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**Influence of Hotel Design on Guest Experience and  
Satisfaction in Kenya**

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## Influence of Hotel Design on Guest Experience and Satisfaction in Kenya

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of the study was to assess the influence of hotel design on guest experience and satisfaction in Kenya.

**Methodology:** This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

**Findings:** The study indicated that aesthetic appeal, functionality, and comfort of hotel interiors significantly contribute to guest satisfaction. Elements such as room layout, furniture design, lighting, and color schemes can create a welcoming and relaxing atmosphere, enhancing the perceived quality of the stay. Additionally, common areas like lobbies, restaurants, and recreational facilities also impact guests' first impressions and ongoing experiences. The design must cater to diverse guest needs, offering both communal and private spaces that facilitate social interactions and personal relaxation. Moreover,

incorporating local culture and unique design elements can provide a memorable and authentic experience, further boosting guest satisfaction. Sustainable and eco-friendly design practices are increasingly valued by guests, reflecting their growing environmental consciousness. Overall, a well-thought-out hotel design can significantly enhance guest experience, leading to higher satisfaction, repeat visits, and positive reviews, which are vital for the hotel's success in a competitive market.

**Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy:** Environmental psychology theory, services cape theory and expectancy-disconfirmation theory may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the influence of hotel design on guest experience and satisfaction in Kenya. Hotels should prioritize investing in visually appealing and unique design elements, especially in common areas like lobbies. Policymakers should encourage and incentivize sustainable design practices in the hospitality industry.

**Keywords:** *Hotel Design, Guest Experience, Satisfaction*

## INTRODUCTION

The influence of hotel design on guest experience and satisfaction is a critical aspect of the hospitality industry that has gained considerable attention in recent years. In the UK, research by Fuchs and Weiermair (2018) demonstrated that hotels that actively sought guest feedback through satisfaction surveys experienced improved ratings on online platforms like TripAdvisor. Their study found that properties implementing systematic feedback loops were able to boost their customer satisfaction scores by an average of 20% over two years. This trend illustrates the importance of monitoring guest experience in real-time to foster improvements. Additionally, the study identified that 75% of surveyed guests were willing to pay more for enhanced services, highlighting a direct relationship between guest satisfaction and financial performance. These insights underscore the necessity for hospitality businesses to prioritize guest experience to achieve lasting success.

In the United States, a study by Wong and Kim (2021) focused on the influence of online reviews on guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry. The research found that 82% of consumers consider online reviews critical when selecting hotels, with establishments that actively respond to reviews reporting a 25% increase in customer satisfaction ratings. Additionally, satisfaction surveys revealed that guests prioritized personalized services, leading to a 15% increase in loyalty among those who received tailored experiences. This highlights the essential role of guest feedback in shaping service strategies and improving overall satisfaction. The study concluded that fostering a responsive and engaging relationship with guests is key to enhancing service quality and customer retention.

In Japan, a study by Tanaka and Fujimoto (2022) examined guest satisfaction within traditional ryokan (inns) and modern hotels. Findings indicated that 90% of guests reported high satisfaction levels when cultural elements were integrated into their experiences, compared to 65% for those in standard accommodations. Satisfaction surveys highlighted the importance of cleanliness, staff professionalism, and unique cultural offerings in driving positive guest feedback. Hotels that embraced local culture and engaged with guests received significantly better online reviews, with a 30% higher rating on travel platforms. This underscores the importance of cultural authenticity in enhancing guest experiences and satisfaction levels in the Japanese hospitality sector.

In developing economies, guest experience and satisfaction are increasingly recognized as pivotal to enhancing hospitality outcomes. A study in India by Singh and Vohra (2019) focused on customer feedback from budget hotels, revealing that cleanliness and staff behavior were the top determinants of guest satisfaction. The researchers noted that hotels that implemented regular training for staff and responded to guest feedback achieved a 30% increase in positive reviews over 18 months. Similarly, in Brazil, research by Oliveira and Santos (2022) found that 82% of guests reported online reviews as critical to their booking decisions, indicating a growing reliance on guest satisfaction metrics. The study highlighted those businesses prioritizing guest experience reported higher occupancy rates, suggesting that attention to customer feedback is essential for success.

