CAPTURING THE GUEST EXPERIENCE IN HOTELS. PHASE ONE: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUEST EXPERIENCE SCAN

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ABSTRACT

The goal for the coming years is to get insight in the guest experience in hotels. What is guest experience? How to measure guest experience? What is the relation between guest experience and guest loyalty? And finally, what tangible elements in the physical environment of hotels and the contact with hotel employees may improve the experience of hotel guests? And in what way should these elements be changed? This paper describes the first and second step towards this goal: a theoretical background of guest experience and the development of the Guest Experience Scan for NH Hoteles. This Guest Experience Scan is a quantitative instrument trying to measure guests' affective evaluation of the physical environment of the hotel and the contact with the hotel employees.

Key words: guest experience; hotel; physical environment; service employees; affection

INTRODUCTION

Hotels are more and more aware of the need to understand the motives, wishes and expectations of their guests in order to be hospitable. Enz (2001) found that U.S. hotel managers identified 'understanding the customer' as second most important issue after human resource management. If guests feel understood and their hotel stay meets or exceeds their expectations, it will result in a positive feeling stored in memory (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010;Liu and Jang, 2009; Kim and Moon, 2009). This in turn results in an increased revisit intention (Kim and Moon, 2009; Bowen and Shoemaker, 1998) and positive word-of-mouth about the hotel (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010; Liu and Jang, 2009).

Up to now, services are mostly evaluated by measuring cognitive satisfaction. In hotels this is often done by using guest comments, in which the guest is asked to comment on satisfaction with tangible elements like the check in/check out, breakfast and room amenities. However, intangible elements of the guest experience which are related to the perceived service environment and feelings experienced during their hotel stay are less commonly measured, although experienced feelings during the process of service delivery are assumed to play an important role in the overall evaluation of the service and the service provider (Oliver, 1997; Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010; Kim and Moon, 2009). Based on their literature review Brunner-Sperdin and Peters (2009) state that the majority of service quality models have mainly cognitive components; emotional aspects are excluded to a large extend. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies measuring experience in the hospitality industry. For this reason it makes sense to further understand the relations between tangible and intangible elements in the service delivery process, guests' feelings experienced during service delivery, and the final evaluation of the service.

The goal for the coming years is to get insight in the (intangible) guest experience in hotels and the role of affection in the experience process. What is guest experience? How to measure guest experience? What is the relation between guest experience and guest loyalty? And finally, what tangible elements in the physical

environment of hotels and the contact with hotel employees may improve the experience of hotel guests? And in what way should these elements be changed?

This paper describes the first and second step towards this goal. The first step is an overview of literature on guest experience. The second step is de development of the Guest Experience Scan, an easy and quick instrument to get insight in the intangible guest experience in hotels and the relation between guest experience and guest loyalty. The development of this Guest Experience Scan is part of a longer term research project. The quantitative measurement of the guest experience will be followed by a second study looking for tangible details in the service environment which create the intangible affective guest experience in order to provide hotels concrete recommendations to influence the experience of their guests.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Guest experience

Research on guest experience starts with the question: what is experience? Researchers differ in their opinion about what experience is. The present paper approaches experience from a psychological perspective: the individual perception and interpretation of the environment. In this view, experience can be characterised in at least four different ways: the presence of absence of flow, affective and/or cognitive responses to the environment, the involvement of multiple moments and experience as a process or as a result.

Firstly, experience can be seen as a memorable event (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). According to this view, experience is characterised as **'flow experience'**, which means that people are totally involved, intensely concentrated and losing their sense of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992, cited in Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009) ; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Boswijk, Thijssen, Peelen, 2005). These experiences result in a lasting impression. Other researchers state that an experience is a result of the inevitable interaction between an individual and his environment, both the physical environment and the social environment (Gupta and Vajic, 1999; Knutson, Beck, Kim & Cha 2010; Johnston and Clark, 2001). This experience may be positive or negative and psychological flow is no prerequisite.

