



Article

Impact of Substantive Staging and Communicative Staging of Sustainable Servicescape on Behavioral Intentions of Hotel Customers through Overall Perceived Image: A Case of Boutique Hotels

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Abstract: Customers have become very sensitive regarding the innovative evaluation of services. Due to competition in the hospitality industry, it is a challenge for hotel marketers to understand customers' behavior. There is scant research in the hotel industry of Pakistan and especially on boutique hotels. This research seeks to measure the relationship between substantive, communicative elements of the sustainable servicescape and behavioral intentions (word of mouth) in a boutique hotel setting. However, the mediating effect of the overall perceived image is examined between these constructs. Responses of boutique hotel visitors were collected from Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, and Murree. Data were analyzed by using structural equation modeling (SEM). Results display that both substantive and communicative servicescape elements positively affect the perceived image of customers, which has a positive influence on behavioral intentions such as word of mouth (WOM). Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed.

Keywords: sustainable servicescape; perceived image; behavioral intentions; S-O-R model; boutique hotels

1. Introduction

Services are an important part of every economy. Most of the advanced nations of the world have observed massive growth in the significance of services to consumers and economies [1]. Services are also a source of competitive advantage [2]. Customers are

exposed to a variety of services such as health care, banking, insurance, transportation, traveling, communication, entertainment, and hotel. Services are intangible entities such as activities, processes, and experiences [3]. Research revealed that it is difficult for consumers to evaluate the quality of services [4]. Therefore, they detect physical clues in services to form their positive or negative opinions about the delivery of services. The hotel industry also plays an important role in the world economy [5]. This sector is facing more competition because of the interaction and extensive involvement of individuals in processing services [6]. However, the destinations of hotels and tourist resorts influence the opinions of customers [7]. Similarly, physical environmental factors affect the psychological conditions and behaviors of hotel consumers [8]. Services occur in an environment that has intangible and tangible elements and thus form a sustainable servicescape. This concept encompasses both visual features like buildings, equipment, design, and colors, along with invisible facets, for instance, music, fragrance, courtesy of workers, and room temperature [9]. A sustainable servicescape is a corporeal environment or premises of a service firm where services are performed [10]. Various atmospheric domains influence feelings and behaviors, for instance, ambient states (music, color, fragrance, lighting, air quality, etc.); function (equipment, furnishing, design, etc.), ornamentation, signs, and symbols [11]. Visitors have made positive observations about the corporal atmosphere that influences affirmative feelings and eventually behavioral intent [12]. Likewise, sustainable servicescape affects behavioral intentions as well as arising psychological states [13].

In fact, the sustainable servicescape consists of substantive staging and communicative staging. According to Dong and Siu [14], substantive staging is based on the corporal facets of the environment (cleanliness, scent, ornamentation, music, etc.), whereas communicative staging aspects focus on empathy and the culture, attitudes, and behaviors of employees. Boutique hotels were set up in the 1970s to 1980s in response to conventional lodging and the standardization of hotels [15]. They are a unique product of the hospitality industry for their features, offerings, and customer services [16]. These hotels have small rooms, particular shapes, advanced and customized services, specific locations, and target customers [17]. Boutique hotels are emerging entities in the hospitality industry of Pakistan that offer customized room services based on destinations.

Khan and Rahman [18] described that substantive staging is significant for evaluating and performing services, whereas communicative staging of the sustainable servicescape, which is denoted by humanitarian and social aspects, is also valuable for organizations as a source of competitive advantage since it may vary from firm to firm. No doubt, the corporal environment is indispensable for the clienteles of service-oriented businesses, but few scholars also emphasize the societal influences of the sustainable servicescape [19]. Moreover, communicative staging comprises workers and their cultural factors [14]. Studies validated that physical atmosphere (such as substantive sustainable servicescape) affects outcomes, for example, efficiency, customer psychological reactions, and behavioral intentions [14,20]. Substantive staging of the sustainable servicescape has a strong effect on the behavioral intents of themed restaurant consumers as compared to communicative staging [21]. Substantive and communicative staging have positive relationships with behavioral intentions (word of mouth) [22]. Similarly, research revealed that both substantive and communicative staging influence consumers' experiences [23]. Societal facets of the sustainable servicescape influence the restaurant image and purchase intentions [24,25]. In a similar way, music, noise, air quality, and temperature influenced the overall image of luxury hotels, and this image formed consumer fulfillment [26]. An affirmative image of a travel destination may enhance customers' willingness to revisit, and word of mouth (WOM). Furthermore, the image of the destination might influence the intent to visit again and suggest others [27]. Image perception also helps to develop the behavior intents of restaurant visitors for word of mouth and intention to visit again [28]. On the basis of the above discussion, authors devised the following research objectives: (1) to inquire into the impact of substantive staging of the sustainable servicescape (SSOS) and communicative staging of the sustainable servicescape (CSOS) on word of mouth (WOM); (2) to enquire

into the mediating role of the overall perceived image (OPI) between SSOS and WOM; and (3) to test the mediating effect of OPI between CSOS and WOM.

The current research may play a significant role in sustainable servicescape literature. The sustainable servicescape can have a positive effect on clients' behavioral intentions. Most of the recent studies in the hospitality industry have investigated the contribution of the sustainable servicescape in a restaurant framework [21,29,30]; moreover, image perspectives and behavior intents observed in hotel backgrounds [11] have primarily focused on substantive staging. On the other hand, a few research works have inquired about the impacts of the communicative staging of the sustainable servicescape in a hospitality context [9,29]. This study also encompasses the industry gap as earlier research was conducted in various categories of the hospitality field such as casual dining [30], coffee stores [31], opera events [32], airports [33], and health care settings [34], while the present research is executed in boutique hotels in Pakistan.

