Original Article

Making sense of the hotel guestroom

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of hotel guestroom design in contribution to a 'guestroom experience' which underpins guest satisfaction and return patronage decisions, and to what extent hoteliers may be using this element to their own advantage, including the marketing of their product to an increasingly discerning clientele. An exploratory qualitative approach was used: purposively sampled General Managers ($N=8$) of deluxe hotels primarily in the Asia Pacific region were invited to participate in an e-mail survey/questionnaire. This research showed that 'sight' was what hoteliers considered the dominant sense of guests, followed closely by 'smell'. Contemporary guestrooms appear to be primarily pleasing to the eye and touch with no apparent consideration for smell despite being found to be the second most important determinant of the positive first and lasting impression for guests. All the human senses, encompassing all elements of 'prosumption', the connection of production with consumption, should be taken into equal consideration with the purpose of imparting all-round client satisfaction with a guestroom thereby maximising the overall guests' hotel experience. The very small sample of hoteliers in this study does not allow for making generalisation to hotels in the Asia Pacific region. Despite this limitation, the study provides insights into a dimension that hotel developers and hoteliers perceive their accommodation product. This paper examines the hotel guestroom, the core product of a hotel, as the principle determinant of guest stay satisfaction. A holistic approach to guestroom design incorporating all the human senses and beyond the banal structural paradigm is required to optimise the 'guestroom experience'. The study examines an aspect of hotel management, namely the core product of hotels and arguably it's 'cash cow' that to date have received limited attention in academic research. At the same time, the study opens several avenues for future research.

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INTRODUCTION

Hotels, establishments that provide paid lodging and usually complementary products and services, are ubiquitous and typify the hospitality industry (Chon and Sparrowe, 2000). The hotel industry is considered one of the most lucrative enterprises worldwide and, with global growth continuing to be positive (Ernst and Young, 2006), warrants introspective scrutiny. The average hotel guest spends some four waking hours per day at a property (Marsan, 1999); the bulk of the remaining time is spent in slumber. Half of those waking hours would typically be spent within the confines of the guestroom (Lundberg, 1994) with the two remaining hours at the various on-site facilities such as a hotel's food and beverage (F&B) outlets. Utilisation of the guestroom signifies the criticality of the accommodation component in the hotel product and hence its importance in terms of its conceptualisation and operation.

The guest is irrefutably a hotel's *raison d'être*, and the accommodation product arguably the defining feature/characteristic of a hotel. However, this idea is not clear in the everyday lexicon: a hotel, by dictionary definition, is a building in which accommodation and food, and sometimes other facilities, are available. Gundersen *et al* (1996) and Lawson (1995) identify the core of a hotel's operation as the ability to satisfy basic needs such as sleep and food. Others studies, however, provide an indication of the primacy of the accommodation aspect. Venison (1983) contends that all hotels, irrespective of category, have at least one element in common, namely bedrooms for rent and in most cases other guest services. Jones and Paul (1993) state that accommodation is the basis on which other hotel products are built. The term hotel would therefore still apply to a facility that offers accommodation primarily, not being one if it were to cease provision of accommodation. The assertion that the bed in the guestroom is the primary defining characteristic of a hotel (Rutes *et al*, 2001), and that the bed is the focal point of the guestroom (Bauman, 2002), lends further credence to this claim. The comment made by the marketing manager of the Peninsula Group (Hong Kong): 'let us not forget, attractive guestrooms are ultimately what hotels are all about' (Cheung, 2002) alludes to the central role of guestrooms in a hotel. Hence, the characterisation of a hotel as a venue for the provision of F&B appears to be erroneous with the advent of hotels such as long-stay properties and limited service properties only offering accommodation.

