The role of aesthetics and design in hotelscape: A phenomenological investigation of cosmopolitan consumers.

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Abstract

Should aesthetics and design be viewed as strategic marketing tools? We argue in this paper there are currently limited frameworks and empirical evidence to help - should this be the ambition of marketers? We propose a *hotelscape* as a holistic evolution of the servicescape concept, which is developed to reflect the role that aesthetics and design can play in influencing consumer behaviour within moments of consumption. The study is based on 37 interviews with cosmopolitan type customers. An interpretive phenomenological approach is deployed to explore the lived experiences of art and design in a hotelscape. We conclude that aesthetics and design can support marketing aspirations in hedonistic consumer groups. Further, that it influences customer experience and directly impacts spend, word of mouth, repatronage and loyalty.

Key words

1.0: Introduction

Clay suggests that the responses and feelings of all individuals' towards aesthetic beauty is a vital part of the lived experience where art is the natural outcome of their love and desire for beauty (Clay, 1908). Design, "art with a purpose" (West & Purvis, 1992:15), can be used as a way to differentiate products and services (Reimann et al., 2010). Esslinger (2009) recommends that designers and business leaders should join forces to build strategies that will offer a more sustainable, aesthetically pleasing and, whether directly or indirectly, a more profitable future.

We propose that academics and managers should respond to Esslinger's call. However, the position of work on art, design and aesthetics in the marketing discipline is not immediately apparent to those wishing to engage with it. At best, the work discussing these elements is limited in scope, fragmented and mostly conceptual. One perspective would be to place this discussion under product design - the "P" of *product*. The tangible product or rendered service is one part of the total consumption experience, as customers respond to the total, holistic offering when making purchase decisions (Kotler, 1973). However, in the "4Ps" context, *place* as a physical environment is seen as an influential feature of the total consumption experience (Bitner, 1992; Kotler, 1973). Within these two intertwined streams of research, first "atmospherics" (Kotler, 1973) and second, "servicescape" (Bitner, 1992) provide an understanding of the various effects of *designed* environments on consumption behavior. Both offer scope for deeper research exploring aesthetics. Customers perceive servicescape differently from service designers and creators, which embeds the importance of understanding phenomena from a customer's point of view when designing aesthetically pleasing servicescapes (Torres & Kline, 2013). Servicescape is a concept which forms the nexus of the aesthetic design, and aesthetics as experienced in the *moment of consumption -* the subjective consumption response to perceived beauty. We focus on hotels as one of the

most globalized business sectors (Yu et al., 2013). They are highly competitive and constantly seeking ways to differentiate their products and services (McNeill, 2008). At the luxury end of the hotel sector, consumption patterns are more hedonistic rather than utilitarian, with aesthetically pleasing design increasing in significance (Wang et al., 2013). An area conceptually underexplored is the role that design and aesthetics plays in creating competitive advantage. We focus this paper on cosmopolitan consumers in Saudi Arabia. Cosmopolitan consumers rely on imagery, are highly conscious of global trends and are discriminating consumers looking for what is "cool" and distinctive (Funk & Oly Ndubisi, 2006).

To bring together notions of design, aesthetics and consumption, we deploy a phenomenological lens to extrapolate the moment of consumption where these concepts come together. Lin and Lin (2016) suggest that little is known about what accounts for an individual's comprehension, appreciation or relationship with a specific servicescape in the moment of consumption. Focusing on the phenomenological experiences of cosmopolitan individuals we introduce and append a concept of the *hotelscape* to the body of work considering *servicescapes* and move to a better position of this as a holistic conceptualization gained from the perspective of individual consumers. In line with Orth, Wirtz & McKinney (2016) we regard the perception of a consumer of a holistic servicescape as entropic. We offer the hotelscape concept as a distinctive development of the servicescape that embeds both the design and individual consumption in an aesthetically pleasing service atmosphere.

Our aims are 1) identify the hotelscape as a lived experience (phenomenon) of cosmopolitan consumers, 2) identify the dimensions of the hotelscape from the perspective of cosmopolitan consumers, and 3) identify the effect of the hotelscape on the consumer and therefore to inform hotels' strategic decision makers.

The paper is structured as follows: First we review the theoretical literature for our contribution of servicescape and design which has deployed a phenomenological lens to marketing phenomena. We then describe our methods and introduce hotelscape as a lived experience. We conclude with limitations and further research directions.

2.0: Literature Review

This section provides a discussion of aesthetics and design from multiple disciplines, outlining the servicescape concept and the contribution to the marketing discipline.

2.1: Aesthetics and design

A growing body of literature is exploring the role of design, aesthetics and atmosphere in the hotel context. This is in response to the hotel sector innovating in the use of "form and function" to create products with segment specific appeal, perhaps best exemplified in the growth of boutique style hotels with "room-by-room distinctiveness" and "architectural spaces" where a "disproportionality large chunk of the design budget is allocated to the lobby and public areas" (McNeill, 2008:387). Design and art helps to strategically position the hotel making it part of the organisation's marketing activity (West and Purvis, 1992), leading to improved occupancy rates and increased average daily room rates (Countryman and Jang, 2006).