Secondly, experience can be described as **affective and/or cognitive responses** to the perception of the environment. For example, Boswijk & Peelen (2008) state that experience is a complex of emotions which occur simultaneously or successively. In emotion psychology, experience is perceived as a feeling which triggers an expression, like laughter, crying, and physical change (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009). A trigger of experience can be described as an impulse and experience itself as a reaction to it (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Donovan and Rossiter, 1982). However, most researchers claim that experience has both an emotional and a cognitive component (e.g. Schmitt, 1999; Ladhari, 2007, Wong, 2004) or a cognitive, emotional and physiological component (Bitner, 1992; Johnston and Clark, 2001). According to these researchers experience is an internal response to external stimuli. In other words, the perception of the environment results in an experience of that particular situation which in turn result in a mental mark of memory (Johnston and Clark, 2001; Zeithaml, Leonard & Parasuraman, 1988).

Thirdly, some authors state that an experience involves **multiple moments** in the service chain (Grönroos, 1984; Knutson et al. 2010; Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007). 'Service is seen as a journey that spans a longer period of time and consists of multiple components and touchpoints. The total customer experience is the result of every element in this journey' (Voss and Zomerdijk, 2007, p.8) and 'the guest's actual real-time experience includes all encounters throughout the journey with the hospitality brand' (Knutson et al. 2010, p.18).

Fourthly, experience can be seen as a result or as a process. Voss and zomerdijk (2007) describe experience as a result of the customer journey. Also in the definition of experience as conscious feelings and thoughts evoked by the process of perception of and participation in the service environment, experience can be seen as a result. However, Boswijk & Peelen (2008) define experience as a continuous and interactive process of doing and undergoing, action and reflection generating meaning. Johnston and Clark (2001) state that customer experiences are also processes: processes which create cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses, resulting in a mental mark, or a memory.

Based on the different definitions of experience described above, in the study presented in this paper experience is defined as the interaction between an individual and his or her environment and the inner response to this interaction. The inner reaction consists of feelings and thoughts which follow the sensory perception of the environment. In the field of Hospitality Business the environment is the service delivery process, and

consists of the physical environment in which the service delivery takes place and the social environment (contact with service employees and other guests). In this definition 'flow' is no necessary element of an experience. Every interaction of an individual with his or her environment is an experience. Further, this definition implies that experience has both an affective and a cognitive component. Experience therefore is a 'result' of this interaction with the environment. However, a service delivery, for example a hotel stay, consists of multiple interactions with the physical and social environment, continuously resulting in feelings and thoughts about these interactions. This makes experience more a process than a result.

Now is explained how experience is defined in this study, it is good to look at the whole service experience process including the pre-experience, experience and post-experience phase. An experience is always preceded by explicit or implicit expectations about the experience (e.g. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985; Lin, 2004): the pre-experience phase. At the end, the experience phase is followed by the post-experience phase, the mental mark (Johnston and Clark, 2001). This mental mark can be expressed by for example: service quality (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1998), corporate image (e.g. Nguyen, 2006) or behavioral intentions (e.g. Knutson, Singh, Yen & Bryant, 2004; Liu & Jang, 2009) or loyalty (e.g. Kim & Moon, 2009; Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2010). It depends on the type of service organisation what output of the service evaluation is most important to get insight in. For example, hotels may be interested most in guest loyalty, since it incorporates revisit intention and brand bonding. However, for a hospital patients' overall satisfaction may be more relevant.

There are several models representing the service experience process. However, the existing models all focus on just a part of this process. Some models of service evaluation encompass the whole process from prior to, during and after participation (O'Sullivan & Spangler, 1998; Knutson, Beck, Kim and Cha, 2010). However, these models lack the attention to internal psychological processes like affective and cognitive responses. Others chart the whole process of pre-experience, experience and post-experience, but do not incorporate the objective aspects of the service environment on which the actual experience is based (del Bosque and San Martin, 2008). Admittedly, service organisations are able to influence the experience of their guests by especially those characteristics of the service environment. Other models include the cognitive and/or affective evaluations but start at the experience phase and do not include the pre-experience phase of the service process (Bitner, 1992; Kim and Moon, 2009, Liu and Jang, 2009, Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2010). Other models focus on a specific part of service evaluation, for example the relation between the participation phase and loyalty (Jeong & Jang, 2010).

Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the whole guest experience process of a service, from expectations about the service until the revisit intention, incorporating prior expectations, the actual participation in the service environment, internal responses to that environment and evaluation and behavior of the service afterwards. The figure is based on the models and literature described above. In the next section of this paper, the components of the model are further explained.

Figure 1. Guest Experience Process Model of Services
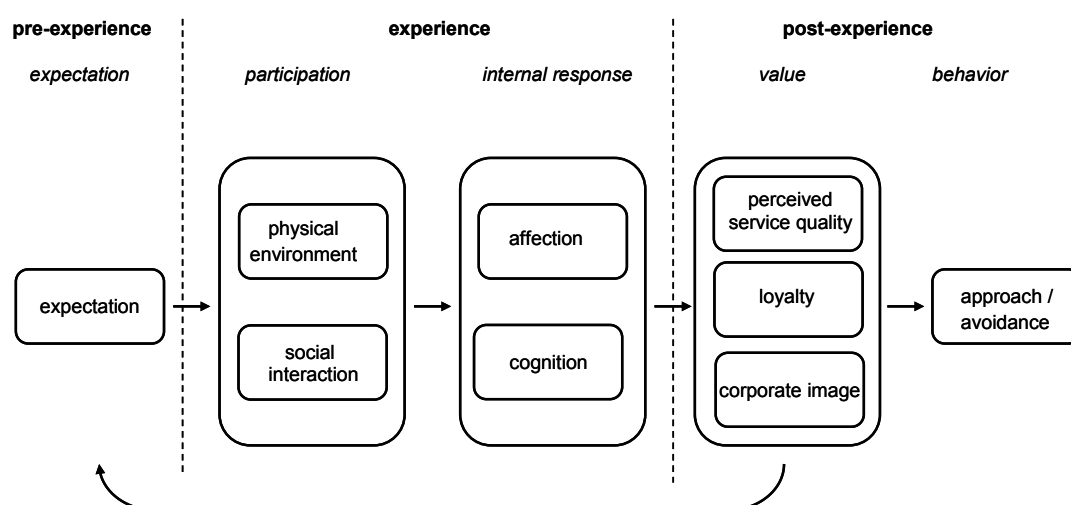
Expectation
The actual experience of a service is preceded by expectations about the service delivery. Expectations can be defined as the individual beliefs about how a product or service is likely to perform in the future (Oliver,

1987). Expectations are important for the experience of services and may influence all the phases in the experience process, directly or indirectly. For example, expectation may serve as a filter in the participation phase; they may influence which elements in the service environment are noticed, and may also influence customer behaviour (part of the participation phase). Entering a hotel, a guest may expect that somebody will approach to help. Therefore he probably will look around for somebody. At the other hand, if a guest expects that he is expected to go to a reception desk, he will immediately look for the check-in desk. Furthermore, expectations effect cognitive evaluation of services, according to the 'expectancy-disconfirmation theory' (e.g. Danaher and Haddrell, 1996, Wirtz, Matilla & Tan, 2000) and together with emotions and individual characteristics they influence the ultimate perceived quality of services (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Table 1 presents an overview of research in which different aspects that influence expectations preceding an experience are described.

Table 1. Literature overview of aspects influencing expectations of services

Author	Attributes of expectation	Industry
Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (1985)	word of mouth personal needs past experience external communication	Service organisation
O'Sullivan & Spangler (1998)	word of mouth promotional activities brand position memories of previous experiences	Tourism
Lin (2004)	Personality traits Goals behavior Cognitive style Involvement Cultural influences	Service industry
Knutson, Singh, Yen & Bryant (2004)	*Based on ASCI (Fornell et al., 1996)* Past experiences Recommendations from others Corporate promotional activities	Hotels

Looking at table 1, a distinction can be made between internal and external aspects of the expectation. Internal aspects depend on the individual, like personality traits, cognitive style, personal needs, memories of past experiences and goals behavior. External aspects influence individuals from the outside world, like recommendations from others and corporate promotional activities.

