

CAPTURING THE GUEST EXPERIENCE IN HOTELS. PHASE TWO: EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE SENSORY CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMFORTABLE AND INVITING AMBIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Given that it is essential for hotels to understand how guests experience hospitality, hotel managers need more concrete and tangible insights into this issue to improve their service. Quantitative research on experience of the physical environment and employee contact has shown that the comfort of hotel rooms and an inviting ambience are the factors that most influence guest loyalty. This exploratory paper employs verbal and visual association methods to translate *comfortable* and *inviting* into tangible sensory characteristics. Results show association of *comfortable* with lingering, sitting, resting, natural colours, rounded-off rectangles, and multiple layers. By contrast, *inviting* is associated with common (meeting) areas such as corridors, white, grey, transparency, and colourful accessories. Visual data proved suitable for identifying tangible (sensory) characteristics, and delivering concrete recommendations for improving invitingness and comfort.

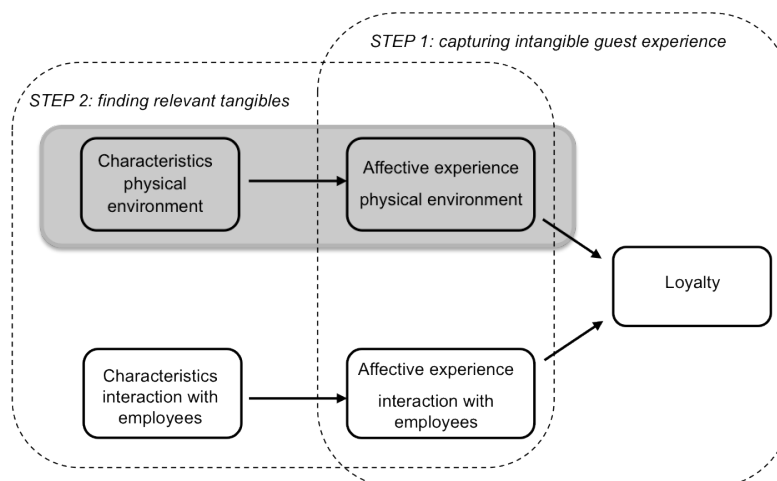
Key words: Guest experience, hotels, physical environment, comfortable, inviting

INTRODUCTION

Hotels are increasingly aware that it is essential to understand how guests experience hospitality. Hotels routinely measure guest satisfaction by using comment cards, asking the guest to comment on specific elements such as the check in/check out and room amenities. However, guest experience is related to perceived atmosphere and feelings experienced during a hotel stay. Though a better predictor for brand loyalty than guest satisfaction, it is less commonly measured (Bennett, Hartel and McColl-Kennedy, 2005).

The goal for hotels in the coming years is to gain insight into the guest experience. What is it and how can it be measured? What is the relationship between guest experience and guest loyalty? And what tangible elements in the physical environment of hotels and the contact with hotel employees positively influence the experience of hotel guests? Which elements show room for improvement?

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



Phase one of the research project, Guest Experience, involved designing the Experience Scan, a quantitative instrument that measures the experience of the physical environment and interaction with employees (Pijls, Schreiber and Van Marle, 2011). Results of this quantitative study provided insight into how the hotel environment and contact with hotel employees are perceived in 55 NH hotels. However, to translate those insights into concrete action by the hotels, another study was needed to find tangibles associated with the experience aspects that need improvement or have a strong relationship with guest loyalty. Phase one showed that the comfort of the hotel room and an inviting ambience ranked highest for guest loyalty. To obtain a deeper insight into these aspects, a qualitative follow-up study was conducted in phase two.

This paper presents the exploratory study (phase two of the Guest Experience project), aimed at translating a *comfortable* and *inviting* ambience into tangible sensory characteristics as a first step in identifying tangible sensory characteristics that are relevant for guest loyalty in hotels.

Figure 1 presents a conceptual model of the constructs that are measured in the Guest Experience project. The model contains several components of the guest experience process (Pijls et al., 2011) and is based on models by Bitner (1992) and Mehrabian and Russel (1974), among others. The present study focuses on a deeper understanding of two aspects related to the physical environment of a hotel: a *comfortable* and *inviting* environment. The grey area in Figure 1 represents that part of the conceptual model that is relevant for the present study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Guest Experience

The goal of the Guest Experience project in hotels is to define what guest experience is and to identify relevant tangibles that hotels can adjust in order to improve the guest experience and thereby increase guest loyalty.