West and Hughes (1991:364) stated "design in hotels is concerned with the construction of tangible attributes that can be shown to and seen by potential customers: thus relaying information to them about how the hotel views itself". Design is about applying human creativity to create products, services, and environments to satisfy the needs of people (Yin, Qin & Holland, 2011). To more fully understand the role of design requires insight into atmospherics, aesthetics, and servicescape and the position of *art* within each of these

elements. Design defines and shapes the appearance of the material and immaterial and provides the logic that underpins form and expression (Woelfel, Jenskrzy & Drechsel, 2013). Form describes look, functionality and interface with users. Expression concerns decisions about colour, texture, sound and behaviour that help users gain an impression of the artefact. Functionality is important to consumption by facilitating "joy and excitement, pleasure and fun, and yes, beauty, to people's lives" (Norman, 2004:311). Whilst agreement on what is covered within the concept of *industrial* design is lacking, common is that it provides "tangible form to human ideas" by creating something new (Candi & Gemser, 2010:68). Emergent from this discourse is the need to holistically consider design and consumption of aesthetically pleasing service objects.

Atmospheric elements and interior design influence customers' desire to stay in a service setting and their re-patronage intention (Joseph-Mathews et al., 2009). Johnson, Mayer & Champaner (2004) echo Kotler (1973:50), describing atmospherics as "the effort to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability". Kotler (1973) describes four customer assessed dimensions of the physical environment: *visual*, *aural*, *olfactory* and *tactile*. These dimensions and how they are perceived by consumers has evolved into eight distinct forms: ambient conditions, space, layout, furniture, lighting, style, artefacts, and colour. Ambient conditions are environment background stimuli that impact human sensors (Kotler, 1973; Turley & Milliman, 2000) that are visual or non-visual, for example colours, auditory, scents (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001; Spangenberg, et al., 2005), and temperature (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005). Whilst interest in creating *ambient* conditions in the tourism industry has increased, how different ambient dimensions combine to influence buyer behavior remains under researched (Heide, Laerdal and Gronhaug, 2009).

Space is the spatial relationship between different objects (e.g. furniture) in a bounded environment (Wakefield and Blodget, 1996). *Layout* is the spatial relationship of equipment, furnishings within a service area. *Furnishing* encompasses look, comfort and availability of furniture (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). *Lighting* affects cognitive abilities e.g. memories, mood, and controls the appearance of colour (Singh, 2006) and influences the perception of quality (Ching, 1996). *Signs, symbols and artefacts* provide important physical dimensions employed to communicate with customers and send different messages about service expectations (Bitner, 1992; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2011). Eiseman (1998) argues that colour is critical in physical interior settings to differentiate offerings, influence appetite, and create negative or positive feelings and moods that help form attitudes. Each dimension reflects the outcome of product design decisions that seek to influence consumer behavior and ostensibly should form an integral part of the "servicescape framework" originally conceptualized by Bitner (1992).

2.2: The servicescape.

Servicescape is described as "the physical surrounding or the physical facility where the service is produced, delivered and consumed" (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003:306), and impacts on customer's perception of the service experience (Reimer & Kuehn, 2005). By focusing attention on how the physical environment stimulates consumers to formulate approach/avoidance decisions, servicescape bridges marketing and environmental psychology concepts (Rosenbaum, 2005). Servicescape captures the interplay between *ambient conditions*, *spatial layout* and *functionality*, with *signs*, *symbols*, and *artefacts* and used to evaluate retail environments and their atmospheres (Turley & Milliman, 2000; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). The impact of single servicescape elements on buying behavior has been investigated, specifically colour (Funk & Oly Ndubisi, 2006), music (Milliman, 1986),

olfaction (Spangenberg et al., 2005), and lighting (Areni & Kim, 1994). However, few studies have combined these stimuli, and other servicescape dimensions have emerged e.g. social, socially symbolic, and natural environment (Fisk et al., 2011).

Importantly for our study, servicescape has been adapted to fit specific *hedonistic* service sector characteristics. *Sportscape* (Wakefield & Sloan, 2010) focused on dimensions such as stadium access, facilities, aesthetics, and crowding. *Shipscape* (Kwortnik, 2008), reflects that cruise ships combine being a hotel, retailer, theme park, and vacation environment with residing guests. In both examples a common emphasis in the discussion is design. However, in the hotel industry, we argue no current study adequately provides holistic insight into aesthetics and design (during consumption), causing problems for managers when targeting specific hedonistic consumer groups. Theoretically, such a framework requires synthesis between the servicescapes marketing literature, marketing discipline literature and design, art and aesthetics. We propose such a synthesis in the next section.

