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Therapeutic Servicescapes, COVID Stress, and Customer Revisit Intention in the Hospitality Industry Post-Lockdown

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Abstract

As the post-pandemic era gradually dawns upon us, the hospitality industry seems to be slow in recovery, partly due to the continuous stress over being infected in public and hospitality places. Scholars have recommended that hospitality establishments seriously consider the potential benefits of artificial intelligence, social distancing, and cleanliness to fast-track the industry's recovery post-lockdown. This study contributes to that stream of research by proposing and testing a model that demonstrates that through alleviating COVID stress, therapeutic servicescapes at hospitality establishments could promote customers' revisit intention post-lockdown. We argue that therapeutic servicescapes have potential marketing and strategic benefits that could fast-track the hospitality industry's recovery while promoting customers' well-being. This is because servicescapes at hospitality establishments can be designed in such a way that it delivers transformative health-related benefits. Findings from the analysis of data collected from 213 relaxation bar customers support the study's hypotheses; that reflective second-order therapeutic servicescape is positively related to customers' revisit intention to relaxation bars through its negative effect on COVID stress. This study theoretically contributes to the literature by empirically demonstrating that a blend of social and physical settings to form therapeutic servicescapes with restorative potentials do occur in commercial hospitality settings. Practically, the findings of the study suggest that managers should seek to blend the restorative potential of the natural environment with relational resources to enhance the therapeutic potential of their place of business. As customers emerge from social isolation experienced during the lockdown, relational resources in hospitality establishments could go a long way. This would not only deliver health-related benefits to customers, but it would also provide marketing and strategic benefits to hospitality establishments.

Keywords: therapeutic servicescapes, COVID stress, revisit intention, social distancing, post-pandemic, S-O-R theory

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted people's recreation routines and leisure time. The rise in infections; mortality rates; quarantine; and lockdown, have triggered adaptive anxiety-related distress including- fear of becoming infected; anxiety sensitivity; bodily vigilance; disease-related xenophobia; and the fear of coming into contact with possibly contaminated surfaces or objects

(Taylor, 2019). Consequently, when governments began to relax lockdown rules in most countries, people hardly returned to their leisure and recreation routines; parks were still deserted, restaurants are empty, and malls remain scanty. The hospitality industry proves to be slow in recovering from the pandemic, partly due to the high risk of contamination at places of leisure and recreation (Shin & Kang, 2020; Zemke et al., 2015). This highlights the vulnerability of the hospitality industry as a result of the pandemic and has sparked conversations on how to expedite the recovery of the industry post-pandemic.

Some have suggested that for the industry to rapidly recover post-pandemic, practitioners should carefully consider the potential benefits of artificial intelligence (AI), social distancing, hygiene, and cleanliness (Jiang & Wen, 2020; Shin & Kang, 2020). Unfortunately, implementing AI in the service industry is capital intensive and practically inapplicable, undesirable, and unconceivable in some hospitality contexts (Ivanov & Webster, 2020). Similarly, hygiene and cleanliness are perceived by some customers as a 'best feature' (competitive necessity) and rarely a 'distinctive feature' (competitive advantage) in the hospitality industry (Xia et al., 2020). Thus, cleanliness may not be a significant differentiator and enduring customer motivator post-pandemic since the pandemic has necessitated it, and governments' policies require it for all businesses reopening post-pandemic. The same applies generally to social distancing, while it is significant in *flattening the curve* (Foroudi et al., 2021); it's in some cases insignificantly related to customer satisfaction (Rukuni & Maziriri, 2020). Thus, there is a need for hospitality businesses to adopt practices that could potentially differentiate them post-pandemic, attract customers by helping them cope better with pandemic anxieties, and at the same time comply with government policies and health-safety regulations required for all business post-pandemic.

