricate and visually rich (Herzog and Kropscott, 2004); how

much is going on in the two-dimensional scene (Herzog & Leverich, 2003); information rate. Greater the number and variety, greater will be the complexity (Spies, Hesse & Loesch, 1997) and it predicts the preference for physical environment, regardless of the content (Kaplan, Kaplan & Wendt, 1972). When plotted against preference /liking, it follows an inverted “U” shaped curve, having an optimum value in the centre (Kaplan, 1987; Naser, 1994).

b) **Mystery**: the hidden information present in the scene, which evokes inferential mental activity, which enhances the preference (Ikemi, 2005); “any features that encourage one to enter more deeply into the larger environment with the promise that one could gain interesting new information” (Herzog & Kropscott, 2004); higher the information more it draws attention and so higher the mystery.

c) **Coherence**: how well is the scene organized; how the elements are complementing each other; features of the picture plane that aid in organizing or understanding the scene (Herzog & Leverich, 2003; Herzog & Kropscott, 2004); greater the coherence, higher will be the preference for the scene. If the viewer is able to organize the information in the scene into a relatively small number of chunks, the scene is said to be coherent .

d) **Legibility**: the level of distinctiveness that enables the viewers to understand or categorize the contents of a scene; the features of the environment that facilitate understanding by aiding way finding and the building of a useful cognitive map (Herzog & Leverich, 2003; Herzog & Kropscott, 2004).

### 6.1. Why Kaplan’s Model is used for this Research?

After reviewing the said three models, this research suggests the usage of Kaplan’s dimensions to measure the visual aesthetic stimuli for the following reasons;

- Aesthetic stimuli exist only as wholes (gestalts) (Hirschman, 1983) and human beings perceive visual aesthetics of service environment holistically (Holbrook, 1983) and they cannot be analyzed via their attribute structure. Also, many researchers have suggested a holistic approach for understanding and measuring aesthetics (e.g., Lin, 2004; Newman, 2007; Ezeh & Harris, 2007). Kaplan’s Model provides a comprehensive set of variables to measure the visual environmental preference.
- The widely used Mehrabian – Russell Model in servicescape studies lacks specific dimensions for the environmental stimuli (Gilboa & Rafaeli, 2003), where as Kaplan’s Model provides a set of stimuli taxonomy.

- Like landscapes, interior environments must also respond to basic human needs for information. Again, the environmental attributes identified in Kaplan's model are also observable in interior spaces (Scott, 1993).
- There is a natural tendency among consumers to prefer those built environments most favourable for understanding and exploration, which are captured in Kaplan's Model (Olascoaga, 2003).
- Kaplan & Kaplan (1972) have extensively examined the role of cognition in person-environment interaction, from an environmental psychology perspective and is a widely used model for environmental preference studies (Stamps, 2007).
- The widely discussed Mehrabian & Russell Model discusses only about affective responses (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Bitner, 1992; Baker, Levy & Grewal, 1992). However, aesthetic responses include cognitive responses also (Bitner, 1992, Kaplan, 1985; 1987; Charters, 2006; Zajonc & Markus, 1982). Hence, Kaplan's Model is preferred.

### **7. The Proposed Model of Visual Aesthetics for the Study:**

The study aims to develop a set of predictors that are related to each other within a systematic theoretical framework.

There were only a few studies which focused on facility driven services, as the context of servicescape studies. For facility driven services, aesthetic aspects plays a major role, as these services may or may not have employees presence, and hence the customer satisfaction for those services depends upon the customer's ability to interact with the facility to produce consumption experience (Turley & Fugate, 1992). Though many studies have done to understand the influence of service environments (eg: Donovan & Rossiter, 1982; Milliman, 1986; Bellizzi & Hite, 1992; Bitner, 1992; Yalch & Spangenberg, 1993; Wirtz & Bateson, 1998; Turley & Milliman, 2000), very few studies have attempted to focus the attention completely on facility driven services. As stated, the social factors (Baker, 1987) are more significant for those services, where employee-customer interactions are more critical, (like for hairdressing, therapist) and for some services, it will be for an extended period of time like for physicians, financial consultants. But for facility driven services, social elements are secondary to service facility (Turley & Fugate, 1992).

There are few studies which addressed the aesthetics aspects, holistically in literature. Almost all the studies mentioned above has focused on evaluating or predicting behavioural response to stimuli of the physical environment as constructed by the producer and no attention to the role of consumers in determining their own experiences. Or in other words, this study takes into consideration the experiential aspects of consumption.

The author proposes a model that represents different processing stages as well as important variables that are involved in aesthetic experiences. Also, it is to be noted that, all existing studies which discussed about the aesthetic factors have considered elements like architecture, color, materials, style etc. for studies (e.g., Baker, 1987; Bellizzi, Crowley & Hasty, 1983; Bellizzi & Hite, 1992; Turley & Milliman, 2000) and only very few studies have incorporated the influence of more than one servicescape element (e.g., Mattila & Wirtz, 2001). Little is researched about the global configurations of the visual aesthetic aspects of the servicescape. Since, visual elements are perceived holistically than in parts, (e.g., Lin, 2004; Newman, 2007; Ezeh & Harris, 2007), such approaches have limitations. Hence, in this model, as mentioned, dimensions to measure the environmental stimuli are taken from Kaplan's Information-processing theory.

