

HOMYNESS IN SERVICE SETTINGS: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEASURE

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HOMEYNESS IN SERVICE SETTINGS: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MEASURE

Homeyness plays an important role in shaping consumer experiences in commercial settings. When commercial settings such as cafes are designed to be home-like, customer experiences are favorable. Despite its importance, homeyness was not studied in service marketing literature in depth and does not have a validated scale for its measurement.

This study specifies the domain of homeyness and identifies its dimensions of familiarity, authenticity, and security. We further develop a valid and reliable measure of homeyness and validate it in a model through structural equation model in SmartPLS on a sample of 790 respondents.

Homeyness has multiple strategic implications for marketing managers. When service settings are designed homey, consumers are more likely to visit these places and provide more benefits to the firms. After extended periods of homestay due to pandemic, homeyness will contribute an enhanced transition to the consumers' return to public service settings.

Keywords: homeyness, construct, measure

Track: Services Marketing

1. Literature Review

Dictionary definitions of homey refer to comfortably informal, cozy, homelike, and friendly as a characteristic of a place other than one’s home. Despite its centrality in human life, homeyness studies in services marketing are scant. McCracken (1989) is one of the first scholars to analyze homeyness in a comprehensive approach (Ulver-Sneistrup & Johansson, 2011) and defines it as “cultural account of the constellation of consumer goods and meanings” (pg. 168). Although McCracken laid out the properties and characteristics of homeyness, they admit that homeyness has rather an intangible attribute and that it is difficult to define it in a solid manner with its whole tangible dimensions. As presented below in Table 1a, 1b, 1c, homeyness can be analyzed from three groups of properties to develop a broad understanding of the concept:

Table 1.a. Physical Properties	Colors, house and furniture material, fabrics, furniture style	Objects in the home – personally significant objects; playful, informal objects, decorative objects, plants and flowers	Diverse styles of furnishings and arrangements	Interior and exterior details such as low ceilings and fireplace	Adjectives describing homeyness - as though someone lived there, informal, comfortable, cozy, relaxed, secure, unique, old, rich, warm, humble, welcoming, accommodating, lived in, country kitchenish
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Source: Adapted from McCracken (1989)

1.b. Symbolic Properties	The Diminutive Property	The Variable Property	The Embracing Property	The Engaging Property	The Mnemonic Property	The Authentic Property	The Informal Property	The Situating Property
	Homey environments are manageable and graspable as smaller contexts as opposed to large scale environments.	Homey places are particular and individual as opposed to uniform places.	Homey environments embrace the occupants and have encompassing quality and power.	Homeyness deliberately aims to grab the attention of occupants, and actively involves the observer.	Homeyness has a historical character with objects sought to create an atmosphere of recollection.	Homey spaces are real and natural as opposed to being artificial or forced.	Homey settings are informal allowing occupants to act freely and without worry.	The occupant is an integral part of the homey place.

Source: Adapted from McCracken (1989)

Table 1.c. Pragmatic Properties	Homeyness as An Enabling Context	Homeyness as a Status Corrector	Homeyness as a Market Place Corrector	Homeyness as a Modernity Corrector
	Homey places enable domestic enactments of self and family.	Homeyness is a cursor of status depending on being high or middle standing families.	Homeyness acts a barrier against commercially assigned meanings.	Homeyness corrects the undifferentiated modern or post-modern homes.

Source: Adapted from McCracken (1989)

In consumer settings, Ulver-Sneistrup and Johansson (2011) explored the implications of homeyness on the everyday branded retail experience in the context of branded grocery stores. Their findings corroborate the framework set by McCracken and summarized in the tables above and demonstrate homeyness has a large role in retail experience. Particularly, one of their main findings reveal that homeyness is more or equally critical in driving positive retail experiences compared to more transformative aspects and experiences.

In a similar study, DeBenedetti, Oppewal, and Arsel (2014) identified that customers' encounters with homeyness in commercial settings created feelings of extraordinary experiences and helped form an attachment to the place. When they analyzed the consumers perceptions in attached places like cafes and restaurants, they found out that customers valued "homey" settings and felt this homeyness led to the feelings of further attachment to these places. Homeyness, according to their respondents, is a blend of familiarity, authenticity, and security. The customers know the focal place intimately including other patrons, owners and workers of the place, and the peculiarities of the place. They feel the place is authentic and real as opposed to a commercial place that only symbolizes a transactional relationship. Lastly, they feel secure in this place, comfortable, and sheltered as if in their own homes.

