

The Room with a View (about itself)

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Abstract

The paper presents a model that objects, activities and emotions are mapped against two major attributes of ‘inspirational’ and ‘familiarity’. The model is used for studying into a number of hotels of different star-ratings selected from around the region. The result of the analysis expressed through an OAE index, helps to identify: What gives a space its value? The conclusion is that creating the right emotion is not so much about how stylish or contemporary the room is; it is more about whether we can create the corner that can evoke the relevant emotion and feeling. The author has developed a new theory – The Ochoko Theory that substantiates the hypothesis of that when the guest is offered to configure the room by selecting object(s) of his/her own choice, the room will end up with a refined attitude which can be interpreted as a view of that particular room of itself.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Bedroom and Emotions

If “Home is where the heart is”, the bedroom corresponds to the atrium of the heart. Each person spends over 30% of the total time during his/her entire life in the bedroom, resting, getting ready for work, and building relationships etc. We can always find a lot of treasures that tell stories about the owner(s) in bedrooms where they hide their ‘valuables’. In fact, environments that people move around themselves contain rich information about their personalities, values, lifestyles, as well as emotions; which is especially true for bedroom that people spent so much time in. Interactionists theories (Buss, 1987; Synder & Ickes, 1985; Swann, 1987) suggest that individuals select and create their social environments to match and underpin their dispositions, preferences, attitudes, and self-views. Consistent with that, individuals are believed to select and create bedroom environments to reflect who they are so as to leverage emotional attainment.

Bedroom in history (and in dictionary) simply refers to a space where the bed is placed and which a person rests and serves two major purposes – sleep and intimacy. But bedrooms are getting ‘bigger’ – bigger in size, with bigger beds, and with people doing more in there. Bedrooms of houses in Europe and North American countries are becoming so, while bedrooms in most Asian countries and especially in Hong Kong, where a square foot costs a few thousands, are best examples of what ‘bigger’ means as they have come to accommodate so much more than just resting. Checking into bedrooms in Hong Kong, it is not difficult to find the most interesting things like water kettle, dumbbells, fax-machine, Chinese dried mushrooms, etc.; bedroom is truly becoming a place of ‘substance’.

Given the changing dynamics and the ‘augmented’ role, today’s bedroom is asked not only to serve a variety of functions, but can also uncover an intensity of ‘emotional attainment’. For example, as discovered through a focus group with the general audience, happy and sad are two fundamental emotions that are generally associated with bedrooms and are determined by a good or bad sleep. When the bedroom extends beyond its ‘obvious’ role and as they are usually refers to Bedroom Suites nowadays; other more complex emotions at the superordinate level - positive vs. negative emotions, and the subordinate level - specific/secondary emotions (Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson and O’Connor, 1987), such as excitement and frustration, emerged and intertwined as a result.

1.2 Hotel(room) and Emotions

“A human occupying a room for one night prints his character, his biography, his recent history, and sometimes his plans and hopes” (John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charlie, 1961*). Steinbeck’s observation draws on an intuition that much can be learned about individuals from the spaces they inhabit.

A hotel in general principle is an establishment that provides paid lodging, usually for one night or on short-term basis, which answers a basic need – to inhabit and rest. Such a simple lodging need has evolved over the decades, and now there is a wide variety of lodging services including Grand hotels, Resort hotels, Spa hotels, Casino hotels, etc ... and the late up-and-coming Boutique Hotels, which provide more than just a short-term resting space. Most of the hotel types house a number of guest services such as a restaurant, a swimming pool, conference rooms, exercise rooms; what the hotel offers have extended beyond just a room. But putting aside all the services, the (hotel)room can be considered the most important place in a hotel as guests spend most of the time inside it. Zooming in room of any hotel type, basic amenities include a bed, a cupboard, a small table and a bathroom, and additional features that can found include may be a telephone, an alarm clock, a TV, robes, slippers, and broadband Internet connectivity - which is key for Boutique hotels. Hoteliers see the additional features as value-adding to what they provide the guests with in addition to the basics, so as to create the best experiences and positive emotions for their guests. (Cornell Hotel & Restaurant Administration Quarterly, August 1 2002)

Talking about emotions, comfortable, feeling welcome, practical, relaxed are the general emotions guests will have for hotels (applying to most hotel segments). A respectable and accommodating staff is a critical element of a comfortable arrival. In terms of value, receiving worthy services for the price paid makes guests feel comfortable with their hotel experience. But when asked to describe further about ‘products’ in the hotel that best give them the most desirable emotions, guests often mention things in the room – in particular, the picture on the wall, a comfortable bed and pillow, convenient amenities, nice toiletries and the greeting note from the manager.