In Nigeria, research by Adebayo and Oyebanji (2023) examined the correlation between guest satisfaction and operational practices in hotels. The study revealed that hotels actively soliciting guest feedback and implementing suggested improvements reported a significant increase in customer satisfaction scores, averaging a 30% rise within a year. Additionally, the study noted that 73% of guests were likely to recommend a hotel based on positive experiences shared through online platforms. These findings emphasize the critical need for hospitality businesses

in Sub-Saharan Africa to prioritize guest experience and satisfaction as essential elements for long-term success in a competitive environment.

In South Africa, Nkosi and Smith (2022) investigated the role of online reviews in shaping guest perceptions. Their findings indicated that 78% of travelers consulted online reviews before booking accommodations, significantly influencing their choices. Establishments that actively engaged with customer feedback saw notable increases in guest loyalty and repeat business, with a 30% rise in returning customers reported. The emphasis on creating memorable guest experiences is critical, as the study suggested that positive reviews directly contribute to improved occupancy rates. This highlights the ongoing need for hotels and restaurants in Sub-Saharan Africa to prioritize guest experience strategies to ensure sustainable growth in a competitive market. Hotel design plays a pivotal role in shaping guest experience and satisfaction, encompassing aesthetic appeal, functionality, and innovation. Aesthetic appeal, defined by visual elements such as decor, color schemes, and architectural styles, significantly influences first impressions and emotional responses from guests. For instance, research by Kim and Choi (2020) indicates that hotels with visually pleasing designs receive higher guest feedback scores, contributing to an overall enhanced experience. Functionality addresses how effectively the design meets the operational needs of both guests and staff, impacting service efficiency and guest comfort. A well-designed space that prioritizes functionality often results in positive online reviews, as satisfied guests appreciate intuitive layouts and accessible amenities.

In Kenya, a study by Ochieng and Mutua (2021) assessed guest satisfaction across various hospitality sectors and found that 78% of respondents indicated that their experiences were influenced by service quality and staff interactions. The findings emphasized that establishments focusing on creating personalized experiences enjoyed better online ratings, which translated into increased bookings. Moreover, the research indicated a significant positive trend in customer satisfaction scores over five years, demonstrating the impact of investing in guest experience initiatives. As the hospitality industry continues to grow in these regions, understanding and leveraging guest feedback will be crucial for enhancing overall service quality and fostering customer loyalty.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, guest experience and satisfaction are emerging as vital components for the hospitality sector's growth. A study conducted in South Africa by Nkosi and Tichaawa (2020) found that 85% of guests rated service quality as the most significant factor influencing their overall satisfaction. The researchers discovered that establishments that engaged in regular satisfaction surveys saw a 25% increase in repeat patronage. Furthermore, the study indicated that online reviews significantly affected booking decisions, with 70% of guests admitting they chose accommodations based on positive feedback from previous customers. This trend highlights the growing importance of guest experience in a rapidly developing market.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, enhancing guest experience is crucial for attracting and retaining customers in the hospitality sector. A study by Mbugua and Muriuki (2020) examined hotels in Kenya, revealing that 75% of guests rated personalized service as essential to their satisfaction. The research found a strong correlation between guest feedback and service improvements, leading to a 40% increase in positive online reviews over a two-year period. Similarly, in Nigeria, Adebayo and Adepoju (2021) highlighted that hotel focusing on cleanliness and staff responsiveness achieved higher guest satisfaction scores, with a reported 85% of customers indicating they would recommend such establishments. This trend

underscores the importance of continuous improvement based on guest feedback in driving service quality and operational success.

Innovation in design, characterized by the integration of modern technologies and sustainable practices, further elevates guest satisfaction levels. Hotels that incorporate innovative features, such as smart room technology or eco-friendly materials, are increasingly favored by tech-savvy and environmentally conscious travelers (Baker & Thompson, 2021). For example, a study revealed that hotels implementing sustainable design elements experienced a 20% increase in positive guest reviews. By aligning design strategies with guest expectations and values, hotels can foster a loyal customer base and enhance their reputation. Ultimately, a thoughtful approach to hotel design that combines aesthetic appeal, functionality, and innovation can significantly contribute to guest satisfaction, shaping their overall experience positively.

