

THE INFLUENCE OF INTERIOR DESIGN ON CUSTOMER REPEAT PATRONAGE IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY IN OWERRI, IMO STATE NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of interior design on customer repeat patronage in the hotel industry in Owerri, Imo State of Nigeria. The specific objectives were as follows: to identify factors that militate against interior design in hotel establishment; and identify the strategies for improving interior design in the hotel industry. To achieve these objectives a survey research design was adopted. The researchers adopted primary data source in getting the required data through the use of structured questionnaire. The population of the study was 143. The sample size of the study was 107 after adopting Taro Yamane's formula. Data were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The findings show that poor management, lack of guest patronage, low revenue, lack of knowledge on the benefit of interior design and lack of competition are the major factors that militate against interior hotel design. Purchase of quality furniture and fittings, periodic maintenance of facility, informing guests on how to use the installed furniture and fittings, involvement of a professional interior decorator in the planning process and carrying out preventive maintenance are the major strategies identified for improving interior design in hotel establishment. Interior design makes guests to recommend the hotel to other guests thereby increasing customer patronage and boosting the hotel revenue. Our research concludes that hotel management should adopt the use of proper interior design to make customers comfortable and willing to spend more and increase patronage as well as reduce the cost of maintenance of wear and tear in the hotels.

Keywords: Hotel, Customers, hospitality industry, patronage, Interior design

Introduction

Hotel design plays a very significant role in the hospitality industry. Hotel interior design can contribute to a guest's experience because it creates the first impression on anybody who walks through hotel doors. This explains why it is important that the interior environment must be created to be lively and beautiful for guests to have rewarding experience and feel comfortable to make them return for a repeat patronage. A well-designed lobby is an indication of a well-designed room (Alfalhri, 2015). Equally, an outdated lobby with old furnishings can turn off guests who are seeking for clean and modern

amenities. With modern technology, many potential guests who search for hotels online are often influenced by the design before considering the price (Christy, 2012). In today's society, people consider pictures when looking at hotels online to see if it is new, clean and has space before booking. When someone sees that a family member or friend stays in a hotel, the person will want to go to the same hotel (Obinwanne & Alozie, 2019). Interior spaces are defined by the architectural structure and enclosures which include floors, ceilings, walls, windows, doorways, and stairways (Christy, 2012). Interior design produces functional and pleasing surroundings with the right mood, ambience, atmosphere and makes an establishment aesthetically pleasing and at the same time unique, since it reflects the establishment personality and taste.

According to Grimley and Love (2007), creating a unique face of the interior together with its style, color, lighting, layout and furnishings should comprise the main task for the designer during hotel construction. In the narrow sense of the term, "design" means the process of artistic construction and is directly related to the interior. Interior is an architectural and artistic design of the internal areas of the building, which provides an aesthetic perception and favorable conditions for human life (Balekjian & Lara, 2011). Hotel design makes the interior spaces aesthetically pleasing and psychologically satisfying for activities. Designing makes objects to appear beautiful, eye-catching and attractive. Design may take place in hotels, restaurants, banks and other organizations. Interior design influences the profitability and success of hotel establishments in the hospitality Industry, (Christy, 2012). Hotel interior design and demand are highly correlated.

Literature Review

The design of a hotel can provide an identity to the business and project the operation's appeal and vision to potential visitors. These elements, both the tangibles such as architecture, décor and furnishings and intangibles such as ambience, are contributors to guests' overall experience at a destination, (Alfahri, 2015). These can be decisive factors in determining guests' satisfaction or dissatisfaction during their stay. Resulting potential business implications can be in the form of repeat visits or word-of-mouth advertisement, (Amaechi, 2018).

Despite a significant volume of studies focusing on hospitality operations' design, various aspects of this dimension have received limited attention in contemporary research. For instance, households, companies, restaurants, banks, and so on, notes the lack of literature dealing with the relationship between design, construction and the efficient operation of hotel assets, (Walter, & Edvardsson, 2012).

Orth, Heinrich and Malkewitz (2012) assert that there is a lack of empirical research that addresses ambience and its role in hospitality settings, while Ryu & Han, (2011) identifies the lack of empirical research or theoretically based frameworks addressing the role of physical surroundings

in consumption settings. According to Balekjian & Lara (2011), studies on the physical elements of retail and consumer product marketing, eclipse those conducted in the area of services marketing, reflecting hoteliers' perception that they have little control over the interior aesthetics of their properties.