The way service encounters are, it often requires that service employees go beyond their formal roles to provide customers with support essential to customers' well-being (Ogunmokun et al., 2020b; Temerak et al., 2018). Consequently, certain commercial institutions do play significant roles in customers' everyday lives, as several customers patronize some business places not just for needs satisfaction related to services or goods, but likewise for the fulfillment of other needs; like human social interaction need, emotional support, and companionship (Rosenbaum et al., 2020; Zablah et al., 2017). Customers visit commercial institutions to temporarily escape from the seclusion of their homes to involve in brief engagement with people. Scholars have examined the reasons customers visit hospitality establishments, such as fast-food restaurants (Cheang, 2002), and diners (Rosenbaum et al., 2007) sometimes go beyond consumption needs to include the need for social support from the people at these establishments, such as other customers and employees. Lucia-Palacios et al. (2018) revealed that friendly banter with sales associates does help customers ease stress and improve well-being.

Thus, this paper proposes that leveraging on this inherent characteristic of the servicescapes at places of leisure and recreation, customers may receive transformative health-related benefits. This could help customers overcome pandemic anxiety-related distress and serve as a significant differentiator in the hospitality industry post-pandemic. The therapeutic servicescapes models how service-oriented organizations can employ their restorative potential and relational resources, to assume a therapeutic role in the personal experiences and daily lives of their customers (Rosenbaum et al., 2020). Drawing on the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) theory, this study develops and tests a model that investigates the potential relationship between therapeutic servicescapes and customers' COVID stress, and how this is linked to customers' revisit intention.

The findings of this study could help the hospitality industry recover quicker, post-pandemic. As it offers insight that could encourage people to return to their recreation routines, by helping them overcome pandemic anxiety-related distress via transformative services with health benefits embedded in therapeutic servicescapes. Further, as previous studies have recommended social distancing and cleanliness as keys to the quick recovery of the hospitality industry, we suggest therapeutic servicescapes; not as an alternative but as complementary. Therapeutic servicescapes come with a potential competitive advantage because social distancing and cleanliness are mandated by governments and regulatory bodies, thus would soon become satisfiers and not motivators; they may soon no longer have strategic and marketing advantages.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), S-O-R theory posits that stimuli (S) are triggers of changes in peoples' organismic/internal states (O), bringing about their avoidance or approach responses (R). The S-O-R framework is used in the hospitality industry primarily because it parsimoniously describes environments, intervening variables, and behaviors (Ali, 2016). There is a significant association between customers' perception of the servicescape and the customers' internal responses (physiological, emotional, cognitive), and behaviors (avoidance/ approach) (Bitner, 1992). Thus, grounded on S-O-R, this study develops a model that suggests therapeutic servicescapes as an antecedent of revisit intention through COVID stress. This framework suggests that stimuli could be covert or overt, which nonetheless induces people's internal state in a bid to motivate particular behaviors. Jacoby (2002) advanced S-O-R when he introduced a flexible and more comprehensive model where three types of stimulus, organism, and response factors were suggested. This revealed the models' dynamic nature and adaptability, particularly in the hospitality industry. As argued by Rosenbaum et al. (2020), therapeutic servicescapes can be considered as stimuli. In the context of recreation and leisure establishments, therapeutic servicescapes is expected to be stimuli that influence the psychological/internal states of customers such as COVID stress (Taylor et al., 2020). Thus, therapeutic servicescapes of recreation and leisure establishments (stimuli) are linked to customers' COVID stress (organism) which then ultimately influences customers' intention to revisit the recreation and leisure establishments (approach response).