This study is important for different reasons. For example, current research adds to the knowledge of sustainable servicescape literature by analyzing the relationship between different constructs in the context of Pakistan. This study also has a contextual gap as the recent surveys have been performed in different parts of the world, e.g., Oviedo-García, et al. [35] in the USA, Lin, et al. [36], Taiwan, and Pizam and Tasci [37], the UK. However, according to researchers' knowledge and literature study, there is no single piece of research on the components of the sustainable servicescape and behavioral intentions, through the overall perceived image has been executed in the context of Pakistan. Therefore, the present study covers this literature gap by targeting hotel visitors from Pakistan.

The overall perceived image is not examined as a mediating variable among sustainable servicescape elements (substantive staging and communicative staging) and behavioral intentions (word of mouth) in a single framework in earlier studies. Thus, it might also be a contribution. So, the objective of this research is to investigate the positive relationship between sustainable servicescape components and behavioral intentions through the mediating effect of the overall perceived image in boutique hotels of Pakistan. The rest of this paper is organized as follows: the next section describes relevant literature to form hypotheses and a research framework for this study. Afterward, the methodology and findings, which include sampling, data collection, the instrumentation of the present study, and how the data are examined, are explained. In the last segment, the research demonstrates a discussion section, which consists of implications and limitations for future research.

2. Literature

Present research includes support from the stimulus–organism–response (SOR) theory [38] to develop hypotheses. The S-O-R paradigm originated from environmental psychology and defines how environmental signs influence consumers' assessments that arise the reactions of clients, for instance, behaviors. This model explains stimuli, such as the environmental stimuli in the service encounter. Physical stimuli influence consumer behaviors positively. Organisms delineate the psychological and rational reactions of customers. In fact, various internal states of consumers are inquired into as organisms [39]. The response is described as the actions and reactions of consumers. Such responses may be positive when customers are inspired by the attractive or spectacular design of the environment [40]. However, consumer actions might differ because of customers' negative feelings about visual design or decoration of the physical settings. Sustainable servicescape refers to a corporal environment that has an effect on attitudes and behaviors of customers and employees. Jani and Han [13] also argued that sustainable servicescape influenced consumer feelings and caused expected client behavioral intentions to arise in the hospitality sector.

The boutique hotel is a blend of service quality facets, specifically design, place, and services [28]. Boutique hotel refers to a distinctive accommodation experience focus on high service standards, stylistic exclusivity, and specific guest care [41,42]. These types of hotels are small; rooms typically number from 3 to 50, although they can be up to 200 lodgings in

some cases [43]. According to Franchetti and Forsgren [44], boutique hotels are a type of lodging that is highly contemporary and equipped with modern design and technological amenities. Van Hartesvelt [45] argued that service employees of these customized hotels are relatively sociable, hard-working, and multitasking, and may serve clients in a warm and friendly manner. Horner and Swarbrooke [46] state five unique characteristics of boutique hotels: they are smaller hotels with a warmer feel; a focus on stylish fittings, accessories, and proper electronics; each hotel is perceived as being unique regardless of the existence of a soft brand in some conditions; a focus on modern styles using key designers to generate ideas; and tailored services (although the hotels do not always have full-service amenities like restaurants).

According to Bitner [10], sustainable servicescape comprised ambient conditions (fragrance, noise, temperature, and air quality), spatial and functional factors (equipment, furnishing, and design), symbols, signage, and style of ornamentation. Researchers employed this model to analyze and comprehend the positive feelings of consumers towards layout and constructed environment [14,47]. This paradigm only focused on physical elements (substantive sustainable servicescape) of the service atmosphere, but social aspects (communicative sustainable servicescape) are also important to investigate behavioral outcomes [48]. Thus, sustainable servicescape is differentiated into two dimensions: substantive and communicative [49]. Nevertheless, substantive staging deliberates physical features (odor, sanitation, music, etc.) of the service surroundings, and communicative facets focus on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Substantive staging deals with corporal factors of the hospitality field. Dong and Siu [14] described that substantive sustainable servicescape includes ambiance, design, signs, symbols, and decoration. The term ambiance is associated with particular components in a distinct environment, for example, heating, air quality, music, lights, and smell [10,50–53]. Henshaw, et al. [54] discovered that fresh air is one of the inducements in destinations and is linked to aroma. Likewise, lights are also essentials of the physical environment [55]. In a research study, Fraser [56] inquired about the impacts of melodies on brand message. Design or layout means arrangements of machines, equipment, and furnishing premises where consumers experience services and usefulness of space [57]. The notion of decoration is linked with the colors of buildings, walls, and flooring [58]. Moreover, the sign may be utilized to explain the firm or inform (about the path taken) [59]. Loureiro [60] discovered that ambiance and design formed the most important sustainable servicescape aspects. Alfakhri, et al. [61] introduced a new term, “hotelscape”, which states that consumer experience of hotel internal design features may stimulate feelings of customers (e.g., pleasure, comfort, and contentment) that eventually affect responses (word of mouth, social relations, time consumption, and loyalty). Contemporary researchers like Dedeoglu, et al. [62] also explained that substantive sustainable servicescape is famous due to the corporal and atmospheric states (ambiance, spatial design, functionality, ornamentation, and symbol) of the environment. On the basis of literature, authors predict the following hypotheses.

