

Impact of Guest Emotions on Hotel Stay Experiences

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ABSTRACT:

Hotel guest emotions and design opportunities in relation to Moment –Of -Truth are the basis of this study. The three-level model of proactive emotional design for hotels is proposed to clarify the need of educating and training students especially on relationships between hotel actual offerings, design updating and emphasis, guest emotions and guest perception, with theoretical basis on a coactions of knowledge in emotional design, experience design, and hospitality. This paper also outlines a design research study that aims to explore opportunities, hotel policies, sources that evoke guest emotions, uncover concerns and meanings from the travellers' perspective, and identify proposed design of opportunities which will lead to potential innovations in both tangible elements and intangible processes for conversion of simple guest to a LOYAL guest. For the purpose of this study, an analytical approach based on appraisal theory in psychology is also introduced for examining hotel policies and staff efforts to enhance the guest's emotional experiences and extracting relevant insights for design.

Keywords: Movement of Truth, Emotion, Experience Design, Hotel

INTRODUCTION

As the World wide Hotels are putting strong emphasis on creating pleasant and memorable experiences for customers (Shedroff & Rhea, 2010), emotional as well as experience design have become most irreversible trends in design research. Hence, aspirants need to be trained to make each experience a memorable one, as well as creating positive feedbacks. This research work is done in the context of hotels, in order to put special focus on the innovative and proactive education option in the field of Hospitality industry.

Emotional design

Emotional design is a planned approach that highlights the importance of eliciting users' positive emotional feedback or responses. By using this approach, formation of policies, procedures and practice are extended beyond function, form and its uses, to emotional dimensions that makes enriched user experiences. The major part of research on emotional design concentrates on products and human-computer interfaces. Emotional design is lucrative and rapidly growing research area; it includes research range from conceptual models to measurement tools to design methods in relation to emotional responses. Major topics include safety & security, fun, pleasure, enjoyment, wow factors, attachment, etc

Experience design

The entire design process is focussed on the core belief of experience needs and desires of guest. The process starts with discovering insights about what truly matters to guests. The

ultimate goal is to convert the insights into actions (design outcomes) that help users achieve optimal experiences. To achieve this goal, a clear and holistic approach to design is needed. Instead of focusing on individual artefacts or feel, designers are concerned with the quality of people's experiences and make a mechanism on the basis of multidisciplinary insights. These rising trends of emotion-driven and experience-driven design imply a change or shift of focus in design knowledge beyond the design of interfaces to both tangible elements and intangible processes that puts experiential impact by evoking positive emotions. This research increasingly assume an incorporative mental and emotional attitude and take the initiative in synthesizing knowledge from diverse domains, generating multidisciplinary insight regarding people's emotions and identifying scope for improved design opportunities that enhance rich experiences thus making it more important to train students on to achieve the ultimate goal of increase the number of loyal guests.

In this paper, hospitality is taken as the research context in which guest emotions and opportunities in relation to hotel stay experiences are studied. The study attempts to enhance knowledge of both emotional design and experience design by putting light on emotion-oriented design for hotels and discovering improved design insights through research. The following sections will highlight the importance of hotel guest emotions, and propose a model of emotional design for hotel. It further outline a guest emotion-oriented research study on identifying devise opportunities, and introduce an analytical approach for making mechanism about improving hotel guest experiences.

1.0 INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF GUEST EMOTIONS

“Emotions” are positive or negative psychological values or affective reactions to perceptions of objects and situations. According to Wikipedia, Emotion, in everyday speech, is any relatively brief conscious experience characterized by intense mental activity and a high degree of pleasure or displeasure. Emotions involve different components, such as subjective experience, cognitive processes, expressive behaviour, psycho physiological changes, and instrumental behaviour. My study concentrates on the subjective awareness component and the appraisal component of emotions on which young aspirants need to be trained as to become a complete skilled manpower.