Therapeutic landscape describes the cathartic functions that some milieus, settings, or places may take up in peoples' lives, once a meaningful confluence of social and physical stimuli exists. A therapeutic landscape emerges when human perceptions, social conditions, and physical and built environments blend to create an environment conducive for healing (Gesler, 1996). The therapeutic potential of places has been studied in the literature—urban and residential areas, religious sites, blue spaces (e.g., beaches, rivers, islands), and green spaces (e.g., gardens, outdoor spaces, and parks) (Bell et al., 2018). The studies show that people seek to maintain closeness to such milieus, settings, or places that promote their wellbeing (Ramkissoon et al., 2018). Consequently, marketing scholars have suggested that the union of social as well as physical components in commercial locations might spur consumers' desire to remain close to such setting, as patronage provides wellbeing benefits like obtaining social support from people present in the setting, and relief from depression or stress (Temerak et al., 2018; Zablah et al., 2017). Therapeutic servicescapes are places of service delivery that have a blend of social and physical components to create an environment that fosters wellbeing and is conducive for healing. Not all consumption setting in the service industry is directly impactful on customers' wellbeing, but such have the

restorative potential of physical and social stimuli. Social stimuli, such as other customers present in service environments, volunteers, and employees, provide relational resources like; light-hearted chats and friendly banter (Altinay et al., 2019), which might stimulate customers' mental and physical well-being (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2018). Certainly, customers patronize places of leisure to engage in light-hearted chats and laughter with others present, and in so doing, they do get momentary relief from the ills of everyday life (Cheang, 2002). In addition to social stimuli, scholars (Purani & Kumar, 2018) have revealed that physical/natural stimuli (such as, water displays & green areas), in commercial settings such as game arcades, zoos, casinos, and leisure facilities (Weber & Trojan, 2018) possess restorative stimuli that minimize, or sometimes remedy symptoms of burnout, exhaustion and mental fatigue. Combining these research streams, this study argues that if customers spend time in leisure or recreation settings with the confluence of restorative potential and relational resources, these spots could take on a therapeutic function in their personal experiences and daily lives.

Drawing on attention restoration theory (ART), the ability to direct ones' attention (such as one's perception and thought) to undesired but important environmental stimuli (in the case of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic; increase infection rates, mortality rates, isolation, and lockdown), necessitates the use of the neurocognitive inhibitory mechanism, which becomes depleted with time (Kaplan, 1995). This depletion then results in symptoms and experiences associated with irritability, exhaustion, withdrawal, disinterest in habitual activities, mental fatigue, and stress (Li & Sullivan, 2016). ART studies (Moran, 2019) report that when individuals with symptoms and experiences related to directed attention fatigue interact with nature, it helps relieve their fatigued neurocognitive inhibitory mechanism. Relying on the ART, Pasini et al. (2014) argued that inherently, natural environments comprise of four conditions: being-away, scope, coherence, and fascination. Being away offers an individual respite from their day-to-day feelings and concerns and helps them momentarily escape to a 'different place'. Scope refers to a setting being coherent and rich enough, that it seems to be outer-worldly in an individual's perceptions. Such settings are engaging to the individual's mind and provide plenty of stimuli to take up a considerable portion of the available room in the individual's mind. Coherence describes a person's ability to comprehend how a place is designed and organized, and how the person can fulfill goals using the place. In conclusion, fascination describes an environmental condition, which effortlessly gets peoples' attention and does so without capacity limitations (Pasini et al., 2014). When these four conditions are combined, they collectively promote healing from symptoms related to exhaustion, mental fatigue, and stress. Following the arguments of Rosenbaum et al. (2020), this study pools restorative resources (four environmental conditions) and relational resources, available at a place of leisure and recreation as representing its therapeutic servicescape. Therefore, to reduce potential multicollinearity, therapeutic servicescape is measured in this study as one second-order construct, comprising of four variables from restorative resources and one variable from relational resources (Kenny, 2016; Rosenbaum et al., 2020). Since places of leisure and recreation may also have both restorative and relational resources, these places may consequently stimulate healing from COVID-19 directed attention fatigue and its ensuing symptoms of stress. Thus, it is hypothesized:

- H_1: Therapeutic servicescapes at places of leisure and recreation will have a negative relationship with customers' COVID stress.

As a favorable post-consumption behavior, revisit intention is described as customers' perceived likelihood of coming back to the same destination (Loi et al., 2017; Pham & Nguyen, 2019).