2.3: Aesthetics and design in the servicescape: Towards a hotelscape framework

Our interest lies in the role of design in combining dimensions to influence consumers in the hotel setting. Candi and Gemser (2010:68) consider industrial design to create product aesthetics that appeal to the human senses "strongly intertwined with the symbolic and experiential value of a product". Aesthetics is "the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature and expression of beauty", and the "study of psychological responses to beauty and artistic experiences" (Wang et al., 2013:30). Simply, aesthetics is concerned with beauty to give pleasure (Stevenson, 2010). Beauty and aesthetics is related to diverse life characteristics such as expressiveness, novelty, intelligence, and how artwork touches the senses (Weggeman, Lammers & Akkermans, 2007). When linked to the physical environment (or

scape) such as surrounding a shop or hotel, aesthetics can support consumers in their sense-making. This is inspired by artefact characteristics such as colour and size; each interpreted differently by individuals (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). The difference between what is considered aesthetic and how it is interpreted is seldom investigated holistically. For example, emotion is an important element in sense-making seen as a response to aesthetics (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Conceptually, aesthetics influence perceptions (Bloch 1995), evoke emotional responses (Norman, 2004), impact essential behaviors (Bitner, 1992), enable product and service differentiation (Desai, Radhakrishnan & Srinivasan, 2001), and ultimately consumer preferences (Orth & Malkewitz, 2008). Whilst the link between consumer's emotional response and product's aesthetic assets is established, marketing and business journals that investigate how and why such a response occurs are lacking (Kumar & Garg, 2010). Further, despite the major influence that aesthetic assessment has on design matters, the relationship to hedonistic consumer behaviour has little empirical support in the marketing literature (Jansson-Boyd, 2010).

Our focus in this paper is hotels. Customers select hotels based on *cognitive* (e.g. price, food and service quality), *sensory* (e.g. general atmosphere, room quality), and *affective* (e.g. comfort, safety and entertainment) attributes. Sensory stimuli when linked to perceived physical quality e.g. room furnishings, seems significant in influencing consumer choice and patronage (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). This links to interior design defined as "the art or process of designing the interior decoration of a room or building" (Stevenson, 2010:912). Centrality visual product aesthetics (CVPA) is the "significance that visual aesthetics hold for a particular consumer in his/her relationship with products [or services]" (Bloch, Brunel & Arnold, 2003:552). They argue customers with high CVPA believe that objects of beauty can impact their life quality, enabling higher level needs to be gained and influencing brand preferences. A feature of CVPA is acumen, i.e. the ability of consumers to

recognize, categorize and judge design. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990:178) described aesthetic *responses* as "intense enjoyment characterized by feelings of personal wholeness, a sense of discovery and human connectedness". Common aesthetic principles are: movement, balance, pattern, harmony, proportion, variety, and emphasis (Kim, 2006). The composition of these principles trigger emotional reactions (Kumar & Garg, 2010). From this taxonomy we argue that the role played by aesthetics and design in a hotel context is not yet adequately understood and requires empirical investigation. In this we answer Walter, Edvardsson & Öström (2010) observation that *servicescape* lacks a robust empirical base, and is capable of significant conceptual development.

3.0: Methods

The study was conducted within the principles of existential phenomenology used within the marketing discipline to examine different consumer based situations (Thompson, 1997; Thompson, Locander & Pollio; 1990) particulalry where deeper surface understanding is required (Gupta & Sharma, 2014) which seeks to avoid the separation of human from context (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). This inquiry tradition allows for the examination of phenomena as emergent, and inseparable from context. Phenomenology targets the subjective experiences of individuals' daily lives, commonly used to understand interpretations and meanings in relation to lived experiences (Thompson, 1997). Phenomenologists study individuals carefully in order to discover the deeper meaning of the lived experience in terms of the individual's relationship with space, time, and personal history (Goulding, 2005). We seek to better understand the perceptions of hotel interior design and aesthetics from consumers' lived experiences. Such an approach has the potential to provide richer understanding of phenomena (Goulding, 2005) - the subjective experiences and how people make sense of them.

The research follows the phenomenological tradition of one-to-one, in-depth, semi-structured interviewing (Cachia & Millward, 2011; Hines & Ardley, 2011). The opening interview questions were structured to draw respondents to the phenomena of interest - aesthetics and design in their hotel stay experience. Follow-up questions were spontaneously derived from the responses to the opening questions - drawing the respondents to extrapolate on the lived experience of those moments of consumption in which design and art were a feature. Cachia & Millward (2011:268) clarify the role of a semi-structured interview in the phenomenology tradition as where:

> "…a fixed set of sequential questions is used as an interview guide but additional questions can be introduced to facilitate further exploration of issues brought up by the interviewee, thus almost taking the form of a managed conversation"

We aimed to identify the hotelscape as initial designed phenomena and then ascertain a series of emergent epiphenomenal outcomes flowing from, but not casually linked, to the holistic concept. In this way, the most complete picture of a respondents *lived experience* was accessed.