Customer emotions have not been given much importance in hospitality research because traditional research is basically satisfaction based. “Tradition is the democracy of dead” and up gradation is the only option to meet the challenges. The dominant pattern is the disconfirmation model which states that a customer's level of satisfaction with a hotel's performance is the result of disconfirmation between his or her expectations and perceived service quality of the hotel. The customers' emotions now dayshave become the new interest in the hospitality research area. Some studies in hospitality presents the strong impact of emotions on customer satisfaction, loyalty behaviours and willingness to pay more. Literature reveals that emotions have emerged as priority, than satisfaction in hospitality research (Torres & Kline, 2006).

This paper focuses on studying “guest emotions” which refer to the emotions that are evoked by hotels and experienced by hotel guests. The growing importance of customer emotions has resulted in enhanced recognition by hotel employees, on drawing out positive guest emotions

and making their guests' experiences more memorable. According to Gilmore & Pine II (2002, p.89), "Innovative experience design will become a critical component of any successful hotel company's core capability." Researchers in this field have recommended in-depth study of guest emotions and experiences in order to form design and decisions that can bring about positive guest emotions.

Bigne, Ros & Andreu (2004) have proposed a model and an operations engineering method for designing emotion-based service encounters. Gilmore & Pine II (2002) suggested a typology that demonstrates experience-driven design for hotels. In IDEO's guest-centred research for Marriott International, opportunities for creating memorable impact were identified as "touch points" on the guest experience journey (Gunter, 2006). There is still much room for research that generates knowledge in emotion-driven design for hotels.

This paper proposes a model of emotional design for Indian Hotels. It also provides quantitative insights about guest emotions and suggestive designs for hotel offerings.

2.0 MODEL OF EMOTIONAL DESIGN FOR HOTELS

The three types of hotel offerings stated in our model correspond with levels of tourism or hospitality service product outlined by Reisinger (2001).

Before explaining the model, it must be highlighted that the term "design" here refers to the design of tangible elements and intangible processes in the hotel context. "Tangible elements" include all tangible tools available in hotels, their functions, arrangement and presentation; while "intangible processes" means mechanisms for offering the tangible elements, and the delivery of related services.

The core argument of the proposed model is that the emotional design strongly influences guest experience and elicits positive guest emotions on three levels. The complexity of design increases along with the level of offerings, which would imply high complexity while providing high level of service offerings and lower complexity at lower level of service offerings. With higher levels of hotel offerings, it would mean providing higher emotional aspects, which increases the level of guests' perception from mere acceptance to satisfaction to generating memorable experience. A level-by-level explanation of services is:

2.1 PRIMARY LEVEL

"Actual Offerings" refer to basic services offered by hotels and tangible products that are provided in hotels and expected by most hotel guests. Design at this level constitutes amenities, features and services that provide basic convenience to hotel guests. For hoteliers and designers who want to evoke positive guest emotions and improve guest experience at this level, the key question to ask is: What kind of tangible elements and intangible processes need to be designed, to offer guests more functional benefits?

Amongst the three types of hotel offerings, actual offerings have the least impact on evoking positive guest emotions and perception. While the presence of actual offerings only contributes to guests' acceptance of the hotel's adequate performance, weakness in Actual Offerings leads to irreparable negative impact on guest emotions and perception.

2.2 MIDDLE LEVEL

Also known as “Augmented Offerings” refer to hotel offerings that extend value-added actual offerings which have the potential of providing benefits to the hotel guests. It means a product with extra features, which makes its more special than the other products in the same category. The benefits may include increased degree of comfort, service reliability, convenience, security, etc. For example in a hotel, the guests who like Indian classic music must be given a set of Indian classic music CDs to make an augmented product.

Design at this level evokes positive guest emotions and increases satisfaction mainly by going beyond the guest expectations. It is also known as- Proactive Approach. Design at this level not only emphasize one functional elements, but also emphasizes on sensorial elements. That means design adds value not only by improving the functional aspect of hotel offerings, but also by delighting one or more of the human senses (visual, auditory, and tactile) through sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch.