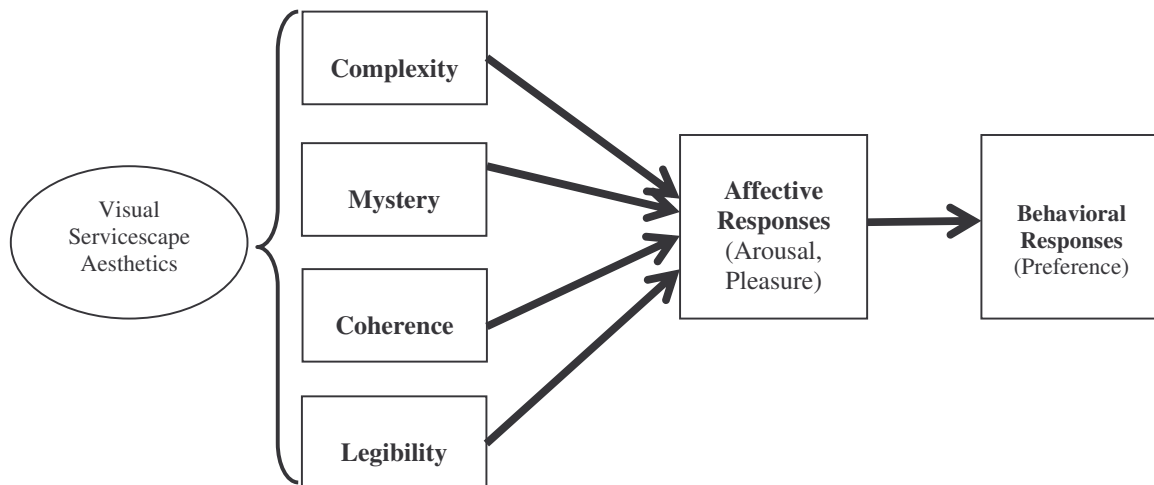
### **7.1. Stimulus Variables:**

The four dimensions of Kaplan's Model, Complexity, Coherence, Mystery and Legibility are used to measure the environmental stimuli. Out of the four dimensions proposed in the model, Complexity and Coherence are based on the properties of a scene and that can be assessed rather directly without any need for making inferences (Herzog, Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982). These two dimensions are more affective in nature, where as Legibility and Mystery requires cognitive interpretation.

### **7.2. Response Variables:**

Nasar's (1994) probabilistic model of aesthetic response to building attributes provided a practical model to measure the aesthetic responses.

### 7.3 The Model:



### 8. Hypothesis:

Berlyne (1951; 1972) has investigated the influence of complexity on emotions and the subsequent studies in natural and urban environment (Nasar, 1994) have confirmed these relationships to arousal and pleasure. Based on these finding in external environments, it is proposed that

**H1:** The perceived complexity of the servicescapes is directly proportional to the level of arousal and pleasure

Kaplan (1987) explains relationship between complexity and preference in the context of information theory. Greater the number and variety, greater will be the complexity (Spies, Hesse & Loesch, 1997) and it predicts the preference for physical environment, regardless of the content (Kaplan, Kaplan & Wendt, 1972). However, if information exceeds human processing ability, people cannot attend to all information, leading to avoidance (low preference). Hence it is proposed as;

**H2:** The perceived complexity of servicescapes bears a curvilinear relationship to preference and this relationship will be mediated by arousal and pleasure.

Mystery is said to be the degree of uncertainty of the information in environment (Ikemi, 2005). As mystery increases, the affective responses towards a (natural) environment increases, leading to preference for that environment (Nasar, 1997; Herzog & Kropscott, 2004). The same concept can be extended to servicescapes as;

**H3:** The perceived mystery of the servicescapes is directly proportional to the level of arousal and pleasure.

**H4:** The perceived mystery of servicescapes bears a linear relationship to preference and this relationship will be mediated by arousal and pleasure.

Coherence refers to features of the picture plane that aid in organizing or understanding the scene (Herzog & Kropscott, 2004). Nazar (1997) demonstrated that “the degree to which scene hangs together” (coherence) positively relates emotions. Also, greater the coherence, higher will be the preference for the scene (Herzog & Leverich, 2003; Herzog & Kropscott, 2004). Hence, extending the same to servicescapes, it is proposed that;

**H5:** The perceived coherence of the servicescapes is directly proportional to the level of arousal and pleasure

**H6:** The perceived coherence of servicescapes bears a linear relationship to preference and this relationship will be mediated by arousal and pleasure.

As mystery increases, the affective responses towards a (natural) environment increases, leading to preference for that environment (Nasar,1997; Herzog & Kropscott, 2004). The same concept can be extended to servicescapes as;

**H7:** The perceived mystery of the servicescapes is directly proportional to the level of arousal and pleasure.

**H8:** The perceived mystery of servicescapes bears a linear relationship to preference and this relationship will be mediated by arousal and pleasure.

## **9. Basic Assumptions:**

This research assumes that people have the capacity to perceive and appraise the aesthetic quality of servicescapes. It presupposes that different theories, approaches, and methods can be developed in order to appraise the aesthetic quality of Servicescapes. It is also assumed that self-declared affective/mood/emotional states of the respondents are true reflections of their actual internal response. Though researches (e.g., Holbrook, 1986) have shown that aesthetic responses

may vary with personality, social and cultural experiences, associations, environmental actors but there are some commonalities across individuals (Nazar, 1994), which is what is discussed in the proposed model. Also cultures tend to be homogeneous in aesthetic responses (Berlyne, 1971 as cited in Jansson, Bointon & Marlow, 2002).

## **10. Conclusion**

This paper is a theoretical one, which attempts to develop a framework for understanding the importance of visual aesthetics in servicescapes. Though Kaplan's Model has been cited in various studies in Marketing literature (e.g.: Bitner, 1992) an attempt to use the whole set of dimensions to understand the consumer preference based on the visual aesthetics of servicescapes has not been attempted in the literature. Also as already stated, in marketing very few studies have addressed the servicescape aesthetics in particular. Validation of the model can be done using suitable methods, which is not currently under the scope of this paper.



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