The attention given to the décor of rooms is increasing, and providing thematic rooms is a way to attract and keep guests who are more fashion forward, tech and design savvy, yet less brand loyal than any generation of travelers before them. The room is definitely where the emotions get most absorbed in relative to all other service areas in a hotel.

2 Context

2.1 Hotel as Home - Boutique Hotel Phenomenon

Gary Chang has commented in his book 'Hotel as Home' that "*the boundaries between the categories of home, service apartments, and hotels have become fuzzier these days*", and more hoteliers are working hard to create hotel more like homes; a lot of the latest boutique hotels are created to appeal to audiences who look for 'the perfect hotel away from home'.

In the earlier times, Boutique hotel describes an intimate, usually luxurious or quirky, low-rise building or bungalows to suit all budgets. As the business evolved, nowadays Boutique hotels means exclusive, exception style and personality, and are usually housed in historical buildings or sometimes in apartment blocks next to residential areas (designed-to-style). Boutique hotels are popping up in Asia's cosmopolitan cities since the end of the 20th century, with Hong Kong and Singapore leading the trend, and Shanghai and Thailand following suite in the past few years. The Boutique-Hotel Phenomenon has transformed the hotel industry, but the boutique movement is also being transformed by the notion that a hotel needs more than funky furniture and eccentric bars to attract the crowd. A lot of (more successful) boutiques adopt a new mentality: combining design with attention to the needs of individuals. It is well supported by the fact that a lot of the new boutique hotels start calling themselves "lifestyle hotels" – which aims to provide inspirational lifestyles. Some of these lifestyle hotels are also attached to names of famous designers like Andree Putman, Philippe Starck, and Rene Lezard. Consequently, people begin to relate lifestyle/boutique hotels as 'home away from home', and interior designers are all stressing that they are creating hotels like homes, or even better?!. Like for the Hotel LKF in Hong Kong, it promises guests that "*all rooms and suites are designed for the comforts of home*", and the Hotel Jia (家) in Hong Kong and the Hotel Home, Buenos Aires, actually name themselves using the word 'home'.

The issue is that whether they are really creating the right emotion to match that of everyone's idea of their own home or bedroom, or are they just indoctrinating something onto the guests by improvising the life of them at only a skin-deep level? Moreover, is what European guests valued just as valued by Asians (even when we try to say that we are all globalized)?

2.2 Consumption Emotions and Loyalty

As business are putting increasingly strong emphasis on creating pleasant and memorable experiences for customers (Schmitt 1999; Diller, Sherdoff & Rhea, 2006), and that recent reports have proved that emotion in design is a key driver to business successes, emotional design has

become a progressive trends in design research. Further research has demonstrated that consumption emotions –subjective feeling states that occur when considering buying, or using a product (Cohen and Areni, 1991) – affect constructs of interest to marketing academics and practitioners; studies have demonstrated that consumption emotions influence both satisfaction and repeat patronage – which is especially true for hotels. Emotions of hotel guests have not been given much attention until recently, hospitality researchers are all seeking alternative approaches in understanding and enhancing customer experience with a new frontier – loyalty. Consequently, emotions have presented to be a new focus.

Certainly the emotions visitors experience in a hotel vary by type and intensity. The Market Metrix Hotel Emotions Scale (MMHI) is a national indicator of customer emotions, satisfaction, and price sensitivity regarding hotel facilities and services available to customers in the United States. The study clearly indicates that emotions do influence customer loyalty towards hotels and that certain emotions play a strong role in the decision-making process regarding willingness to pay a given rate and willingness to return (Jonathan Barsky & Leonard Nash, 2002).

However limited research addresses the situational conditions, or antecedents, association with consumption emotions (Nyer, 1997; Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Mayer, 1999). Scant research had tried to study the relationship between emotions and specific objects within a particular context. Since emotion is acute (limited in duration) and intentional (directed at a certain object), the connection between a particular object to emotions of the one using it or seeing it, at a particular time, in a specific context, seems obligatory.

