ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS OF HOTEL LOBBIES PREFERENCES THAT ENHANCE PATRONAGE

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ABSTRACT
The lobby of a hotel building is the first port of call to such a building hence the first interior impression of the building is generated. Various literature reviews suggest that a stimulating physical environment has the potential to make a positive impact on customers' perceptions and behavior. However, there is lack of data pertaining to the physical environment that emphasizes attractiveness of hotel lobbies that will enhance patronage. This study aimed at providing solutions to comfortable and aesthetically pleasing hotel lobbies. The objective of this study is to examine which variations of five lobby architectural elements are preferred by hotel guests and thus, ascertain how these elements affect their overall behaviors toward the total hotel's environment. The elements were chosen based on observations of existing hotel lobbies in Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria and reviews of related literature. The study used questionnaire method. Opposing variations of each element were looked at during the data collection. The findings of the study revealed large scale lobby; hard material (tiles) for floor finishing; stucco for wall finishing; seating type (sofas /seats /chairs) arranged in group and service areas (bar, dining and shop) are preferred. Variations of hotel lobby's architectural elements proved that all the five architectural elements have significant impact in enhancing patronage. It is recommended among others that the architects and interior designers should be encouraged to design a hotel lobby that will ensure good and lasting memory for hotel guests and visitors alike.

Keywords: Hotel; Lobby Design; Lobby's Architectural Elements

INTRODUCTION

The physical environment plays an important role in influencing customers' behavior, creating an image for an organization (Bitner, 1992; Lucas, 2003; Veronique, 1997), and affecting social and cultural interaction (Lang, 1987). As a result, a number of corporations are creating enticing and innovative environments to better showcase their products and services. An appropriate physical environment helps produce quality performance; if the environment is unsuitable, people often leave and seek one that aligns more closely to their tastes and preferences (Pulgram, 1979). For this reason, it is important for the designers to gain information about the customers' reactions and behavior towards the settings (Davis, 1984). Since the function of the building is as equally important as its appearance, it becomes appropriate to identify problems through environmental design research (Lambert et. al., 1984).

Hotel lobbies are only a small part in the overall hotel development (Rutes, 2001). For that reason, researchers have not put as much emphasis on interpreting lobby design as necessary, since they are the focal point of any hotel first experience. With so many brands burgeoning, hotels are using their lobbies to provide product and service differentiation (Worcester, 2000). Many older hotels are redesigning their lobbies to meet the needs of travelers by balancing aesthetics and design; while also providing guests with the services they require (Adorka, 1995). For example, high technology lighting applications and sculptural furnishings and finishes typify the latest trends in lobby design (Mucci, 2005). Unlike other facilities like banks, restaurants, and retail stores, customers spend long period of times in hotels; the longer one stays in the facility, the greater the chance the physical environment will help influence overall service satisfaction (Baker, 1987). Customers may not return to the facility if they are unsatisfied with the service provided (Wakefield et. al., 1996).

Researchers have elaborated contemporary hotel design but from various and diverse angles, which makes it difficult for the reader to combine it to an overall picture and understanding (Collins, 2001). As a result of this exploration, better information about the physical elements of lobbies and how the relationships between these elements help its guests' perceptions of the hotel will take place. Architectural elements preferences of hotel lobbies that enhance patronage constitute the topic of the present paper. In this backdrop, the paper examines which variations of five architectural elements are preferred by hotel guests

and thus ascertained how the elements affect the overall behavior of guest towards hotel environment. To explore this, data collected from five prominent hotels in Adamawa State, Nigeria viz: Meridian hotel, Alheri Royal hotel, Homtel suites and derivatives, City green hotel and Muna hotel, are analyzed and the results are reported.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The research design is a mapped out plan or blue print which specifies how data relating to a given problem should be collected and analyzed, it provides the framework for the conduct of any investigation (Abayomi, 1999). The research design used for this study was Case Study. Case study is an in-depth study designed for a thorough understanding of a given social unit which may be a person, a group of persons, a community or an institution (Abayomi, 1999).

The methods used for obtaining this information consist of quantitative approach. The research was confined to Meridian hotel, Alheri Royal hotel, City Green hotel, Homtel Suites and Derivatives and Muna hotel in Yola, Adamawa State, Nigeria. The sampling was based on availability or accessibility.

DATA COLLECTION
A semi structured questionnaire was designed for studying guests' perceptions toward hotel lobbies. The main question of the present study revolves around what are the forces that shape the physical environment of hotel's lobbies. The questionnaire was designed to address hotel lobby architectural elements, including the size of the lobby, seating type and arrangements, floor finishing, wall finishing, and service areas (bar, dining and shop).

The general manager of Meridien hotel, Alheri Royal hotel, Homtel Suites and Derivatives, City Green hotel and Muna hotel were contacted by visiting the hotels. The purpose of the study was explained, and request was made to distribute the questionnaires to the guests. A total of two hundred (200) questionnaires were distributed (forty for each hotel). The expected time for completing the questionnaire was between 4-5 minutes.