What is guest experience? Based on a literature review, Pijls et al. (2011) concluded that there is no consensus among researchers and practitioners regarding the concept of guest experience. Is it a result or is it a process? Does it involve cognition and/or emotions? In this study, (guest) 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 resulting from the sensory perception of the environment. In the hospitality industry the environment is an essential element of the service delivery process, which consists of the physical environment where the service delivery takes place as well as the social environment (contact with service employees and other guests) (Mei, Dean & White, 1999). In the present study we looked for the visual characteristics in the physical hotel environment that result in an experience of comfort and invitingness. In the next section, the role of the physical environment or ambience in the experience of services, particularly in hotels, is discussed in more detail.

The physical environment

Research on the experience of services has shown that customers form an impression of a service based on several dimensions of their interaction with the service and the service provider, such as the physical surroundings and contact with service employees (Bitner, 1992; Heide, Lærdal and Gronhaug, 2007; Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009; Kim and Moon, 2009; Jeong and Jang, 2010; Berry, Wall and Carbone, 2006; Mei et al., 1999). As the present study focused on the physical surroundings, this dimension will be further discussed.

The physical environment where a service is delivered and experienced by the customer plays an important role in forming perceptions. Ryu and Han (2010) state that a pleasant physical setting, for example featuring innovative interior design, pleasing music, subdued lighting, pleasant colour scheme and ambient odour, spacious layout, and appealing table settings, determines to a large extent the degree of overall customer satisfaction and loyalty. Likewise, Mattila and Wirtz (2001) emphasize the role of the physical environment by stating that ambient factors such as scent and music affect customer evaluations of service experience and induce either approach or avoidance behaviour. However, there is still a lack of empirical research on this subject. Bitner (1992) identifies the 'lack of empirical research or theoretically based frameworks addressing the role of physical surroundings in consumption settings' (p. 57). More recently, Heide et al. (2007) argued that 'there is an apparent lack of empirical research that addresses ambience and its role in hospitality settings'.

Within the physical environment, a distinction can be made between different types of elements. Most categorizations are based on the dimensions introduced by Bitner (1992), and contain the subdivision of the physical environment into 'ambient conditions', 'functionality and lay-out' and 'design' (Heide, Lærdal and Gronhaug, 2007; Brunner-Sperdin and Peters, 2009; Liu and Jang, 2009).

Ambient conditions are background features such as temperature, air quality, noise, music, lighting and olfaction (Bitner 1992). In a review of empirical research on servicescapes, Kearney, Kennedy and Coughlan (2007) state that music has received most attention (Milliman, 1992; Spangenberg, Grohmann and Sprott, 2005). Other variables that have been researched, according to Kearny et al., are olfaction (Bone and Ellen, 1999; Spangenberg et al., 2005), colour (Chebat and Morin, 2007), and lighting (Summers and Herbert, 2001).

Functionality and lay-out refer to spatial arrangement of the interior (lay-out), furnishing and equipment (Bitner, 1992). Furnishing is defined as an element that directly affects the comfort and performance of both customers and employees in the servicescape (Bitner, 1992; Harris and Ezech, 2008). Arneill and Devlin (2002) show that visual interpretations of the furnishings of a context contribute to the perceived service quality. Lay-out also affects people's impression of the service environment. Aubert-Gamet (1997) states that 'the internal layout of buildings may either ease or restrict movement, thereby evoking a sense of crowding or spaciousness'. In turn, the extent of crowding of personal space affects people's mood and behaviour (Kaya and Erkip, 1999).

Design refers to aesthetic elements such as architecture and intangible aspects of the physical surroundings (Slåtten and Mehmetoglu, 2010). According to Alonso and Ogle (2008), for hotels, for example, design is a significant tool in enhancing the building's attractive appeal, creating an atmosphere in the public arena. Nguyen and Leblanc (2002) argue that décor and visual symbols, used to create an appropriate atmosphere within the servicescape, can influence a customer's belief about whether a firm is trustworthy or untrustworthy, expensive or affordable (Bitner, 1992), and successful or unsuccessful (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2002).

Use of visual images in qualitative research

Elements of the physical environment can be described in words, but also visualized. The use of visual imagery in qualitative research reveals information with a depth and richness beyond that available from text alone. Images can serve as a tool for understanding informants' deep emotions and experiences that are not always easily articulated through words (Hunting & Conroy, 2011). Zaltman (1997) argues for the use of research methods that take into account the nature of thought production, which includes both verbal and non-verbal elements. The majority of human communication is non-verbal and people's thoughts and emotions often occur unconsciously. Therefore, pictures can serve as entry points for concepts and associations stored in memory (Coulter and Zaltman, 1994).

