THE ROLE OF AMBIENCE ON CUSTOMERS' PATRONAGE IN HOTEL INDUSTRY (A CASE STUDY OF TWO HOTELS IN VICTORIA ISLAND, LAGOS)

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the role of ambience on customers' patronage in two hotels in Victoria Island, Lagos. The study was conducted at Beni Gold Hotel and Apartment and Integrity Hotel & Suites in Victoria Island, Lagos. An Ex-post facto research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study was comprised of management staffs from the two aforementioned hotels, respectively. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 respondents from each of the hotels, and this gave a sample size of 80 respondents, which was used for the study. The main instrument for the study was a questionnaire tagged "Role of Ambience on Customers' Patronage in Hotel Industry Questionnaire" (RACPHIQ). The questionnaire, which was developed by the researcher for data collection, was administered to the respondents, and retrieved 6 latter from each respondent in the two selected hotels in Victoria Island, Lagos. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques, such as simple regression analysis, for testing the hypotheses. The test for significance was done at a 0.05 alpha level and at 68 degree of freedom. Based on the findings of the study, the study revealed and concluded that there is significant influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. Also, that there is significant influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. Therefore, the study recommended, among many others, that since the goal of every successful business is to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction, the hotel should provide their clients with value-added transactions through positive customer interaction. In turn, the customer will feel important and satisfied.

KEYWORDS: Ambience, Lighting, Air Quality, Customers' Patronage, Hotel Industry, Beni Gold Hotel & Apartment, and Integrity Hotel & Suites

Introduction

Ambient conditions are part of the broader service scape; they have been noted as having an influence on customers' satisfaction, behavioural intentions, and image. A comfortable ambience acts to enhance customers' satisfaction, serves to ensure behavioural intentions towards the service environment and positive reviews about the service, and creates a favourable image of the service or brand in the mind of the customer. Apart from influencing such variables, ambience can have a differential influence on responses from customers with different personalities. Despite the informative nature of many studies, they

appear to look only at the environmental aspects of consumers' behaviour or at individual characteristics at the expense of other behavioural facets (Eroglu and Machleit, 2008). Openness to experience pertains to the individuals' proactiveness in seeking and appreciating novelty; conscientiousness reflects individuals' achievement propensity; extraversion factors indicate individuals' quantity and intensity of interpersonal interaction; while agreeableness, on the other hand, deals with individuals' orientation toward being empathetic with others; and neuroticism relates to individuals' proneness to psychological distress (Mowen, 2000). Customer satisfaction is a common research variable due to its culminating effect on customers' future behaviors, such as repurchasing and spreading positive reviews to potential new customers about a particular product or service.

Statement of the Problem

Few studies have focused on the role of ambience on customers' patronage in hotels, such as temperature, lighting, noise, music, and scent. For this reason, there is little evidence of the role of ambience on customers' patronage. Among the few studies having related variables such as lighting and air quality on customers' patronage, Steffy (1990) suggested that in hotel environments where the lighting is designed to harmonise with furniture and accessories, as well as the good odour perceived by the customers, this can lead to customer satisfaction, but in a situation where the lighting does not harmonise or the odour in the hotel environment is not pleasant with other elements of the room, this can lead to customer dissatisfaction or may influence customer patronage. This has brought us to the main objective of this study, which is to examine the role of ambience on customers' patronage in hotel industry.

Purpose/Objective of Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the role of ambience on customers' patronage in hotel industry. Specifically, the following objectives were drawn:

1. To determine the influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry.

2. To find out the influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered:

1. What is the influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry?

2. What is the influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:

1. There is no significant influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry.

2. There is no significant influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry.

Literature Review

Ambient Conditions

Several authors have identified ambient conditions as a factor that affects perceptions of and human responses to the environment (Baker, 1987; Baker, Berry & Parasuraman, 1988;

