

# Servicescape

## Internal Branding, the Missing Link in Terms of Tourism Servicescape

**Abstract** | Companies and organizations which provide products and services using standardization and quality control methods attempt to develop a conventional and repeatable level of experience for their customers. But, it is not possible to examine the target when the basic variables associated with the issue are uncontrollable or highly objective-subjective. Tourism services are multilateral issues affecting communication among tourists, workers and the environment providing services, therefore, it bears multiple aspects of subjective, objective and subjective-objective considerations. Branding was introduced to management literature of tourism organizations with the same purpose and is oriented to determine the direction of positioning and imagination in customers' mindset before experiencing any tourism services. Although considering servicescape and branding in tourism organizations are accounted as a solution to promote competitiveness and to overcome existing challenges in providing services, there is a human link missing which needs further exploration. The human factor and internal branding program are two issues which can be considered as the missing links servicescape and branding. This paper is aimed to recognize what internal branding within the tourism corporates to improve servicescapes by using library studies and reviewing theoretical foundations applying experts' opinions and author's experiences.

**Keywords** | Servicescape, Internal Branding, Tourism Services, Tourism Servicescape

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**Introduction** | Branding is produced by metropolitan lifestyle that liberates the residents of these big settlements from the time-consuming and complicated process of comparing products and services in order to decide for the purchase. Naturally, the human mind comments based on comparing components and favorable factors which have learned about the quality of a product or services from either learning-based or experience-based environment. Certainly, designing guidance signals such as brand names which their attractiveness lies not only in the logo and shape but also in the mentality and concepts is a logical solution for the convenience of both customers and providers of these products and services. It eases the way for customers to access reliable, high-quality products and services and providers to survive in today's turbulent business climate.

Tourism, as a value system and a platform for experimenting, has roots in the history of the origin of man; though after the industrial revolution it has evolved to the modern format that exists today. Moving from a certain point to a specific location doing defined activities and returning to the basic point can be considered as tourism. In this route, the act of returning to the same original point is important because the emphasis is on the word "circulating" or "revolving". Thus, what is derived as a value from this physical displacement is to gain experience and awareness which their value depends on the person's capability. But in this regard, the tourist plays the role of an organization itself, consisting of values, experiences, prejudices and even mental and/or physical-chemical status while gaining experiences, intervenes in amount and orientation of perception. A tired and hungry tourist can understand messages and signals sent from providers differently, and not knowing his/her state and conditions while experiencing the tourism services can be challenging for those providing these services. In contrast, tourism service providers or staff have an important role in this matter. While these people actually are

capable of understanding the situation, they are also transferor and representative of the brand. Thus, their behavior in addition to the physical and environmental elements of servicescape develops an objective mindset which greatly affects services. What can be reviewed and used as the missing link and a way out of these challenges is the concept of internal or organizational branding which is an interdisciplinary field consisting of human resource management, marketing, strategic management and organizational behavior. Servicescape cannot be arranged properly unless the staff has been fully aligned and integrated with slogans and promises, and they have been experienced enough to create branding. In this model, social interaction between staff is known as a valuable phenomenon which leads to the strengthening social capital within the organization and the positive customer perception of service quality. Employees of tourism services that are aligned in a form of brand value act harmoniously in an elegant, precise and coordinated way, who lead the customers from rational review to an emotional concept and a sensational connection to the organization. This is the starting point of an intelligent pathway of which disruptive elements affecting customers is guided toward a proper subjective-objective and environmental behavior factors and provides customer satisfaction. The main purpose of customer satisfaction which is the first step to gain customers loyalty can be a good solution for tourist agencies.

#### Tourism Services

A literature review of hospitality and tourism services in western resources offers a holy triad of food, drink, and accommodation (Imani khoshkhoo, et al. 2015), that is, the main biological factor in the context which is offered by its culture and has been proposed as vital elements. However, according to Maslow, the primary biological needs and security levels will be led continuously to a much higher level which impact customer perception about services. Therefore, the holy triad of elements does

not necessarily mean that the other supplements are non-sacred. This holy triad can be known as three objective elements that in their absence tourism does not exist, but even if present, it requires other subjective and objective-subjective elements. The subjective elements like customer's expectations and perception of the non-produced services which are intangible before being produced, are insensibly correlated to the objective-subjective elements like a combination of the attitude and appearance of the staff and the physical environment; which have more impact on customers though it's less considered.

