

Article

The Role of Spatial Layout in Shaping Value Perception and Customer Loyalty in Theme Hotels

Tsen-Yao Chang ¹ and Yu-Cheng Lin ^{2,*}

¹ Department of Creative Design, National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Douliu City 640, Yunlin, Taiwan; changty8908@gmail.com

² Graduate School of Design, National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Douliu City 640, Yunlin, Taiwan

* Correspondence: d10930019@yuntech.edu.tw; Tel.: +886-979708855

Abstract: Despite the acknowledged connection between physical environment and human behavior, the literature often underestimates the crucial role of hotel spatial layout and its relation to other factors in shaping customer loyalty. The layout of theme hotels is often simply considered a general environmental consideration, ignoring its far-reaching impact. This research proposes that guests staying at theme hotels will perceive value when utilizing the layout and appreciate all aspects of hotel facilities. This, in turn, influences their value perception and loyalty to the hotel. To analyze the data, confirmatory factor analysis and path analysis were employed on a sample of 298 individuals who stayed in theme hotels. The findings from these analyses reveal that both the hotel layout and the external environment positively influence guests' evaluations of the internal environment ($R^2 = 0.640$). Furthermore, the evaluation of the internal environment and layout significantly impacts guests' perceived values ($R^2 = 0.517$), subsequently shaping their loyalty to the hotel ($R^2 = 0.370$). Perceived value emerges as a vital mediating factor between the layout and customer loyalty. This study presents compelling evidence that spatial layout significantly influences customer loyalty in theme hotels through perceived value, transcending internal and external environmental boundaries.

Keywords: theme hotels; atmospherics; spatial layout; perceived value; customer loyalty



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1. Introduction

Theming has emerged as an established strategy in the highly competitive hospitality industry to cater to changing customer demands and preferences. Theme hotels adopt specific cultural themes throughout their property as part of their business strategy to appeal to niche markets [1–3]. The rise in diverse theme hotel types, such as family-oriented, luxury, and green hotels, caters to varied customer interests seeking distinctive experiences [1,4]. Theming is considered a valuable tool for competitive environments like tourism, restaurants, and theme parks [5], acting as a strategic option for survival and growth in the industry [6–8].

The atmosphere guests experience at their destination significantly impacts their behavior, making it a crucial aspect of the tourism and leisure industry [9,10]. Atmospheric elements such as lighting, color, scent, music, and spatial layout can moderate human behavior in enclosed environments like hotels [11]. Specific atmospheric cues are considered prerequisites for guest relaxation, happiness, comfort, and satisfaction, particularly in theme hotels [12]. While the overall atmosphere affects consumer perceptions and behaviors through emotional and attitudinal responses [13,14], spatial layout has been identified as a distinct variable influencing consumer behavior [15]. However, the critical role of spatial layout in shaping human behavior, despite influencing guests' hotel perceptions, has been largely overlooked in the context of theme hotels.

Customer loyalty, characterized by a sustained commitment to a brand through repeat purchases, positive word-of-mouth, and new product purchases [16], leads to enhanced

customer lifetime value, increased market share, and improved financial performance for firms. Many factors drive customer loyalty, with proven ones including customer satisfaction, values, brand, experience, product/service quality, reputation, emotional connection, switching costs, and rewards [17–19]. Although customer satisfaction often predicts loyalty, some argue that customer value is core, as satisfaction does not necessarily result in loyalty [20–24].

Limited scholarly attention has been given to how guests' liking of the physical surroundings and spatial layout impacts their value perception and customer loyalty in the context of theme hotels. Satisfied customers develop high levels of happiness, excitement, and potentially loyalty based on their surroundings [11]. However, the effects of this phenomenon remain underexplored specifically in theme hotel settings. Understanding the influence of spatial layout on perceived value and loyalty can provide valuable insights for theme hotel operators to enhance customer experiences and foster loyalty effectively.

The perception of value that customers hold towards a product or service and its provider is a crucial element in explaining loyalty [25,26]. Numerous researchers have found that creating and maintaining an attractive physical environment and delivering high-quality service are essential for fostering value perception, which is vital for attracting and retaining customers in the increasingly competitive hospitality industry [27–29]. Although perceived value may not be the sole predictor of loyalty, it is considered the most important and direct factor [30]. While there are many studies exploring the relationship between value perception and customer loyalty in various contexts and service businesses within the hospitality industry [14], few, if any, have focused specifically on theme hotels, as the current research aims to do.

Although spatial layout plays a crucial role in connecting various elements of the interior and exterior environments, its significance as a critical cue in shaping visitor behavior is often overlooked in the literature on atmospheric cues. Spatial layout links different parts of the interior facilities and external environments, enabling hotels to create comprehensive and impactful experiences. Carefully designing the spatial layout allows businesses to establish a cohesive and seamless environment that enhances the overall visitor experience [31]. While previous studies have generally disregarded the importance of layout in consumer behavior research, this study proposes a framework to highlight the effects of spatial layout and the interaction of atmospheric cues in fostering customers' value perceptions and then building customer loyalty, specifically in the context of theme hotels.

This study aims to analyze the influence of the spatial layout of theme hotels on a customer's perceived value and, subsequently, their loyalty. The research questions addressed in this study include the impact of a customer's likeness of the external environment and spatial layout on their likeness of the internal environment, as well as how the spatial layout and perceived value can contribute to fostering customer loyalty.

2. The Literature Review

The current research explores how the customer's value perception will be influenced by atmospheric factors and then result in the customer's loyalty in the theme hotel context. The study contends that the external environment, in conjunction with the layout, profoundly influences guests' perceptions of the internal environment, with the layout playing a pivotal role in integrating environmental perception. Consequently, this integration shapes guests' value perceptions and, subsequently, their loyalties. Through systematic analysis, this study examines the inter-relationships between variables and formulates testable hypotheses.