H1: *“Substantive staging of sustainable servicescape” influences behavioral intentions positively.*

H2: *“Substantive staging of sustainable servicescape” affects overall perceived image positively.*

Physical environment (substantive staging) has an inclination to influence consumer fulfillment due to service exposure and perhaps lead to behavior intentions [10,11]. Substantive staging was discovered to be more influential on consumer service appraisals than communicative staging [14]. Numerous scholars revealed that substantive sustainable servicescape affects significant consequences, for instance, behavioral intents, organizational effectiveness, and psychological reactions of customers [14,63]. Physical sustainable servicescape aspects affect affirmatively and significantly the client's perceived image and behavioral responses, like word of mouth [64]. Jang, Ro and Kim [24] discovered that corporal and societal sustainable servicescape develops the image of a hotel and motivates behavioral intents of consumers (for example, staying longer and suggesting others). Communicative staging is defined as the societal elements of services setting. This concept

consists of organizational culture and employee-related issues [65]. Arnett, et al. [66] argued that when hotel employees feel job satisfaction and pride, their behavior improves positively. Such behavior shows employee dedication for good service delivery, cooperation with colleagues, and commitment to the organization. Hence, workers' productivity regarding services may influence the image of a firm positively as these employees reflect organizations' appearance. Nguyen [67] stated that there is a positive relationship between service employees and sustainable servicescape that has a mutual influence on corporate image. Substantive (physical evidence) and communicative (human signs) staging of the sustainable servicescape affect consumer exposures [23]. The service environment is influenced by corporal features and societal exchanges among buyers and workforces [68]. Besides, physical inducements, e.g., human stimulus, and communications with staff, affect consumer service encounters [10,68]. Park, Back, Bufquin and Shapoval [48] described that communicative sustainable servicescape encompasses societal characteristics and service experiences with workers as an important communication approach with visitors.

Chang [11], Dong and Siu [14] hypothesized the human aspects as communicative sustainable servicescape, which describes the way service environment is presented and perceived. Furthermore, communicative staging along with substantive staging affects positive consumer feelings and behavioral intent. Hospitality researchers have laid more emphasis on the impact of communicative sustainable servicescape [9,50,64]. Empathy among staff and consumers demonstrates a healthy gesture for individual service quality and such bond improves the perceived image of a hotel [24]. When customers transfer social harmony among other clients and service employees, they realize that workers are consumer-oriented, and this turns into a positive hotel image.

Service firms have accepted the significance of their workers for consumers [69–71]. Indeed physical environment is significant for clients of service organizations, but some researchers also have emphasized the social factors of sustainable servicescape [72]. Communicative staging includes employees of a company as well as cultural facets [14]. Pizam and Tasci [37] presented a novel concept, “experienscape”, to explain the improvement in sustainable servicescape by the addition of the organizational culture of service firms that comprise of staff and other stakeholders. The authors propose the following hypotheses based on the literature.

H3: *“Communicative staging of sustainable servicescape” affects behavioral intentions significantly.*

H4: *“Communicative staging of sustainable servicescape” has a positive impact on the overall perceived image.*

Behavioral intentions state the extent to which an individual has formed deliberate plans to execute or not perform some specific forthcoming actions [73]. There are few studies on perceptions about substantive staging and communicative staging of the sustainable servicescape jointly, and their impacts on perceived values, particularly in the hotel background. Favorable behavior intentions show that consumers have affiliation with a firm and consist of affirmative comments about it, endorsing services to other people and being willing to pay a high price, and maintaining organizational loyalty [74]. Fishbein and Ajzen [75] argued that behavioral intent is a substitute for real behavior. Consumers' behaviors regarding revisiting and recommending services to fellows are the outcomes of their feelings [76]. Dedeoğlu, Bilgihan, Ye, Buonincontri and Okumus [62] described an effect of substantive and communicative staging on behavioral intents of consumers through innovation and psychological advantage, with moderating impact of prior exposure. Most behavioral intentions have been studied in the domain of positive WOM or revisiting intent [77–80]. Similarly, Dedeoğlu [7] revealed that behavioral intentions were usually explored under the WOM and revisiting intentions. WOM refers to informal recommendations accepted among consumers [81]. Positive WOM encompasses enjoyable, colorful, or innovative experiences; endorsements to others; and even noticeable demonstrations [82]. According to Dedeoğlu [7], behavioral intentions are related to the certainty that travelers will revisit a place, have affirmative discussions, make comments about the

destination, and be resilient to even small price rises. Based on these arguments, authors propose the following hypotheses.