Is homeyness a part of a larger set of service components? From a broader perspective of service components, services marketing contributed to the knowledge in this topic with the concepts of service encounters and servicescapes, i.e., built-in physical surroundings in service environments (Bitner, 1992; Bitner, Booms and Tetreault, 1990). Service encounters refer to customers' interaction with the service firm (Bitner et al., 1990). Servuction system identifies and categorizes the components of the service encounters, i.e., contact employees, focal and fellow customers, and physical resources; that result in the final customer experience. Bitner et al. (1990) state that service encounters encompass all

interactions the customers have with the service firm including its physical facilities, the notion of which Bitner (1992) later developed into the concept of servicescapes.

Servicescapes theory broadly looks at physical factors of aesthetics, ambience, layout, and cleanliness, while some studies added design elements such as seating comfort (Bitner, 1992; Kim and Moon, 2009; Harris and Ezeh, 2008; Reimer and Kuehn, 2005). Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) extended the servicescapes to natural settings by adding a natural dimension in order to include restorative potential of physical servicescapes. However, servicescapes theory, to our knowledge, did not include homeyness as an explicit dimension of a service setting.

As briefly summarized, homeyness plays an important role in the consumer experience of commercial settings and needs further understanding and measurement of the concept. It is not integrated with servicescapes theory or not evaluated so far as a part of service components.

2. Methodology

In order to develop a valid and reliable measure of homeyness, we followed the scale development process adopted by Kohli, Jaworski, and Kumar (1993).

2.1. Domain Specification

Homeyness is a hard-to-define concept due to the diversity in inherent meanings it is associated with. Therefore, we first consulted the literature to identify the constituents of homeyness. The research on homeyness is mainly carried out in other scientific fields such psychology and sociology. These studies focus either on the artefact value of the home or on the well-being of individuals driven by homelike features of physical settings (Marsden, 1999). The most relevant literature for the role of homeyness in commercial settings is provided by McCracken (1999) and Debenedetti et al. (2014). While McCracken provides a larger framework, Debenedetti et al. identified three dimensions of familiarity, security, and authenticity that emerged from a grounded theory approach.

In order to understand the three themes above, we carried out 6 interviews with architects and designers. These interviews revealed that homeyness is perceived as a technical aspect of design and arrangement. On further 10 interviews with the owners of cafe and restaurants with service settings that feature homey designs, the psychological aspects of homeyness were determined as natural and comfortable environments, escape from daily

routine, and the feelings of knowing the place and place rituals. These attributes mainly corroborated the dimensions proposed by DeBenedetti et al.

Based on the results of interviews with experts and literature review, we define homeyness as “an experiential state that is induced by the recreation and rendering of characteristics associated by home and homelike features in commercial settings”. Homeyness is multidimensional consisting of the dimensions of familiarity, security, and authenticity. Familiarity refers to feelings and experiences of having a knowledge of a place, its rituals, and the respective people in this place. As each home is unique and authentic, authenticity refers to feelings and experiences of uniqueness felt in the place and the differential state of this place from a regular commercial setting. Security refers to the feelings and experiences of comfort and safety felt at home.

2.2.Item Generation & Purification

Based on the interviews and thorough literature review, two authors of this study generated 27 items independently. These initial items were assessed by two independent researchers. This assessment revealed that 9 items that were ambiguous, did not reflect the intended meaning, and were repetitive. Therefore, they were omitted, leaving 18 items.

The ensuing 18 item measure was administered to a student sample of 136 respondents. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in this pretest led to the drop of 4 more items due to low communalities and cross-loading. EFA also confirmed the existence of 3 dimensions of the homeyness construct. The final 14 item scale consisted of 5 items for familiarity, 6 items for authenticity, and 3 items for security, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The List of Items

Dimension	Items	Nr.
Familiarity	I have a good knowledge of this place.	BA1
	I have a good knowledge about the patrons of this place.	BA2
	I know the manager and the employees in this place.	BA3
	The people in this place know me well.	BA4
	I have a knowledge of things that people generally do not know about this place.	BA5
Authenticity	This place is genuine and irreplaceable.	BA6
	This place offers more than a set of products or services.	BA7
	This place has a human link instead of a transactional relationship.	BA8
	Relationships with the managers of this place go beyond what I typically expect from a commercial place.	BA9
	The furniture, decoration, and architecture of this place carry the managers' and employees' personal touch.	BA10
	The furniture, decoration, and architecture of this place tell a story.	BA11
Security	This place feels like a safe haven.	BA12
	At this place, I feel protected such as in a family-like environment.	BA13
	At this place, I feel comfortable and can behave however I feel like.	BA14

2.3 Exploratory Factor Analysis

In order to validate the homeyness concept, data was collected from a national sample of respondents through a face-to-face interview (n=790). Quota sampling method was used, and quotas were determined by National Standards Institute's categorization on gender, age, income, and education.