2.1. Theoretical Background: The SOR Model

This study adopts the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model as its theoretical background to analyze the influence of spatial layout on a customer's perceived value and loyalty in theme hotels. The SOR model, which predates the well-known work of [32], provides a framework to explain how environmental stimuli (S) affect the internal states

of individuals (O), which in turn influence their responses (R). Mehrabian and Russell's model, based on the SOR framework, has been instrumental in exploring the effects of environmental stimuli on emotional states and behaviors in a wide array of contexts [4,33,34]. In the context of this study, stimulus (S) is the spatial layout and atmospheric elements of the theme hotel, organism (O) is the guests' internal evaluations and perceptions of value, and response (R) is the guests' behavioral outcomes, such as loyalty and repeat patronage.

2.2. The Atmosphere in the Theme Hotel

Numerous studies have shown that the physical environment significantly impacts human behavior [28]. As a result, researchers have defined a place's atmosphere as the intentional design of space to produce desired effects on consumers [35,36]. There is considerable evidence that atmospheric elements crucially influence customers' evaluation processes and decisions after making a purchase [37]. This understanding of atmospheric cues' impact on human behavior has spurred investigations across diverse contexts [9,10].

Recent studies have proposed various categorizations of atmospheric elements to identify the specific sources of environmental influences on human behavior and establish corresponding measures to achieve desired outcomes. Some suggest three categories: ambient conditions, spatial layout and functionality, or signs, symbols, and artifacts [31,38]. Others conceptualize four elements: exterior, general interior, layout and design, and decor [39], while certain scholars include people as an independent dimension [13]. In this research, the four-element scheme is adopted, with decor incorporated into spatial layout to explore its significance in theme hotel operations.

Theming, which involves creating environments with symbolic meanings through motifs [5], has become a popular concept in various business sectors [40]. As an important marketing strategy, theming aims to design atmospheres that meet customer expectations through a process called reality engineering [41]. This approach has been widely adopted in sectors like amusement parks, casinos, malls, airports, restaurants, and hotels [42]. Specifically in the hospitality context, the International Theme Hotel Research Institute defines a theme hotel as any lodging property focused on a specific cultural theme, reflected through its unique design, construction, decor, facilities, and services [6]. Common theme hotel concepts include sports, family [43], country living, urban chic, luxury, business, wellness and spas, and history, culture, and heritage themes [44].

At its core, theming uses the physical environment to produce psychological effects that encourage desired consumer behaviors [45]. Atmospheric cues are carefully designed and controlled spatial elements that evoke emotional responses through senses like sight, sound, smell, and touch [46]. The goal is for these emotional responses to shape consumer behavior [31]. By utilizing atmospheric effects, businesses can influence consumer behavior at different points—before and after a purchase. These behaviors may encompass purchase decisions, brand loyalty, positive reviews, and customer referrals, collectively contributing to sustainable strategic advantages.

2.3. Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty refers to an affective bond between a customer and a product, service, brand, store, or supplier [47]. It manifests as a favorable attitude towards the brand, potentially resulting in repeat purchases over time [48]. Loyalty has long been regarded as a crucial strategic goal, proven to provide sustainable competitive advantages to businesses [19].

Loyalty behaviors can be measured through metrics like customer retention, willingness to pay premium prices [17], generation of referrals, positive word-of-mouth [48], and frequency of recurring purchases [49]. Customer loyalty essentially represents an attitude and behavior that create mutual benefits for customers and providers [50]. Specifically, in the hotel industry, loyalty manifests through positive reviews, recommendations to others, and intentions to return for future stays [51]. Customer loyalty provides several benefits for businesses. It leads to more frequent purchases, higher spending levels, and increased

adoption of products/services [52]. Ultimately, customer loyalty helps reduce operational costs and customer acquisition expenses. It also boosts customer retention rates. Customers remain loyal to be benefited by mitigating perceived uncertainty and risks associated with brand switching [53].

Environmental factors, including the consciously designed physical environment, play a significant role in influencing customer loyalty by shaping human attitudes and behaviors [31,35,36,54]. Consequently, it is crucial for both mainstream and theme hotels to efficiently manage their operations and create a positive atmosphere that appeals to customers, fosters loyalty, and encourages repeat visits.

By consciously designing the physical environment to elicit intended effects on consumers, hotels can leverage atmospheric cues to favorably influence customer attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in a manner that promotes loyalty.

2.4. The Environment and Spatial Layout

2.4.1. External Environment

The external environment refers to the area outside the building. For hotels, the outdoor physical environment encompasses architectural style, entrance location, exterior decor, signage, surrounding areas [54,55], natural surroundings, outdoor leisure and recreation facilities, and landscape design [56]. Studies have proven that it influences visitor experience because it is often the first interaction between user and provider [57].

A well-designed external environment creates a favorable first impression on potential customers [56] and contributes to positive memories of the overall experience. Exterior factors play a crucial role in shaping the customer's initial perception of the hotel [58]. This initial perception can then influence how they view and experience the interior environment.

Moreover, some external factors may extend their influence into the interior spaces. For example, views of gardens or outdoor features can affect visitors' perceptions of the internal environment through associated sights, sounds, and smells [59].

2.4.2. Interior Environment

The interior environment refers to the physical elements inside the building [60] that comprise all facets of the interactions between the occupants (visitors, employees, and others) of a building within the space [61]. Incorporating thematic elements in interior design, such as color schemes and artwork, can evoke positive emotions and create a unique atmosphere that resonates the hotel guests with value perception [61].

The interior environment encompasses various physical elements inside the building that shape the overall ambiance and comfort levels experienced by occupants, including guests, employees, and others [62]. Factors such as thermal conditions, acoustics, and natural lighting play crucial roles in ensuring environmental comfort within hotel interiors. Maintaining optimal temperature levels, effective sound insulation, and strategic incorporation of natural lighting can significantly enhance guests' comfort and satisfaction [63]. Additionally, incorporating thematic elements in the interior design, such as color schemes and artwork, can evoke positive emotions and create a unique atmosphere that resonates with guests' value perceptions [62]. While the external environment, including views, sights, sounds, and smells of outdoor features like gardens, can influence visitors' perceptions of the internal environment [28], ensuring environmental comfort within interior spaces is paramount for fostering a positive guest experience [64].

2.4.3. Spatial Layout

Spatial layout refers to how furnishings and fixtures are arranged in the area [65]. It is defined as the arrangement and spatial relationships between machinery, equipment, and furniture [66]. The layout factor has been generally viewed as an integrated part of internal atmospheric elements [13]; however, it has also been regarded as a distinct envi-

ronmental factor closely interwoven with the overall atmosphere [67] to affect customers' behaviors [31,68].