### **Problem Statement**

The influence of hotel design on guest experience and satisfaction remains a critical area of exploration, as many hotels struggle to align their architectural and aesthetic choices with the evolving expectations of modern travelers. Despite the growing recognition of design as a fundamental component of guest experience, there is limited empirical evidence detailing how specific design elements—such as aesthetic appeal, functionality, and innovative features—directly impact customer satisfaction ratings and online reviews (Kim & Choi, 2020). Moreover, with the increasing competition in the hospitality industry, understanding the nuances of design influence can provide hotels with a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining guests. Existing studies often focus on broader service quality metrics without adequately addressing how design specifics contribute to overall guest perceptions (Baker & Thompson, 2021). This research aims to bridge this gap by investigating the relationship between hotel design and guest experience, ultimately providing actionable insights for hotel operators to enhance customer satisfaction through strategic design choices.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Environmental Psychology Theory**

Environmental psychology theory, originated by Harold M. Proshansky, focuses on the interplay between individuals and their surroundings. The theory posits that the physical environment significantly impacts human behavior, emotions, and overall well-being (Proshansky, 1976). In the context of hotel design, this theory is relevant as it suggests that a hotel's aesthetic and functional elements can profoundly influence guests' experiences and satisfaction levels. For instance, a well-designed lobby with comfortable seating and pleasing aesthetics can enhance guests' first impressions and set a positive tone for their stay. Understanding these environmental influences can help hotel designers create spaces that maximize guest satisfaction and comfort (Proshansky, 1976).

#### **Servicescape Theory**

Servicescape theory, developed by Mary Jo Bitner in 1992, examines how the physical environment of a service setting affects customers' perceptions, emotions, and behaviors. The theory highlights elements such as layout, decor, and ambient conditions as critical factors shaping customer experiences (Bitner, 1992). Applied to hotel design, servicescape elements like room layout, lighting, and innovative design features can significantly impact guest satisfaction. A thoughtfully designed servicescape can lead to positive guest feedback and higher satisfaction scores, as it enhances comfort and usability. This theory underscores the

importance of strategic design in creating favorable guest experiences and competitive advantages for hotels (Bitner, 1992).

### **Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory**

Expectancy-disconfirmation theory, proposed by Richard L. Oliver in 1980, explains customer satisfaction as a result of the comparison between their expectations and the actual performance of a product or service. When applied to hotel design, this theory suggests that guests arrive with preconceived notions about what a hotel's design should offer, influenced by marketing and prior experiences (Oliver, 1980). If the hotel design meets or exceeds these expectations, guest satisfaction is likely to be high. Conversely, if the design falls short, it can lead to dissatisfaction. This theory is crucial for understanding how well-aligned hotel design is with guest expectations and for identifying areas of improvement to enhance overall guest satisfaction (Oliver, 1980).

### **Empirical Review**

Chen and Kim (2020) examined the impact of aesthetic appeal in hotel lobbies on guest satisfaction in luxury hotels in South Korea. Using a mixed-methods approach, they surveyed 300 guests and conducted in-depth interviews with hotel managers. The study found that guests rated their overall experience higher when the lobby design was visually appealing and unique. They recommended that hotels invest in contemporary and culturally relevant design elements to enhance guest satisfaction. The researchers also noted that the ambiance created by the lobby significantly influenced first impressions and set the tone for the stay. Further, they suggested regular updates to lobby design to keep up with evolving guest preferences. This study underscores the importance of aesthetic elements in shaping guest perceptions and satisfaction levels. Moreover, it highlights the need for hotel managers to prioritize design aesthetics as part of their service improvement strategies. Finally, the study emphasized the role of cultural elements in creating a unique and memorable guest experience.

Gonzalez and Torres (2019) explored the relationship between room functionality and guest satisfaction in budget hotels in Spain. They used a quantitative method, collecting data from 500 guest satisfaction surveys. Their findings indicated that functional room designs, particularly those optimizing space and convenience, significantly improved guest satisfaction. The study suggested that budget hotels should focus on practical design solutions that enhance the guest experience without necessarily increasing costs. Additionally, they recommended incorporating multifunctional furniture to maximize space efficiency. This research highlighted the critical role of room functionality in guest satisfaction, particularly in budget accommodations. It also pointed out that functional design contributes to a more comfortable and convenient stay for guests. The study concluded that practical and efficient room designs are essential for meeting the needs of budget-conscious travelers.

Li and Xu (2021) investigated the effect of innovative hotel design on guest satisfaction in Chinese boutique hotels. They adopted a qualitative approach, conducting focus group discussions with guests and in-depth interviews with hotel designers. The findings revealed that innovative design elements, such as unique room layouts and technologically advanced amenities, significantly enhanced guest satisfaction. The researchers recommended that boutique hotels continuously innovate to differentiate themselves from competitors. They also suggested that incorporating local cultural elements could provide a more authentic experience for guests. This study emphasized the importance of innovation in hotel design to attract and retain guests. Furthermore, it highlighted the role of technology in creating a modern and comfortable environment. The study concluded that continuous innovation in design is crucial for maintaining high levels of guest satisfaction in the competitive boutique hotel market.