H5: *Overall perceived image influences behavioral intentions significantly.*

H6: *Perceived image mediates the relationship between “substantive staging of sustainable servicescape” and behavioral intentions.*

H7: *Perceived image has a mediating effect between “communicative staging of sustainable servicescape” and behavioral intentions.*

3. Methodology

The data were collected from boutique hotels in Pakistan to hypothesized relationships (Figure 1). The authors selected these hotels from Lahore, Faisalabad, Islamabad, and Murree to represent the hotel industry of Pakistan. Lahore is a metropolitan city and has a huge population. It is one of the biggest Asian markets in terms of business. It has a large number of hotels and restaurants. Faisalabad is an industrial city and is called the Manchester of Pakistan because of its enormous textile industry. It is also a populated city. Islamabad is the capital of Pakistan and the center of government institutions, embassies, hotels, universities, etc. Murree is famous for its climate and thus a favorite destination of travelers. These locations are chosen because of the flow of travelers and the large number of hotels. In addition, visitors are easy to approach here. Therefore, the convenience sampling technique [83] is used to collect data from individual customers of boutique hotels. A representative sample of visitors from the ages of 20 years to 50 years or above was taken into the consideration for the current study. The authors received 265 valid responses from the visitors who visited the selected hotels. Consequently, this research aims to investigate the opinions and preferences of hotel customers about customized lodgings. In addition, this survey is cross-sectional in its nature. Researchers asked hotels administrations to provide information about visitors. Initially, they were reluctant to share such information of their clients but after the assurance provided by authors that the data would not be disseminated anywhere. Hence, researchers are allowed by managers to record data from travelers. These hotels are also liable to follow SOPs for COVID-19 advised by authorities. Likewise, researchers, employees, and visitors are also recommended to observe such precautions to stop the pandemic. However, before starting the formal data collection segment, researchers talked to the human resource departments of the hotels to receive assistance and approval for data collection from consumers. The researchers also signed a contract with ethical authorities of these service organizations to observe ethical standards in the process of data collection. Furthermore, the authors obtained informed consent from all the participants involved in this survey. Thus, data were collected by authors through a self-administered questionnaire, and respondents were requested to fill out these questionnaires. The researchers distributed a total of 500 questionnaires among boutique hotel customers and obtained 265 completely filled surveys from individuals. Therefore, the response rate of the present study was 53 %. This data were collected in 4 weeks. The data collection procedure was finalized during the months of February and April in the year 2021. The present survey was executed according to the ethical standards defined in Helsinki Declaration.

Measurement and Handling Social Desirability

The present study adapted the scales from previous prevailing inquiries; therefore, the reliability and validity of the survey were pre-tested. Components of sustainable servicescape substantive and communicative staging are independent variables and are measured among boutique hotel customers by the scales of Loureiro, et al. [84] and Mody, et al. [85]. This tool has 16 items. A sample item is “*Lighting was comfortable*” for SSOS. Moreover, a sample item of CSOS is “*I felt welcome at the hotel.*” The dependent variable, i.e., behavioral intentions (word of mouth), is measured by the scale of Mody, et al. [86]. It has two items. A sample item is “*I say positive things about the hotel to other people for travel*”

(visit).” Overall perceived image is the mediating variable in this study, which is measured by the questionnaire of Nguyen and Leblanc [87]. This tool consists of three statements. A sample item of this scale is “*I have always had a good impression of this hotel.*” The researchers used a seven-point Likert scale for the current study. The authors performed different steps to handle the matter of social desirability. For example, all the statements of the research instrument were randomly dispersed throughout the questionnaire. The researchers executed this process to disrupt any possible sequence of answering the responses. This procedure is also helpful to tackle the possibility of some interest or disinterest for a particular construct. Moreover, the survey was analyzed for accuracy and appropriateness by the experts in the field. Such measure is essential to avoid any ambiguity or misunderstanding in a statement due to double meanings of words. Many scholars also approved these steps to alleviate the degree of social desirability. Table 1 displays the demographic details of the sample.

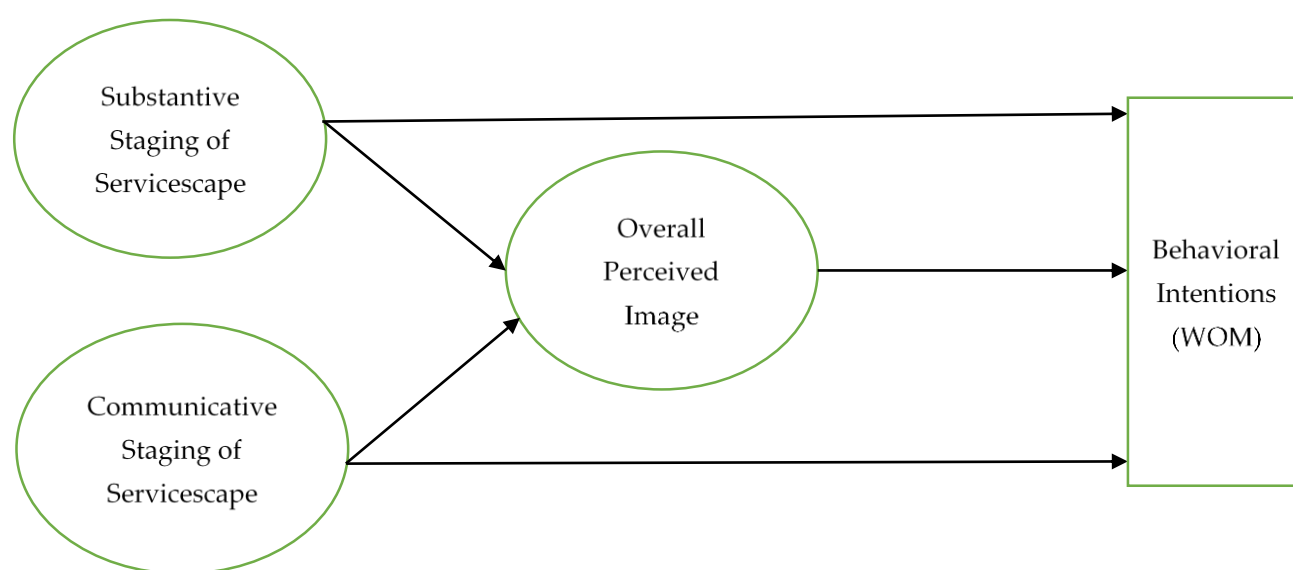


Figure 1. The proposed research model, hypothesized by authors. This model comprises four constructs: substantive staging of sustainable servicescape (SSOS) = the independent variable (X1), communicative staging of sustainable servicescape (CSOS) = independent variable (X2), overall perceived image (OPI) = mediating variable (M), and behavioral intentions (BI) = the dependent variable (Y).