Two hundred (200) usable questionnaires were retrieved and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) tool was used to analyze the data and for preparing descriptive and correlation analysis. Data were

grouped on spreadsheets that represented each question. The responses were analyzed by frequency distribution analysis and percentages.

SAMPLING

The sample consisted of two hundred (200) guests randomly selected in the lobbies. The sample comprises of one hundred and thirty seven (137) male and sixty three (63) female. Their age ranges from 18 years and older. Stratified random sampling technique was chosen and used for analysis since it is cumbersome to study the entire population; first dividing into strata and then random sampling within each stratum was made. This method ensured the provision of unbiased, suitably close estimate of the relevant characteristics of the sample population.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Preferred Architectural Elements of Hotel Lobby

The result indicates that larger percentage 95.5% (191) of respondents preferred large scale lobby space as against 4.5% (9) of respondents that preferred small scale lobby space (see table 1). This gives the guests a feeling of freedom and help celebrates the services of spaces like dining, bar, shops, etc. that may be available.

The result suggests that sofas/seats/chairs arranged in group are preferred as against sofas/seats/chairs arranged individually with percentage 70.5% (145) and 27.5% (55) respectively (see table 1). This foster close socialization and enhance discussing issues of common interest. This also suggests the need for communal life among customers.

The result shows that larger percentage 67.5% (135) of respondents preferred hard finish materials (tiles) as against 32.5% (65) of respondents that preferred soft finish materials (carpet and wood) for floor finishing of hotel lobbies (see table 1). More customers prefer a hygienically descent environment of the floor which ceramic floor tiles engender. It also shows the conscious of their environment being clean.

The result indicates that stucco 52% (104) was preferred for wall finishing of lobby space over ceramic tiles 6.5% (13), paints 8% (16) and wall paper 33.5% (67) (see table 1). The glazing and reflecting effects helped to provide more brightness to the environment.

The result indicates that larger percentage 89.5% (179) of respondents preferred presences of bar, dining and shop in their lobby space as against 10.5% (21) of respondents that preferred absence of bar, dining and shop in their lobby space (see table 1). This eases way finding and gives close proximity to the services as may be needed by the guests, also safe the guests time and cost of leaving the lobby for such services.

Table 1: Preferred Architectural Elements of Hotel Lobbies

Hotel	Scale of Lobby		Seating type and arrangement		Floor finish material		Wall finish material				Service areas (Bar, Dinning and shop)	
	Small	Large	Sofa/seat/chair; group seating	Sofa/seat/chair; individual seating	Hard (tiles)	Soft (carpet, Wood)	Tiles	Paints	Stucco	Wall paper	Presences of bar, dinning, shop	Absence of bar, dinning, shop
Meridian	3	37	29	11	31	9	1	2	27	10	30	10
Alheri royal	1	39	27	13	26	14		1	21	18	38	2
Homtel suites & derivatives	3	37	31	9	23	17	3	4	15	18	36	4
City green	2	38	25	15	26	14		3	28	9	39	1
Muna		40	33	7	29	11	9	6	13	12	36	4
Total	9	191	145	55	135	65	13	16	104	67	179	21
Percentage (%)	4.5	95.5	72.5	27.5	67.5	32.5	6.5	8	52	33.5	89.5	10.5

Source: Field Survey (2016)

DISCUSSION

Scale of Hotel Lobby

The scale of hotel lobby was categorized into small scale or large scale. Small scale lobbies have low ceiling height (3m), small reception desks, small furniture and decorations, smaller details such as window trim and overall be small in size; large scale lobby have high ceiling height (5m), large reception desks, large furniture and decorations large details such as window trim and overall property. The size of the hotel lobby depends on the dimension and category of the overall property. As a rule of thumb, the size of the lobby area of a city hotel for example, can be calculated as $1m^2$/room (this exclude back office space) (Lawson, 2007). It is base on the above attributes that the respondents preferred large scale lobby as against small scale lobby. Positive comments about large scale were "comfortable", "open", "inviting" and elegant". The only positive comment made on small scale lobby was, it is cheap and it seems more private. The result indicates a definite and overwhelming preference for large scale lobby. Small lobby size makes difficult for creating proper seating arrangements; when there is much number of guests to be accommodated, it could evoke sense of crowding, creating, and feelings of physical discomfort. When there is not sufficient space in the physical environment, it may cause less excitement (wakefield, et. al., 1996). In this regard Worcester (2000) said, in the economical and midscale scale segments there is a trend towards larger lobby spaces. The result clearly demonstrated the fact that large scale hotel lobby have significant impacts in enhancing patronage.

Seating Type and Arrangement

This research includes two (2) variations on seating type and arrangements: group seating arrangements that foster interactions and individuals seating arrangements that do not. The seating arrangements were made up of different types of furniture including sofas, seats and chairs depending on function of the space. Group seating arrangements were preferred over individual seating arrangements. Positive comments about the group seating arrangements were "cozy", "homey", "intimate", and comfortable and the individual seating arrangement were "unfriendly", "uncomfortable", "uninviting", and "impractical". This result indicates group seating arrangement that foster conversation and interaction among users of hotel lobbies were preferred as against individual seating arrangements that do not. It is common for hotels to have sofas or seats with fabric coverings and cessions – a quality that defines seating comfort (Lucas,

2003). Worcester (2000) in this regards stated that "Guest interaction is key in hospitality and accessibility is key in lobby design. Based on these findings it could be inferred that guests are more satisfied with their physical environment if the furniture arrangements is comfortable and accommodating. This claim also supports Bitner's theory that physical comfort correlates with behavior and helps influence positive feedback from customers. Comfort, furniture configuration, and seating arrangements influence behavior because comfortable and economically, designed chairs and sofas can relive the stress of having to hit on one place for extended period (Davis, 1984).