A review summarizing two decades of studies on atmospheric effects on human behavior in business environments concluded that spatial layout was one of the most frequently discussed variables in atmospheric research [11]. Layout design typically considers several factors like the hotel's size, grade or standard, arrival and departure patterns, tour and convention, accessibility, operation efficiency, typical length of stay, target market segments (e.g., Muslim-friendly), and seasonality [69]. The layout should allow guests to move smoothly and easily through the space, enabling them to appreciate the attractive interior decor and the hotel's theme [70]. Moreover, in themed hotels, maintaining thematic consistency across all areas, including the lobby, guest rooms, common areas, and special amenities, is a major concern [28]. This consistency aims to complement the theme and provide guests with a fully immersive, cohesive, and engaging environment [69]. By ensuring thematic consistency throughout, themed hotels can offer guests a unique and memorable stay that aligns with the chosen theme [69,71].

What we already know can be summarized as follows: Spatial layout is considered a crucial atmospheric element that can significantly impact customer behavior, experience, and the ability to create an immersive and thematically consistent environment across all areas of a themed hotel. On the other hand, the literature lacks specific case studies demonstrating how various spatial layouts have influenced the guest experience in themed hotels. It does not delve into the challenges or trade-offs involved in maintaining thematic consistency across different areas through spatial layout. Crucially, the literature does not provide empirical evidence or data to support the proposed hypotheses linking guests' perceptions of spatial layout to their overall impressions of the internal hotel environment.

While external factors like location and the broader environment can influence a hotel's attractiveness, it is the internal environment that ultimately determines how customers perceive value. In essence, the internal environment can create customer value that the external environment cannot. According to the halo effect [59], guests' impressions of the hotel's internal elements, including facilities and services, can be affected by their first impressions formed before reaching the internal environment. The current research thus proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: *The guests' impressions of the external environment will positively affect their impressions of the internal environment.*

Free movement that facilitates visitor flow without obstacles can engender positive feelings towards the hotel's internal environment, including physical, social, and emotional factors [70]. Thus, the second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: *The guests' likeness of spatial layout will positively affect the guests' impressions of the internal environment.*

2.5. Perceived Value

Perceived value refers to customers' overall assessments of the monetary and non-monetary values of a product or service. It is based on their perception of what is received versus what is given [72,73]. For theme hotels, a guest's perceived value may stem from factors like comfort, utility fulfillment, service quality, and/or symbolic aspects like brand image [74]. Among these, functional value that ensures guest comfort is considered core [75].

Perceived value represents the trade-off between the quality or benefit of a product or service and the sacrifices made by the customer, typically monetary costs [76]. It is viewed as a complex [77], multifaceted [78], dynamic [79], and subjective concept [72]. Perceived value is regarded as a reliable predictor of behavioral intentions, customer purchasing behavior, and competitive advantage [80].

Value perception is central to customer relationships [81] and linked to customer experience [82]. The literature suggests that the physical environment significantly shapes the image influencing value perception [83]. Since the internal environment and associated facilities were designed and arranged to fulfill the customer's expectations of a theme hotel, all the individual components that customers favor will work together to launch positive emotions [58]. These positive emotions strongly impact perceived value [38], and the third hypothesis is as follows:

H3: *The internal environment that the customer favors will positively affect the customer's value perception towards the theme hotel.*

The study by Lewison [84] indicates that store layout influences shopping atmosphere, shopping behavior, and customers' perceived values. Layout is considered a key element driving purchase intention and perceived value [30,66,67,85,86]. An appealing layout can also fulfill hedonic needs [87]. This implies that a well-designed layout in theme hotels can create a positive ambiance, enhancing guests' value perceptions. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H4: *A favorable layout will positively affect the customer's value perception towards the theme hotel.*

Value perception of services, products, brands, and companies is crucial, largely due to its impact on loyalty [88–90]. The positive effect of value perception on loyalty applies to functional, experiential, and symbolic values [74].

In the context of theme hotels, the perception of symbolic and experiential values will rise after interactions with services if the layout conforms to the theme of the hotel. This will positively impact customer loyalty, resulting in recommendations [91] or intentions to re-visit [88,89]. The fifth hypothesis is, therefore, proposed as follows:

H5: *Positive perceptions of the theme hotel's value positively influence customer loyalty towards the theme hotel.*

2.6. Research Framework

The current research proposes that the internal environment of a theme hotel is affected by the layout and external environment. The internal environment will then, together with the layout, have a positive impact on guests' perceived values of the hotel. The perceived value will then positively affect customer loyalty. The research framework is shown in Figure 1.

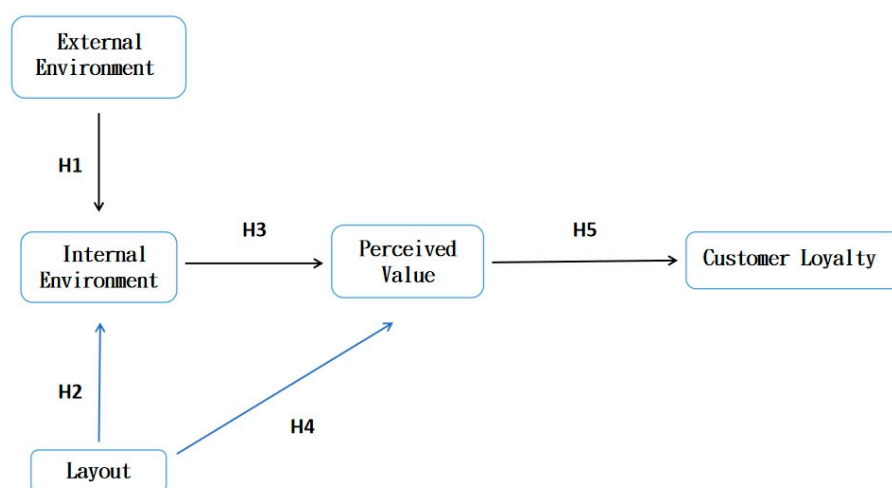


Figure 1. Research framework.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