Services offered in the tourism industry is known as a high challenging industry due to their different features such as immediate production, corruptibility, lack of capability of being saved, multiple dependencies to other corresponding services, the seasonality of the industry, an unexpected trends in demand, inflexibility in supply, introducing manpower and customers as a product (Dwyer et al., 2015). Therefore, despite easy entering to different parts of the market, there are serious inherent risks in tourism services which severely affect its survival and competitiveness. One of the concepts formed from a combination of environmental, intellectual, and human elements, which can be applied in the management capacity of the non-managable services, is Servicescape. In other words, it shows how to manipulate the elements which affect other elements related to the services which are not capable of being manipulated in order to make them manageable.

### Tourism Servicescape

Tourism and hospitality products can be considered as a complex of all factors and activities built up to meet the customers or tourists demands and requirements; which is offered to them in the form of a whole package or small parts of services. Thus, tourism includes a wide range of products and services that are set together to create an overall perception or experience. This perception

will finally have long-term undeniable impacts on tourists which is affected by tourist quality of life before the trip and also affecting their quality of life after the trip. (Muzaffer Uysal, 2012). Certainly, this product consist of three main levels including core, tangible, and additional which considering each level requires different approaches in attitude and management. For example, the main product of a hotel is its residential system, not its room. Thus, what a tourist expect as a hotel is a place distinct residential space. But in contrast, other characteristics and distinct advantages such as spacious rooms or comfortable lobby chairs have been considered as product's sensibility. Therefore, what can be recognized as sensible product's characteristics refers to the distinguishing features and elements of the product. But extra products can be added inclusively as unrelated facilities which benefit the product with subjective value without increasing any cost for tourists. For example, a free of charge laundry room for washing clothes or allocating a room for ironing on each floor of the hotel may be one of these options of added product. This section highlights the presence and applicability of elements necessary to form a tourism product to attract the attention of tourists in a manner that shows the priority of some necessary characteristics and underlies some other which improve subjective values of customers about received product or service.

However, what is known as facilities in tourism literature, and more as the physical elements is called servicescape (Hudson et al., 2014). While the experts believe that servicescape is not merely related to watching but is an approach of sightseeing and describing the reality (Atashinbar, 2009). Thus, it is an emerge of the connection between human perception, the environment and the interactions between them from past to present and contains narrative quotes and particular expression (Mansouri, 2004).

Here the concept of communication and interaction between customers and employees can make

a different typology for servicescape which is illustrated in Table 1. It is obvious that tourism and related services are at a high level of complexity with great details and bilateral communication services in this part.

Although tourism production consists of different layers and each of which has different value and category in customers' mindset, it needs more important components to consider the significant situation due to its high complexity and dependency to the interaction between tourists and employees. Hence, the concept of tourism servicescape cannot be summed up in the terms of environmental and spatial definitions and meanings, and the important factors are those definitions and meanings creating the proper perceptual field by connecting them to the environment. This is the point that the concepts of brand and branding are considered and used to improve the influence and efficiency of tourism servicescape.

### Branding

Human has started to use signals, signs, names, and flags etc. to distinct phenomena from each other since from the very beginning of his history. Edible products were sold by using the characteristic and distinctive signs to provide both controllability of products and assurance for customers. After the industrial revolution, the issue shifted to new conditions and distinguishing marks found its essential role in business. Brands were transformed from a determiner into the form of spiritual values; and nowadays, concepts such as brand equity is considered as a great value for auditing in commercial companies (Moshabaki Esfahani et al., 2015). Thus, the branding is a process which

organizations providing goods or services apply to induce their own concepts into the customers' mindset and use it as a reminder in their daily lives through positive and distinctive memories in order to promote customers' loyalty. In the other hand, organizations integrate the product or services with customers' cognition and emotion in a way that at the time of deciding to buy a new product, it guides the customer's decision-making system to see the brand as a more valuable product. Hence, the brand does not mean a luxury and expensive item, but a subjective concept which binds to objective and perceptual elements of mind by being imported and fixed in the daily life of people providing positive values added.

Obviously, branding programs are systematic attempts to convey meaning through information and promotional tools to the target audience and customers. Clearly, brand promises produce customers' mindset which can be completely non-organic or merely informer and organic transferred based on oral advertising by customers. For example, a tourism agency offering tours to historical cities transfer the perception of providing reliable, perfect, fast services to the customers through their own communication networks. Henceforth, the important issue to customers is to be satisfied by receiving fast perfect services from the staff. Accordingly, the possibility of any defect in providing services or slipping from these promises strongly exists at the moment of contact. That is, insecure contact due to the inexperienced staff which has been designed in a very quiet and reliable environment by the organization (servicescape) can transmit a sense of confidence to the customers. Or a city tour setting with the best automobiles in

Table 1: Typology of Servicescape Based on Organizations Providing Service. Source: (Bitner; 1992).