Table 1. Demographic detail.

Demographic	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	183	69.0
Female	82	31.0
Age-group (Year)		
20–30	90	34.0
30–40	146	55.0
40–50 and Above	29	11.0
Work Experience (Years)		
1–5	60	23.0
5–10	75	28.0
10–15	89	34.0
15–20 and Above	41	15.0

Table 1. Cont.

Demographic	Frequency	%
Income		
PKR.40,000–PKR.60,000	68	26.0
PKR.60,000–PKR.80,000	98	37.0
PKR.80,000–PKR.100,000	61	23.0
PKR.100,000–PKR.150,000 and above	38	14.0
Hotel Patronage		
Once in a month	119	45.0
2–3 times in a month	66	25.0
Quarterly	80	30.0
Employment Status		
Self-Employed	128	48.0
Full time	90	34.0
Retired	47	18.0
Total	265	100

4. Results

4.1. Common Method Bias

The authors started the data analysis section by examining the presence of common method bias (CMB). The researchers executed the CMB test because the data for all constructs in this study were collected from an individual respondent. Therefore, the reservation about the presence of CMB is not without reason. Consequently, researchers performed a single-factor analysis in SPSS (IBM, Armonk, NY, USA) as per the recommendation of Harman [88]. Thus, the authors allowed all the questionnaire items to load on a single-factor. In accordance with the recommendations of Harman, if the output of single-factor analysis approves a single-factor that shares a variance of 50% or more, then it is stated that the data require more important consideration of the authors, to report the issue of CMB. In this situation, the single-factor analysis outcomes confirmed the absence of any factor that was sharing more than 50% variance. The maximum variance shared by a single-factor was 37.70%, which is less than the threshold degree. So, the researchers validated that CMB is not a possible issue in the current survey.

4.2. Convergent Validity, Factor Loadings, and the Reliability Analysis

In the next segment of data analysis, researchers performed different tests to approve reliability and validity. Hence, the researchers, first of all, tested for convergent validity, which was authenticated by the results of average-variance extracted (AVE) for every construct. For such purpose, authors estimated the factor loading of all the items of a construct and perceived no problem in item loadings for a variable as the loading range for all items was more than the threshold level of 0.50. After approving the factor loadings, the researchers evaluated AVE for each construct by determining the sum of squares of all item loadings and dividing it by the number of items. For example, in the case of SSOS, there were 10 items, and thus the authors initially calculated the sum of squares loadings of all these 10 items and then divided it by 10. Accordingly, researchers calculated AVEs for all concepts. The AVE outputs present the base to evaluate the foundation of convergent validity as if the value of AVE for a particular concept is greater than 0.50; it is a confirmation that the items of that construct are converging, and hence, the overall standard of convergent validity is confirmed. The results of convergent validity (AVE values) for every concept have been stated in Table 2 by the researchers. It is clear from the outputs of Table 2 that all AVEs are more than the threshold level of 0.50, which identifies that there is no issue of convergent validity in the dataset of the present survey. Likewise, the reliability results were established on the basis of Cronbach Alpha (α) values of each concept and based on results of composite reliability (C.R) values. The general rule to develop the reliability of a questionnaire is that together the values of (α and C.R) would be equal to or more than 0.70. According to the statistical results mentioned in Table 2, there

is no reliability problem as all four constructs generated acceptable values of reliability. Therefore, the authors verified that there is no problem of reliability in the current study.

Table 2. Factor loading, convergent validity, and reliability results.

Item	Loadings	AVE	A	C.R
SSOS1	0.75			
SSOS2	0.85			
SSOS3	0.83			
SSOS4	0.78			
SSOS5	0.81			
SSOS6	0.79			
SSOS7	0.76			
SSOS8	0.86			
SSOS9	0.87			
SSOS10	0.81			
SSOS11	0.77	0.65	0.93	0.95
CSOS1	0.82			
CSOS2	0.72			
CSOS3	0.76			
CSOS4	0.70			
CSOS5	0.79	0.58	0.88	0.87
WOM1	0.86			
WOM2	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.71
OPI1	0.74			
OPI2	0.71			
OPI3	0.76	0.75	0.78	0.85

Notes: loadings = factor loadings, α = Cronbach alpha, and C.R = composite reliability.