The accommodation part of a hotel (Rooms Division) typically contributes the bulk of total revenues, outperforming the other profit centres, not only in terms of revenues, but also in terms of departmental profit (Arthur Anderson & Co, 1993; DeVeau *et al*, 1996). The profitability of rooms is demonstrated by a 1999 PKF analysis of the hotel industry in which it was determined that properties deriving less of their revenue from F&B achieve the higher profit margins (Quek, 1999). Because of this it is essential that hoteliers continually reassess the purpose and function of their hotel guestrooms, the core product in a hotel. The physical aspects and tangible dimensions of the guestroom are keys to the satisfaction of the guest and a prime consideration for return patronage. It is proposed that the standard guestroom needs to be

re-invented after its recognition of the five fundamental human senses – sight, olfactory, auditory, taste and tactile; the extra dimension of atmosphere, the so-called X-Factor, that encompasses the tangible physical factors of architecture, décor and furnishings (Nobles, 1999) should also be incorporated. The guestroom, as part of a hotel environment, impacts on the senses in multiple ways (Doswell and Gamble, 1979). The interaction of the room and its occupant is qualified by the occupant's perceptions, both mental and physical. Hence the design and presentation of the room has to be scrutinised right from conceptualisation stage through to its daily operational execution.

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Within a hospitality context, a traveller would wish to spend most of the waking hours outside the guestroom for associated leisure or business activities. Although this may hold true for the former's vacationers, it might not be true for the business traveller. According to Levere (2003), business travellers are now increasingly using their hotel rooms for work as well as relaxation; therefore they spend more time in their rooms. Obata (2001) suggests that hotel rooms become the second homes for many business guests; thus these rooms should be warm, comfortable and inviting, and conducive for the conduct of business. The desire for a dedicated work area in the guestroom is not a recent one. Callan (1994) found this to be one of the 12 most salient attributes which managers and hotel customers considered to be important when a hotel is selected and whether the guest decides to return.

The possible reasons for the shift in business guests' behaviour are the 'declining economy, cutbacks in travel budgets, increased pressure on time and productivity, and the traveller's desire to use free time to unwind and stay in touch with their families' Levere (2003). Other possible factors are the sense of increasing insecurity in public places and the agitations of air travel caused by the current threat of terrorism. This trend may be linked to 'armoured cocooning', a term describing the escape to tranquil, rejuvenating places that are indoors rather than outdoors (Loehr, 2001). A survey conducted in 2000 by Embassy Suites Hotels found two distinct personality types in travellers: 'Upstairs' and 'Downstairs' guests. According to the study, 'Upstairs' personalities are defined by actions and characteristics of more introverted people who spend less time in public areas, preferring private spaces, such as bedrooms, over more social spaces such as lobbies and lounges. 'Downstairs' personalities are considered to be those more extroverted who tend to spend most of their time in public areas. Although the findings indicated that nearly two out of three female respondents generally classified themselves as extroverts, more than half of these same women travellers reversed their attitudes when travelling for business, describing their behaviour as more 'Upstairs' and introverted on a business trip. Many hotel operators are responding to this phenomenon by providing a more welcoming retreat equipped with the requisite business tools and facilities. The Grand Hyatt Hong Kong undertook a

complete redesign of all its guestrooms to mark its 10th anniversary emphasising the creation of accommodation perfectly suited to the needs of the discriminating business traveller (Hotel Online, 1999). This shift is a marked departure from the traditional view that the hospitality industry lacked innovation with the many hotels and resorts built in the 1990s looking much like their forerunners of 25 years earlier (Van Pelt, 1996). This view is shared by Rutes *et al* (2001) who opine that the industry's standard guestroom layout today is little different from the one pioneered in 1953 by Kemmons Wilson, the founder of the Holiday Inn chain.

The physical aspects of a standard guestroom could be categorised as a 'hygiene factor' when Herzberg's Hygiene Theory is applied (Balmer and Baum (1993), that is, the room is perceived as an essential element to avoid disappointment but in itself does not create satisfaction). However, Venison (1983) contends it to be the basis upon which both hard and soft complementary services are built. A parallel between the guestroom and an aircraft seat can be made. In the past the infamously undifferentiated and uncomfortable economy class aircraft seat confined the passenger for most of the journey. Relatively unchanged until recently, it has seen radical design changes in recognition of the importance a well-designed seat plays in the satisfaction of the passenger, notwithstanding that it too could be considered a hygiene factor.