Floor Finish Materials

The two variations of materials used were hard finish materials (ceramic tiles, slate and terrazzo) and soft finish materials (wood, carpet). Lobbies with hard finish materials were preferred over lobbies with soft materials. Positive comments about hard materials, were "durable", "easy to clean", "relaxing", and inviting and the soft materials were "warm" and "homey". This result shows that hard finish materials (tiles, slate, and terrazzo) were preferred over soft finish materials (carpet and wood). "Durable" implies the strength of the finishing lasting longer instead of having floor finishes that will require replacement constantly. The "easy to clean" of tiles implies that it removes the cumbersomeness of having to scrubbing or using chemical cleaning disinfectants that may be harmful to health. It is in these regards that Ranson (1991) argues that poor indoor air quality as well as using toxic or otherwise unsuitable building materials affects the health of the housing occupant. Similarly affects the health of hotel lobby users. This is vital for hotel designers to have finish materials in lobby that encourages cleanliness of the space, which Jusan (2007b) argues to be a non visual sensation that supports everyday activities that take place in the space.

Wall Finish Materials

The four (4) variations of materials used were tiles, paints (emulsion and dulux), stucco and wall paper. Lobbies with stucco for wall finishing were preferred as against paints (emulsion and dulux,), wall paper, and tiles. Positive comments made about lobbies walls finished with stucco were "smoothing", "beautiful", "pleasant" "comfortable", "appropriate" and "easy to clean". Comments made on wall finished with tiles were "durable" and "easy to clean". Comments made on wall finished with wall paper were "inviting", "Hygienic", and "pleasant". The result indicates that a definite and

overwhelming preference for wall finished with stucco. "Appropriate" implies that the wall finishing can very much encourage daily guest's activities patterns as eating, recreation, etc. "comfortable" implies that the wall finishing keeps the interior atmosphere of the lobby conducive for the users. Both the rational – price, location, service qualities and emotional considerations – happiness, excitement are customer's motivating factors when choosing hospitality products (kwortnik, 2003). Therefore To be successful, the wall finishing materials need to target the type of guest the hotel wishes to attract.

Service Area (Bar, Dining and Shop)

The two (2) set of variations on service areas (Bar, Dining and Shop) were: Presence of Bar, dining and shop and absence of bar, dining and shop. Presences of bar dining and shop in hotel lobby were preferred as against hotel lobbies that do not have bar, dining and shop. Positive comments for presence of bar were "entertaining", "comforting", and "amusing". Positive comments made on restaurants (dining) were "satisfaction" and "comfortable". Positive comments made on shop, (gift, clothes, and salon) were "comfortable" and "exciting". Berens (1995) in this regards stated that having a lobby bar may affects customer's intent to stay in the lobby for a longer period of time. The result also indicates definite and overwhelming preferences for presence of dining and shop (clothes, gifts, and salon) in hotel lobby space. Curtis (2001) in this regards stated that the globalization and general tend towards a modern, high – tech life cause blurred boundaries between the define target segments. This means that "on the one side it encourages guests to demand a mix of services that allows a more enriched "experience" of the hotel, and on the other, it encourage the hotel to offer a fusion of functions in the lobby". Lawson (2009) has identified common services such as a lobby lounge, cloakrooms, toilets, public and house telephones, shops, display cases, vertices, brochure racks for hotel and local information or notice board. Moreover, Mundy (2008) added internet access, televisions and convenience/retail stores as service offers for guests in the hotel lobby. Therefore, having verities of services in the lobby space will enhance guests' patronage hence provision for bar, dining and shops are encouraged.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is the uniqueness of a lobby that grabs the guest's attention. Unexpected setting can be a pleasant surprise for frequent guests. The ill innovative or not special in some way the guest will feel

uneasy about the accommodations he or she doesn't see and may choose not to stay or return to your hotel, this research has produced significant results in an area of study often ignored. Architects and Interior designers must work carefully to ensure a good and lasting memory for hotel guests by giving more attention to hotel lobby spaces. This is in view of the fact that most frequently the first and last experience a guest has in a hotel happens in the lobby, during check in and out. Hotel consideration in lobbies should strive to provide large scale lobby ($1m^2$/room, 5m ceiling height) lounge or sofa, seats or chairs and seating arrangement that foster interaction, hard material (tiles) for floor finishing, stucco for wall finishing and presence of service areas such as bar, dining and shop. Finally, it should be clearly noted that today's hotel lobby should not say "welcome home" but rather "welcome to your multimillion dollar home".

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