Afterward, the authors executed correlation analysis, discriminant validity analysis, and the results of various model fit indices. These results have been reported by the authors in Table 3. With these findings, values of correlation between all the constructs are significant and positive, which demonstrates that all the concepts of the current survey are significantly related. For instance, the value of the correlation between the substantive staging of sustainable servicescape (SSOS) and word of mouth (WOM) is 0.534 **, which is positive and significant. This confirms an affirmative and important relationship between these constructs. To confirm discriminant validity, the authors measured the square root of AVE for each concept independently. After calculating all the square root results of AVEs, the researchers contrasted the square root value of AVE for each concept with the values of correlation. Consistent with the standard of Fornell and Larcker [89], if correlation results are less than square root values of AVE for a concept, the discriminant validity is documented. For example, the square root of AVE for WOM is 0.81, which is greater than the correlation value between SSOS and WOM (0.534 **). Hence, in line with the recommendation of Fornell and Larcker [89], the discriminant validity criterion is confirmed. The authors also measured different model fit indices to approve the goodness of data fit. For such purpose, the researchers perceived various model fit results compared to a standard threshold and discovered that the findings of model fit indices described a good fit between theory and data. Finally, the researchers pointed out the problem of multicollinearity by analyzing variance-inflation-factor (VIF). The authors identified support from the guidance of Hair, et al. [90] to conclude about the existence of multicollinearity in the current study. According to the general standard, the overall value of VIF was less than 3, confirming the absence of multicollinearity issue. Therefore, the authors were confident that there is no probability that the problem of multicollinearity may produce any weakening impact of coefficient estimation.

Table 3. Correlation, discriminant validity, and model fit indices results.

Construct	Mean	S.D.	SSOS	CSOS	WOM	OPI
SSOS	5.29	0.72	0.81	0.63 **	0.54 **	0.62 **
CSOS	4.89	0.71		0.76	0.36 **	0.46 **
WOM	4.62	0.76			0.85	0.44 **
OPI	4.65	0.73				0.73
Model fit indices	Range	Obtained				
χ^2/df	5.00	2.852				
RMSEA	0.08	0.056				
NFI	0.90	0.938				
CFI	0.90	0.926				
GFI	0.90	0.931				

Notes: S.D = standard deviation, ** = significant values of correlation, and bold diagonal = discriminant validity results.

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

The researchers used structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis to test hypotheses in the current survey. Basically, SEM is a second-generation co-variance-based data analysis process, which is selected by a majority of modern researchers to analyze data at an advanced level [91–93] because this technique permits scholars to measure different relationships together. So, to estimate the hypotheses of the current research, the authors executed structural models with AMOS. In the initial part, the researchers observed the direct relations theorized in hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. Accordingly, the authors performed a structural model without any involvement of mediating variable. The findings of direct impact analysis for hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are mentioned in Table 4. According to these results, the model fit values were in the tolerable ranges ($\chi^2/df = 2.87$, RMSEA = 0.053, CFI = 0.954, GFI = 0.934, and NFI = 0.935). Moreover, the findings of hypothesis 1 were statistically significant ($\beta_1 = 0.54$ **, $p < 0.001$), verifying that SSOS positively affects the WOM of the customers in the boutique hotels. Therefore, based on these findings, hypothesis 1 is accepted. Similarly, the authors verified hypothesis 2 of the current study by reiterating the steps described above. Likewise, the results also validated that SSOS positively relates to OPI, approving that hypothesis 2 is also positive and significant ($\beta_2 = 0.43$ **, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, hypothesis 3 is also approved as the findings demonstrate that overall perceived image positively influences word of mouth ($\beta_3 = 0.27$ **, $p < 0.001$). Nevertheless, hypothesis 4 is approved as the results show that CSOS has a positive impact on WOM ($\beta_4 = 0.49$ **, $p < 0.001$). In the same way, hypothesis 5 is also accepted as the results show that CSOS influences OPI positively ($\beta_5 = 0.24$ **, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4. The results for hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Path	Estimates	S.E	CR	p-Value	LLCI	ULCI	Decision
SSOS → WOM	(β_1) 0.54 **	0.057	9.47	0.001	0.198	0.468	Accepted
SSOS → OPI	(β_2) 0.43 **	0.055	7.82	***	0.353	0.729	Accepted
OPI → WOM	(β_3) 0.27 **	0.063	4.28	***	0.357	0.734	Accepted
CSOS → WOM	(β_4) 0.49 **	0.045	10.9	***	0.256	0.860	Accepted
CSOS → OPI	(β_5) 0.24 **	0.047	5.11	***	0.473	0.874	Accepted
Model fit indices	Range	Obtained					
χ^2/df	5.00	2.87					
RMSEA	0.08	0.053					
NFI	0.90	0.935					
CFI	0.90	0.936					
GFI	0.90	0.934					

Notes: ULCI = upper-limit confidence interval; LLCI = lower-limit confidence interval; and **, *** = significant values.

In the second section, the authors performed a structural equation model to analyze the mediating effect of OPI between SSOS and WOM. In addition, OPT is also examined as a mediator between CSOS and WOM. Thus, the researchers have chosen bootstrapping option by choosing a large bootstrapping sample of 2000 by a bias-corrected confidence interval with 95%. The method of bootstrapping to evaluate the mediating impact is predicted by numerous scholars on the conventional method suggested by Baron and Kenny [94]. This procedure was excessively disapproved by famous scholars like Hayes [95] and Zhao, et al. [96]. In addition, the Sobel test technique for mediation is also opposed because of its low power as compared to bootstrapping process [97].

The findings of the bootstrapping process (Table 5) approved that OPI partially mediates between SSOS and WOM. Correspondingly, OPI partially mediates between CSOS and WOM. The authors supposed that there is partial mediation as the beta values were reduced from ($\beta_1 = 0.54^{**}$ to $\beta_6 = 0.12^{**}$), ($\beta_4 = 0.49^{**}$ to $\beta_7 = 0.06^{**}$) and these are significant ($p < 0.001$). Besides, the model fit results indices values were also enhanced as compared to direct effect model, which shows that there is a good fit between theory and data ($\chi^2/df = 2.76$, RMSEA = 0.058, CFI = 0.962, GFI = 0.941, NFI = 0.952). Hence, based on such results, hypotheses 6 and 7 are approved, and it is confirmed that OPI mediates between SSOS and WOM. It is also validated that OPI mediates between CSOS and WOM.