A Pannell Kerr Forster Associates (1991) report contended that the focus of the hotel industry in the 1980s was the upgrading and respecifying of the physical product; subsequently the focus had shifted to service quality such as guest-staff interaction. This appears to hold true as there is a high inclination for hoteliers and guests alike to over-emphasise the soft service aspect of the hotel product while overlooking the hardware aspect. Toffler (1980) describes the customer as a participant in a 'prosumption' process, one not only encompassing the consumption of a static physical product consisting of identifiable, tangible properties, but also an intangible interactive product. Skalte and Sandvik (2002) consider this perspective of the product particularly appealing in the case of hotel accommodation and have differentiated interaction elements and physical elements in their two-dimensional quality construct. The guestroom is one of the physical elements subjected to the evaluative dimensions of elegance, comfort, aesthetics and satisfaction.

The central role of the guestroom in a hotel enterprise pleads for heightened design and operations considerations. It is proposed that guestroom design, albeit restricted by known and calculable economic factors (Lundberg, 1994), and subject to a highly heterogeneous customer and hotel type requirements should be re-thought. This requires much further research on the property's interaction with the occupant in creating a favourable guestroom experience.

Hotel guests' satisfaction is greatly influenced by their guestroom experience, a term used to describe satisfaction with the accommodation element of a stay. This is supported by a study of hotel guests in various market segments in which it was shown that the guestroom contributed most to guest satisfaction compared to other satisfaction factors such

as the, pre-arrival and arrival considerations, departure arrangements, hotel services and F&B (Hotel Online, 2000).

Negrusa & Ionescu (2005) explains that hotels are designed from the inside out, with emphasis on interior spaces and how the guest interacts with them and other guests. This paper proposes that the design should be underpinned by the five human senses encompassing all elements of presumption, be they tangible or intangible in nature. This approach was motivated by Shostack's (1977) suggestion that a molecular model of service entities would be a useful framework for developing a model of the structure of satisfaction decisions in hotel operations. Accordingly, the service entity consists of discrete elements that are linked together in molecular-like wholes. A major molecule is the guestroom that stimulates all of the guests' senses.

Although many elements in the so-called 'hard' product offerings contribute to guests' positive impression of their stay, a variety of components are geared towards a balanced sensual experience, often described as the X-Factor. In describing the X-Factor, the five human senses can be used as a reference point. A culmination of all the senses creates a new one – the so-called sixth sense (Walker, 2002); this involves intangibles such as emotion, atmosphere and fantasy. This idea was adopted by a regional, upscale, resort chain being incorporated in their name: Six Senses Hotels, Resorts and Spas.

Jusko (1991, p. 30) provocatively states: 'Guestrooms; no matter how lavish the lobby or ravishing the restaurant, it's guestroom appeal that keeps customers coming back'. DeVeau *et al* (1996) declare that no matter the type of property the most important aspect of it in the minds of the guests are the guestrooms and bathrooms. According to them, those two items leave an impression on the guests that are far more lasting than the other aspects of the hotel.

Rutes *et al* (2001) point out that many hotel operators believe the guestroom with its bathroom makes a more lasting impression on the lodging guest than does the exterior architecture or the lobby or any other single interior space. Loehr (2001) when remarking that many times good guest bathroom design is crucial in inspiring guests to return to a hotel echoes this opinion. Wong (2001, online) asserts: 'the bathroom is more important than the room itself'. This indicates the extent of the importance of the bathroom in contemporary hotel design.

The issue of how a guestroom should look is an enigmatic one. An alternative view to the hackneyed 'Home Away from Home' is that of Lewis (1999, p. 179):

There's No Place Like Home: Dorothy's Famous Mantra could not have been more truthful. Hospitality designers often invoke the words 'residential' and 'homey' in describing the intentions of their designs. But, let's face it, hotels feel as much like our homes as their guest rooms feel like our own bedrooms. Indeed, there may be individuals who have floor safes in their closets, fully stocked mini-bars in their television cabinets, and clock radios bolted to their nightstands, but these people are the exceptions to the rule. Most of our homes do not resemble the hotels we choose to visit. This, after, all, is largely the reason we visit them.