2.3 TOP LEVEL

“Experiential Offerings” is the topmost level in the proposed model and an integrative level of hotel offerings. This term refers to the combination of various tangible elements and intangible processes that create meaningful experiential impact for guests.

At this level, design is a synthesis of the functional, sensorial and meaningful aspects i.e. guest emotions and memorable experiences. Meanings are the messages that the hotel wants to communicate to guests. These meanings does not only means status or identity, but also includes meanings that matches with guests’ aspirations, i.e. harmony, accomplishment, individuality, well-being, social responsibility etc. Diller, Shedroff & Rhea (2006) pointed out that companies can address people’s growing desire for meanings, by intentionally designing integrative experiences, based on a specific meaning and expressed cohesively through products and services. Guests experiences based designing, requires a deep understanding about meanings relevant to hotel guests and requires the team of wide array of tangible elements and intangible processes in order to communicate the desired meanings.

The two main questions to ask at this level are: (1) what are the meanings that the hotel wishes to convey? (2) How can the hotel integrate functional elements, sensorial elements and meanings to discover memorable guest experiences?

One way of creating Experiential Offerings is by developing themes based hotel stay. According to Gilmore & Pine II (2002, p.92), a theme is “the dominant idea or organizing principle, devotion to which creates a coherent experience for guests.” This shows the importance of effective design of tangible elements and intangible processes. Amongst the three levels in the model, Experiential Offerings have the maximum impact on guest emotions and perception. Since Experiential Offerings communicate meanings robustly with tangibles and processes through many functional and sensorial means, they usually evoke memorable experiences for hotel guests. In this way, Experiential Offerings creates a memorable guest experiences and in turn gives loyal guests to the hotel and a positive moment of truth. Ideally, hotels try to achieve ultimate excellence by designing unique Experiential Offerings.

2.4 VALUE AND CHALLENGE

The proposed model of emotional design for hotels clarifies the relationships between types of hotel offerings, design emphases, guest emotions and impact on guest perception. However, the model emphasizes and shows how design can influence guest emotions with different emphases at three levels of hotel offerings. It is important for both hoteliers and designers as it facilitates structured attempts to design for emotional impacts for hotel stay experiences.

The challenge of proposing this model is that it must have enough structure and clarity about the relationships without erasing the dynamism of guest experience and the openness for contextual factors. Therefore, the proposed model is most purposeful, simplistic and general, so that it applies to all possible hotel levels.

The following section outlines a guest emotion-oriented research study that will inform design for hotels. It will make use of the proposed model as well as an analytical approach based on psychology for the data analysis to generate design-relevant insights.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research study addresses three specific research questions:

- (1) What are the sources that evoke guest emotions in hotel stay experiences?
- (2) From the perspective of travellers, why and how do those sources evoke their emotions?
- (3) What are the design opportunities (regarding tangible elements and intangible processes in hotels) that will enhance hotel stay experiences?

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

For conducting this research, the author uses in depth interview method.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed the model of emotional design for hotels and outlined a research study in progress that aims to address the need for in-depth education, training and understanding about guest emotions and the need to discover design opportunities that elicit memorable guest experiences.

The three-level model shows the linkage between types of hotel offerings, design emphases, guest emotions and guest perception. At the primary level, design focuses on functional aspects. At the level of Augmented Offerings, design adds value through functional and sensorial benefits that boosts guest expectations. At the top level- Experiential Offerings level, design involves the teaming of functional, sensorial and meaning-oriented elements based on themes to reflect irreparable guest experiences- Moment of truth and loyal guest. The research describes the use of in-depth interviews to explore the sources of guest emotions, triggers, concerns and insights groups and guests' interpretation of their emotional responses to generate opportunities with reference to the model of emotional design for hotels. At the levels of Actual Offerings and Augmented Offerings, research findings will

help to generate design suggestions for innovations and improvements; while theme-based scenarios will be envisioned at the level of Experiential Offerings. These design suggestions and scenarios will inspire hoteliers on possible ways to enhance guest experiences especially providing hard core training opportunities in both academics and in the industry.

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