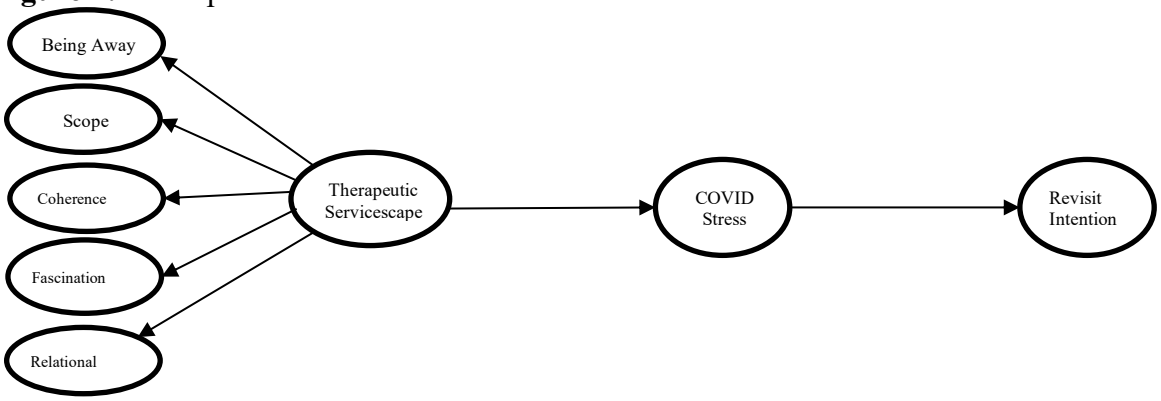
Revisit intention has been referred to as the ultimate success of the servicescape in the hospitality industry (Kim & Moon, 2009). Contingent on their experience in the servicescape, customers respond either with avoidance or approach behaviors (Bitner, 1992). If they are pleased with their experience, they respond with approach behaviors which could include willingness to pay, exploration, staying longer, recommendation, and revisiting (Firat, 2019). Conversely, when customers are not pleased with the servicescapes, they respond with avoidance approach behaviors such as negative word-of-mouth and boycott. It is expected, based on the potential health-related benefits of a therapeutic servicescape that customers would respond with an approach behavior. The customers' memorable and pleasant restorative and relational experience of therapeutic servicescapes would trigger the desire to visit the servicescape in the future, so as to have such pleasant and memorable restorative and relational experiences again. Thus, it is hypothesized:

- H_2: Therapeutic servicescapes at places of leisure and recreation will have a positive relationship with customers' revisit intention.

Studies of prior pandemics (and epidemics) reveal that stress or the lack thereof is a significant precursor of behaviors during and after the pandemic (Taylor, 2019). People with extreme anxiety and distress are more likely to engage in behaviors that might be socially disruptive, such as panic buying and over-utilizing of medical resources because they misread trivial ailments as symptoms of serious infection (Asmundson & Taylor, 2020). In the COVID-19 pandemic, as governments relax lockdown restrictions, those with extreme anxiety continue to excessively engage in preventative behaviors such as overly maintaining physical and social distancing, avoiding public gatherings, and staying home. These behaviors slow down the recovery of economic, social, and other activities post-pandemic, and have been said to be a source of concern (Taylor et al., 2020). As discussed above, it is expected that therapeutic servicescapes (with its restorative and relational resources) could help individuals overcome extreme pandemic-related anxieties and stress. Thus, this study hypothesizes that therapeutic servicescapes of places of leisure and recreation will have a positive relationship with customers' revisit intention, through therapeutic servicescapes' negative association with COVID stress. The alleviation of COVID stress could be a mechanism through which therapeutic servicescapes would influence customers' revisit intention. Thus, it is hypothesized that:

- H_3: COVID stress mediates the relationship between therapeutic servicescapes at places of leisure and recreation and customers' revisit intention.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model