Table 5. Mediation results for H6 and H7.

Path	Estimates	S.E	Z-Score	p-Value	ULCI	LLCI	Decision
SSOS → OPI → WOM	(β_6) 0.12 **	0.027	4.44	***	0.177	0.265	Accepted
CSOS → OPI → WOM	(β_7) 0.06 **	0.065	6.81	***	0.196	0.356	Accepted
Model fit indices	Range	Obtained					
χ^2/df	5.00	2.67					
RMSEA	0.08	0.058					
NFI	0.90	0.952					
CFI	0.90	0.962					
GFI	0.90	0.941					

Notes: ULCI = upper-limit confidence interval; LLCI = lower-limit confidence interval, **, *** = significant values; and S.E = standard error.

5. Discussion

The present research is based on the S-O-R model as a theoretical framework to examine the impact of sustainable servicescape elements (substantive and communicative) on behavioral intentions (word of mouth) through the overall perceived image among visitors of boutique hotels in Pakistan (Figure 2). Thus, the findings of this study confirmed that substantive and communicative staging positively improves WOM in boutique hotels of Pakistan. The respondents of the current study confirmed that their behavioral intentions (WOM) are influenced by physical elements (buildings, paintings, furniture, music, fragrance, equipment, etc.) and nonphysical features such as culture, empathy, and attitudes and behaviors of hotel employees. Due to the growth of the hotel industry and the diverse needs of travelers, competition among hotels is increasing in the current hotel industry. Therefore, the accommodation sector may offer customized services to target various segments. Boutique hotels, because of their small size and individualized services, may accomplish this purpose efficiently. Results of this study also discovered that SSOS and CSOS are major contributors to WOM. In addition, OPI mediates between SSOS, CSOS, and WOM effectively.

The results from the relationships between SSOS and WOM are consistent with the findings of Song, Suess, Mody and Dogru [49]. In the same way, the relationship between CSOS and WOM is in line with the results of Park, Back, Bufquin and Shapoval [48]. However, the perceived image also influences behavioral intentions (WOM) significantly. The destination image (perceived image) is a psychological concept consisting of notions, views, and emotions that traveler possesses regarding a destination [98]. Basically, a hotel image is an outcome of nostalgic feelings in a hotel background [99]. Hence, these findings

are consistent with the results of Sharma and Nayak [100]. The perceived image plays a mediating role between substantive, communicative sustainable servicescape and word of mouth in boutique hotels of Pakistan. Such results are consistent with the findings of previous researchers [9].

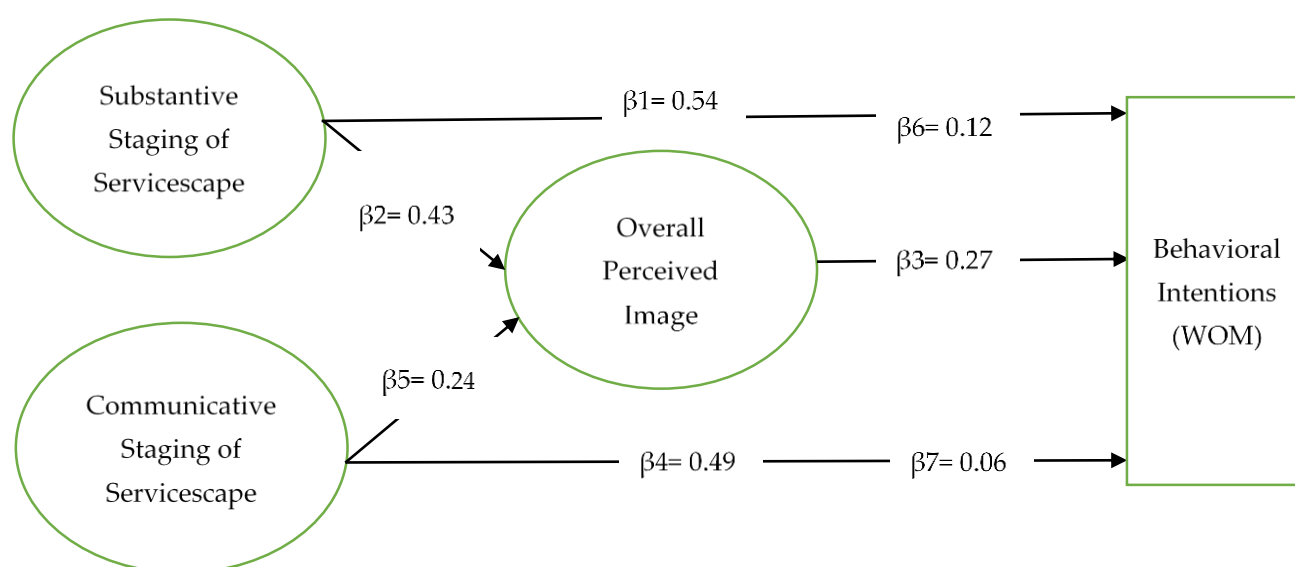


Figure 2. The research models with regression weights and hypotheses.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This research is not only relevant to the hospitality literature but also important for the lodging industry of Pakistan. In fact, the current study seeks to develop the relationship between substantive and communicative sustainable servicescape and word of mouth through the perceived image of boutique hotel visitors in the context of Pakistan. Past studies intended to manage sustainable servicescape like a subsection of service quality or merely focused on the impact of a single sustainable servicescape component. This might lead to a misunderstanding of this construct. This research formulated a complete model of sustainable servicescape with an emphasis on both elements of sustainable servicescape, i.e., substantive and communicative dimensions. Therefore, the current study presents a holistic view of boutique hotel sustainable servicescape and how its dimensions link to behavioral responses (word of mouth).