Respondents selected a commercial service setting that they are attached to, such as a café. After screener and demographic questions, respondents rated Likert-type items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For data quality, missing values, outliers, and normality were assessed.

790 sample size is adequate for the calculation of correlations and the ratio of observations to variables is sufficient to continue with the EFA. Principal components method was utilized for the extraction and VARIMAX rotation was employed. In the analyses, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy, the significance of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, MSA values, total variance explained (TVE) by the factors, communalities, factor loadings, and Cronbach's Alpha for reliability analysis were assessed. All these factors of evaluation were presented in Table 3 below. The significance value of Bartlett's Test was significant for all items and MSA values were above the required threshold of 0.80. Hence both values were not separately reported.

In the initial EFA, items BA1 and BA11 had lowest communalities and their loadings were below 0.70. BA12 had a loading of 0.663 but an acceptable communality value. Therefore, items BA1 and BA11 were omitted. In the second EFA, BA6 had a low loading and low communality value and was omitted from the analysis, which led to the final 11 items.

Table 3. EFA Results

Factors	Item	EFA Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Total Variance explained (%)	Communalities	Omitted Items
Familiarity	BA_4	,848	,923	,934	78,329	0,851	BA1
	BA_3	,841				0,846	
	BA_2	,831				0,808	
	BA_5	,749				0,751	
Authenticity	BA_8	,792	,887			0,789	BA6
	BA_9	,774				0,785	
	BA_10	,763				0,717	
	BA_7	,718				0,711	
Security	BA_13	,802	,858			0,840	BA11
	BA_12	,775				0,746	
	BA_14	,722				0,773	

2.3. Validation

In order to validate the scale, we carried out a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and path analysis through SmartPLS v3. In the constructed model, we treated the independent variable homeyness as a reflective second-order factor and used further visit intention as the dependent variable. The items for future visit intention were adopted from Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon (2002), Teng et al. (2015), and Kim and Moon (2009).

In the first stage of the analysis, we examined the convergent and discriminant validity and reliability of the first-order measurement model. Due to reliability issues, we dropped BA12 and BA10 in the initial run. All loadings for the remaining items are above 0.40, all Cronbach's Alphas are above 0.70 as a support for factor reliability. The item loading matrix is presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Item Loading Matrix

Item Loading Matrix*					
Dimensions	Items Nr.	0.869	0.923	0.864	0.851
Security	BA_13			0.858	
	BA_14			0.886	
Familiarity	BA_2		0.829		
	BA_3		0.874		
	BA_4		0.859		
	BA_5		0.897		
Authenticity	BA_7	0.817			
	BA_8	0.831			
	BA_9	0.840			
Future visit intention	BJ_18				0.809
	BJ_19				0.845
	BJ_20				0.774

* Cronbach's Alpha at the top row

The correlations between all factors, the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliabilities (CR) were presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Discriminant and Convergent Validity

	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Authenticity	Familiarity	Future visit intention	Security
Authenticity	0.869	0.688	0.829			
Familiarity	0.922	0.749	0.735	0.865		
Future visit intention	0.851	0.656	0.678	0.532	0.810	
Security	0.864	0.761	0.824	0.689	0.636	0.872

Convergent validity is achieved with AVEs above 0.50 threshold. Following Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) criterion for discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE should be higher than any correlation with another factor. All our factors achieve discriminant validity with the note that security dimension is very close to authenticity. Therefore, we resorted to heterotrait-monotrait ratios to assess discriminant validity further. All ratios were below 1.00, as a second support for discriminant validity (Henseler, Ringle, and Sarstedt, 2015). Finally, all CRs are above 0.70 indicating the reliability of the factors.

In the following stage, we tested whether homeyness predicts future visit intention in a model and ran a path analysis. Partial least squares method does not provide a list of goodness of fit measures except SRMR, which is 0.116 higher than 0.08 threshold. Model fit indices do not perform well for repeated-indicator method in second-order factor models. For the purpose of this study is only to verify nomological validity of the homeyness construct, we did not create latent variables for two-stage higher-order constructs. Finally, sample size is large in this study(n=790) and goodness of fit tests tend to offer poor results when real datasets have larger samples sizes.