Methods

Research Instrument, Sampling, and Data Collection

Data were collected using a self-administered survey from customers of relaxation bars in Lagos, Nigeria. Relaxation bars are leisure and recreational places that form a significant part of the growing Nigerian hospitality industry (Ogunmokun et al., 2020a). They are mostly outdoor relaxation centers with great natural and built environments, where drinks and light food are sold. They typically operate at night, and occasionally local African music bands perform live quietly. After obtaining the consent of the relaxation centers' management, customers were intercepted as they leave the relaxation spot and were invited to participate in the survey. The data collection commenced in the last quarter of 2020; 3 weeks following the third phase of easing lockdown regulations (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Respondents were asked to reflect on their time at the relaxation bar, and honestly answer the questions in the questionnaire. They were assured anonymity and told that there were no wrong or right answers. A total of 213 customers voluntarily agreed to participate in the survey. See Table 1 for details of the samples' demographic characteristics. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale; with 1 being Strongly disagree, and 5 being Strongly agree. The five sub-dimensions of therapeutic servicescape, with a total of 18 items were adapted from Rosenbaum et al. (2020). COVID stress was measured with 6 items adapted from Taylor et al. (2020), and revisit intention was measured with a 7-item scale adapted from Meng and Choi (2018).

Table 1: Sample Demographics

Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	58	27.2
Male	155	72.8
Age (years)		
18-27	29	13.6
28-37	76	35.7
38-47	48	22.5
48-57	37	17.4
>57	23	10.8
Marital Status		
Single	74	34.7
Married	139	65.3
Income (Nigerian Naira)		
<100,000	87	40.8
101,000-500,000	68	31.9
501,000-1,000,000	50	23.5
>1,000,000	8	3.8

Data Analysis

Common Method Variance

There is a potential risk of common method bias as the data were collected from a single source. For this reason, some preventative measures were taken. First, in the questionnaire design, Viswanathan and Kayande's (2012) recommendation on item sequencing across and within constructs was adopted, to prevent responds bias arising from respondents' guessing the potential relationship between the study's constructs. Second, we avoided ambiguous terminologies in the wording of the items, to enhance respondents' understanding of the questions and be able to answer honestly. Finally, during the data collection, respondents were voluntarily recruited; they were

guaranteed anonymity and assured that the data will be used strictly for statistical purposes. Post-hoc, Harman single test factor was conducted, and it revealed that no single item had more than 50% of the total variance extracted (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Thus, common method bias does not seem to be an issue with the study's data.

First-Order Measurement Model Assessment

For the sake of parsimony and on theoretical grounds, therapeutic servicescape is treated as a reflective second-order construct; with relational resources, fascination, being-away, cohesion, and scope as its sub-dimensions. Following the examples of Ogunmokun et al. (2021a), and Ogunmokun and Timur (2021), the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) of all first-order construct was conducted. CFA results revealed accepted fit indices for all first-order constructs (relational resources, fascination, being-away, cohesion, scope, COVID stress and revisit intention) - χ^2 = 672.760, *df* = 328, *Δdf* = 2.051, *CFI* = .957, *IFI* = .957, *SRMR* = .060, *RMSEA* = .069. The CFA results also revealed accepted fit indices for second-order therapeutic servicescapes measured as a latent construct with five dimensions χ^2 = 269.008, *df* = 129, *Δdf* = 2.085, *CFI* = .974, *TLI* = .969, *SRMR* = .045, *RMSEA* = .072. However, a CFA of one-factor model (with all items loading on one variable) revealed much poorer fit to data- χ^2 = 3429.644, *df* = 349, *Δdf* = 9.827, *CFI* = .593, *IFI* = .595, *SRMR* = .158, *RMSEA* = .204. The convergent and discriminate validities of the first-order model were also tested, and they demonstrated satisfactory validities (see Table 2).