2.3 Emotions and Values

Empirically, consumption experiences are linked with both values (Beatty, Hale, Homer, and Misra, 1985) and emotions (Havlena & Holbrook 1986; Havlena, Holbrook, and Lehman, 1989). Research demonstrates that the consumption of a product can express or fulfill a certain value in a person's life, and the consumer's preference for certain value(s) or the person's own value scale are likely to be expressed through consumption; and that emotions help illuminate satisfaction responses to consumption. For example, a lady who got a good job offer is happy and decides to go shopping for a bag. If the lady buys a bag from a brand name shows that she values recognition and acceptance more; but if the lady chooses to buy a bag from a local brand name manufactured by recycled material, she sure values the Earth more. In both situations, the lady achieved satisfaction for meeting the desire to celebrate, and the positive emotion further elucidate the contentment. Accordingly, emotions and values and intertwined in consumption

(Holbrook 1986), consumption experiences that are valued because that are enjoyable are linked to positive emotions, and vice versa.

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 The Lampshade Model

Brunwik's (1956) Lens model, personal environments and observers' perception of the occupants is conceptualized. Drawing on Brunwik's model for studying occupant's relationship with objects in a room, the Lampshade Model (Fig.1) conceptualizes the relationship of emotions, activities and objects in the room with two major attributes 'inspirational' and 'familiarity', with theoretical basis on a synergy/collaboration of knowledge in consumption emotions, emotional design and emotions and values.

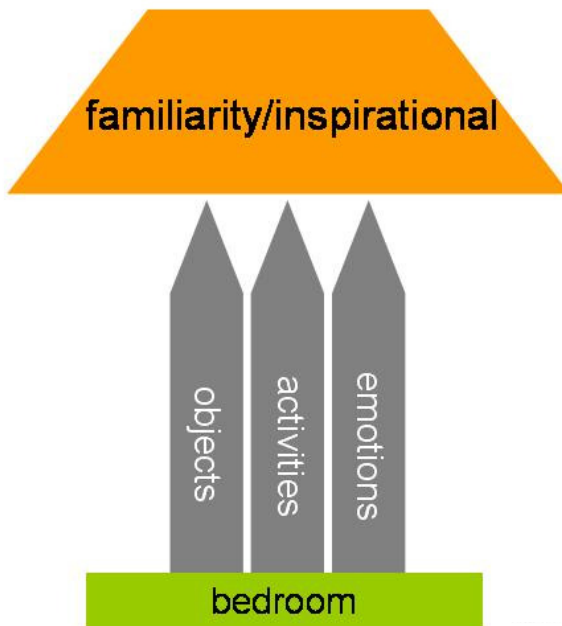


Fig 1 : Lampshade Model

We note that individual do decorate rooms (especially bedroom) and place objects in the room to how they would like to be regarded (Baumeister, 1982; Goffman, 1959; Swann, 1987), which are closely relate to activities-of-preference during particular period of time; and that the activities are able to drive or change emotional state of occupant. For example, the occupant of bedroom A who works as an Art Director has the room painted in orange, and has fragrant candles placed in a lot of corners in the room. The occupant's favorite corner in the room is the bedside table where the largest fragrant candle is. Whenever the occupant lights the candle, she will immediately feels

happy. Her latest favorite activity is doing Yoga. The candles represent her energy, and having an orange wall (which is pretty unusual for a bedroom) shows that she values to be seen different.

4. Researches and Sampling

4.1 Research Questions

Initial research on bedrooms is conducted by photo elicitation and interview from 60 participants around HK, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, Mainland China, and North America. Photo elicitation is a graphic-based approach that encourages participants to use images and descriptions to respond to a design and to review how they feel about it. Apart from the visual, other relevant data and facts are collected via email, phone interview, and spoken interview. The study addresses the following questions:

- a) what are the objects, activities, and emotions that exist in a bedroom?
- b) what is the one corner or object that people value most in a bedroom and what emotion it represents?
- c) what activities carried out in the bedroom drive emotions and create value(s)?

4.2 Research Methodologies

The initial research process spans over a period of 8 months that involved 38 participants from Asia Pacific and 22 participants from North America. Target aged from 25 to 55, are working people who travel for business and leisure at least twice a year.