Russell & Snodgrass, 1987). Ambient conditions include background characteristics of the environment such as temperature, lighting, noise, music, and scent. As a general rule, ambient conditions affect the five senses. However, sometimes such dimensions may be totally imperceptible (gases, chemicals, infrasound), yet may have profound effects (Russell & Snodgrass 1987), particularly on employees who spend long hours in the environment. A very limited number of empirical studies in consumer research confirm that ambient factors may influence customer responses. For example, in studies of restaurants and supermarkets, it has been illustrated that music tempo can affect the pace of shopping, length of stay, and amount of money spent. In another study, familiarity with music played a role in perceptions of how long they spent shopping; when the music was unfamiliar to the subjects, they believed they had spent more time shopping (Yalch & Spangenberg, 1988). Hundreds of workplace studies conducted over many decades have revealed that lighting, temperature, noise, music, and colour can all have an impact on employee performance and job satisfaction. It is often recognised that when a guest visits a restaurant, he would like an environment that would make him feel comfortable and relaxed during the duration of his stay.

Service Scape

Service scape is considered as the environment in which the service is assembled and in which the seller and customer interact, combined with tangible commodities that facilitate the performance or communication of the service (Booms & Bitner, 1981). It is important for service organizations, including hospitality entities, to manipulate the service scape effectively to enhance customer satisfaction and increase repeat business (Namasivayam & Lin, 2008). Similarly, Bitner (1992) defined "service scape" as the built environment that has artificial physical surroundings as opposed to the natural or social environment. Namasivayam and Lin (2008) described service scape as the physical environment of an organisation encompassing several different elements, such as the overall layout, design, and décor of a store. The service scape also includes aspects of atmospherics, such as temperature, lighting, colors, music, and scent. Service scape is important since it influences not only consumers' cognitive, emotional, and physiological states but also their behaviours (Namasivayam & Lin, 2008). Research suggests that the physical setting may also influence the customer's ultimate satisfaction with the service (Bitner 1990). In addition, research in organisational behaviour suggests that the physical setting can influence an employee's satisfaction, productivity, and motivation (Steele, 1986). "The way the physical setting is created in organisations has barely been tapped as a tangible organisational resource" (Becker, 1981). Management of the physical setting is typically viewed as tangential in comparison with other organisational variables that can motivate employees, such as pay scales, promotions, benefits, and supervisory relationships. Similarly, on the consumer side, variables such as pricing, advertising, added features, and special promotions are given much more attention than the physical setting as ways in which customers can be attracted to and/or satisfied by a firm's services.

Air Quality and Customers Patronage

Hui and Bateson (1997) and Nguyen and Leblanc (2002) posit that fresh air and comfortable temperatures in a hotel may result in customers' having more favourable perceptions of an operation and evaluating their experiences more positively. Similarly, Han and Rye (2010) added that the air quality of the hotel affects customers physiologically. For instance, if the temperature is too cold or too hot in the hotel, customers will feel uncomfortable. The discomfort will be reflected through their avoidance behaviour (Zelthaml and Bitner, 2006).

They will choose another hotel to go to on their next visit. The influence of pleasant scents as a powerful tool in increasing sales has gained much attention in the hotel and hospitality industry (Lin & Worthley, 2012). Fresh air might also simply influence a customer's mood, emotions, or subjective feelings (Bone and Ellen, 1999). Similar to other environmental stimuli, for example, music, air quality should be evaluated with other environmental cues when examining the impact of the physical surroundings on customer behaviour and satisfaction. Individuals do not evaluate the physical environment based on only one environmental stimulus. All the discrete pieces combine to form a holistic picture. In this case, it is through various environmental cues that individuals receive input through their sensory systems to form a mental picture, which then stimulates an emotional response (Lin & Worthley, 2004).