The sampling frame was non-probability and quota sampling with criteria for inclusion being Saudi Arabian, culturally open and flexible cosmopolitans, travelling from Saudi Arabia at least twice a year, and having a minimum of five different luxury hotel stays within two years prior to data collection. By selecting a reasonably homogenous group of respondents, true to the traditions of interpretive phenomenology, conclusions were drawn that were thought to be the lived experiences of that group.

> "Phenomenology presents perception as a process of embodied, essentially interpretive, looking. Perceptual themes can recur, thereby forming a pattern across an individual's or group's experience" (Wilson, 2012:234).

Thirty-seven participants were interviewed; aged between 18 and 55 with a range of occupations as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Overview of research participants

Participant	Age	Occupation	Yearly travel
1	55	Architect	6
2	35	Head of investment	6
3	45	CEO of training company	24
4	40	Risk assurance manager	2
5	30	Brand manager	5
6	29	PhD Student	2
7	28	Doctor	3
8	29	Project manager	7
9	27	Communication engineer	5
10	18	Student	3
11	54	Teacher	3
12	27	Third Secretary	2
13	25	Teacher	3
14	29	Housewife	4
15	58	Banker	2
16	50	Bank chief officer	3
17	19	Student	2
18	27	Housewife	6
19	29	Housewife	3
20	19	Student	4
21	32	Pharmacist	3
22	26	University supervisor	3
23	28	Translator	3
24	24	Housewife	2
25	30	Nutritionist	3
26	42	Housewife	2
27	18	Student	3
28	28	Housewife	2
29	26	Banker	3
30	32	Housewife	2
31	28	Housewife	3
32	34	Teacher	2
33	25	Lieutenant	2
34	18	Student	3
35	45	Head teacher	3
36	30	Teacher	2
37	30	PhD Student	5

Interviews were recorded and to facilitate sense-making a reflexive notebook kept. Interviews were transcribed and translated into English and to minimise distortion of meanings back translated into Arabic using an independent third-party. Differences in interpretation were sorted through negotiation and discussion. Selected transcriptions were read and validated by the respondents as part of the analysis. Suggested changes were of marginal importance, primarily concerned with the addition of certain facts remembered from reading the transcript. Initial concepts were derived from free reading of the transcripts in English and with reference to the reflexive notebook. Initial themes were identified that maintained organic association with the respondents, but which allowed for enough abstraction to hold the promise of theoretical development. Second stage analysis employed NVIVO qualitative software package to identify more fine grained codes within the initial themes. Interviews lasted between two and three hours. Consent was sought and gained from all participants. Gioia, Corley & Hamilton (2013) argue to achieve a qualitative rigor and develop concepts, the link between the data and the new insights must be demonstrated. Transcripts were checked against recordings to remove errors, and codes were cross checked to reduce drift of meaning. Each theme and code is derived from words used by respondents which are utilised within the findings to provide authenticity of response (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

4.0: Findings

In this section we overview hotelscape. We will introduce the elements of a hotelscape, section by section, concluding with a conceptual framework that unites the disparate elements of discussion.

4.1: The relative importance of hotel design versus hotel attributes

Aspects of the designed environment have been argued to be the main focus of the hotel industry. An exception here is that of hygiene, which is the only factor consistently discussed as more important than hotel interior design. Our cosmopolitan participants demonstrated that aesthetic design is of great importance in their hedonistic enjoyment of the hotel servicescape.

> "I will always remember these hotels because they are art from the inside, really beautiful…Art and design in hotels means a lot, it keeps an impression, keeps a touch for you, so you always remember how neat and beautiful the place was, well decorated, it adds value, that's why you see some hotels are more expensive than others, they paid a lot of money to make it extravagant." Interviewee 16

These customers perceive design as more important than price or value (Wang et al., 2013). Participants seemed willing to reduce the length of their stay to be able to afford a more expensive hotel whose design they prefer. We propose 'hotelscape' to encompass matters of the designed environment from the perspective of high spending and hedonistic, cosmopolitan consumers.

4.2: The hotelscape as a holistic concept

Theory suggests that humans holistically make sense of their surroundings by categorising the relationship between different information cues (Hekkert, 2006). Orth, Heinrich and Malkewitz (2012) explain consumers deconstruct environments which they then combine to form a picture to judge the service environment holistically (Lin, 2004). These perspectives shaped our approach to analysis. Participants were encouraged to identify moments in which design elements affected their overall service consumption experience. Customers with interest in décor, art, design, and architecture focused on such details and were able to elaborate on each.

> "If a person is interested in décor and architecture, like myself, he will notice details more than others and consider it more when choosing the hotel." Interviewee 1

This study suggests cosmopolitan consumer groups have significant sensitivity to aesthetics and art. Next we examine the potential tension between aesthetics and functionality in the hotelscape.