The Photo Elicitation assessment is conducted by inviting the participants to use a camera to photograph their own bedroom. The participant can choose to show favourite corner(s) of his/her bedroom (and some also include hotel rooms), and/or close-up shots of particular objects that each has feelings towards inside. Then the participants is asked to send in the photos with a short description of each photo to explain why he/she considers a particular object/corner to be worth capturing. Apart from contextual data, the research also involves an interview which each participant is asked to discuss the activities they usually engage in the room. (Fig.2)

They are then asked to list (positive) emotions prompted through a list emotive descriptors derived from the Framework of Emotions (Carroll Izard & Robert Plutchik, 1977), which also include most highly-rated emotions listed in the MHFI, such as: comfortable, content, practical, secure, entertained, relaxed, elegant, pampered, excited, respected, and cool.

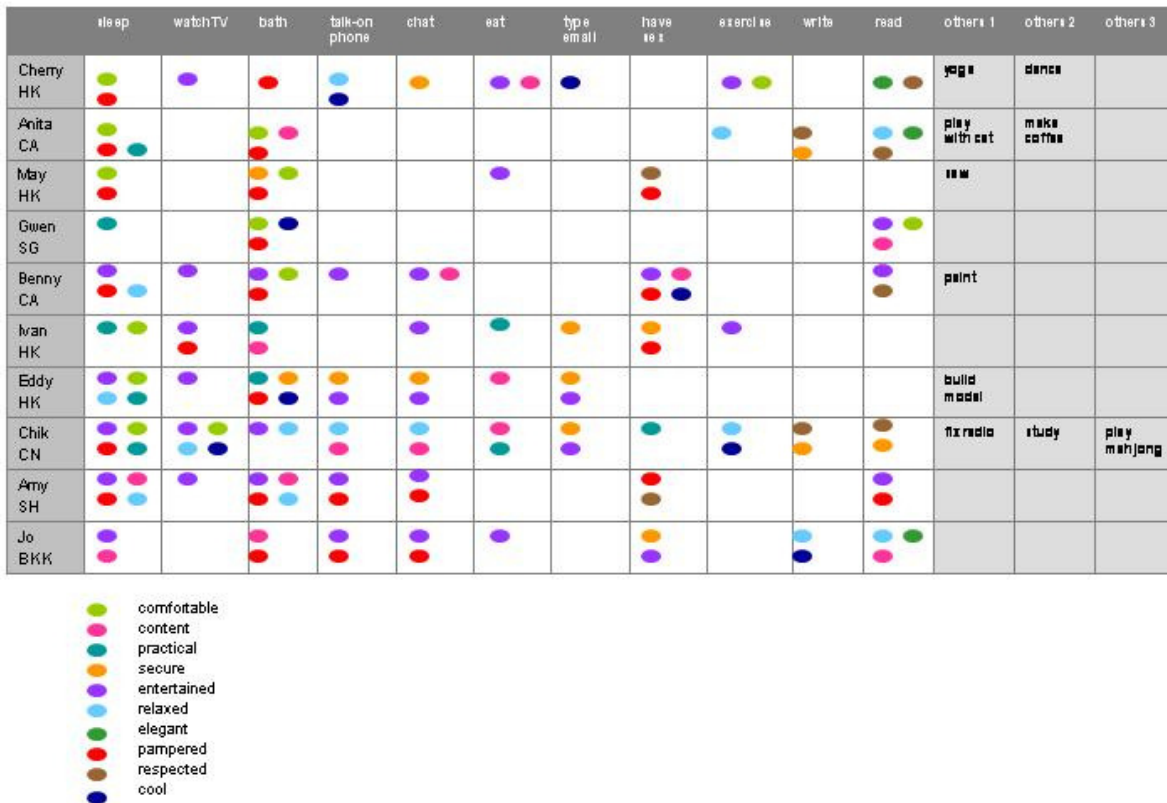


Fig 2 : Room Activities and Related Emotions

The photos together with the generated data from the interviews are then collaborated (Fig.3), and the findings are indicated in the following section. The beauty of using the two approaches is that the result is well-balanced with both contextual as well as conditional information which provides a more macroscopic perspective of the participant's response. The findings from the initial research helps to establish the context for the second part of the study on selected hotels.