Lighting and Customers Patronage

Countryman and Jang (2006) noted that first, lighting can be designed to guide people's movement through space, and secondly, lighting can be designed in such a way that it has a positive influence on the appreciation of a space, via the perception of that space. Research indicates that there is a relationship between lighting level preferences and individuals' emotional responses as well as their levels of satisfaction. In another study, Baron (1990) pointed out that "subjects had more positive affect in conditions of low levels of lighting compared to high levels of lighting" and that "the level of comfort was increased at relatively low levels of light, while comfort decreased with high levels of light" (Countryman and Jang, 2006). In addition, lighting can be one of the most powerful physical stimuli in hotels, particularly in upscale hotels. While bright lighting at hotels may symbolise quick service and relatively low prices, subdued and warm lighting may symbolically convey full service and high prices (Ryu and Han, 2011). This has been supported by Kumar et al. (2010), who assert that what most of us assume is proven scientifically, that bright lighting conditions in combination with orange-coloured walls induce feelings of low quality hotels and low price perceptions. Soft lighting, on the other hand, appears to increase feelings of high quality hotels as well as high price perceptions. They further assert that lighting can be used to draw attention away from less attractive areas and also highlight certain areas of interest in the hotel. Lighting helps to create excitement, change a customer's mood, and help improve the hotel image.

Customers' Satisfaction, Hotel Image, and Loyalty

The overly researched construct of customer satisfaction emanates from its pivotal influence on future sales to satisfied customers or their post-consumption behavioural intentions to repeat consumption of a product/service and/or to spread good reviews about a consumed product/service. Customer satisfaction in general pertains to the evaluation of a product or its features (Clemes et al., 2009). This understanding of customer satisfaction implies that the concept can be applied at the micro and macro levels, with the former pertaining to product features and the latter to the overall product. This study takes the overall satisfaction aspect of a hotel service as it is perceived in determining guests' image of and loyalty to a hotel and its services. Despite the number of studies in this area, the relationship between customer satisfaction, image, and loyalty remains equivocal. Some researchers have cited image as an antecedent to customer satisfaction (Lee, Back & Kim, 2009; Prayag, 2008), with satisfaction having a consequential positive impact on loyalty. On the other hand, others have perceived satisfaction to be a precursor to image and image together with satisfaction as factors impacting loyalty (Helgesen and Nesset, 2007; Kandampully and Hu, 2007).

Moderation Effect of Hotel Ambience

Ambient conditions that are part of the broader service scape (Bitner, 1990) have long been noted as having an influence on customer satisfaction, behavioural intentions, and image (Baker et al., 1994). A comfortable ambience acts to enhance customer satisfaction, serves to ensure behavioural intentions toward the service environment and positive reviews about service, and creates a favourable image of the service or brand in the mind of the customer. Apart from influencing such variables, ambience can have a differential influence on responses from customers with different personalities. The Mehrabian and Russell (1974) model of stimulus–organism–response (S–O–R) supports the personality and ambience argument. In the consumption context, the model explains how the environment evokes different consumer responses that lead to either approach or avoidance behaviour toward the service environment. In perceiving the atmosphere as a broader concept that includes the physical environment, Turley and Milliman (2000) argued that the potential interactions between atmosphere and an individual's characteristics determine the individual's responses to an environment. They further asserted that a different environment might produce a different response in different individuals. This personality and environment interaction yielding different individual responses implies a complex relationship that can mean either of the causation factors being regarded as an independent factor with the other one being a moderator.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was an Ex-post facto design. The study was conducted at Beni Gold Hotel and Apartment and Integrity Hotel & Suites in Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria. The population of the study was comprised of management staffs from the two aforementioned hotels, respectively. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 respondents from each of the hotels, and this gave a sample size of 80 respondents, which was used for the study. The main instrument for the study was a questionnaire tagged "Role of Ambience on Customers' Patronage in Hotel Industry Questionnaire" (RACPHIQ). A letter of introduction was given to the heads of the organisations for understanding and assistance. The questionnaire, which was developed by the researcher for data collection, was administered to the respondents, and retrieved 6 latter from each respondent in the two selected hotels in Victoria Island, Lagos. The researcher subjected the data generated for this study to appropriate statistical techniques, such as simple regression analysis, for testing the hypotheses. The test for significance was done at a 0.05 alpha level and at 68 degree of freedom.

Results and Discussion

Results

Hypothesis One: The null hypothesis states that there is no significant influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. In order to test the hypothesis simple regression was used to analyse the data (see table 1).