A total of 298 valid responses out of 330 solicitations, with a response rate of 90.30%, were collected through electronic questionnaires distributed via virtual travel communities. As far as the sample size is concerned, the literature suggests a minimum sample size of 200 for models with several constructs and observed variables [92], and 300 participants is generally recommended for SEM studies [93]. The data collection period was from February 2023 to August 2023. Participants were sent a letter outlining the research objectives, participant qualifications, questionnaire structure, and ethical considerations of the study before the questionnaires were distributed. To qualify as a respondent, individuals had to be at least 20 years old and have stayed at one of the theme hotels included in the study within the previous six months. These were Leofoo Resort Hotel in northern Taiwan, Dive Cube Hotel and Atayal Resort in the central region, and Hotel Cham Cham in the south. Photos of the four hotels are shown in Figure 2. Participants who did not meet the criteria, or who provided incomplete answers for one or more variables, were excluded during the data-cleaning stage. All participants were informed of their right to terminate the survey at any time. Table 1 presents the profiles of the respondents.



Figure 2. The four hotels used in the research: (1). Leofoo Resort Hotel; (2). Dive Cube Hotel; (3). Atayal Resort; and (4). Hotel Cham Cham.

Table 1. Profile of respondents.

Variables	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	110	36.9
	Female	188	63.1
Marital status	Married	136	45.6
	Single	162	54.4
Education	<H. School	3	1.0
	H. School	34	11.4
	College	188	63.1
	Graduate	73	24.5

Table 1. Cont.

Variables	Categories	n	%
Job	Student	26	8.7
	Retired	9	3.0
	Blue collar	78	26.2
	Office staff	110	36.9
	State	35	11.7
	Professional	28	9.4
	Bus. Owner	6	2.0
	Top manager	6	2.0
Origin	Fujian	218	73.2
	Hakkai	43	14.4
	O. Province	21	7.0
	Primitive	3	1.0
	Foreigner	7	2.3
Age (Years old)	Other	6	2.0
	<23	25	8.4
	24–35	146	49.0
	36–47	105	35.2
	48–59	20	6.7
Job nature	>60	2	0.7
	Full-Time	252	84.6
	Part-Time I	40	13.4
	Volunteer	6	2.0
Monthly income	<20 K	18	6.0
	21~40 K	87	29.2
	41 K~60 K	64	21.5
	61~80 K	39	13.1
	81~100 K	46	15.4
Area	>101 K	44	14.8
	Urban	232	77.9
	Rural	63	21.1
	Other	3	1.0

n = 298.

3.2. Instruments

Structured questionnaires were used to obtain the respondents' opinions of the external and internal environments and layouts; perceived values; and customer loyalty. A 7-point Likert scale was employed, with 1 signifying 'strongly disagree' and 7 representing 'strongly agree'. The socio-economic factors included gender, age, education, occupation, and income.

Items used to measure the external environment, internal environment, and layout were drawn from previous studies on atmospheric effects with some revisions [2,13,28,29,31]. The measurement of perceived value was based on previous studies, incorporating four dimensions: quality, price, emotion, and social [27]. The factors used to measure customer loyalty included recommendation (referral), word-of-mouth, re-visiting intention, and switching [49,94,95], as shown in Table A1. The overall perception of value was calculated by averaging the values across these dimensions.

3.3. Statistical Analysis

This study adopted software packages of SPSS 22 and AMOS 22.0 for statistical analysis. The two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) method proposed was used to estimate the measured values and the structural model [96], including confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and model fit [96,97].

Descriptive analysis was used to profile the respondents. The hypothesis of the relationship between atmosphere perception and the independent variables of perceived value and customer satisfaction, including the mediating effect of perceived value, was

tested using path analysis. The bias-corrected percentile of the bootstrapping method was used to determine the mediating effect by checking the lower and upper bounds of indirect effects. A mediating effect will be confirmed when the range does not include 0. This research adopted the significance levels at $p \leq 0.05$.

4. Results

4.1. Sample Profile

The participants in this study consisted of residents of Taiwan, of which most (188, 63.1%) were female, single (162, 54.4%), and held a college degree (188, 63.1%). Most of the respondents were office workers in private businesses (110, 36.9%), were 24–35 years old (146, 49.0%), in full-time employment (252, 84.6%) with monthly incomes between NTD 20,000 and NTD 40,000 (87, 29.2%), and urban residents (232, 77.9%).

4.2. Common Method Variance

To detect if there was a common method bias, this study adopted the recommendation of [98] and used [99] single-factor test to test for common method bias. Checking for common method variance is important in management research as it can lead to relationship inflation and increase the chances of Type II errors. Relationship inflation occurs when the correlations among the variables are inflated or deflated due to the common method effect. Type II errors happen when a relationship exists in the population but is not detected due to common method variance attenuating that relationship.

The method of Harman's single-factor test used SPSS 22 software to perform factor analysis. The result shows that the percentage of the first squared loading variance explained is 38.455%, which is less than the standard value of 50%. A value less than 50% indicates that no single factor accounts for the majority of the covariance, suggesting common method bias is unlikely to be a serious issue in this study.

4.3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

4.3.1. Convergent Validity

Table 2 shows that the standardized factor loadings of all questions are from 0.732 to 0.893, and the convergent validity is confirmed with acceptable levels. The composite reliability of each construct ranges from 0.884 to 0.948, indicating acceptable levels of internal consistency [96,97,100]. Lastly, the average variance extracted (AVE) of each construct ranges from 0.601 to 0.685, exceeding 0.5, so all constructs have adequate convergent validity [97,101].

Table 2. Results for the measurement model.

Construct	Item	Item Reliability		Construct Reliability	Convergence Validity
		Std	SMC	CR	AVE
Internal Environment	IEB1	0.820	0.672	0.948	0.672
	IEB2	0.860	0.740		
	IEB3	0.824	0.679		
	IEB4	0.798	0.637		
	IEB5	0.801	0.642		
	IEB6	0.792	0.627		
	IEB7	0.826	0.682		
	IEB8	0.847	0.717		
	IEB9	0.806	0.650		
Layout	DB1	0.799	0.638	0.884	0.656
	DB5	0.828	0.686		
	SB1	0.770	0.593		
	SB2	0.840	0.706		
External Environment	OEB1	0.750	0.562	0.900	0.601
	OEB2	0.732	0.536		
	OEB3	0.769	0.591		
	OEB4	0.761	0.579		
	OEB5	0.814	0.663		
	OEB6	0.823	0.677		

Table 2. Cont.