Fig 3: Collaborated Data

5. Findings and Insights

5.1 The Bedrooms' Views

The initial study sheds some new lights to the understanding of what bedroom means to people nowadays. The most interesting finding is that over 60% of the participants indicates that the best corner of a bedroom is the bathroom, only 45% of people picks the bed as the most favourite corner. (Fig. 4)



Fig 4 : Favorite Corner Distribution Map

Bedroom Objects

The objects most frequently captured are pillow, bedside reading light, paperbacks or magazines, key-holders, wallet, shampoo, slippers, toothbrush, teacup/coffee mug, and i-pod. A few Asia participants show ash-tray and Nintendo DS, while a few North America participants show pot-pourri and condom package (that could be a gender thing). 50% participants regard toothbrush, pillow, and teacup/coffee mug as objects of highest familiarity; incense candle, mini hi-fi, mobile phone, and souvenir from trips as objects of highest inspiration.

Bedroom Activities

There is slight difference in the kind of activities conducted by different participants. Asia participants mention activities like talking on the phone, watching TV/DVD, bathing mostly related to familiarity; while consider activities such as practicing Yoga and enjoying body-massage as activities of inspiration. While North American and Australians talk about having sex and bathing as activities of familiarity and activities like exercising and watching DVD as

inspirational. In general, over 70% of the participants indicates that bathing is the activity most closely related to a bedroom, while only 45% indicates having sex.

Bedroom Emotions

Content, entertained, relaxed, sophisticated, and cool are the top five emotions listed by over 89% of participants. Values are found in things that give the participants sense of familiarity, which are the objects, activities, and emotions they put on the top of the list. Others further down the list are things that are seen as more inspirational to them.

5.2 The Critical View

Although the findings show differences in Asia Pacific people and North American in what give them a sense of familiarity and inspiration in their bedroom, the divergence is not major. It seems that object(s) that one can have his/her 'handprint' on or can claim ownership within the bedroom space best gives values, and that the extended role has given new insight to what defines a bedroom to most people nowadays.

The only criticism about the self-reflective research approach is that these statements might be sincere and intended to convey truthful messages about what the individual is really like, but they may also be strategic, even deceptive statements intended to portray the individual in certain light (Samuel Gosling and Sei Kin Ko, 2002).

6. Appraisal Model

6.1 The Double Mat Model

The Double Mat Model (Fig. 5) used in the second stage of the study is developed in reference to the List of Values (LOV) (Kahle, 1983) and the Measurement Approach (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), which is used to examine people's emotional response to environments (eg. architectural space). The analysis outcome of an OAE (Object-Activity-Emotion) Value Index is then used to match against the listed object, activity and emotion of bedrooms from the stage one study to help determine the closeness of that selected hotelroom to any particular type bedroom.