Types of Servicescape Based on Communication	Physical Complexity of Servicescape	
	Elaborate	Lean
Self-service (customer only)	Golf land	ATM
Interpersonal Services	Hotels & Restaurants	Hair Saloon
Remote Services (employee only)	Telephone or Insurance Co.	Automated Voice Messaging Systems

the tourist destination cannot inculcate a sense of integrity and speed in the customers by a careless and tardy tour guide. Thus a new issue emerges within the organization in the meantime which is known as branding or internal branding.

### Internal Branding

Emerging new challenges of branding projects led to considering employees as the first target in branding and in practice the direction of branding from outside to inside, which used advertisement and public relations, was turned to the inside to outside direction using organizational culture. There are numerous definitions for internal branding that there is no theoretical unity among the words. Some consider it as educational and communicational mechanisms that deliver brand messages or brand identity to staff (Pswarayi, 2013). Some other have attributed it to management practices with an emphasis on leadership which is designed for the ultimate purpose in aligning individual goals of employees with defined objectives to achieve an appropriate level of behavior expected from a known brand (Zeppelin, 2006). Certainly, the purpose of branding is to create a version in human mind and personalizing an impersonal product or service so that makes a sense of connection and trust that is to distinguish the product and services. This kind of analogizing an impersonal body of the brand to a human body can lead to achieve sustainable competitive advantage since customers gain specific images of the brand and also observe human features in its components and providing approaches. Figure 1 is a schematic of environmental to behavioral influences and the effects on mindset. It is clear that physical signs and symbols are applied as a causal factor to form perception using servicescape. But hereinafter, customers and employees will response as individual dynamic organisms to the perception due to their personal and psychological characteristics and their individual and group experiences. It is obvious that there are two types of effect in this process. The

direct and indirect impacts on staff that have long-term effects on the quality of their working life and direct and indirect impacts on customers whose perceptions are affected by the quality of received service. Thus, both groups reveal psychological and emotional cognitive reactions creating the field of perception and satisfaction of being customer or employee in the enterprise sector in an interaction. Importantly, internal branding as a guiding and implementing the program in the phase of staff response to customer services will be a precursor to form a safe experience.

Meanwhile, in measurements related to the internal branding, this default exists that prevail achieving staff customer satisfaction and comfort leads to obtaining customers satisfaction more than anything else. Therefore, the formation of any action or subjective which leads to the employees' satisfaction working in the brand is on the internal branding agenda.

Therefore, internal branding as a development of perception and a mental program within the servicescape plays the role of interaction insurance between customer and organization and also recognizes service providers as the first early products' buyers in the organization. The primary products of the organization are the same jobs that will be sold to employees and the satisfaction of employees from their job in the organization and quality of working life would ultimately lead to their satisfaction of servicescape. According to the quality of services pattern, this consent can lead to employees' loyalty to the organization, which is considered as the first step of developing the quality of services by them. In other words, employees will be loyal service brokers who will generate loyal customers. For loyal employees, providing overall organizational requirements is much more important than doing their ordinary organizational tasks and far beyond daily accounting issues they seek for long-term spiritual matters. In other words, the absence of an employee in working hours or tolerating bad behavior of some customers will

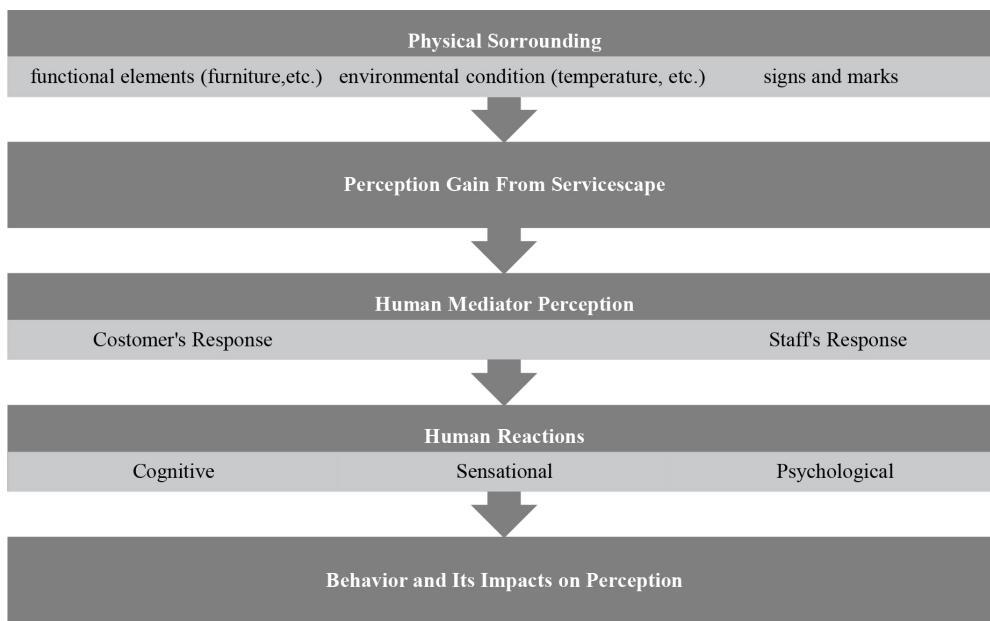


Figure 1: environmental to behavioral influences in servicescape. Source: Author, adapted from (Bitner, 1992).