Smith and Jones (2018) assessed the impact of sustainable design on guest satisfaction in eco-friendly hotels in the United States. Using a mixed-methods approach, they surveyed 400 guests and analyzed online reviews. The results showed that sustainable design practices, such as energy-efficient lighting and water-saving fixtures, positively influenced guest satisfaction. They recommended that hotels adopt more sustainable practices to appeal to environmentally conscious travelers. Additionally, they suggested that hotels promote their sustainability efforts to enhance their brand image. This research highlighted the growing importance of sustainability in the hospitality industry. It also pointed out that guests appreciate and value eco-friendly practices. The study concluded that sustainable design not only benefits the environment but also enhances guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Okumus and Avci (2019) explored the influence of cultural design elements on guest satisfaction in Turkish heritage hotels. They employed a qualitative method, conducting interviews with 200 guests and hotel managers. The findings indicated that cultural design elements, such as traditional architecture and decor, significantly enhanced the guest experience. The researchers recommended that heritage hotels preserve and highlight their cultural features to attract culturally interested tourists. They also suggested that hotels offer cultural activities and experiences to complement the design elements. This study emphasized the importance of cultural authenticity in hotel design. It also highlighted the role of cultural elements in creating a unique and memorable guest experience. The study concluded that incorporating cultural design elements can enhance guest satisfaction and differentiate heritage hotels from other types of accommodations.

Baker and Kim (2020) examined the impact of lobby design on guest satisfaction in luxury hotels in the United States. They used a quantitative method, surveying 600 guests and analyzing customer feedback. The results showed that guests rated their overall experience higher when the lobby design was visually appealing and functional. They recommended that luxury hotels invest in high-quality materials and unique design elements for their lobbies. Additionally, they suggested that hotels regularly update their lobby designs to keep up with changing trends. This research highlighted the importance of lobby design in shaping guest perceptions and satisfaction levels. It also pointed out that the lobby serves as the first point of contact and sets the tone for the entire stay. The study concluded that investing in lobby design can significantly enhance guest satisfaction and loyalty.

Martin and Garcia (2022) investigated the effect of room design on guest satisfaction in European boutique hotels. They adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining guest surveys with in-depth interviews with hotel managers. The findings revealed that unique and personalized room designs significantly enhanced guest satisfaction. The researchers recommended that boutique hotels focus on creating distinctive and memorable room designs. They also suggested that hotels incorporate local cultural elements to provide an authentic experience for guests. This study emphasized the importance of personalization in room design to attract and retain guests. Furthermore, it highlighted the role of cultural elements in creating a unique and memorable guest experience. The study concluded that personalized and culturally relevant room designs are essential for maintaining high levels of guest satisfaction in the competitive boutique hotel market.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked

into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

## RESULTS

**Conceptual Gaps:** While existing studies have explored various dimensions of hotel design such as aesthetic appeal, functionality, innovation, and sustainability, there is a need for a more integrated approach that considers these dimensions holistically. Most studies tend to focus on a single aspect of design, such as the impact of aesthetic appeal on guest satisfaction (Chen & Kim, 2020) or the role of room functionality in budget hotels (Gonzalez & Torres, 2019). Future research should aim to examine how multiple design elements interact to influence guest experience and satisfaction comprehensively. Additionally, the role of emerging technologies in enhancing hotel design and guest experiences remains underexplored. There is potential to investigate how innovations like smart rooms and AI-driven personalization can be incorporated into hotel design to further enhance guest satisfaction.

**Contextual Gaps:** The contextual scope of current research is limited, with a significant focus on specific types of hotels such as luxury (Baker & Kim, 2020) and boutique hotels (Li & Xu, 2021). There is a lack of studies addressing the impact of hotel design on guest experience across a broader range of hotel types, including mid-range and economy hotels. Furthermore, while studies have considered the perspectives of guests and hotel managers, there is a dearth of research examining the views of other stakeholders such as hotel staff and designers. Understanding their perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how design elements are perceived and implemented. Additionally, existing studies have predominantly used guest satisfaction surveys and interviews. Incorporating diverse methodologies, such as experimental designs or longitudinal studies, could provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of hotel design on guest satisfaction.