Furthermore, most operating hotels in Owerri, Imo State, have not given adequate attention to the interior design of hotels to sustain the revenue generation to keep them going as is obtainable in developed countries such as USA, Dubai, UK, Spain, France and South Africa. These countries place high priority on interior design when constructing hotels because they believe more customers will be attracted to the hotels through their designs, which helps in guest satisfaction and return patronage. The hotels in these countries do not only pay attention to design during hotel construction but go beyond that by refurbishing and redesigning from time to time. On the contrary, some hotels in Imo state have gone extinct; others are confronted with loss of revenue, poor management, guest rejection of rooms, lack of competition, lower customer patronage and low returns on investment because of poor interior design and redesign that meet the taste of time. Some guests that used a particular hotel hardly return to the same hotel for repeat patronage due to bad interior design. It is on this premise that this study, therefore, endeavors to examine the influence of interior design in in hotel industry on customers repeat patronage. Specifically, the study will; identify factors that militate against interior design in hotel establishment; and identify the strategies for improving interior design in the hotel industry.

Obinwanne and Alozie (2019) carried out research on interior design of hotel rooms as a factor affecting customer satisfaction. The study was focused on hotels operating in Abakiliki, the State capital of Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The subjects of the study were both customers and managers from the selected hotels. A sample size of 150 respondents was used for the study. A survey research method was adopted where questionnaire and interview were employed as instruments for data collection. The question was structured in 5 points Likert rating scale. The questionnaire was validated by five experts who modified the questions to achieve the objectives of the study. The questionnaire was tested for reliability through one test administration and the internal consistency was measured using Cronbach Alpha which showed a numeric value of alpha of 0.85. Simple descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution tables were used to analyze the data. The results revealed that proper interior design of hotel rooms reduces wear and tear maintenance cost, makes the guest feel more satisfied and willing to spend more and increases the level of patronage thereby leading to income generation and increasing return on investment (ROI) for the hotel owners. Therefore, management should adopt the use of proper interior design to make guests more comfortable and reduce the cost of maintenance

It is against this background that the current research seeks to understand the effect of interior design in hotels for customers repeat patronage. It becomes important to maintain a high standard interior design

in hotels to make hotels a destination of preference that will satisfy the guests and provide them with unique comfort and experience, as well as providing the right financial returns to the owners. This is because more hotel users are becoming more educated, selective, responsible and sensitive to their immediate environment.

Methodology

The study focused on influence of interior design in hotel industry on customer repeat patronage. The study was conducted in Owerri, Imo State, using some selected hotels to generate data. This study adopted a descriptive survey. The population for the study comprises managers and customers of City Global hotel, Concord hotel, Empire International hotel, Toprate Luxury, Forever Hotel and Suite in Owerri, Imo State. A total number of five managers who were chosen from five hotels were used for this study. The statistical formula derived by Yamane was employed. The instrument to gather data from the respondents were well-structured questionnaire. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage and mean on a four-point scale.

Result and Discussion

Question1: What are the factors that militate against interior design in the hospitality industry?

Table 1: Mean Responses of the Respondents on the Factors that Militate Against Interior Design in Hotel Industry

S/ N	Factors militating against interior design	SA	A	D	SD	Total NO	Total score	M
1	Poor management	44(51%)	29(34%)	13(15%)	0	86	289	3.36
2	Lack of guest patronage	40(46.5%)	40(46.5%)	6(7%)	0	86	292	3.40
3	Low revenue	47(54.5%)	30(35%)	9(10.5%)	0	86	296	3.44
4	Lack of knowledge on the benefit of interior design	50(58%)	20(23%)	10(12%)	6(7%)	86	286	3.33
5	Lack of competition	45(52%)	35(41%)	6(7%)	0	86	297	3.45

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, U= undecided, D=disagreed, SD=strongly disagreed

The result presented on table 1 shows the mean response of the respondents on the factors that militate against interior design in the hospitality industry. The result indicates that poor management, lack of guest

patronage, low revenue, lack of knowledge on the benefit of interior design and lack of competition are the major factors that militate against interior design in the hotel industry within the study area. The items have mean values of 3.36, 3.40, 3.44, 3.33 and 3.45, respectively, which were above the criterion mean of 2.50.