Table 2: First-Order Correlation and Validities

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	Relational	COVID Stress	Revisit Intention	Being Away	Cohesion	Fascination	Scope
Relational	.966	.805	.655	**0.897**						
COVID Stress	.941	.732	.252	-0.502***	**0.855**					
Revisit Intention	.851	.589	.252	0.353***	-0.502***	**0.768**				
Being Away	.915	.787	.628	0.616***	-0.333***	0.361***	**0.887**			
Coherence	.915	.783	.550	0.742***	-0.394***	0.290***	0.547***	**0.885**		
Fascination	.899	.748	.655	0.810***	-0.440***	0.361***	0.793***	0.681***	**0.865**	
Scope	.742	.607	.414	0.644***	-0.316***	0.243**	0.452***	0.585***	0.564***	**0.779**

Study's Measurement Model

The CFA of the study's constructs (COVID stress, revisit intention, and second-order therapeutic servicescape) revealed accepted fit indices- χ^2 = 711.510, *df* = 341, *Δdf* = 2.087, *CFI* = .951, *IFI* = .951, *SRMR* = .065, *RMSEA* = .072. The constructs likewise demonstrated convergent validity as all factor loadings were significant and above .5 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), and values of the reliability test had Cronbach alpha > .70, confirming high reliability (see Table 3). Values of average variance extracted (AVE) were above .50, likewise, the values of the composite reliability are more than the values of the AVE, which confirms the convergent validity of the study's model (Hair et al., 2010). Also, the values of MSV were less than the values of their respective AVE, further confirming the constructs' discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010) (see Table 4). To ensure the absence of multicollinearity, VIF values were checked, and they have values ranging from 1.40 to 1.56, which were below the acceptable threshold of 10.

Table 3: Factor Loadings, Means, and Distribution

Item	Loading	Skewness	Kurtosis	*M*	*SD*
Therapeutic Servicescapes	α = .873				
Relational	α = .964				
I know what to expect when I come to this bar	.978	-0.383	-1.001	3.13	1.148
The employees are perfectly honest and truthful in this bar	.965	-0.172	-0.784	2.82	1.213
The employees can be trusted completely at this bar	.955	-0.445	-1.31	3.21	1.127
The employees have high integrity in this bar	.914	-0.268	-0.678	3.06	1.198
Other customers are very friendly at this bar	.891	-0.34	-1.069	3.15	1.177
Other customers can be trusted completely at this bar	.861	-0.176	-0.922	3.09	1.152
Other customers are helpful at this bar	.681	-0.498	-0.67	3.17	1.159
Fascination	α = .898				
Places like this bar are fascinating.	.889	-0.509	-0.563	3.44	1.162
In places like this bar, my attention is drawn to many interesting things.	.861	-0.465	-0.541	3.32	1.126
In places like this bar, it is hard to be bored.	.845	-0.45	-0.491	3.3	1.109
Coherence	α = .913				
There is a clear order in the physical arrangement of things in this bar.	.922	-0.076	-0.57	2.74	0.992
In places like this bar, it is easy to see how things are organized.	.893	-0.333	-0.887	2.79	1.066
In places like this bar, everything seems to have its proper place.	.837	-0.204	-0.729	2.77	1.054
Scope	α = .685				
This bar is large enough for me to explore many different areas.	.959	-0.164	-0.328	2.72	0.882
In places like this bar, there are few boundaries, or obstacles, that limit my possibility of moving easily around.	.543	0.242	-0.179	2.92	0.923
Being Away	α = .903				
Places like this bar are a refuge from nuisances.	.984	-0.255	-0.745	2.97	1.126
To get away from things that usually demand my attention, I go to places like this bar.	.963	-0.236	-0.609	3.15	1.089
To stop thinking about the things that I must get done, I go to places like this bar.	.681	-0.28	-0.453	3.15	1.071
COVID (Contamination) Stress	α = .937				
I am worried that if I touched something in a public space (e.g., handrail, door handle), I would catch the virus	.977	-1.143	1.212	2.27	0.990
I am worried that if someone coughed or sneezed near me, I would catch the virus	.955	-1.084	1.376	2.21	0.969
I am worried that people around me will infect me with the virus	.932	-1.043	1.011	2.32	0.997
I am worried about taking change in cash transactions	.836	-1.119	1.164	2.29	0.999
I am worried that I might catch the virus from handling money or using a debit machine	.695	-1.077	0.913	2.36	1.021
I am worried that my drink may have been contaminated by handlers in the bar	.688	-0.915	0.932	2.23	0.905
Revisit Intention	α = .854				
I intend to visit this bar in the near future	.838	0.002	-0.299	3.33	1.088
I am not planning to visit this bar in the near future (R)	.819	-0.93	-0.17	3.10	1.041
I will make an effort to visit this bar in the near future	.738	-0.641	-0.151	3.27	1.051
I will certainly not invest time and money to visit this bar in the near future (R)	.663	-0.739	-0.486	3.00	0.993