Participation

The participation in the service environment is the first step in the actual experience phase. Participation includes the perception of external stimuli by seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting and acting in the environment of the service delivery based on these perceptions (Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen, 2005). In other words, this first part of the experience includes knowledge of or observation of objects or events through involvement in or exposure to them (Jeong & Jang, 2010). This phase is also defined as the service encounter, a period of time during which a customer interacts with a service. This definition includes discrete, separate and distinct events and behavior, as well as customer's interaction with all the dimensions of a service, such as the physical surroundings and the service contact employees (Bitner, 1992; Wong, 2004).

If a guest enters a hotel, he perceives the environment of the entrance by for example smelling the typical scent of the hotel, seeing the environment, the design, the colours and materials and people in the hotel, hears sounds of people walking and talking and maybe some background music and feels the temperature and his feet on the ground (being soft on a carpet or hard on an stone floor). Based on these perceptions the guest behaves in a certain way, for example walking to the reception desk and talking with the employee behind the desk. As can be derived from this example, forming an impression of the service environment includes the perception of an enormous amount of cues of the environment. Table 2 presents a literature review of classifications of these cues or attributes.

Table 2 shows that the focus of de various studies is different, which is understandable because the mental processing of the service delivery process is such a complex process that it is impossible to investigate the whole range of attributes influencing the evaluation of the service. Some of the studies mainly focus on the physical environment (Kim and Moon, 2009) others on the behavior of employees (Parasuraman et al.,1990; Knutson et al., 2010), or combine elements of social interaction en physical environment (Bitner,1992; Slåtten et al., 2010; Heide et al., 2007; Liu & Jang, 2009). Additionally, some studies also discern a third element in the participation, the equipment and (technical) facilities (Kim and Moon, 2009; Brunner–Sperdin & Peters, 2009).

Examining all the aspects of the participation phase, the classification of Liu and Jang (2009) is an overall classification which covers most of the attributes mentioned in literature concerning the physical environment. Based on their classification, the following description of two components is made for the perception of environment in service settings in general. Firstly, there is the interaction between the guest and the physical environment (e.g. Bitner, 1992; Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010; Kim and Moon, 2009; Heide et al. 2007). Within the physical environment a distinction can be made between the ambience (tangible sensorial characteristics like scent, temperature, colour, noise, music and lighting), lay out (spatial arrangement of the interior) and design (aesthetic elements such as architecture and style, including accessories). Secondly, the interaction between the guest and other people can be discerned. This includes both contact with employees (e.g. Parasuraman et al. 1990; Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010; Heide et al. 2007 and Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009) and contact with other guests (e.g. Wu & Liang, 2009). fThis classification serves as basis for the present study on hotel experience.

Table 2. Literature overview of dimensions and attributes of participation in the service delivery process