Construct	Item	Item Reliability		Construct Reliability	Convergence Validity
		Std	SMC	CR	AVE
Customer loyalty	LOY1	0.848	0.719	0.915	0.685
	LOY2	0.893	0.797		
	LOY3	0.819	0.671		
	LOY4	0.824	0.679		
	LOY5	0.748	0.560		

Std: standardized factor loadings; SMC: square multiple correlations; CR: composite reliability; and AVE: average variance extracted.

4.3.2. Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis—Reliability and Validity

As depicted in Table 3, all constructs appear to have satisfactory reliability (0.876–0.957) and convergent validity levels (0.716–0.849) [97].

Table 3. Confirmatory factor analysis of second-order model.

Construct	Item	Item Reliability		Construct Reliability	Convergent Validity
		Std	SMC	CR	AVE
QUAL	Q1	0.879	0.773	0.925	0.756
	Q2	0.921	0.848		
	Q3	0.879	0.773		
	Q4	0.793	0.629		
EMOT	ER1	0.776	0.602	0.910	0.773
	ER2	0.921	0.848		
	ER3	0.932	0.869		
PRIC	P1	0.772	0.596	0.910	0.716
	P2	0.894	0.799		
	P3	0.858	0.736		
	P4	0.857	0.734		
SOC1	SO1	0.832	0.692	0.876	0.702
	SO2	0.855	0.731		
	SO3	0.827	0.684		
Perceived value	QUAL	0.926	0.857	0.957	0.849
	EMOT	0.927	0.859		
	PRIC	0.928	0.861		
	SOCI	0.904	0.817		

Std: Standardized factor loadings; SMC: square multiple correlations; CR: composite reliability; and AVE: average variance extracted.

4.3.3. Target Coefficient

The target coefficient is calculated by comparing the chi-square value of the fully correlated model (structural saturated model) with the chi-square value of the second-order model. In the case of the perceived value construct, the chi-square value of the structural saturated model is 243.245, while the chi-square value of the second-order model is 256.184. The target coefficient is obtained by dividing the chi-square value of the fully correlated model by the chi-square value of the second-order model, yielding 0.949.

The target coefficient of 0.949 provides evidence of the existence of the second-order factor. This implies that 94.9% of the variance in the fully correlated model can be explained by the second-order factor.

4.3.4. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity refers to the ability to differentiate between tested variables and different constructs based on predefined criteria. In this study, the verification of validity was conducted using the HTMT method [102]. This method utilizes the hetero-trait–mono-trait ratio (HTMT) of correlations, which is derived from the multi-trait–multi-method matrix. It is worth noting that discriminant validity is considered satisfactory when the HTMT values are below 0.90, as suggested by Roemer and colleagues [103]. As indicated in Table 4, all HTMT values between the constructs are below the 0.90 threshold, thereby confirming the achievement of discriminant validity in this study. The bootstrap

confidence interval for HTMT in all facet combinations does not include the value one, thereby confirming the presence of discriminant validity [104].

Table 4. Results of discriminant validity by HTMT.

Relationship		HTMT	5% Bias-Corrected Confidence Interval		
			2.5%	97.5%	
Perceived value	<-->	Interior	0.689	0.480	0.865
Customer loyalty	<-->	Interior	0.407	0.247	0.568
Ext. environment	<-->	Interior	0.663	0.444	0.825
Interior	<-->	Layout	0.680	0.439	0.851
Perceived value	<-->	Customer loyalty	0.606	0.427	0.754
Perceived value	<-->	Ext. environment	0.582	0.391	0.737
Perceived value	<-->	Layout	0.595	0.332	0.789
Customer loyalty	<-->	Ext. environment	0.464	0.305	0.608
Customer loyalty	<-->	Layout	0.396	0.200	0.586
Ext. environment	<-->	Layout	0.418	0.159	0.647

4.4. Model Fit

SEM was used to assess the model fit by providing absolute and incremental fit indices for the model and the empirical data. Indices are $\chi^2/DF = 1.291$ (<3) [105], RMSEA = 0.031 (<0.08) [106], GFI = 0.924 > 0.90, and AGFI = 0.902 > 0.90 [107]. As far as the incremental indices, CFI = 0.924 > 0.90 [108], NFI = 0.924 > 0.90, and TLI (NNFI) = 0.980 > 0.90 [109,110], as shown in Table 5. All of these indices are acceptable and show a good level of model fit.

Table 5. Model fit indicators.

Model Fit	Criteria	Model Fit of Research Model
χ^2	The smaller the better	845.579
DF	The larger the better	655
Normed chi-sqr (χ^2/DF)	$1 < \chi^2/DF < 3$	1.291
RMSEA	<0.08	0.031
TLI (NNFI)	>0.9	0.980
NFI	>0.9	0.924
CFI	>0.9	0.982
GFI	>0.9	0.924
AGFI	>0.9	0.902

4.5. Path Analysis

The results of path coefficients of path analysis show that the layout ($b = 0.486$, $p < 0.001$) and external environment ($b = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$) significantly impact the internal environment, and H1 and H2 are supported with 64% of the variance explained, as shown in Table 6 and Figure 3. The internal environment ($b = 0.754$, $p < 0.001$) and the layout ($b = 0.323$, $p = 0.001$) significantly impact the perceived value, thus H3 and H4 are supported with 51.7% of the variance explained. The perceived value ($b = 0.563$, $p < 0.001$) significantly affects customer loyalty; therefore, H5 is supported with 37% of the variance explained. Criteria of variance inflation factor (VIF) are lower than three (between 1.000 and 1.221), which indicates that the probable collinearity is not significant [111].

Table 6. Path analysis.