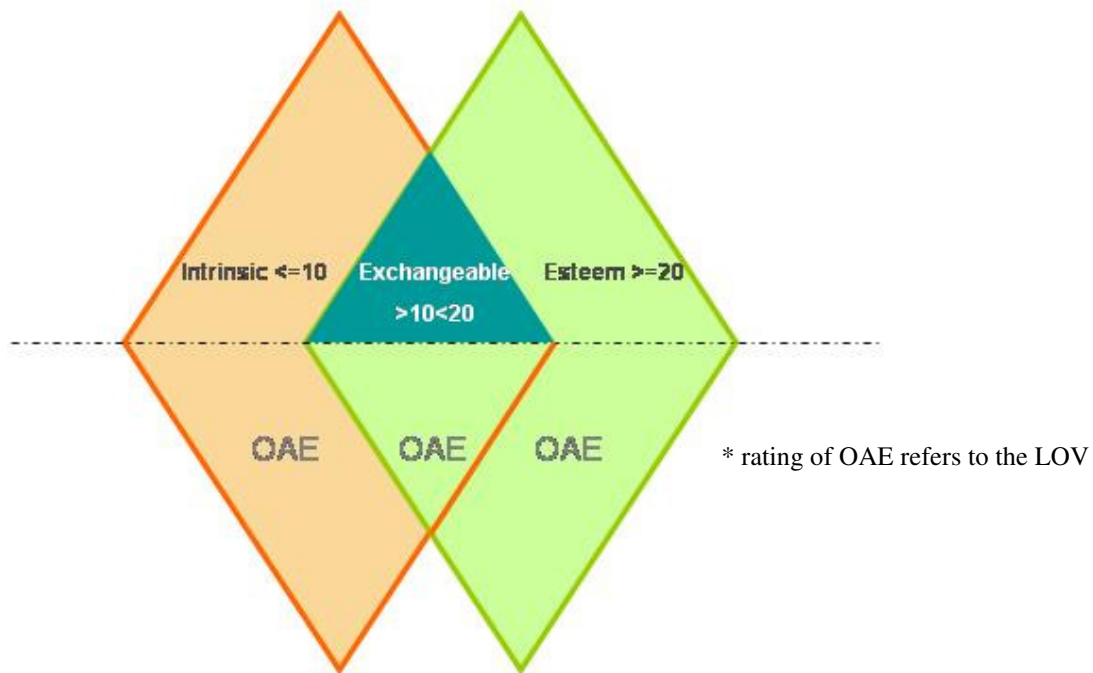


Fig 5 : Double-mat Model

Twenty lifestyle/boutique hotels from Hong Kong, Thailand, Shanghai, Singapore, New York and Australia are chosen for analysis. Hotels selected include Hotel Jia, HK; Hotel LKF, HK; The Scarlet, Singapore; Morgans, N.Y.; Mansion Hotel, Shanghai; which are rated good value for money by travelers on popular hotel search and travel websites.

Three major values – intrinsic, esteem and exchangeable values are stated in the model. Intrinsic Values has an index score of ≤ 10 , Esteem Values has a index score of ≥ 20 , and Exchangeable Values has an index score of $>10, <20$.

6.2 Analytical Approach

The analysis gives answer to the following question - what object(s) and its related activity in the room of hotels can evoke the emotion(s) closest to that contained in a bedroom which is most desired by people?



Fig 6 : Value Index Calculation

The analysis starts with an evaluation of the objects and activities that exist in the room of selected hotels. The objects, activities, and emotions will each be assigned a score (on a scale of 1 to 5) (Fig. 6) with reference to the List of Values (LOV), and the Value Index will then determine whether the room of the hotel belongs to the Intrinsic, Esteem or Exchangeable value category. For example, if the room has a Value Index of O5, A1, E5, the total score of 16 will determine that the hotel belongs to the Exchangeable category. The value does not imply an absolute insinuation of good or bad. But the value of a room's objects, activities and emotion components is able to reflect what kind of target it may appeal to, and can also be used to determine which lodging service the hotel should be best categorized as.

6.3 Findings and Knowledge-gained

The outcome of this analysis can be used as a control to moderate research for other hotel categories. The two-stage research leads to the development of The Ochoko Theory. Ochoko is the Japanese term of Sake-cup. It is common that when a guest orders sake when dining in a Japanese restaurant, he/she will be invited to choose his/her own Ochoko, which not just aligns with the aesthetic emphasis of the Japanese dining table, but also enhances the guest's sense of belonging that elevates the whole dining experience. The theory supports the aforementioned hypothesis that - object(s) that one can have his/her 'handprint' on or can claim ownership within the bedroom space (even for a short period of time) best gives values. By incorporating the

thinking into the Ochoko Theory for objects to create emotional values, it is to propose offering guests a choice of their own items when staying in the (hotel)room. Since teacup/coffee mug and toothbrush are on the top of people's most familiar objects in a bedroom list, those could be the objects that hotels offer to provide guests with a choice of to create a greater sense of 'intimacy of belonging' during the stay. Hotel-room will then be able to have similar capability of bedroom to reflect the guest's personality and preference which then translates into an attitude – a view about itself being comforting or satisfying to a level that lives up to the guest's view of his/her 'ideal' hotel-room.

7. Conclusion

The fact is that although lifestyle/boutique Hotel is able to offer high level of personalized services and products, little can be done to replica a home within a hotel. Supported by Donald Norman's believe that "*people tend to choose things based on the occasion, context, and above all, the mood*"; the perceived value for objects and activities change according to the nature of the stay. It might only be possible to create 'intimacy of belonging' during the stay, and it might also be possible for guests to arrive at a higher 'level of contentment' and 'emotion attainment' through offering certain service, or placing particular products/items in the room, or at crucial 'touch points' within. Accordingly, the object chosen by the guest works as a good 'reflective design' that helps to reflect his/her within the context of the environment (and in this case, it is a hotel). The idea is that for most of the time, when we encounter an object, our reaction is determined not only by how well it works, but by good it looks to us, and by the self-image, loyalty and nostalgia it evokes in us (Donald A. Norman, 2004). As the hypothesis stated in the early section - individuals are believed to select and create bedroom environments to reflect who they are so as to leverage emotional attainment, the object helps to create the link between the guest and the temporary environment. Astutely, the corner that can evoke the right emotion and feeling is where the object is placed and where the activity takes place.

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