Authors	Dimensions in participation	Attributes	Industry
Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, (1990)	tangibles	physical facilities, equipment, appearance of personne	service organisations
	reliability	ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately	
	responsiveness	willingness to help customers and provide prompt service	
	assurance	knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence	
	empathy	caring, individualised attention the firm provides its customers	
Bitner (1992)	ambient conditions	temperature, lighting, noise, music, scent, etc.	service organisations
	spatial layout and functionality	Lay out, equipment, furnishings	
	signs, symbols & artefacts	explicit communicators like labels, directional signs, rules of behavior and implicit communicators like art, photographs, personal objects	
Slåtten & Mehmetoglu (2010)	ambience	scent, temperature, color, , air quality, sound, lighting	theme parks
	interaction	interaction between customers and service providers	
	design	design, architecture, intangible aspects of the physical surroundings	
Knutson, Beck, Kim & Cha (2010)	7 dimensions consumer experience	environment, derived benefit(s) ,utility or usefulness of the service, convenience, accessibility, incentive, brand trust	service organisations
Heide, Lærdal, & Gronhaug (2007)	atmospheric factors	background conditions in the environment, e.g. temperature, scent, noise, music, and lighting	hotels
	social factors	the ''people'' component of the environment	
	design factors	functional and aesthetic elements such as architecture, style, and layout	
Brunner–Sperdin & Peters (2009	hardware	interior design,lighting, colour, scent, sound	Hotels
	humanware	empathy, expertise and responsiveness of employees, ability to take part in the service delivery process	
	software	technology, process management	
Wu & Liang (2009)	environment	lighting, temperature, cleanliness, architecture, colours	Hotel-restaurants
	interaction with employees	satisfactory service, reliability, professionalism	
	interaction with other customers	loudness, behave rudely, hitting the table	
Kim & Moon (2009)	Facility aesthetics	architecture & decoration	restaurants
	Layout	layout of furnishing & signs	
	Electric equipment.	Audio/video machines	
	Seating comfort	Comfort seats, distance to table, easily getting in and out	
	Ambient conditions	lighting, temperature, scent and background music	
Jeong & Jang (2010)	food quality	taste, presentation, food temperature, freshness, , variety, etc.	restaurants
	service quality	attentiveness, helpfulness, friendliness of employees	
	atmosphere	neat and well dressed employees, cleanliness of dining areas, design of the restaurant	
Liu & Jang (2009)	interior design	overall design, style of furnishing, painting	restaurants
	ambience	lighting, music, scent, temperature	
	spatial Layout	sSeat space, possibility to move around	

Internal response

The second part of the experience phase as defined in the present study are the cognitive and affective responses to the interaction with the service environment. The majority of service evaluation research focuses only on the cognitive evaluation of the service delivery process, mainly measuring satisfaction with services. An example is the American Consumer Satisfaction Index that is widely used (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, and Bryant,1996), which is based on three components of satisfaction: Overall perceived quality, perceived

value and customer expectations. However, several recent studies have criticized purely cognitive models to evaluate services (e.g. Ladhari, 2007; Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010, Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009; Wong, 2004).

Table 3 presents an overview of some research focusing on cognitive and/or affective responses during the service encounter. Because an extended literature overview would contain hundreds of studies, the present overview is limited to a number of widely used models in service evaluation research which are frequently cited, together with some recent studies focusing on the affective component of service evaluation as the present study focuses on the affective component of experience. Table 3 shows that in some studies the affective evaluation of services is measured by one single emotional construct of positive emotion (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010; Kim and Moon, 2009). Others use a more elaborate list of mixed emotions based on emotion theories of for example Mehrabian & Russel (1974), Ekman (1980) and Frijda (1986). The role of emotion is gaining attention as a central element in service quality management (Oliver, 1997). There is a need for further research on emotions in service settings.

Table 3. Literature overview of cognitive and/or emotional evaluation of services

Authors	Service evaluation	attributes	Industry
Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, and Bryant,1996	cognition	ASCI model of satisfaction, measuring satisfaction, confirm/disconfirm expectations, comparison to ideal	goods and services
Bitner (1992)	cognitive	beliefs, categorization, symbolic meaning	service organisations
	emotional	mood, attitude	
Kim & Moon (2009)	affective response	pleasure feeling	restaurants
	cognitive response	perceived service quality	
Liu & Jang (2009)	emotion	pleasure, excitement, refreshment, interest, relaxation, anger, disgust, boredom, regret, distress, contempt	restaurants
	cognition	perceived value	
Wong (2004)	emotional satisfaction	pleased/unpleased, unhappy/happy, disgusted/contended, enjoyable/frustrating	retail
Slåtten & Mehmetoglu (2010)	emotion	Joy (positive affect)	theme parks
Brunner–Sperdin & Peters (2009)	emotional state	state of flow: feel t be in good hands, lose track of time, enjoy, immerse oneself, being happy, under control	hotels
Richins (1997)	emotions	anger, discontent, worry, sadness, fear, shame, love, peacefulness, contentment, optimism, joy, excitement, surprise	product consumption
Laros & Steenkamp (2005)	emotions	hierarchical model of emotions containing 3 levels: positive/negative affect, 8 basis emotions, 42 specific emotions	food