be respond without negative reactions and will be answered with compassion and selflessness; and staff considers the job, not just as a daily task but as a part of the collective value. But underlying this new satisfaction for customers' loyalty to the brand secures the profitability and survival on the market businesses (Hudson et al., 2014).

Therefore, internal branding as a psychological-management mechanism is also recognized as a supplement for branding programs within the organization which both outreaches to sustain the perception of customers and plays the narrator role in servicescape. It is a human tradition rooted in the real or apparent history of the organization

**Conclusion** | Certainly, providing services in the tourism industry requires considering details accurately and ignoring them leads to failure of that industry in today's competitive markets. Services which can be introduced in three levels requires three levels of management and consideration. At the primary level, what is presented as the main requirement of customers is considered. They are the objectives and primary issues which any tourism corporate can establish to stabilize their own businesses by applying the most simple comparisons and investigations; and usually, the highest level of

that shows its truthfulness to the customers by implementing tasks properly. Trustworthiness or timeliness cannot be considered as an immediate or heterogenous act. But it is a historical narrative about people working in an organization who understand trustworthiness or timeliness properly and fulfill it both to each other and to their customers in the same attitude.

If branding can be referred to design identities or characters, tourism servicescape can be simlized to a palpable body and configuration that internal branding is its blood flow with a regular rate and rhythm which leads to providing services to the user and continuity of servicescape.

expenses are allocated to this part. At the second level, that is, manifestation of subjective elements increasingly, the main features and characteristics combine with main agents and customers can perceive the value of a distinct service from other services by comparing and interpreting slightly. At this level, the issues allocated to branding and shaping factors arises especially in terms of servicescape and continue to the third level that is the level of adding factors. Thus, there are objective factors to consider at third level accompanied with attached subjective elements.



It is certain that topics of branding and internal branding can be raised after the establishment of the main product; and as illustrated in Table 2, the importance of subjective factors at second and third levels of product becomes more considerable and prominent. It is important to emphasize that by moving from the second to the third level of tourism products, objective and subjective issues integrate and reveal a differentiated objective-subjective feature.

Internal branding can be mentioned as a missing link in terms of branding and servicescape at the second and third level of production. This measurement may be raised to aligning and consistency brand's promises and to integrate the behavior expected from brand and servicescape.

It is recommended that current enterprises in the tourism industry which tend to enter the subjective and subjective-objective issues in branding and internal branding pay special attention to following considerations:

1. To provide the necessary objective platforms and

hardware before carrying out any reformative and development actions.

2. The importance of human resources as a mediator and translator between objective and subjective factors in this corporate is significant which must be developed before any measurement.

3. Branding is a continuous process and pathway and Brand-book is a strategic and functional document. To establish a successful internal branding and servicescape for tourism program, continuous process management according to controllable elements emphasizing on Brand-book is necessary. To achieve this importance, a branding manager and control measurements are prerequisite.

4. New categories of services and internal branding are just dynamic and management tools within the enterprise which can be developed and enhanced in recognizing customer process. Thus, implementation of these programs is the start of a progress which requires better-recognizing of customers and emphasizing on defined values of the brand.

Table 2: Summing up the production levels according to the subjective and objective elements of research. Source: Author.

Production or Services Levels	The Presence and Dominance of Subjective and Objective Elements	Description
First level: Core or Main Level	The dominance of objective and forming elements of products or services which fulfill the customers' primary needs	Developing of servicescape definitions at this Level
Second Level: Sub-level	Adding subjective features to objective elements to distinct the first or core level	The dominance of brand and internal branding at this level. benefiting servicescape from brand's entity at subjective, subjective-objective, and objective levels which provide integrity and help to transfer integrated and meaningful definitions
Third Level: Adding	Adding objective features accompanied with specific perceptions to develop values for products or services	Increasing subjective values due to the providing objective features which elevate the value of received services in customer's mindset. Elevating the level of dominance of subjective-objective issues. Servicescape, Branding, and Internal Branding are at the service of developing a distinct image from main product and by-product.

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