5.2. Practical Implications

This study also guides hotel practitioners in the formulation and implementation of tourism policy. It is recommended that hotel marketers should promote specific information regarding rooms, dining, restaurants, temperature, air quality, music, scent, and employees, etc., because it directs customers to develop their images of destinations [101]. Hospitality professionals may design advertising campaigns by emphasizing the specialties of destinations. The promotional mix should focus on stimulating and promoting certain feelings that can boost travelers' positive emotions for destinations. Throughout the world, destinations have been effectively applying music, imagery, and visual effects in their promotional campaigns to stimulate the emotional appeal of visitors. Hotel managers should present testimonials of happy customers in their ads because certain destinations are notorious for impolite attitudes and behaviors of hotel employees, for example, overcharging, hidden charges, deceptive advertising, and lack of utilities as tourists may experience in some substandard lodgings of Murree. This is crucial to understand for hotel experts because such bad experiences might create negative word of mouth for destinations. This is also important to develop a strong positioning among hotel visitors. Likewise, these

professionals can offer a peaceful environment, customized accommodations, internet, gaming area, and a variety of menus to target customers of boutique hotels.

Hotel practitioners also observe business opportunities based on new developments and geographical landscaping to attract more visitors. For example, WTTC mentioned that the income generated from tourism in the last 12 months was \$194 million for Pakistan's treasury, which was almost 6.9 % of GDP [102]. The WTTC assumes that tourism will grow up to 36.1 billion dollars in a decade. CPEC also developed a positive image of Pakistan worldwide [103,104]. Now global airlines have trust and have started their operations in the country again, which is a good sign. The exceptional biodiversity of Pakistan is fascinating [105]. The wilderness of the enormous mountains in the northern zone is the central point for natural and quest tourism [106]. The hilly north may become a tourism hub if the infrastructure and superstructure are advanced. Pakistan has important elements for an affluent maritime tourism sector due to its splendid seashores blessed with God-gifted magnificence shores, bays, cliffs, and headlands [103]. Pakistan's coastline of 1050 km alongside the Arabian Sea stretches 350 km in Sindh and 700 km in Baluchistan. The coastal strip with beautiful beaches and geographical landscapes suggests an alternative venture zone in the south. It is predicted that coastal tourism contributes over 183 billion US\$ worldwide, whereas data display that Pakistan has a projected coastal tourism potential of about 4 to 5 billion US\$ [107–109].

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current research demonstrates theoretical and practical recommendations to boutique hotels for developing their marketing and advertising campaigns to create positive word of mouth; however, there are several limitations. For instance, the scope of this research and sample selection affects word of mouth. Nevertheless, these limitations also present directions for upcoming research in the sustainable servicescape paradigm. First, as the scope of this study only comprises boutique hotels of Pakistan, this may limit the applicability of the findings. Thus, to expand the results, it would be beneficial to replicate the current research in other domains of the hospitality industry. Secondly, the sample size of the populace may be increased to make this study more rigorous. The current research is focused on choosing individual customers of boutique hotels, which might restrict the generalizability of the results. Hence, to deduce wider generalization a larger sample is recommended. Likewise, this study merely selected boutique hotels from Lahore, Faisalabad, Islamabad, and Murree; thus, the geographical focus may increase opposition to the generalizability of the research. Future scholars could add more cities, for instance, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta, to overcome such limitations. Another potential limitation of the current research is that it employed cross-sectional data and describes relationships based on cross-sectional data, which holds particular risks. Therefore, future studies need to utilize longitudinal data. Moreover, future researchers could conduct more in-depth studies to comprehend the impact of diverse forms of sustainable servicescape on consumer behavioral intentions through other mediating variables.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this research reveals the impact of sustainable servicescape elements on behavioral intentions of boutique hotel customers. Overall perceived image is also examined as a mediating variable between substantive, communicative servicescape and behavioral intentions (WOM), which is a significant contribution to the hospitality literature. It is deduced that the behavioral intentions depend on servicescape elements. Therefore, according to SOR theory the psychological and physical stimuli influence consumer responses. Servicescape components affect overall perceived image positively such as, hotel customers develop positive images of the destinations due to the ambient features like buildings, rooms, paintings, lighting, music, fragrances, and hotel employees, and their culture. Likewise, clients of such customized lodgings may transmit positive or negative word of mouth because of hotel facilities. When these consumers feel satisfaction due to

the abundance of services, they develop good images and recommend certain boutique hotels to friends and family members. In addition, sustainable servicescape elements and perceived image are the strong predictors of behavioral intents (WOM). To summarize, this study discovered that boutique hotel managers might take advantage of the findings in the development of marketing campaigns to target customers. In the same way, this study has a significant contribution to help hospitality practitioners to understand the preferences of consumers. Furthermore, this survey points out that perceived image is a contributor to WOM, which can assist marketers to design promotional mixes for the effective positioning of their lodging services among potential clients.

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