4.2.1: Design: aesthetic look versus design functionality in the hotelscape

Baker (1986) categorizes design elements into either aesthetic (e.g. colour and material), or functional (e.g. architectural design) which will be evident in a well-designed servicescape. The findings of this study align with this view. A dimension of a hotelscape we propose is that the perception of customers toward the hotel design is shaped by both the look and the functionality of the interior design.

> "…if there isn't a seating area, then I will have to do everything on my bed, so space, placement and layout are important. It matters in the basic things and not the details, like the room design importance from colour and layout. I will use the layout." Interviewee 23

Hotel guests consider "look" and "functionality" of the hotel interior design as equally important in forming their holistic perceptions. Look and functionality are specific design characteristic elements discussed next.

4.2.2: The key elements of hotel interior design

Drawing participants to reflect on their first moments in their hotel stay, we explain the most identified elements as 'key' elements. Interviewees were asked to discuss the aspects of the hotelscape that they best recall. C*olour* was the most significant factor mentioned first when discussing hotel design.

> "Colours impact me greatly, dark colours make me just want to sleep in the hotel and not want to go back to the hotel. When I like the design I want to stay more in the room and order room service. So design affects how much time I spend in the hotel." Interviewee 6

Lighting was discussed as something that affects mood with controllability of room lighting a recurrent theme.

> "…the rooms were dark and like staying in a cage, I like a great deal of light coming in. I hate low lighting; I couldn't stay there more than two days. So lighting really affects your mood. […] I like it controllable, where I can choose bright or dim, and in different places like ceiling, and side lamps." Interviewee 12

Furniture design emerged as influencing recall in the experiences of hotel consumers. The aesthetic design of furniture helped to inform participants making internet hotel bookings because it provided a tangible cue about likely experience.

> "I will see the pictures before booking; I compare choice of furniture, if it looks better in quality and more comfortable… and the colours of course." Interviewee 10

A hotel's design *style* was seen as an important aspect of the hotelscape, especially *classical* and *modern*. Guests who preferred a classical hotel style expressed views that modern is neither comfortable nor practical, and to be tolerated only in short stays.

> "Some hotels are very modern, which is annoying or very dark - depressing…like black modern hotels. I like castles…hotels with history […]. Luxury, I like to feel like a princess on my holidays because my daily life is not luxurious, I feel it is 'me' time where I can enjoy and see beautiful scenery…Classic gives more atmosphere of luxury and royalty, modern is boring and not luxurious." Interviewee 30

A classical style, especially if historical, seemed associated with luxury. Regardless of the hotel's general style, uniqueness and unexpected touches were usually appreciated, especially in the hotel lobby, with cognitive processing of lobby areas being a holistic activity. Participants were less able to reflect on disaggregated elements of the first moment in the hotel, but were better able to disaggregate the first moment in the bedroom. This suggests that in phenomenological terms, in later moments, greater disaggregation of features occurs as the sojourn lengthens.

The importance of the *layout* in the hotelscape also emerged with a convenient layout decreasing search time, enabling better service delivery, and enhancing value by increasing a customer's enjoyment of the offered service.

> "I like details and care about them. Like TV location to the bed. Details that attract my attention are when things are hidden so that the room does not look busy, such as iron board and coffee machine in cupboards…space distribution is important, to have everything in the right place, you don't feel a lot of things in the room. Interviewee 4

Five key design elements are therefore identified in the hotelscape; *color, lighting, furniture, style* and *layout*. Discussion will next turn to supplementary elements.

4.2.3: Supplementary elements of hotel interior design

Supplementary elements emerged as secondary in the accounts of respondents, and came into focus in the later moments of the hotels sojourn. *Space* as a measure of distance, was mentioned by most interviewees though with differing levels of relative importance. Several interviewees commented that a small space could be tolerated if other things are available, or on short trips. Others insisted on the importance of spacious hotels regardless of location.

Ambient conditions relating to *scent* and *sound* were significant in creating first impressions. Examples of *olfactory* design related to preferred scents including flowers, coffee, baking, and scented candles, especially in the entrance lobby. S*ound* in the hotelscape was also highly valued, with soundproofing and noise reduction being central to comfort.

> "Sometimes you feel that the breakfast in the hotel is an experience, when you sit and there is music we stay more than an hour, decoration of the restaurant, and its colours. Noise in hotels is very important, regardless of space and busyness, it is important to have noise free walls." Interviewee 4

Technology is recognized as providing added value for guests, and a chance to build loyalty, enhance satisfaction, and increase revenue (Bilgihan, 2012). Tangible technologies

through design mentioned included different Media - mp3, Ipads, plasma televisions, electricity sockets availability, wi-fi, and remote controls.