Studies have been conducted to determine guest expectations as part of the customer-centric management approach. The general results have shown a divergence between the perspectives of the hotelier and the guest (Min and Min, 1997; Lockyer, 2002). It is proposed that the 'homey' idea is a non-issue although not discounting the possibility of the role of bed design in lending a residential look to a guestroom (Baumann, 2002) which typically would have a standard institutionalised feel. What the guest expects is an environment in which he or she is comfortable and where the entirety of human senses is stimulated in a positive way.

Cleanliness is a recurring factor in the determination of guest satisfaction with the guestroom (Venison, 1983; Lewis, 1987; Atkinson, 1988; Knutson, 1988; Taninecz, 1990; Lockyer, 2002), its quality being highly ambiguous and subjective depending on an individual's perception. Yet, it is the most frequently mentioned attribute that hotel guests use to evaluate a hotel critically. A study involving frequent travellers who were grouped into three market segments, namely economy, mid-price and luxury hotel users, revealed that irrespective of segment, more than two-thirds of the respondents considered cleanliness, comfort and well-maintained rooms as one out of five factors important when either selecting a hotel for the first time or for repeat patronage (Weaver and Oh, 1993). Noteworthy is a lack of cleanliness might be the prime reason for a guest not to select the establishment, but exceptional cleanliness is not an attraction (Lewis and Nightingale, 1991), pointing strongly to the subjectivity involved. An article in *The Rooms Chronicle* identified, in order of importance, four key points about cleanliness of hotel rooms: odour, visual cleanliness, shininess of bathroom and well-made-up bed. All the human senses come into play in gauging cleanliness: sight for visible soiling, smell for airborne particles, touch for surface dirt, taste and, to lesser extent, sound.

The spatial aspects of the guestroom, namely the size (Interior Design, 1998; Matte, 2003), are also important to guests with the trend being to larger and more comfortable rooms (Lundberg, 1994). The provision of larger guestrooms might not be always feasible, so some properties employ various techniques such as furniture, hanging art placement and mirrors (Rutes *et al*, 2001). Others use various shades of white on the walls and ceiling (Glader and Barnes, 2003) to conjure the impression of spaciousness. Lighting levels are also closely linked to feelings of spaciousness (Jones and Lockwood, 1989). Whether real or illusionary, spaciousness is also a mental and sense-based quality, its reported importance to guests further demonstrating the need to address the importance of human senses in hotel guestroom design and layout.

The hotel hardware satisfaction threshold is already very high. Balmer and Baum (1993), using Herzberg's Hygiene Theory, assert that a guest's 'lower' needs, once satisfied, will require ever greater incentives to maintain the same level of satisfaction – hence spiralling guest expectations. DeVeau *et al* (1996) opine that guests demand more from guestrooms than ever before. Claus Sendlinger, chief executive officer of lower-case, high-style design hotels, a marketing consortium representing more than 100 hotels in 35 countries remarked: 'Ten years ago, good design and architecture were competitive advantages'. Now, he says, they

are minimum requirements. With industry research revealing a consistent and quantifiable relationship between good hotel design and the bottom line (WAT&G, 1998), the guestroom's 'Hygiene Factors' categorisation should be questioned.

A North American hotel chain conducted a study of its customer satisfaction identifying 20 attributes, of which eight were guestroom specific, considered critical for the chain (Atkinson, 1988). Its top management wanted to focus on those attributes rather than spread the company's energies across too many issues and risk the possibility of performing unsatisfactorily because of an excess of targets. The study further indicated that once the chain's properties were performing well on those major attributes, the management could then give its attention to other areas of guest service. The need to engender renewed attention to the hotel guestroom is reiterated by McMillan (2008, p. 23):

There will also be a greater focus on getting the basics right. Functionality is too often overwhelmed by gimmickry and the guest often suffers poor sound insulation, noisy air-conditioning systems, poor lighting, inadequate and fluctuating shower pressure, and uncomfortable beds. Designers and engineers still do not take these requirements as seriously as they should. After all, if the customer's basic needs are not satisfied then nothing else really matters.