The use of visual images in qualitative research can be divided into two categories. The first category contains research in which subjects are confronted with visual stimuli and are asked to react to those images by, for example, making a selection or talking about what they see. Here, visual images function as cues for storytelling (Donoghue, 2000) or cues for retrieving memories, as often used in clinical psychology. Research on brand image, product development and advertising (Chang & Huang, 2009; Coulter and Zaltman, 1994) often uses a second approach. Subjects are asked to produce visual stimuli, for example by taking pictures or creating collages (Chang and Huang, 2009; Hunting and Conroy, 2001). In the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET), developed by Zaltman, respondents also choose their own images. Coulter and Zaltman (1994) argue that the participants' control of the visual stimuli increases the likelihood of uncovering important customer issues not previously considered.

Analysing visual data

Literature on the use of visual data collection describes techniques that use visual methods to elicit data rather than methods analysing these visual data (Gleeson, 2011). According to Braun and Clark (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within visual data. A theme captures an element in the data that is relevant for the research question.

Braun and Clark (2006) distinguish two approaches to thematic analysis: inductive or 'bottom up' (Frith & Gleeson, 2004) and deductive or 'top down'. An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves, and they may have little relationship to the specific questions to the participants. Neither would they be driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area or topic. Inductive analysis is therefore 'a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the

researcher's analytic preconceptions' (Braun and Clark, 2006) and is data-driven. In contrast, a 'deductive' thematic analysis is guided by the researcher's theoretical assumptions and is analyst-driven. This form of thematic analysis is not aimed at providing a rich description of the data overall, but at a more detailed analysis of a particular aspect of the data. The present study has an inductive character, as there were no specific assumptions from theory about the themes that are related to 'comfortable' and 'inviting', except for the categories of environmental characteristics given in Table 1.

The level at which themes are to be identified is also important for the analysis of visual data. Braun and Clark (2006) distinguish a semantic and a latent level. On the semantic level, the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything beyond the explicit information from the participants. In contrast, a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data and starts to identify the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualizations behind the explicit data. In the present study, both types of analysis were performed: first the identification of themes emerging from the visual data (latent level) and subsequently the explicit environmental sensory characteristics which express the (latent) themes (semantic level). Heide and Grønhaug (2009) is relevant for the latent level. They inventoried the fundamental descriptors of the atmosphere in hotels. These descriptors – which may be interpreted as themes – were grouped into four higher-order themes (based on factor analysis): distinctiveness, hospitality, relaxation and refinement. These themes, together with the environmental characteristics of the physical environment (elements of the ambience, functionality/lay-out and design), serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Table 1 provides an overview of these elements.

Table 1. Themes and environmental elements associated with the ambience in hotels

Themes (Heide & Gronhaug, 2009)	
Distinctiveness	Special, fascinating, different, unusual, one of a kind, memorable, rarefied, peculiar, seductive, characteristic, attractive, dream, charming
Hospitality	Welcoming, hospitable, professional, genial, communicating, effective, civilized, true, feel-good, flexible, serious, well-being
Relaxation	Pastoral, resort, holiday, family-like, serene, quiet, easy, suburban, simple
Refinement	Classical, traditional, historical, upper-class, rich, luxurious
Environmental elements (e.g. Bitner, 1992)	
Ambience	Light, colour, sound (noise, music), smell, taste, temperature, material, air quality
Functionality/Lay-out	Furnishing, lay-out (special arrangement of objects), equipment
Design	Architecture and style of the interior, including art, signs, typology, accessories

Gleeson (2011) developed a 'recipe' consisting of 10 steps for polytextual thematic analysis of visual data. This procedure identifies and defines themes and higher-order themes in the data. This recipe has several elements in common with the five-phase thematic analysis described by Braun and Clark (2006). These two procedures for performing thematic visual data analysis have been used for the present study.

METHOD

In order to discover environmental characteristics that people associate with *comfortable* and *inviting*, two data collection techniques were used: verbal associations and visual associations. Because visuals and text are used, not all senses are directly involved. This means that the study provides visual elements such as colour, light and shapes directly, but elements perceived by the other senses, such as scents, sounds, tastes and materials, can only be measured indirectly.