We use the term *artefacts* as it has been used in the servicescape literature to denote the physical dimensions of servicescapes (Bitner, 1992; Fisk et al., 2011). Respondents spoke of visual aesthetics as influencing perceptions evoking emotional responses. This transformed a standard looking hotel into an aesthetically appealing hotel, by adding touches such as art works, paintings, sculptures, or photos. This reinforces that aesthetics can influence consumer perceptions (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004; Bloch, 1995), evoke emotions and emotional responses (Norman, 2004).

The importance and role of *big windows* in the hotel design came through consistently, enabling a space to feel light and airy, and enhancing the view. Managing the relationship between natural light and visual stimulation in the retail industry is a means of attracting customers to luxurious retail outlets and conditioning their behavior (Joy et al., 2014). Our findings add that light and window size is aesthetically and functionally important in designing a hotelscape.

> "Big windows are very important to make places bright, they even reflect differently on the furniture. Bright natural light affects me a lot. Usually a lot of glass makes a place airy and not gloomy. It is an important factor, when you first wake up. You want to see the sunlight; you don't want to feel that you are sitting in a box. Interviewee 19

The use of natural cues such as flowers, greenery and water features also impacts positively on hotel sojourners with many mentioning the positive effect it had on them. A phenomenon previously identified in health care (Whitehouse et al., 2001), and in relation to student accomodation to enhance academic performance (Iwasaki, 2003). Despite this, the perception of natural cues in the hotel industry seems to have been overlooked in the literature.

This section has highlighted how hotel guests perceive the hotel design, and that design is about both the look and the functionality of the hotelscape. We have identified the most significant design elements (*space*, *ambient conditions*, *technology*, *artefacts*, *big windows*, and *natural cues)* that shape the overall holistic hotel design from customers' lived experience during moments of consumption.

4.3: The outcomes of an effective hotelscape

We have so far considered hotelscape as a holistic concept and as a series of designed elements, now we consider the outcomes of a designed hotelscape. This we view as arising from the holistic hotelscape as an experienced phenomenon. We differ from functionalist researchers as we do not seek to associate specific features of the servicescape to specific outcomes. Instead we seek to visualize phenomena experienced in moments of consumption.

4.3.1: Value creation

The impact of design on the competitive advantage of hotels utilizing design effectively seems profound within the cosmopolitan segment we studied.

> "We have chosen hotels for their designs so many times, such as a boutique hotel where everything was white, all the interiors […]. Design makes a big difference, in a hotel you want something new to see and experience, to try something luxurious and cool." Interviewee 14

> "Sometimes you go for a hotel just for its design … it makes it stand out."
> Interviewee 15

We therefore consider how design creates epiphenomenal value for customers. First we consider *creating value for customers*, including the impact of the hotel interior design on customer's emotions and behaviours. Second we consider *creating value for hotels*, including the use of hotel interior design as a *marketing segmentation tool* for *creating competitive advantage*.

Emotion is an important element in sense-making and a central response that artefacts generate (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Whilst a relationship between design and emotion has been posited (Norman, 2004), it has not been linked to industry specific aspirations. Our findings suggest that a pleasant hotelscape can *trigger positive emotions*, while unpleasant environments can influence customers' emotions negatively. Despite this, few researchers have explored customers' emotions as a management tool.

We asked participants to reflect on hotel interior design in relation to *relaxation*, *satisfaction*, and *entertainment* and what emotions were aroused as a result of it. Participants appreciated aesthetic design and when it met their expectations it led to satisfaction.

> "It's not normal to be sad in a well-designed hotel! Basically it changes your mood towards happiness or not." Interviewee 27

We found that the feeling of pleasure or joy was described differently by interviewees, who often expressed their joyful feelings as "in a good mood" or "feeling satisfied".

A further dimension emerged in hotel design as being a source of entertainment. This was manifested in a guests need to feel cosy and relaxed, regardless of their reasons for travelling.

> "Drinking coffee in a comfortable and nicely decorated place takes me somewhere else, I live the moment, enjoy, even the taste of coffee will be different. Usual food and drinks taste differently in beautiful places." Interviewee 11

Colours used in the hotel played a role in stress reduction which resonates with Mohsin and Lockyer, (2010) who highlighted the relationship between sensory attributes and the physical quality of a room in selecting a hotel.

4.4: Behavioural influences

Kotler (1973) was the first to suggest manipulating environmental cues to influence consumer behavior. Since then, servicescape writers have claimed the ability to influence customers' behaviours and their buying intentions (Joseph-Mathews et al., 2009; Orth, Heinrich & Malkewitz, 2012). Our study identified a range of critical behavioral influences that derive from customer value creation which feed into value creation for hoteliers.

The majority participants revealed that the more satisfied and happy they were as customers the more time they wanted to spend in the hotel, increasing food and drink purchased, thus providing a financial benefit for hoteliers. This, we found was directly linked to the use of art and design in lobbies, lounges and restaurants. Although the relationship between the time spent and volume of purchases is well established (Donovan & Rossiter, 1982), the role of pleasant hotel designs in making customers spend a longer time in the hotel has received limited investigation that we feel would benefit from further research.