Question 2: What are the Strategies for Improving Interior Design in the Hospitality Industry?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on the Strategies for Improving Interior Design in Hospitality Industry

S/N	Strategies for improving interior design	SA	A	D	SD	Total no	Total score	Mean
1	Purchase of quality furniture and fittings	55(64%)	25(29%)	6(7%)	0	86	307	3.57
2	Periodic maintenance of facility	50(58%)	26(30%)	10(12%)	0	86	298	3.47
3	Informing guests on how to use the installed furniture and fittings	45(52%)	35(41%)	6(7%)	0	86	297	3.45
4	Involvement of a professional interior decorator in planning process	60(70%)	21(24%)	5(6%)	0	86	313	3.64
5	Carrying out preventive maintenance	44(51%)	29(34%)	13(15%)	0	86	289	3.36

Note: SA=strongly agreed, A= agreed, D=disagreed, SD= strongly disagreed

The result presented on table 2 shows the mean response of the strategies for improving interior design in the hospitality industry within the study area. The result indicates that purchase of quality furniture and fittings, periodic maintenance of facility, informing guests on how to use the installed furniture and fittings, involvement of a professional interior decorator in planning process and carrying out preventive maintenance are the major

strategies for improving interior design in the hospitality industry. The items have mean values of 3.57, 3.47, 3.45, 3.65 and 3.36, respectively, which were more than the acceptable levels of 2.50.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in table 1 shows that poor management, lack of guest patronage, low revenue, lack of knowledge on the benefit of interior design and lack of competition are the major factors that militate against interior design in the hospitality industry. The finding is consistent with the findings of Balekjia et al. (2011), which revealed similar items as factors that militate against interior design in the hospitality industry in Nigeria. The finding is also in conformity with the findings of Grimley et al. (1997), which also revealed similar items as the factors affecting proper interior design in hotels. The findings in table 2 shows that purchase of quality furniture and fittings, periodic maintenance of facility, informing guests on how to use the installed furniture and fittings, involvement of a professional interior decorator in planning process and carrying out preventive maintenance are the major strategies for improving interior design in the hospitality industry.

The finding is supported by the works of Obinwanne et al. (2019), which revealed similar items as strategies for improving interior design in the hospitality industry and they opined that, It is essential for the designer to know the framework, the conditions, and any standardized branded design element before the planning process to be able to meet customer's expectation to get them satisfied. Further on this, Alfalhari (2015), maintain that a well-designed lobby is an indication of a well-designed room and an outdated lobby with old furnishings can turn off guests who are seeking for clean and modern amenities.

A similar view was canvassed by Christy (2015) that designing makes hotels rooms to appear beautiful, eye-catching and attractive. This will help to generate more income, increase the level of patronage, reduce wear and tear and as well increase customer satisfaction.

Conclusion

The role of interior design in hotels cannot be underestimated as cool colours and good furniture attract guests to the hospitality industry and helps to maximise profit. This makes it necessary for the hotel industry to pay strict attention to interior design. Design in hospitality and tourism facilities is regarded as a core aspect that can contribute towards adding value to both operations and guests. Hotel interior design can help make or mar guests' experience. Hotel interior design creates the first impression on anybody who walks through hotel doors. The interior environment must be created to be lively and beautiful to make guests have experiences that are rewarding, pleasant and comfortable to make them return for a repeat patronage. A well-designed lobby is an indication of well-designed rooms. Equally, an outdated

lobby with old furnishings can turn off guests seeking clean and modern amenities.

The findings reveal that poor management, lack of guest patronage, low revenue, lack of knowledge on the benefit of interior design and lack of competition are the major factors that militate against interior design in the hotel industry.

Therefore, to this end, it is recommended that the management of hotel establishments should ensure they purchase quality furniture and fittings to satisfy and attract more customers for repeat patronage. There should be periodic maintenance of facility to avoid wear and tear in the hospitality industry. Managers of hospitality industry should involve the professional interior decorator in the planning process and carry out preventive maintenance as one of the major strategies for improving interior design in the hotel industry.

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