Verbal associations

To obtain a deeper understanding of what people associate with 'comfortable' and 'inviting', guests of hotel NH Krasnapolsky in Amsterdam were interviewed during breakfast and asked: 'a comfortable environment, what does that mean to you?' and 'an inviting environment, what does that mean to you?'. Over two days, 35 guests participated, 21 male and 14 female. Most guests were British (40%), Dutch (20%), or Belgian (11%). The remaining participants were American, German, French and Irish.

Visual associations

The qualitative technique of gathering visual associations by creating mood boards was used to reveal associations stored in memory. Fourteen guests of hotel NH Utrecht participated in the study. They were asked to select images from a variety of magazines (interior, lifestyle and outdoor life) and individually create two mood boards, one with images they associated with ‘a comfortable environment’ and one for ‘an inviting environment’. Fourteen mood boards were created for ‘inviting’ and 13 mood boards for ‘comfortable’. All participants were Dutch and aged from 20 to 54. Of the mood boards, 33% were created by males and 66% by females.

RESULTS

Based on the procedures of Gleeson (2011) and Braun and Clark (2006), both the textual and the visual data were analysed at the explicit, semantic level (environmental categories) as well as at the latent level (themes). Four researchers were involved in the analysis. They first analysed the data individually and then the results were put together and discussed. Tables 2 and 3 show the results of the word associations with comfortable and inviting.

Looking at the themes, ‘clean’ is a theme that is associated with both *comfortable* and *inviting*. However, *comfortable* is additionally associated with soft, easy, large and calm, while *inviting* is associated with tidy, fresh, cosiness, interiors and attracting attention. Concerning the environmental cues, *comfortable* is associated with a modern and luxurious style, warm and light colours, delicate materials, sitting on a bed or in a bath, and with pillows and carpets. On the other hand fresh, light and warm colours, mood lighting, distinct shapes, flowers, something to eat and drink, and having a view express *inviting*. Thus, there seems to be both some overlap and distinct differences between *comfortable* and *inviting*. Moreover, *inviting* is more stimulating and refers to more senses (see, touch, smell, taste) than *comfortable* (only see and touch).

Table 2. Results word associations *comfortable*

<i>Association</i>	
Themes	Large, soft, clean, easy, calm
Environmental category	
Ambience	Arousal -- Colour red, orange, light colours, light, Shape -- Materials -- Sound -- Smell -- Temperature warm
Functionality / layout	Social/solitary -- Location bed, bathroom, shower Time -- Functionality sitting, fitness Sight -- Objects furniture, cupboard, space, pillows, carpet, radio/television, delicate materials In/outside --
Design	Modern, luxurious

Four exemplary mood boards for *comfortable* are presented in Figure 3, and Table 4 shows the results of the analysis. Six main themes emerge from the visual data associated with a comfortable environment: alone, inward, quiet, inactive, massive and soft. *Comfortable* and the associated themes are expressed by rooms in which people can sit or lie on beds or couches, or in baths, with soft materials such as blankets, clothes and pillows. In a comfortable environment, natural soft colours such as brown, blue and green prevail, and shapes are square, but with rounded edges. The room is warm and not too tidy. *Comfortable* is communicated by a basic, classical style with modern elements. This description shows elements that are recognizable in most of the mood boards. However, some mood boards also show elements that are less clear. For instance, some contain red or yellow elements, or cool elements (cool water). The number of mood boards is too small to decide whether these elements are exceptions or really belong to *comfortable*.

Table 3. Results word associations *inviting*

Association		
Themes	Space, clean, tidy, fresh, interior, cosy, attracting attention	
Environmental category		
Ambience	Arousal	--
	Colour	colourful, fresh, light and warm colours, mood lighting,
	Shape	distinct shapes
	Materials	beautiful materials
	Sound	--
	Smell	flowers
	Taste	coffee, champagne, snacks and drinks
	Temperature	--
Functionality / layout	Social/Solitary	--
	Location	--
	Time	--
	Functionality	--
	Sight	view
	Objects	entrance, open door, windows, wardrobe, chairs, pillows, presents
	In/outside	--
Design	Not too modern	