Appealing servicescapes have been found to generate customer referral with positive *word of mouth* (Ladhari, 2009). Examples include recommending hotels visited, writing reviews on the hotel website, providing feedback to the hotel, or even following others' recommendations.

> "I once chose a hotel in Paris called […], I heard about its luxury and ancient history so it attracted me and I went there out of curiosity. I really enjoyed it because I've seen something different and knew the difference between the old classic and new decoration, added to my experience."
> Interviewee 11

The images used by a hotel to demonstrate aspects of its design were noted by the respondents as being instrumental in selecting an environment that suited their needs. They placed similar importance on the influence of personal photos of design features posted in social media reviews.

Loyalty was a consistent theme that respondents mentioned. One emergent mechanism to create this was through differentiated design and art in hotel rooms allowing

them to experience different settings without having to change hotels. It strengthened loyalty and reduced the feeling of risk in trying somewhere new.

> "Something unique is having different styles in different rooms, so when you repeat the hotel you would have the same standard but feel the change at the same time, as you can choose another styled room within the same hotel every time you visit, instead of taking the risk and trying a new different hotel, and that will attract more people to try their other styles." Interviewee 37

We found that the impact of hotel art and design on *social interaction* through smiling, friendliness and greetings was mentioned by the majority of interviewees. It influenced how they communicated with travelling companions and hotel staff.

> "It affects how I treat everyone related to the hotel, I'll be happy with everyone, treat everyone in a good manner, the staff I mean. I'll smile. Wanting to go back again sometime, I will tell my friends about it. Not only staff, I will be happy with everyone, waking up and being a morning person when you usually are not, this happens when you wake up in a very beautiful place, this changes your personality and character." Interviewee 34

4.5: The "hotelscape" framework

The term "hotelscape" is used to denote a development of the servicescape concept that focusses on aspects of interior design in the hotel experience. Design emerged as a two-part concept with both an aesthetic and functional element. In Figure 1 a summary of these is presented. The model posits an association between the hotelscape as a holistic phenomenon and elements considered emergent i.e. factors not linked casually. The three main areas identified are the value creation process (from the perspective of hoteliers and customers) that comes from the presence of interior design, the symbolizing of meaning, and the shaping of experiences.

Figure 1: The "Hotelscape" framework
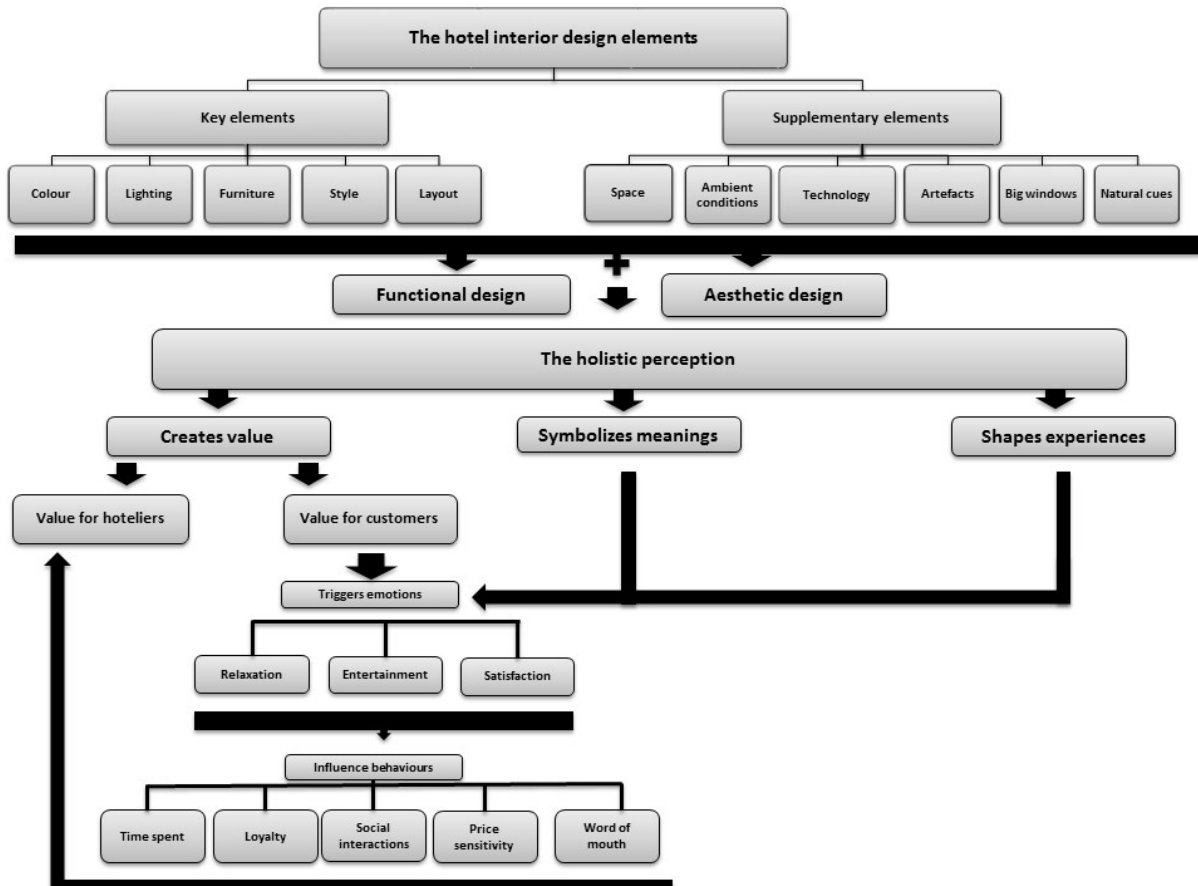
5.0: Conclusion