Value

The cognitive and affective responses to the participation in the service delivery process result in the value of the service organisation to a guest, which can be expressed by for example the perceived service quality (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1998), corporate image (Nguyen, 2006), and the behavioral intention, often called 'loyalty' (e.g. Kim and Moon, 2009; Knutson et al., 2004). Table 4 presents an overview of literature regarding the most often measured constructs expressing this overall value of the service provider in relation to guest experience. Of course, there are more constructs expressing overall value of services and service organisations, such as commitment, overall satisfaction and well-being. However, the constructs presented in table 4 are most often measured in research on guest experiences. Since loyalty is part of the study presented in this paper, the focus is on this expression of service value. The other constructs are just briefly presented. Most important conclusion is that the constructs are close together and partly overlapping. Further study of literature is needed to provide more insight in the distinction between the constructs. As can be derived from table 4, positive word of mouth, recommendation to others and repurchase intention are the most commonly used attributes of loyalty.

Behavior

In the end, loyalty (and other expressions of the value of the service provider) influences guests' future behaviour. As defined by Mehrabian & Russell (1974), guests will come back again (approach) or will choose for another hotel the next time (avoidance).

Table 4. Literature overview of behavioral intention

| Authors	Construct expressing the service value	Attributes	Industry
Kim & Moon (2009)	loyalty	Revisit intention	restautants
	perceived service quality	Three – item scale of Wakefield & Blodgett (see below)	
Bitner (1992)	loyalty	affiliation, exploration, staying longer, commitment, carry out plan	service organisations
Slåtten et al. (2010)	loyalty	loyalty (recommendation to other people)	them parks
Liu & Jang (2009)	loyalty	repeat purchase, recommendation to others, word of mouth	restaurants
Bowen & Shoemaker (1998)	loyalty	likelihood of returning, making business referrals, word of mouth, providing refererences and publicity	
Jeong & Jang (2010)	loyalty	positive word of mouth, help company	restaurants
	service quality	attentive services, dependable & consistent restaurant, friendly & helpful employees	
Parasuraman, Zeithaml,Berry, (1998)	service quality	Reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, empathy	service organisations
Grönroos (1984)	service quality	Technical quality, functional quality, image	service organisations
Wakefield & Blodgett (1996)	perceived service quality	Perceived performance , comparison to expectation, normative evaluation (what is should be or not what is should be)	leisure services
Wong (2004)	overall service quality	excellent overall service, service of high quality, high standard of service, superior service in every way	retail
Knutson, Singh, Yen & Bryant (2004)	loyalty	Repurchase intention, price tolerance	hotels
Keh & Xie (2009)	corporate reputation	highly regarded, succesfull, well-established company,	service organisations
Nguyen (2006)	corporate image	service value, overall impression of the service organisation	retail

Conceptual Model

The aim of the present project is to get insight in the (intangible) guest experience in hotels. What is guest experience? How to measure guest experience? What is the relation between guest experience and guest loyalty? And finally, what tangible elements in the physical environment of hotels and the contact with hotel employees improve the experience of hotel guests, and in what way should these elements be changed?

From the literature study described above it can be concluded that guest experience is a complex process of information processing: the interaction of an individual with the physical and social environment and his or her cognitive and affective response to that interaction. The hotel industry is looking for easy tools to get insight in the guest experience. The present study therefore aims for the development of a easy and quick instrument to get insight in the role of the guest experience in hotels and their relation to guest loyalty. Measuring all the elements in the experience process is impossible. Since there are several instruments developed to measure the cognitive evaluation of a service environment (often measuring satisfaction), it was decided to focus on the affective component of the hotel experience, since it is still a challenge to develop a tool which measures this intangible component of experience. In the present study is tried to measure the affective experience of the physical environment and the affective experience of the hotel staff. In phase one of the project a quantitative instrument is developed to get an impression of the affective experience of the physical environment and the interaction with the hotel staff. Phase two of the project will attempt to find tangible elements in the physical and social environment of a hotel which can be changed in order to improve the affective experience of guests in hotels.