Note. KMO = .917

Table 4: Correlation and Validities

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	COVID Stress	Therapeutic Servicescapes	Revisit Intention
COVID Stress	.941	.732	.258	**0.855**		
Therapeutic Servicescapes	.902	.652	.258	-0.508***	**0.807**	
Revisit Intention	.851	.590	.251	-0.501***	0.398***	**0.768**

Structural Model Assessment

The hypotheses positing the indirect and direct relationships of the study were estimated via the structural equation modeling technique (SEM) using a bootstrapping approach. This is most appropriate as there have been criticisms of the stepwise approach of testing mediation effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2004), as it does not directly assess indirect effects. Consequently, the study employs an SEM bootstrapping approach to test mediation because it estimates indirect effects, accommodates for assumptions of normality, provides the overall model fit, and assesses indirect and direct effects in a causal model.

Specifically, the study's hypotheses were tested using SPSS AMOS24 with 10,000 bootstrapping at 95% confidence. Hypothesis 1 tested the relationship between therapeutic servicescape and COVID stress and found that there is a significant negative association (β = -.508; 95% CI [-.377, -.062]). Thus hypothesis 1 is supported. Hypothesis 2 tested the relationship between therapeutic

servicescape and customers' revisit intention and found that there is a significant association between them (β= .194; 95% CI [.039, .363]). Thus, hypothesis 2 is supported.

Mediation Analysis

Finally, hypothesis 3 tested the mediating role of COVID stress in the indirect relationship between therapeutic servicescape and customers' revisit intention. The indirect effect from the bootstrap analysis was found to be positive and significant (ab = .204), with a 95% confidence interval not including zero (.110 to .317). Since the direct effect (c) hypothesized in hypothesis 2 is positive (.194) and significant (p = .0037), the study's hypothesized mediation is complementary (Zhao et al., 2010). Thus, hypothesis 3 is supported.

Table 5: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypotheses		**Coefficient**	**95% CI**		
			LL	**UL**	
Hypothesis 1	Therapeutic Servicescapes => COVID Stress	-.508	-.377	-.062	Supported
Hypothesis 2	Therapeutic Servicescapes => Revisit Intention	.194	.039	.363	Supported
Hypothesis 3	Therapeutic Servicescapes => COVID Stress => Revisit Intention	.204	.110	.317	Supported

Discussion

Results from the analysis of the samples' data (see Table 5) revealed that therapeutic servicescapes have a negative association with COVID stress; thus, supporting hypothesis 1. This confirms that the more customers spend time in leisure and recreational spots that have a blend of a restorative natural environment and relational resources, the more they are likely to be relieved of COVID stress. This corroborates the findings of Lucia-Palacios et al. (2018), and Purani and Kumar (2018) that relational, natural, and physical elements of places of service delivery can enhance consumers' wellbeing. Further, in support of the study's hypothesis 2, the results revealed that therapeutic servicescapes have a positive direct relationship with customers' revisit intention. Thus, this study shows that customers, considering the therapeutic servicescapes of leisure and recreational spots, would likely return to the leisure and recreational spots. This confirms that based on their experience in the servicescape, customers would respond either with avoidance or approach behaviors (Bitner, 1992). This finding suggests that a blend of a restorative natural environment and relational resources at leisure spots would trigger customer revisit intentions (a form of approach behaviors). Finally, through its negative relationship with COVID stress, this study demonstrates that therapeutic servicescapes of leisure spots would influence customers' revisit intention, thus supporting hypothesis 3.