DV	IV	Unstd	S.E.	Unstd/S.E.	p-Value	Std	R ²	VIF
Int. environment	Layout	0.486	0.056	8.702	<0.001	0.482	0.640	1.221
	Ext. environment	0.612	0.074	8.249	<0.001	0.465		
Customer loyalty	Perceived value	0.563	0.056	10.031	<0.001	0.608	0.370	1.000
Perceived value	Int. environment	0.754	0.101	7.450	<0.001	0.542	0.517	1.000
	Layout	0.323	0.099	3.273	0.001	0.231		

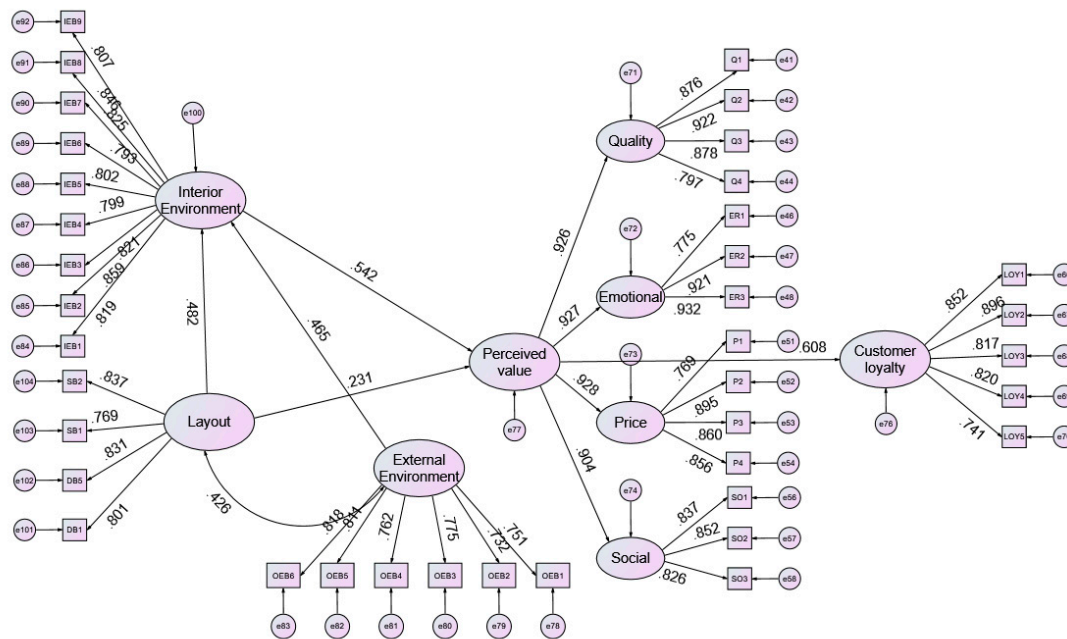


Figure 3. Structural equation model.

4.6. Mediation Effects

Bootstrapping mediation analysis can provide confidential intervals for testing the indirect effects [112]. The mediation effect of perceived value is confirmed because no “0” presents between the lower and upper bounds of the CI (0.333 and 1.249, respectively) for the total effect of layout → perceived value [112,113], as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. The analysis of indirect effects.

Effect	Point Estimate	Product of Coefficients			Bootstrap 1000 Times Bias-Corrected 95%	
		S.E.	Z-Value	p-Value	Lower Bound (2.5%)	Upper Bound (97.5%)
Total effect						
Layout → Perceived value	0.689	0.237	2.905	0.004	0.333	1.249
Total indirect effect						
Layout → Perceived value	0.366	0.162	2.253	0.024	0.151	0.846
Direct effect						
Layout → Perceived value	0.323	0.287	1.128	0.259	−0.094	1.071

5. Discussion

Previous research on atmospheric cues generally considered spatial layout as one of the cues that similarly influence customers’ perceptions of value and loyalty [13]. This study demonstrates that spatial layout is a distinctive environmental cue linking external and internal environments. It induces guests to appreciate the services holistically, ultimately resulting in an enhanced experience and value perception, thereby fostering customer loyalty.

5.1. Interior Atmospherics Is the Main Value Creator

Since most services hotel guests encounter are indoors, the interior atmosphere appears to be the primary source generating value for guests [57]. In-house facilities and services play crucial roles in fulfilling hotels’ exchanges with guests [114]. The current research

confirms that the interior environment positively affects customers' value perceptions in the themed hotel context, consistent with previous studies [29].

Specifically, themed hotels utilize atmospheric cues to influence guests' reactions and behaviors. Previous research consistently shows that the layout and internal environment emerge as pivotal factors shaping guests' value perceptions, consequently influencing their loyalty.

While the external environment can attract customers through unique shapes, styles, or overall imagery like nature, wildlife, or outdoor activities, as exemplified by Club Med [115], hotels in general offer fewer interactions between guests and external elements, consequently fewer opportunities for recognition. However, the external environment may affect guests' impressions of the interior due to halo effects [59] facilitated by careful spatial layout design [62] as the current research has also revealed.

The previous discussion on customer loyalty overlooked the critical role of environmental comfort factors like thermal conditions, acoustics, and natural illumination [63,64]. These elements significantly impact guests' overall experiences, perceived values, and loyalties towards the establishment [63]. Maintaining optimal conditions in these areas can enhance comfort and satisfaction and foster loyalty [63]. Comprehensive analyses examining the influence of thermal, acoustical, and lighting factors on environmental comfort and loyal patronage are essential for fully understanding drivers of customer loyalty in hotels.

5.2. Spatial Layout Is a Distinctive Atmospheric Factor

Contrary to many previous studies that viewed spatial layout as part of the interior environment [13], this research reaffirms the distinctiveness of spatial layout in enhancing the overall guest experience [116] and augmenting customer value [63].

As a distinctive atmospheric factor, spatial layout not only plays a crucial role in providing visionary stimuli but also acts as a bridge linking the external and internal environments, influencing guest perception and behavior [57]. This suggests that spatial layout can be understood as a multifaceted element central to hotel services, significantly and distinctly contributing to the overall atmosphere. It consistently maintains the chosen themes throughout the hotel [9], ultimately fostering guests' value perceptions and loyalties [117]. This is particularly important for themed hotels, where a consistent and cohesive image and perception of the hotel theme can create a unique experience [28,29,85].