Figure 2 presents a conceptual model of the constructs that will be measured in the project. The model is based on the Guest Experience Process Model of Services depicted in figure 1 and contains several components of the guest experience process. The focus is on the affective responses to the physical and social environment of the hotel and the relation with loyalty. There has already been evidence that the physical environment influences the emotional state of guests (Slåtten et al., 2010; Brunner-Sperding and Peters, 2009 (specifically in hotels); Liu & Jang, 2009 and Kim en Moon, 2009). Also interaction with employees has a strong effect on guest emotions (Slåtten et al., 2010). The emotional state in turn influences guest loyalty (Wong, 2004, Liljander and Strandvik 1997). Other studies revealed a relation between the physical environment and contact with employees and loyalty (Jeong & Jang, 2009). However, since in these studies no emotions were measured it is not clear if the service environment directly effects loyalty or indirectly, mediated by affective state (emotion) or beliefs (cognition).

Additionally, finding suitable, reliable and valid methods to investigate the affective component in service evaluations is still a challenge. For this reason it is decided to develop a quantitative instrument measuring the intangible feelings elicited by the interaction with the physical environment (ambience lay-out and design) and the interaction with hotel staff. As dependent variable loyalty is measured, since loyal guests are important output variable for hotels (phase 1 in the model depicted in figure 2). Follow-up studies will focus on phase two in the model, aiming to find relevant tangible aspects in the physical environment and in the interaction with employees, which hotels can focus on to elicit desired feeling of guests.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Affective Experience in Hotels
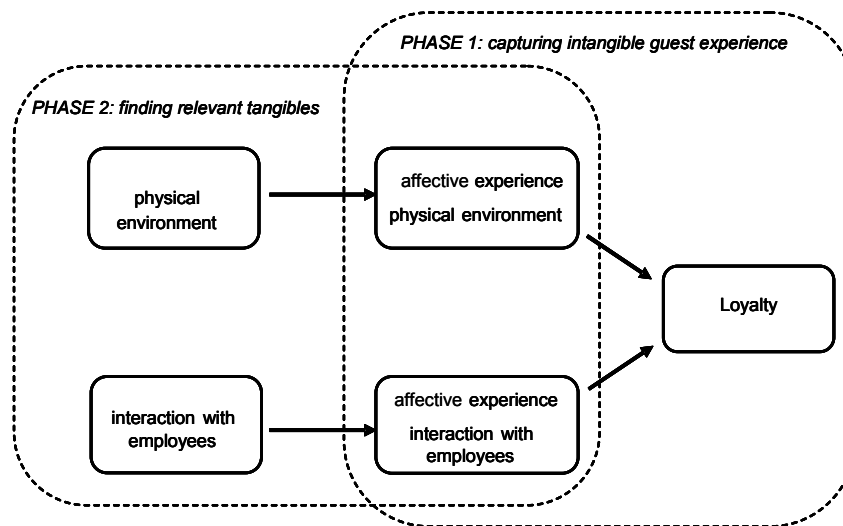
THE NH HOTELES GUEST EXPERIENCE SCAN

Research instrument

In order to measure guest experience in hotels a quantitative questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire needs to be easy and quickly to complete. The maximum time for completion is 10 minutes. Next to general characteristics of the guests (age, gender, nationality, business/leisure, former visits to the hotel), the main part of the questionnaire is based on the affective experience of the physical environment (considering the division in ambience, lay-out and design) and the contact with hotel staff. A selection of items was made by using a filter of the four brand values of the hotel. So the questionnaire contained items on the affective experience of the physical environment and items on the affective experience of the contact with hotel employees. Each item refers to one of the brand values (table 5).