These findings reveal that therapeutic servicescapes' attributes of fascination, cohesion, scope, relational resources, and 'being away' at leisure spots are significantly related to customers' COVID stress and that this relationship is an underlying mechanism through which therapeutic servicescapes could influence customers' revisit intention. As most countries are opening up after several months of lockdown and restrictions, most hospitality businesses will have to cope with customers' concerns of being infected at service points (Jiang & Wen, 2020; Shin & Kang, 2020). In addition to what has been suggested in the literature to alleviate the fear of customers in the hospitality business post-lockdown, this study has demonstrated that therapeutic servicescapes could both alleviate COVID stress and foster more re-patronage.

Theoretical Implication

Theoretically, the current study shows that the blend of social and physical settings to form therapeutic servicescapes with restorative potentials occurs in commercial hospitality settings such as relaxation bars, and not only in blue and green settings. It highlights, based on the S-O-R, that the servicescape of hospitality establishments act as stimuli that react with customers' internal responses to provoke a behavioral response. Further, this study contributes to the scholarly discussion on the quick recovery of the hospitality sector post-pandemic. It highlights the potential operational, strategic, and marketing limitations of AI, social distancing, and hygiene; the three major suggestions in literature so far. In accordance with Bell et al. (2018), this study demonstrated that post-lockdown, therapeutic landscapes' social and physical settings truly blend in ways that are contributing to human healing from COVID stress and anxiety. This in turn would boost the performance of the sector post-lockdown by fostering customers' revisit intention, thus providing a marketing advantage. In terms of strategic value, since all businesses post-lockdown will have to obey social distancing protocols and hygiene rules, therapeutic servicescape could serve as a differentiation strategy. Besides, unlike AI, creating a therapeutic servicescape is less capital intensive and requires less technical expertise.

Practical Implication

Practically, the study has marketing, strategic and health implications. This study suggests that managers should seek to blend the restorative potential of the natural environment with relational resources to enhance the therapeutic potential of their place of business. This is because as customers emerge from social isolation experienced during the lockdown, relational resources in hospitality establishments would go a long way in curbing COVID stress. This would not only deliver health-related benefits to customers, but it would also provide marketing and strategic benefits to the establishments as it stimulates revisit intention. For example, leisure and recreational places may integrate natural elements, like water fountains, aquariums, as well as greenery into their physical settings. In addition, managers are encouraged to improve the coherence and scope of hospitality establishments' servicescape. The involvement and suggestions of customers in the arrangement and organization of the servicescape may be solicited for this. Furthermore, to reduce COVID stress and trigger revisit intentions, fascination and being away should be enhanced. Practically, this could be achieved by giving customers a break from an overload of pandemic news & stories. If COVID health and safety nudges will be provided within the servicescape, they could be more pleasant and perhaps emphasize positives, such as the number of COVID patients recovering and the potency of vaccines. Finally, managers may likewise consider promoting a stronger rapport between their employees and customers, as well as among customers. This might be done by creating an online community, and by supporting a social or environmental cause that might enhance employee-customer socialization.

Limitations and recommendations for future studies

The current study has some limitations that can be explored in future studies. There are still stringent COVID-19 restrictions in some places, and certain services are offered online. Thus, future studies can explore whether social, natural, and physical conditions can be incorporated into cyberscapes or virtual consumption settings such as the higher education sector (Ogunmokun et al., 2021b). Also, there are other conceptualizations of therapeutic servicescapes (Higgins &

Hamilton, 2019) that future studies can explore and juxtapose with the one used in this study, to enhance the current understanding and application of the concept in the hospitality industry. Finally, the study's data is skewed in terms of gender distribution. While this is typical of the study's patriarchal population and context, our findings might not be generalizable to other contexts.

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