This study employed a phenomenological approach to better understand the role that aesthetics and design has in influencing the behaviors of cosmopolitan hotel consumers. This has enabled servicescape to be conceptualized differently based on insights gained by looking specifically at moments of consumption through the lens of aesthetics and design. The outcome of this is the creation of "hotelscape".

We have offered a conceptualization of the hotelscape as a holistic phenomenon whilst providing some insight into the elements of the designed environment raised by

respondents. The advantage of this approach is to provide some guidance for designers in creating memorable experiences to cosmopolitan customers. We have tried to associate the *holistic* phenomena of the hotelscape with a series of emergent themes, linked to the totality of the lived hotel experience. We feel this approach offers some enhanced value to hoteliers to better appreciate the advantages of good design.

The study's development of hotelscape empirically adds to the body of work that has emerged since Bitner (1992) linked physical environment to emotional responses. We provide insight into aesthetics and design as *key elements* and *supplementary elements* which influence consumers to seek aesthetically pleasing experiences in their moments of consumption. We conclude that hotelscape aligns with Bitner's servicescape framework in regard to some concepts but take it further to make it more applicable to the hotel industry and valuable for both theorists and managers.

The findings go some way in supporting the contention that design and aesthetics can have real business benefits for attracting and retaining customers and encouraging them to spend their time in the hotel, using facilities such as bars and restaurants, increasing income.

5.1: Management Implications

The implications of this research are pertinent to the managers of luxury hotels where hedonistic enjoyment takes place. In the tradition of service blueprinting, the disaggregation of the hotelscape elements allows for functional and aesthetic elements to be considered at a granular level. We therefore respond to Wang et al., (2013:38) call that:

> "…marketing researchers are in need of critical theoretical foundations on the nature of aesthetics, as well as a framework for understanding the impact of aesthetic stimuli on consumers' psychological and behavioural consequences in the marketplace".

However, given that we derived the findings in a phenomenological tradition, the framework also encourages managers to consider functional and aesthetic design as 'holistic' and experienced in moments of consumption, rather than as cause and effect relationships between specific elements of the hotelscape. Value in one element may be linked to value from the association with other elements. Returning to Esslinger (2009) who viewed that designers and business leaders should join forces to build strategies that will offer a more aesthetically pleasing and more profitable future. We have highlighted several managerially important features related to the experiences of consumers of the hotelscape, both with competitive advantage and potential for greater value-capture. Deployment of the framework as a management tool can support marketing objectives such as segmentation and positioning, customer attraction and retention, discretionary spending, and spreading word-of-mouth.

5.2: Areas for further research and limitations

We are mindful of the methodological limitations which exist in using a qualitative method to propose hotelscape. The study is based on the views of a one nation sample of consumers, albeit which manifest the attributes of customers defined by the transnational characterization of being 'cosmopolitan'. Such consumers are greatly shaped by their hedonistic, lived hotel experiences. Second, by investigating other consumer types (cosmopolitan but from different national cultures), distinct elements of the proposed hotelscape framework may be found to influence behavior differently. A cautionary note should be made in this because our study focused on a very specific consumer type. Building a hotelscape for one such group may run the risk of alienating other equally attractive customers and also become obsolete as fashion and tastes change. Examination of other hedonistic consumer groups, beyond the globally reaching cosmopolitans should be

undertaken to help increase the generalizability of our findings. By looking at the role of aesthetics and design in these environments, plus through the eyes of other national customer types, we believe the transferability and authenticity of out conceptualization of hotelscape could be demonstrated. It is also apparent that aesthetics and design as cues that shape consumer behavior are relevant to other luxury business environments such as shopping malls, restaurants, cinemas and theatres. Research that looks at servicescape in these contexts through the lens of aesthetics and design would help bridge the gap that currently exists between these areas and marketing. Whilst care was taken in data analysis, reliance on NVIVO has the potential for more subtle themes that may be identified through manual coding to be missed. Finally, the use of quantitative techniques would enable the relationships suggested in this study to be modelled.

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