Table 5. Items on affective experience of the physical environment and the contact with employees.

construct	items
affective experience physical environment	the ambience of the hotel puts me at ease
	the ambience of the hotel makes me feel safe
	the interior design of the hotel is visually appealing to me
	being in my hotel room makes me feel comfortable
	the ambience of the hotel exceeds my expectations
	the layout of the hotel feels familiar to me
affective experience interaction with hotel staff	the contact with the employees exceeds my expectation
	I perceive the contact with the employees as being pleasant
	the employees seem reliable to me
	the employees make me feel at ease
	the employees are empathetic towards me
	the employees seem approachable to me

Answers to the questions about the physical environment on a 5-point likert scale, from strongly disagree to totally agree. Loyalty was measured by asking for: recommendation to others, revisit intention and the extent to which the hotel and the hotel brand appeals to the guests (also using a 5-point likert scale). Additionally, in order to provide the hotel an emotional profile, the guests are asked to select from a list the emotions they experienced during their hotel stay. Guest can select the following emotions (based on Richins, 1997; Laros and

Steenkamp, 2005 and the corporate brand values): enthusiastic, surprised, pleased, fulfilled, joyful, respected, peaceful, relaxed, welcome, inspired, optimistic, worried, uneasy, tense, unfulfilled, uninspired, frustrated, sad, discontented, irritated. Because of the international guests both an English version and a Dutch version of the questionnaire are developed.

Expected outcomes and limitations

The outcomes of the Hotel Experience Scan are expected to provide the hotels:

- a general impression of the affective experience of the physical environment and the interaction with the hotel employees;
- an impression of how the hotel scores on the corporate brand values;
- a characterisation of the hotel in terms of experienced feelings by guests during the hotel stay;
- insight in the guest loyalty to the hotel;
- insight in the relation between affective experience and guest loyalty.

The Hotel Guest Experience Scan deliberately does not provide tangible aspects in the physical environment of the hotel and the contact with the employees by means of which the hotels can influence the experience of their guests. These tangibles are hundreds of elements, from used colours, materials, scent, music and acoustics, lighting, furniture, design, lay-out, art, temperature, cleanliness, available information, to for example appearance, behaviour, facial expressions and voices of employees. Moreover, all these aspects may differ between the various moments and locations during the hotel visit (for example check-in, hotel room, restaurant, lobby, check-out). So how to decide which of the elements is most worthy to change in order to elicit the desired hotel experience? It is impossible to incorporate all these elements in a questionnaire.

Therefore in this research project was decided to try to find relevant tangible aspects in two phases. Phase one focuses on insight in the intangible affective experience by performing the quantitative Hotel Guest Experience Scan presented in this paper (figure 2, phase 1). Phase two focuses on qualitative investigation of the elements of the affective experience measured by the scan, which appear to be an important contributor to guest loyalty. These qualitative investigations aim to trace what elements in the participation phase of the experience process cause the affective responses which NH hoteles aims for (see also figure 2, phase 2). At the end of the project it is expected to have some grip on the affective part of the experience process from participation to loyalty. Hotels are then hopefully able to start to use guest experience as steering instrument to improve the perceived service quality, which transform the organisation into a guest oriented service provider.

FUTURE RESEARCH

After a pilot in two Dutch hotels of NH Hoteles, the Hotel Guest Experience Scan will be carried out in 55 hotels of NH Hoteles in Europe. Secondly, additional qualitative research will be carried out to find out which particular tangible elements contribute to the aspects measured by the guest experience. What aspects in the process of their stay positively influence their experience and what aspects can be improved? Insight in these tangible aspects will make it possible for hotels to influence the experience of their guests.

Additionally, also segmentation of both guests and hotels is interesting. Are the scores on and relations between the tangible elements of the service environment, the affective responses and the guest loyalty the same for all the hotels and for all type of hotel guests? Or are the differences depending on the individual context of guests, for example between business and leisure guests, or between extravert and introvert individuals, or between old and young guests, or between guest who travel alone or with a group, or between novel guests and frequent visitors? The pre-experience phase of the experience process is than involved and needs further research.

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