TABLE 1: Simple regression of the influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.99	0.98	0.98	0.36	0.98

*Significant at 0.05 level; df =78; N =80; critical r–value = 0.235

The above table 1 shows that the calculated R-value 0.99 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.235 at 0.5 alpha level with 78 degree of freedom. The R-square value of 0.98 predicts 98% of influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is significant influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. It was also deemed necessary to find out the influence of the variance of each class of independent variable as responded by each respondent (see table 2)

TABLE 2: Analysis of variance of the influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	393.27	1	393.27	2983.26	.000[b]
Residual	10.28	78	0.13		
Total	403.55	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Constant), Air Quality

The above table 2 presents the calculated F-value as (2983.26) and the critical f-value as (.000[b]). Being that the critical f-value (.000[b]) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is no significant influence exerted by the independent variables (air quality.) on the dependent variable which is customer's satisfaction.

Hypothesis Two: The null hypothesis states that there is no significant influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. In order to taste the hypothesis, simple regression was used to analyse the data (see table 3).

TABLE 3: Simple regression of the influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	0.92	0.85	0.85	0.89	0.85

*Significant at 0.05 level; df =78; N =80; critical r–value = 0.235

The table 3 shows that the calculated R-value 0.92 was greater than the critical R-value of 0.235 at 0.5 alpha level with 78 degree of freedom. The R-square value of 0.85 predicts 0.85 of influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. This rate of percentage is highly positive and therefore means that there is no influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. It was also deemed necessary to find out the influence of the variance of each class of independent variable as responded by each respondent (see table 4).

TABLE 4: **Analysis of variance of the influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	341.83	1	341.83	431.96	.000[b]
Residual	61.73	78	0.79		
Total	403.55	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction
b. Predictors: (Constant), Lighting

The above table 4 presents the calculated F-value as (431.96) and the critical f-value as (.000[b]). Being that the critical f-value (.000[b]) is below the probability level of 0.05, the result therefore means that there is no significant influence exerted by the independent variables (lighting.) on the dependent variable which is customer's satisfaction.

Discussion of the Findings

The result of the data analysis in table 1 and 2 were significant due to the fact that the obtained R-value (0.99) and the calculated F-value as (2983.26) were greater than their respective critical-value at 0.05 level with 78 degree of freedom. The result implies that there is significant influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. The finding agrees with the opinion of Hui and Bateson (1997); Nguyen and Leblanc (2002), who posits that fresh air and comfortable temperature and in a hotel may result in customers having more favorable perceptions of an operation and evaluating their experiences more positively. Also in agreement with Han and Rye (2010), who asserted that, air quality of the hotel affects customers physiologically for instance if the temperature is too cold or too hot in the hotel, customers will feel uncomfortable. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

The result of the data analysis in table 3 and 4 were significant due to the fact that the obtained R-value (0.92) and the calculated F-value as (431.96) were greater than their respective critical-value at 0.05 level with 78 degree of freedom. The result implies that there is significant influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. The finding is in agreement with the opinion of Ryu and Han, (2011), who averred that lighting is one of the most powerful physical stimuli in hotels, particularly in upscale hotels. While bright lighting at hotels may symbolize quick service and relatively low prices, subdued and warm lighting may symbolically convey full service and high prices. Lighting help to create excitement, to change a customers' mood and help improve the hotel image. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn.

There is significant influence of air quality on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. Fresh air and comfortable temperature and in a hotel results in customers having more favourable perceptions of an operation and evaluating their experiences more positively. Also, there is significant influence of lighting on customer's satisfaction in hotel industry. Lighting can be one of the most powerful physical stimuli in hotels, particularly in upscale hotels. While bright lighting at hotels may symbolize quick service and relatively low prices, subdued and warm lighting may symbolically convey full service and high prices.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Since the goal of every successful business is to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction the hotel should provide their client with value added transaction through positive customer interaction. In turn, the customer's will feel important and satisfied.

2. For hotels investors to record huge success in all aspect, efforts must be geared towards putting in place all essentials that will create customer satisfaction because, customers are becoming more conscious of their convenience, satisfaction, and safety.

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