5.3. Design for Both Functional and Sentimental Values

Perceived value is a critical factor that directly fosters customer loyalty [21,118]. This study adopts a four-dimensional construct to measure perceived value, encompassing quality, price, emotional, and social dimensions [21,118]. In this framework, quality and price are associated with the functional (or cognitive, economic, and utilitarian) aspect of value, whereas emotional and social values are linked to the sentimental (or emotive, sentimental, social, and hedonic) aspect [119,120].

Spatial layout design typically employs linear displays or free-form layouts. Linear displays facilitate efficient and utilitarian shopping behaviors, while free-form layouts aim to create an immersive atmospheric effect, allowing guests to fully engage with the intended spatial theme [68,70]. However, the effectiveness of particular spatial layouts in achieving strategic goals largely depends on design management's integration of the layout with other environmental factors, aligning with the company's missions and objectives [121]. Both functional and sentimental values are essential components of customer loyalty.

5.4. Academic Implications

The current research holds significant academic implications. In contrast to previous studies that treated environmental factors as equally influential in fostering customer value perception and customer loyalty, this research establishes a sequential influence relationship among individual environmental factors. Specifically, internal environmental factors are found to have the greatest impact due to a guest's prolonged contact time and frequent

utilization of services, and the spatial layout helps to enhance the guest's perceived value. However, the advantages and benefits of the internal environment rely on stimuli provided by the external environment. Achieving a cohesive layout design is crucial to creating an overall atmosphere that enhances guests' perceptions of overall value.

This research goes beyond considering spatial layout solely as a part of the atmosphere. It emphasizes the significant role of spatial layout as a hub for integrating other environmental factors. This integration is pivotal in ensuring customers' comprehensive value perceptions, which ultimately contribute to customer loyalty.

Despite the fact that customer satisfaction is critical and important in the hospitality industry, it is not a sole factor in building customer loyalty, which is actually the ultimate goal an organization should reach for its competitive and sustainable advantage. Consistent with previous studies, this research provides additional evidence to show the linkage of perceived values and customer loyalty [20,21]. It is the value that plays the role of building customer loyalty.

Overall, this research offers valuable insights into the sequential influence relationship of environmental factors, the significance of internal and external environments, the importance of layout design, and the role of spatial layout in integrating various factors. These findings contribute to the academic literature and provide a foundation for further exploration in the field.

5.5. Practical Implications

The spatial design of theme hotels aims to fully immerse guests in an intended thematic atmosphere and ambiance. The layout should go beyond mere functionality to evoke emotional appeal and alignment with the chosen theme. It should guide guests through various services while complementing and reinforcing the overarching thematic narrative. For instance, in a historical-themed hotel, the service directory could mimic the architecture and design of the represented era. An effective layout impacts guest value perception beyond just setting the ambiance—it enhances the entire thematic experience.

Research reveals guests attribute nearly equal significance to each dimension shaping their overall perceived value at theme hotels. As such, these properties should seamlessly integrate all services with thematic elements through thoughtful spatial design, creating a holistic, unified sense of value.

Consistency is paramount for theme hotels to maintain an authentic, immersive experience. Any renovations or changes must be executed meticulously to avoid disrupting the theme. Alterations to the layout and design should only serve to deepen thematic immersion, never detract from it. Theme hotels heavily rely on enveloping guests in a specific ambiance, so layout consistency across all areas is critical.

Managing overall guest value perception involves more than just meeting basic expectations—it requires exceeding them through full immersion into memorable, thematic experiences. Guests should feel the theme itself significantly adds value, creating a unique, unforgettable stay. Regardless of upfront investments into facilities and spatial layout, achieving desired performance ultimately hinges on comprehensive operational management. One-time financial and physical expenditures are insufficient to cultivate lasting customer loyalty. An integrated system encompassing spatial layout design must be established and continuously monitored.

While core operational implications are similar across hotels, theme properties must prioritize theme consistency, immersion, and aligning layout/design with the theme to craft a truly distinctive, memorable guest experience.

5.6. Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations to this research. Firstly, customer satisfaction was not included in the model, as it has been extensively studied before. Instead, the current research directly links perceived value and customer loyalty, potentially overlooking the specific relationship between satisfaction and loyalty as distinct concepts. Although satisfaction

is not the sole determinant of customer loyalty, and positive perceptions towards other independent variables imply satisfaction, not explicitly including this variable may lead to a misunderstanding that customer satisfaction is not important.

Secondly, this research adopts a four-dimensional perspective of value perception [120], using overall values as a single independent variable to explain customer loyalty. However, as value perception is composed of quality, price, emotion, and social values in this study, using an overall average score disregards the differences in individual values and may conceal the uniqueness of certain individual values. Although most of this distinctiveness arises in different service scenarios, such as catering, housekeeping, reception, etc., this research takes a macro perspective by examining the entire theme hotel and does not intentionally differentiate between different service scenarios within the hotel.

Thirdly, the research focuses on the services offered by the hotel as a whole and does not delve into differences between departments. This may limit our understanding of the specific functions of some hotel departments. Exploring the influence of each dimension of customer perceived values on theme hotel loyalty could provide valuable insights for academic research and practical applications in the industry. Investigating the relationship between each atmospheric factor and each dimension of perceived value would be worth exploring in future studies.

Fourthly, the sampling method used in this research may limit the generalizability of the findings. The data were intentionally collected from several theme hotels situated in areas of natural beauty. While the sampling frame accounted for differences in geographical locations, it is important to acknowledge that the respondents in this study may not adequately represent all the themes present in operation, and their distribution across these hotels may not be evenly balanced. Additionally, all the theme hotels examined in this study are located in similar natural environments, which excludes other themes such as sports, outdoor activities, cultural or heritage experiences, and nature-based adventures. Exploring differences between themes, as has been performed in the restaurant business, could provide valuable insights, showing whether they are subtle or significant, and could enhance our understanding.