Figure 3. Examples mood boards *comfortable*



Table 4. Results visual associations *comfortable*

	<i>Association</i>	
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alone - Inwards - Quiet - Inactive - Massive - Soft 	individual, solitary inside, inwards, closed, withdrawn, introvert rest, calm, still, quiet, relaxed stable, unmoved, passive, slow, loose heavy, dense, massive, solid, grounded
Environmental category		
Ambience	- Arousal	low arousal, not stimulating, no associations with smell, food, noise
	- Colour	mainly dark, natural and cool colours such as brown, blue, green, but sometimes also colourful items in red or yellow
	- Shape	square with rounded edges
	- Material	dull/dim (no glimmer), textile, fabric, cloth, wood, stoneware,
	- Sound	--
	- Smell	--
	- Taste	--
	- Temperature	warm (blankets, pillows, bare feet, fireplace, lamp, oven, bath, but also some cool (water, swimming pool)
Functionality / layout	- Social/solitary	mostly solitary
	- Location	bathrooms, bedrooms
	- Time	long stay
	- Functionality	Place for sitting and lying, to repose, relax, lounge
	- Sight	--
	- Objects	furniture: pillows, clothes, blankets, beds, chairs, couches, baths
Design	- In/outside	inside a building
	Design	- Loosely, approachable, basic, classical as well as modern style

Additional searching for 'comfortable' within Google images show pictures that are in accordance with the present study, also including soft but large/massive beds, couches and chairs with square shapes in natural colours (brown, beige, green, blue) and also sometimes with red, orange and yellow.

The themes that are recognized in the visual associations are in line with the themes calm and soft in the verbal associations. Easy and large are also reasonably applicable to the visual data. However, cleanliness is not a typical characteristic of the pictures selected for the mood boards. Moreover, the visual data yield more and richer data, adding themes such as alone, inward, inactive and massive, and more tangible environmental characteristics.

Figure 4. Examples mood boards *inviting*



Table 5. Results visual associations *inviting*

<i>Association</i>	
Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fresh - Active - Styled - Impersonal - Fragile - Distraction
	energetic, vivid composed, tidy, clear light, transparency
Environmental category	
Ambience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arousal - Colour - Shape - Material - Sound - Smell - Taste - Temperature
	stimulating grey and white with colourful catchy accents (rose, red, orange, lime) also sometimes with dark colours providing contrast different shapes transparent, shiny, glass, steel associations with resonant sound, loudness, flowers bar, coffee cups, coffee pot, alcoholic beverages predominantly cool (water, use of steel and glass, some pictures outside), but also a fireplace, lamps (warm)
Functionality / layout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social/solitary - Location - Time - Functionality - Sight - Objects - In/outside
	mostly social, rooms for multiple persons (tables/chairs, kitchen, corridors) bathroom, corridors, parts of rooms (corners) short stay -- look through/line of sight lot of (small) objects / details mostly inside, home interior
Design	- Variety of styles: austere, modern, baroque, classical

Figure 4 shows four exemplary mood boards for *inviting*, and Table 5 presents the analysis. Six main themes emerge from the visual data associated with an *inviting* environment: fresh, active, styled, impersonal, fragile and distraction. These themes are in line with the themes fresh, interior, attracting attention and tidiness (Table 3). Again, cleanliness did not show up in the mood boards. Cosy (verbal associations) is in contradiction with impersonal (visual associations). Inviting and the associated themes are generally expressed in the mood boards by pictures of the interiors of rooms, lines of sight and corridors. Colours associated with inviting are grey and white in combination with colourful accents. Shiny materials and transparency, and a fresh, not too warm environment characterise invitingness. These results are to a large extent in line with the characteristics mentioned in the verbal associations. An inviting environment, furthermore, seems not to be related to a specific style; a variety of styles are depicted in the mood boards, from modern to baroque to classical.

As can be deduced from the attempt above to describe an inviting environment based on the mood boards, it is difficult to grasp the elements. There is variety across the mood boards. Searching for *inviting*

within Google images shows pictures of places indoors but also outdoor locations (*i.e.* holiday destinations) and many images of people spreading their arms and people with flirtatious looks (mostly women). Thus, people seem to play a significant role in the case of *inviting*. It seems to be much harder to design an inviting environment compared to a comfortable environment, since *comfortable* is probably indeed associated with the physical environment, while for *inviting* the appearance and behaviour of people may play a considerable role.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The present study provides insight into what constitutes a comfortable and an inviting environment, as well as insight into using visual data in investigating guest experience.