**Geographical Gaps:** Geographically, the majority of studies have focused on developed economies like the United States (Smith & Jones, 2018) and European countries (Martin & Garcia, 2022). There is a significant gap in research on the influence of hotel design in developing and emerging economies. For instance, studies focusing on Asian countries like China (Li & Xu, 2021) and South Korea (Chen & Kim, 2020) have begun to emerge, but research in regions like Africa, South America, and the Middle East remains limited. Understanding how cultural, economic, and social contexts in these regions influence the relationship between hotel design and guest satisfaction could provide valuable insights. Future research should aim to fill this gap by conducting cross-cultural studies that compare the influence of hotel design on guest experience in diverse geographical contexts.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

### Conclusion

The influence of hotel design on guest experience and satisfaction is multifaceted, encompassing elements such as aesthetic appeal, functionality, innovation, and sustainability. Empirical studies indicate that visually appealing and unique designs significantly enhance guest satisfaction, as evidenced by higher ratings and positive feedback (Chen & Kim, 2020). Functional room designs that optimize space and convenience also play a crucial role in improving guest experiences, particularly in budget accommodations (Gonzalez & Torres, 2019). Innovation in design, such as technologically advanced amenities and unique room layouts, further elevates guest satisfaction by offering differentiated and memorable experiences (Li & Xu, 2021).



Sustainable design practices have been shown to positively impact guest satisfaction, aligning with the growing preference for eco-friendly accommodations (Smith & Jones, 2018). Additionally, incorporating cultural elements in hotel design not only enhances the aesthetic appeal but also provides guests with a unique and authentic experience, fostering higher satisfaction levels (Okumus & Avci, 2019). The importance of lobby design, as the first point of contact, underscores the need for hotels to invest in high-quality materials and unique design elements to set a positive tone for the entire stay (Baker & Kim, 2020).

Despite the existing body of research, there are notable gaps in the literature. Future studies should adopt a more integrated approach, consider diverse types of hotels, and explore the impact of hotel design in developing and emerging economies. Additionally, incorporating the perspectives of various stakeholders and utilizing diverse methodologies can provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of hotel design on guest satisfaction. Overall, thoughtful and strategic hotel design is essential for enhancing guest experiences, fostering loyalty, and maintaining a competitive edge in the hospitality industry.

### **Recommendations**

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

#### **Theory**

Future research should incorporate insights from architecture, psychology, and hospitality management to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the impact of hotel design on guest satisfaction. This interdisciplinary approach can provide a deeper understanding of how design elements influence guest perceptions and behaviors. Existing models of guest experience can be expanded to include specific design elements such as aesthetic appeal, functionality, and innovation. These models should account for the dynamic nature of guest preferences and the evolving trends in hotel design. Theories should consider cultural differences in design preferences and their impact on guest satisfaction. Research should investigate how cultural contexts influence the importance placed on various design elements, providing a more global understanding of hotel design.

#### **Practice**

Hotels should prioritize investing in visually appealing and unique design elements, especially in common areas like lobbies. This can enhance first impressions and overall guest satisfaction, as indicated by higher ratings and positive feedback (Chen & Kim, 2020). Practical and functional room designs that optimize space and convenience are crucial for improving guest experiences, particularly in budget accommodations (Gonzalez & Torres, 2019). Hotels should consider incorporating multifunctional furniture and efficient layouts to maximize comfort and usability. Boutique hotels and luxury accommodations should continuously innovate by incorporating unique room layouts and technologically advanced amenities to differentiate themselves from competitors and enhance guest satisfaction (Li & Xu, 2021).

#### **Policy**

Policymakers should encourage and incentivize sustainable design practices in the hospitality industry. Adopting eco-friendly design elements can not only benefit the environment but also appeal to environmentally conscious travelers, thereby enhancing guest satisfaction (Smith & Jones, 2018). Policies should support the preservation and promotion of cultural design elements in hotels, particularly in heritage and boutique hotels. This can attract culturally interested tourists and provide unique, authentic experiences that enhance guest satisfaction (Okumus & Avci, 2019). Policies should promote regular updates and renovations of hotel

designs to keep pace with evolving guest preferences and industry trends. This includes incentivizing the use of high-quality materials and unique design elements in hotel renovations (Baker & Kim, 2020).

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