The path analysis is presented in Figure 1 below:

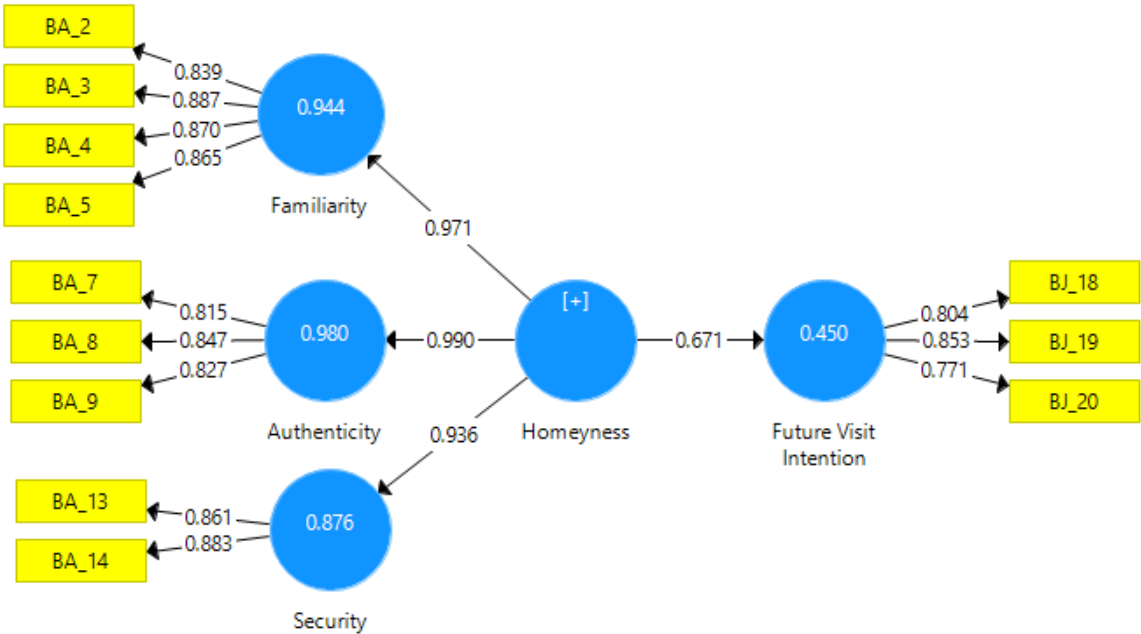


Figure 1. Path analysis

Path coefficients and their respective statistics are provided in Table 6 below:

Table 6. Path coefficients and respective statistics

	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
Homeyness -> Authenticity	0.990	0.990	0.009	106.777	0.000
Homeyness -> Familiarity	0.971	0.971	0.009	106.478	0.000
Homeyness -> Future Visit Intention	0.671	0.673	0.040	16.816	0.000
Homeyness -> Security	0.936	0.936	0.013	70.208	0.000

The homeyness construct as a second order factor has a positive impact on the future visit intention with a considerable effect of 0.670. Homeyness explains the 45% of the total variance in future visit intention. The path from homeyness to future visit intention is significant as the T statistics obtained through 1000 sample bootstrapping are significant.

3. Discussion & Conclusion

The homeyness scale we developed in this study is a valid and reliable measure as indicated by the assessments of discriminant, convergent, and nomological validity, and reliability. We validated the scale in a large sample in a context of cafes and restaurant. We tested homeyness in a nomological network and demonstrated its impact on the relevant construct of future visit intention empirically.

The first contribution of this study to the literature is the measure development for the homeyness construct. This is the first scale of homeyness in services marketing literature to our knowledge. Homeyness is also not studied in large extent in services literature and we aim to fill this gap. While consumption patterns and behavior in third places are becoming a crucial facet of services marketing, homeyness construct will be instrumental in providing explanations to complementary concepts of customer loyalty, satisfaction and experience.

There are certain shortcomings of our study. The first shortcoming is we did not use repeated indicator approach in our second-order factor of homeyness, resulting in higher SRMR value in the second-order factor, while the measurement model with first-order factors has 0.023 SRMR. The second limitation is we did not validate the homeyness scale in other service contexts or in branded retail settings. Third limitation is we empirically tested homeyness' relationship only with future visit intention. Its relations to servicescapes theory, customer experience, and other relevant marketing concepts should be further studied.

Homeyness has multiple implications for managers and practitioners as well as public policy makers. First, homeyness has strategic implications for the design of service settings. Consumers are more likely to visit homey places and provide more tangible and intangible benefits to the firms. After extended periods of homestay due to pandemic, homeyness will contribute an enhanced transition to the consumers' return to public service settings. Homeyness has implications for public policy. Many public service settings, such as elderly houses, can be designed as homey places and occupant satisfactions can be increased.

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