For the fifth limitation, it is worth noting that the findings are confined to a specific subset of themed hotels and thus cannot be extrapolated universally. The theme hotels examined in this study are situated in areas of natural beauty and primarily focused on nature-based themes. Consequently, the results may not be entirely applicable to themed hotels with different thematic orientations, such as sports, outdoor activities, cultural or heritage experiences, and nature-based adventures. The influence of atmospheric cues and perceived value on customer loyalty could potentially vary across different thematic contexts. Future research efforts should explore a broader range of themed hotel categories to assess the generalizability of the present findings and identify potential variations across distinct thematic environments.

Lastly, the experiences of first-time visitors and returning visitors may vary across a wide range of variables. Unfortunately, this research did not include this specific characteristic as a variable, which could limit the generalizability of the test results, especially in cases in which returning guests constitute a significant customer base. Therefore, future research is recommended to categorize respondents into first-time and returning visitors, as studying this dimension could yield distinct outcomes related to customer loyalty within the context of theme hotels.

6. Conclusions

Theme hotels have emerged as a strategic response to intense competition in the hotel industry in Taiwan. However, these establishments often prioritize the theme's appearance and hardware aspects, disregarding the significance of spatial layout in facilitating a comprehensive perception of value. Drawing on the stimulus-organism-response mechanism, this study investigates the interplay between environmental factors, perceived value, and customer loyalty. The findings indicate that internal environment and layout factors exert

a positive influence on customers' perceived values. Notably, spatial layout serves as a pivotal element that integrates both external and internal environmental factors, thereby impacting customer loyalty through value perception. This highlights the importance of thoughtfully designing spatial layouts that create synergy between the exterior surroundings, interior ambiance, and the overarching theme concept. Achieving thematic consistency across all touchpoints is crucial for delivering an immersive and cohesive experience that resonates with guests' expectations. The research underscores the critical role of seamlessly blending exterior and interior ambiance elements in the space layout design of theme hotels by effectively leveraging the theme, as well as the physical environments both inside and outside the hotel. Such holistic integration of theming with atmospheric elements is fundamental to providing customers with an encompassing perception of superior value and fostering their attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. As theming and experiential concepts gain increasing prevalence within the hospitality sector, prioritizing congruence in spatial layout configurations becomes essential. Optimizing visitor circulatory patterns, ensuring fluid transitional sequences between separate spatial zones, and aligning design particulars with the core conceptual narrative can augment the desired atmospheric impact. The present research endeavor provides directional guidance to theme hotel design professionals and operational facilitators on leveraging the comprehensive potential of spatial composition and arrangement. Through strategic integration of physical spatial parameters with the overarching thematic proposition, they can formulate distinguished and memorable guest experience propositions conducive to cultivating enduring patron loyalty and commitment.

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Appendix A

To whom it may concern,

We present to you a questionnaire centered around the “theme hotel layout environment”. The primary aim of this survey is to comprehend the perspectives of Taiwanese individuals concerning hotel layout, environment, and customer loyalty. We are seeking responses from the general adult population residing in Taiwan.

The questionnaire comprises six distinct sections: six questions regarding the external environment, nine questions concerning the internal environment, four questions relating to the layout, eighteen questions exploring perceived value, seven questions delving into loyal behavior, and eleven questions gathering personal information.

Completing this questionnaire is anticipated to take approximately 10 min of your time. We wholeheartedly appreciate your valuable participation.

Rest assured that this questionnaire guarantees complete anonymity. Your information and responses in this study are treated with the utmost respect and care to ensure that your reputation, financial security, and privacy remain entirely safeguarded. Please feel at ease when answering the questions. Once you have completed the questionnaire, kindly return it to the research staff who distributed it to you.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are at liberty to decide whether to participate and complete the questionnaire. Should you choose to participate and later decide to discontinue, please bear in mind that due to the anonymous nature of

this survey, once submitted, individual responses cannot be identified, and withdrawal from the study will not be possible in the future.

Upon the completion of this study, which is anticipated to conclude after August 2023, we would be delighted to share the study results with you. If you wish to receive a summary of the results, kindly provide your email address as follows:

Email: _____@_____

We extend our best wishes to you and express our gratitude for your participation.

Yours sincerely,

Table A1. Introduction, measure items of the questionnaire.

Items	Source
External environment:	
Clear access and signage.	
Ample, clean parking is available.	
The entrance features a visible guiding line.	
Pleasing aesthetics and surroundings.	
Refreshing outdoor atmosphere.	
Distinctive outdoor ambiance.	
Internal environment:	
Hotel cleanliness.	
Comfortable interior decor.	
Abundant and pleasant lighting inside the hotel.	[2,13,31]
Good air quality without unpleasant odors.	
Spacious and comfortable interior.	
Relaxing atmosphere on public and room balconies.	
Flat floors with anti-slip measures.	
Spacious and convenient waiting area.	
Refreshing and comfortable hotel lobby ambiance.	
Spatial Layout:	
User-friendly interior design in the hotel.	
Safe and comfortable public spaces and rooms.	
Conveniently located facilities with easy access.	
Spacious and comfortable spatial connection, including walkways.	
Perceived values:	
Quality:	
Highly trained and professional staff.	
Well-equipped reception services.	
Meeting demand effectively.	
Continuous improvements.	
Room for staff efficiency enhancement (R).	
Emotion:	
Hotel service instills a sense of safety.	
Easy access to required services and reception.	
Positive and reassuring interactions with staff.	[21,94,95]

Table A1. Cont.

Items	Source
Occasional disrespect experienced in hotel (R).	
Staff's service attitude promotes comfort.	
Price:	
Reasonable prices for hotel products.	
Clearly marked product prices.	
Hotel offers good value for money.	
Advance communication of reception charges.	
Social:	
Hotel has a well-recognized reputation.	
Approval from friends and relatives for hotel visits.	
Friends inquire about spending details at the hotel.	
Suggestions from acquaintances to explore other hotels (R).	
Loyalty:	
Referral:	
I promote the hotel's advantages to friends and relatives.	
I highly recommend the hotel when asked.	
Word-of-Mouth:	
I praise the hotel's service in front of others.	
Re-visit:	[49,74,88,118]
I will choose this hotel again in the future.	
I plan to return to this hotel for next vacation.	
I want to stay in this hotel again soon.	
Switching:	
I would follow the hotel if it relocates.	

(R) for reverse questions.

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