Comfortable is associated with themes such as alone, inward, quiet, inactive, massive, large and soft. These themes refer to a large extent to the element 'relaxation', one of the four elements of the ambience in hotels as defined by Heide and Grønhaug (2009). A comfortable environment can be expressed by tangible elements in the (hotel) environment such as bed(room)s, bath(room)s, couches, soft materials including carpets, blankets and pillows, natural soft colours such as brown, blue and green, and square shapes with rounded edges. Furthermore, basic or classical styles with modern elements cause an environment to be experienced as comfortable.

Inviting is associated with themes such as fresh, active, styled, fragile and attracting attention. An inviting environment can be expressed by tangible elements in the (hotel) environment such as lines of sight, corridor details in rooms, where people can meet each other and have a bite or a drink, grey and white in combination with colourful accents, shiny materials such as glass and steel, and a fresh, not too warm environment.

An inviting environment is difficult to describe and to visualise: the responses and mood boards do not show a consistent representation of *inviting*. The appearance and behaviour of people is most probably an essential element for an inviting ambience. However, the human component was not included in this study, and this may explain the variety of images on the mood boards. Further research on 'inviting' should include the characteristics of people's appearance and behaviour. Pictures found through Google images support this idea, since people are present on a large proportion of the images. The themes related to *inviting* are related to the element 'distinctiveness', as defined by Heide and Grønhaug (2009). The overlap can be expected to become even larger when the human component is added.

The characteristics associated with *comfortable* and *inviting* are based on the verbal associations of 35 hotel guests and 27 mood boards. Further research, yielding more data, is necessary to confirm the outcome of the present exploratory study and further investigate the variability in characteristics. A larger number of mood boards will show whether these characteristics are exceptions or really belong to *comfortable*.

A comparison of the results of the visual associations with those for the mood boards shows that the latter indeed deliver more in-depth and richer information, in accordance with Hunting & Conroy (2011), among others. Mood boards appeal to more sensory channels, provide more associations, and elicit more tangible elements and deeper information regarding the themes, despite the fact that the choice of images was limited to those in the magazines that were provided for the mood boards. These limitations may be overcome by asking participants to supply photographs of situations or places that they associate with inviting or comfortable. Even so, the verbal and the visual associations turned out to be complementary. This suggests that multiple methods for data collection should be used, preferably including additional methods using sound, touch, taste and smell. Finally, in the present study the researchers analysed/interpreted the mood boards, while in the next phase the participants will be asked, prior to the analysis, to explain why they selected particular pictures.

RELEVANCE FOR PRACTICE

How does the outcome of this study help hotels in directing the experience of their guests? The results of the Experience Scan performed in phase one of the project on guest experience in hotels showed that the comfort of the hotel room and an inviting ambience ranked highest for guest loyalty. However, to increase guest loyalty by making the ambience more inviting and the hotel room more comfortable, we need a greater understanding of the tangible elements that make people perceive an environment as comfortable and/or inviting.

The goal of the project is to find relevant tangibles that hotels can use to understand and influence the experience of guests. The present study, phase two of the project, shows that it is possible to find relevant tangible (visual) characteristics in the physical environment (the use of certain colours, materials, shapes, styles, etc.). If we compare visuals of the present hotel rooms with the mood boards, recommendations for improving the comfort and invitingness of hotel rooms follow naturally from the differences in shapes, colours, materials, accessories and light. The results can be used directly by the hotels. By looking at the differences between the mood boards and the environment in the hotels (figure 6), we can see clearly how to make the environment more comfortable or inviting

Figure 6. Present and desired atmosphere hotel rooms NH Hotels



For *comfortable*, provide a large bed with multiple layers of blankets, bedcovers and pillows, use natural colours and add items with square shapes and rounded edges. Covering the windows with translucent curtains elicits feelings of protection and comfort. People are essential in order to create an *inviting* ambience. Regarding the physical environment, eye-catching accessories throughout the whole hotel, such as flowers, vases, pillows, soap and napkins will create an inviting atmosphere. These kinds of accessories are easy to change and can be adjusted to suit the seasons, for example. By changing these items, hotels can refresh their environment at regular intervals and remain inviting and surprising.

As a next step, it would be interesting to determine what tangibles involving other sensory elements, such as sounds, smells and tastes, are associated with *comfortable* and *inviting*. Tangibles related to other themes that are important for guest loyalty would also be interesting. We are currently researching which tangible elements of the appearance and non-verbal behaviour of hotel staff represent *flexible* and *approachable*. Deeper understanding of the aspects of behaviour and appearance that are associated with flexible and approachable will help hotels to train their staff in order to improve their service and increase guests' loyalty.

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