A literature search on the hotel guestroom and guest sensory perceptions was carried out to investigate major determinants of their satisfaction. While guestroom attributes has been reported as one of guests' satisfaction determinants and are incorporated in mainstream satisfaction measurement, none addressed the role of the human senses.

Method

As the literature on this topic was not rich enough to provide a satisfactory foundation, an exploratory qualitative study was undertaken to enrich the findings of the literature search. The intention was to elicit data in the human senses area, specifically related to hotel guestroom design and occupant satisfiers, from a small number of industry practitioners.

An e-mail-based qualitative questionnaire was designed and sent to purposively sampled General Managers ($N=29$) of deluxe hotels primarily in the Asia Pacific region. Eight questionnaires in total were completed and returned from the following locations: Macau SAR (2), Peoples Republic of China (2), Australia (2), Singapore (1) and Malaysia (1). Notwithstanding the lower than expected response rate (27.6 per cent), the discussion produced detailed and insightful information about the guest experience and expectations. Selected data relevant to the human senses area were extracted from the study for the purposes of this paper. Granted a qualitative study of a small number of respondents render findings that are not statistically representative (Jenkins and Harrison, 1990); however, the data drawn does provide a starting point from which further focus groups of hotel guests, architects and interior designers can be conducted in this research area where there are no apparent established industry standards Patki (2003).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The respondents represented a wide range of hotel companies (Starwood Hotels and Resorts: St. Regis, Sheraton; Shangri-la Hotels and Resorts; Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group; InterContinental Hotels Group: Holiday Inn, Intercontinental; Millennium and Copthorne International) and reflected a perspective of senior hoteliers familiar with the lodging industry in the region. The results are discussed according to themes as follows.

Primary criterion used by business guests when they evaluate their hotel stay

The following are the responses from the eight managers, A–H, to the question ‘What do you think is the primary criterion used by business guests when they evaluate their stay at your property?’

- (a) Recognition (at check-in and throughout stay); Service – accurate, fast and intelligent; Problem Resolution – empathy, follow-up.
- (b) Location; Service Quality; Condition of room.
- (c) The ability to get things done quickly, efficiently and with as little hassle as possible.
- (d) Location, location and location; Frequent Flyer Cards; Company-approved hotel; Previous Experience.
- (e) Quality; Service; Cleanliness; Value of money.
- (f) Safety and Security; Cleanliness/Maintenance; Location; Business Centre and Meeting Facilities; Service Quality and Responsiveness.
- (g) Price; Location; Business facilities; Comfort.
- (h) Location; Communication; Facilities; Reputation; Conference centre; Service; Relaxation; Business centre; Awards; Special deals.

The responses indicate that a combination of factors determines how guests evaluate their stay at the property but there are specific and indirect mentions of the guestroom. Respondent C mentions ‘condition of room’; and E and F make mention of ‘cleanliness’. The results suggest that hoteliers consider the room as a ‘hygiene factor’ in their hotel operation; hence the low frequency of mention of the room’s ambience. It is interesting that guestroom facilities, such as the much-discussed in-room IT facilities, were not mentioned. Again this indicates that such items would fall under the hygiene factor. General Managers, based on their operational background, prioritise their operations differently. For example, a hotelier with a food production background would emphasise the culinary aspects of the hotel, while one inclined to marketing would focus on that consideration. Managerial myopia, whereby hoteliers do not see their hotel’s services in the same way as their guests, observe these through eyes familiar with the property, thereby underrating the guestroom. Research conducted by Lockyer (2002) showed generally that managers rate those items they influence on a daily basis more highly than do potential guests, who rate the actual room and its facilities more highly.

It is interesting to note that, even within a defined segment of a hotel’s facilities, the variance in guest feedback was wide. This highlights the

heterogeneity of hotel guests and the difficulty in meeting the needs of every guest. Jones and Ioannou (1993) found that, while hoteliers recognised each guests' needs were different, all guests were assumed to be homogeneous in terms of how their needs are satisfied. The result is a 'cookie cutter' output, implemented seemingly for reasons of practicality. Guests' dissatisfaction with the homogeneity of the hotel product has led to the widespread trend of niche and thematic hotels.

Dominant positive human sense

The respondents were asked to identify the human senses (see Figure 1 for the definitions) to which guests referred most often as positive stimuli during their stay(s)?

The responses are listed below according to respondent:

- (a) Guests often speak about the 'feeling' of the hotel and speak of a combination of factors that make the hotel 'work'. Guests do not usually refer to specific senses unless they have had a negative experience.
- (b) View of the ocean, that is, external visual.
- (c) Strange as it may seem, I believe that the first impression of a room is made by the smell of the room as the guest enters. Once an olfactory impression of a room is made, the other senses come into play. A guest stepping into a smelly, stale room, for example, tobacco smoke, will not notice the beautiful flowers or view or anything else until the smell is removed.
- (d) Tactile, assuming that you are talking about 'feel' as an emotion
- (e) Sight, Tactile, Olfactory, Taste, Auditory
- (f) Sight, Auditory
- (g) Tactile, Taste
- (h) Sight, Olfactory

The responses are varied but a central thread emerges in that a combination of senses comes into play in creating a positive impression. Sight appears to be a dominant sense having been cited three times as being the most mentioned positive stimuli. Respondent B also indirectly refers to sight as a 'view' that would involve sight and possibly also sound and smell. Two respondents cite the tactile sense. The inference here

Auditory – what they can hear
Olfactory – what they can smell
Sight – what they can see
Taste – what they can consume
Tactile – what they can feel/touch

Figure 1: The human senses.

is that tactile is used in the context of an experiential 'feel' instead of the strict interpretation of touch sensation. This idea of multiple and combined sensorial sensations points to the need for further research. The Time Hotel in New York, a design boutique hotel, uses a unique marketing strategy based on intellectual and sensory stimulation. Suggestions of multi-dimensional sensations are used when guests are invited to 'Taste a color' and 'Feel the sensation of color'.

Respondent C asserts strongly that smell is a key sense and, while others play their part, is subordinate to it.

Dominant negative human sense

The responses to the question: 'Which of the five human senses would most often be referred to by your guests as negative stimuli during their stay(s)?' are as follows according to respondent:

- (a) Noise, Cleanliness
- (b) Smell of mould
- (c) Olfactory, with noise as a strong second
- (d) Tactile as the 'feel' swings both positively and negatively
- (e) Taste, Olfactory, Tactile, Sight, Auditory
- (f) Olfactory
- (g) Tactile, Taste
- (h) Auditory, Olfactory

The sense of smell appeared to be the most common cause of discomfort for guests having been mentioned three times as the primary negative sense, by respondents B, C and F, and three times as a second most noted negative stimuli by respondents A (as a component of cleanliness), E and H). Auditory and Tactile each were mentioned twice as the primary stimuli. Taste was mentioned once and would require some qualification. The GM in question found that a majority of his guests were dissatisfied with the range of products being offered in their in-room mini-bar, indicating a taste component.

Contribution of the human senses to the creation of a positive first impression

The respondents were asked to rate the five human senses in terms of their importance towards creating a positive first impression on a business guest upon arrival at the room.

Table 1 tabulates the results of question 2.1 in which the respondents were asked to rate the five human senses in terms of their importance toward creating a positive first impression on a business guest upon arrival at the room. The most important sense was designated as number 1 followed by the other senses according to their rank respectively.

Sight provides the greatest initial impact on guests according to this study. This is supported by the view that we live in a visually oriented world where the vast majority of our attention is focused on what we can see (Suzuki, 2002); and that sight is the dominant sense in humans (Special Sense Organs, 2002). Interestingly, smell is the second most important sense being identified as the sense most often cast as negative

Table 1: Rating of the five human senses in terms of their importance toward creating a positive first impression on a business guest upon arrival at the room

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total	Rank
Auditory	2	4	3	2	5	3	4	4	27	3
Olfactory	3	1	1	5	3	2	2	3	20	2
Sight	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	10	1
Taste	4	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	35	5
Tactile	5	3	5	3	2	5	3	2	28	4

Table 2: Rating the significance of the five human senses in contributing to a positive guestroom experience (satisfaction with the accommodation)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	Total	Rank
Auditory	2	2	2	4	4	3	4	4	25	4
Olfactory	4	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	17	2
Sight	3	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	15	1
Taste	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	39	5
Tactile	1	3	4	3	3	5	3	2	24	3

stimulation during a hotel stay (see question 2). Sight, on the other hand, was not indicated specifically as a negative stimuli but this was inferred as it ties in with cleanliness (Respondent A). It is worthy of note that two respondents, B and C, rated smell as the most important sense with sight being next. According to *The Rooms Chronicle* (2001), as the door to the guestroom opens, it is the odour that greets the guest first. This implies that odour is the key aspect of hotel room cleanliness and that in general, smell would rate higher than sight in creating a positive first impression.

Significance of the five human senses in contributing to a positive *guestroom experience*

Using the terminology 'guestroom experience' as the cumulative experience a guest has directly attributed to all dimensions of the lodging, viz the guestroom, the respondents were requested to consider the influence of the human senses on contributing to guest satisfaction.

Table 2 shows the most important sense designated as number 1 with the other senses ranked *seriatum*.

The visual aspects of the room contributed most to satisfaction with the guestroom, then the smell of the room followed by the surface treatments such as fabrics, linen and furnishings. The ratings varied from respondent to respondent with no obvious pattern, a finding similar to that of Jones and Lockwood (1989) whereby individuals look at the room in different ways, with the exception of sight and especially taste. It suggests that human perception is a highly individualistic process and differs from person to person. Despite this difference, the fact that the hotel guestroom is the part of the hotel where guests are likely to spend most of their stay, has the design and decoration of the room impact significantly on the guests' perceptions and enjoyment of that stay (Jones and Lockwood, 1989).

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The guestroom plays a decidedly central role in hotel operations and renewed attention should be given to its every aspect. The trend to outsource complementary services such as F&B can be considered affirmation of this core role. Hotels are increasingly micro-segmented and are being marketed accordingly. This segment-driven strategy facilitates the planning and operation of guestrooms due to discrete design parameters set by the target market.

This research into the views of a small sample of hotels' General Managers on the impact on guests' five senses by a lodging room has shown that sight was thought by them to be the dominant sense followed closely by the olfactory sense. This hierarchy does not however appear to underpin the design and operational priorities of hotel guestrooms. Contemporary hotel guestrooms are typically pleasing to the eye and touch with no apparent consideration for smell, despite it being cited as the second most important determinant of a positive first and lasting impression in guests. This finding resonates with the view that:

The study of ambient scent and its effect on human behaviour is still in its infancy. The implications of understanding how to manipulate this variable could be far-reaching for any services industry, particularly for the hospitality industry. (Zemke and Shoemaker, 2007, p. 938)

We're all preoccupied with what stimulates us visually or audibly, and I think smell gets short shrift. Why not add it to the design mix? (Gaillard in Burr, 2008, p. 106)

All the human senses should be taken into equal architectural consideration aimed at imparting an all-round satisfaction of the guestroom which leads to the emergence of the X-Factor without any resort to gimmickry and flavour *du jour* fads. Hoteliers should seek reliable input from their guests who have first-hand guestroom experiences at theirs and other properties.

The effects of the recent tragic hotel bombings in Indonesia, Kenya and Pakistan, and the hijacking of an iconic hotel in India on the perception of the hotel guestroom being an 'armoured cocoon' are yet to be seen. Guestrooms should be made even more welcoming to business travellers in addition to being secure havens due to the heightened unease of being in vulnerable public places.

This study was conducted on a small sample of hoteliers in the Asia Pacific area and therein lays a limitation in regards to generalisation. The findings of this exploratory research must be considered carefully as the sample used was not random and therefore cannot claim to be statistically representative for wider range of hotels in the region. Further research in the significance of smell in hospitality, in general, and hotel, in particular, is warranted in an ever increasingly competitive business environment.

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