DIFFERENTIATING EMOTIONAL HOTEL EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Emotions experienced in response to hotel services were examined with an online questionnaire. The study resulted in 348 cases of hotel service emotions. The frequency of reported pleasant emotions was similar to the frequency of reported unpleasant emotions. Often reported pleasant emotions were satisfaction, enjoyment, and admiration. Often reported unpleasant emotions were dissatisfaction, aversion, and boredom. Some conditions were found to elicit both pleasant and unpleasant emotions (e.g., the hotel staff and decoration), whereas some other conditions caused predominantly pleasant emotions (e.g., the view and complementary items) or unpleasant emotions (e.g., the hygiene and hotel maintenance). Results are reported and an initial concept for an instrument to measure emotional responses of hotel guests is introduced.

Key Words: emotions, hotel experience, measuring experience

INTRODUCTION

Last month we stayed in a hotel in Chicago. On entering our room we found a memo on the hotel bed: *"Sweet dreams…. Due to the close proximity of the Chicago Fire Station, the front desk is equipped with ear plugs to ensure a peaceful night's rest, regardless of the fire hours activity."* Our response was, as can be imagined, one of anxiety. It is an example of the variety of emotions one can experience in a hotel - elicited by all kinds of service aspects, including the architecture, efficiency of check-in procedures, tidiness of the room, hotel view or location, and encounters with employees, to name a few. All of these emotions are of interest to those who design and manage hotel services because it is widely agreed that these emotions strongly influence the behaviour of consumers. Studies have demonstrated that emotions influence both post-purchase satisfaction (Oliver, 1993) and repurchase decisions (Allen et al, 1992). Emotions have been found to be an important component of consumer response, and the importance of emotions in the sphere of consumer behaviour has been firmly established (Richins, 1997). Likewise, the emotional experiences of hotel guests have been shown to be critical components of satisfaction and loyalty (Barsky & Nash, 2002). In fact, emotional bonding with a service provider is a prerequisite for customer loyalty (Mattila, 2001), increasing the willingness to recommend the service to other customers (Harrison-Walker), to be more 'forgiving' in cases of an occasional service failure, and future purchase intentions (Mattila, 2001). For this reason, we postulate that insights in guest emotions can serve as input for management decisions or design interventions.

Despite the shown relevance of guest emotions, hotels generally do not measure the emotions experienced by their guests (see Barksy & Nash, 2002). Guest surveys found in most hotels ask for opinions about predefined service features, such as, cleanliness of the room and check-in and check-out procedures (e.g. quality of food; Excellent 1 2 3 4 5 Poor). These surveys present incomplete information that cannot help hotel managers with decision making (Lewis & Pizam, 1981). According to Barskey (1992), hotel surveys typically do not provide sufficient data for informed decision-making by the hotel manager at the property level or for strategic determination at the corporate level. Two main limitations are that they do not provide an overview of

features of the service that elicit emotional responses, and that they do not provide insights in what particular emotional responses are experienced.

We are in the process of developing two methods for measuring emotional responses of hotel guests. Our aim is to develop a set of instruments that enable hotel guests to report their emotional responses (instead of their opinions) towards their hotel stay. The first step in this development was to investigate which emotions are typically experienced by hotel guests. The current paper reports an explorative study that was designed to identify what emotions are experienced frequently, and what the causes or 'eliciting conditions' of these emotions are. An online questionnaire was developed that invited respondents to report examples of emotions they had experienced while staying in a hotel. The study is reported, and the initial concepts for the two measurement methods are presented.

EMOTIONAL EPISODE STUDY

METHOD

Participants

Respondents were recruited through online social networks (e.g. Facebook and LinkedIn) and online communities and blogs dealing with hospitality, services, and design. They were not paid for their contribution and not required to provide personal information, such as name, age, and gender. Approximately 116 people participated. This number is an estimation because people were able to report as many cases as they wanted. The estimation is based on an average of three cases per respondent that were reported in a pilot study.

Emotion Types

The questionnaire was based on a set of 14 basic consumer emotions – seven pleasant and seven unpleasant: satisfaction; joy; pride; admiration; attraction; fascination; hope; dissatisfaction; aversion; boredom; sadness; fear; shame; contempt. This set was developed by Author (2002) by combining the typologies of Ekman (1994), Lazarus (1991), and Ortony, Clore and Collins (1988) and adding emotions that are typically experienced in consumption situation, such as dissatisfaction, attraction, and boredom.

Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was developed in Dutch, English, and Spanish. In this questionnaire respondents were invited to report examples of emotions they had personally experienced as a hotel guest. Each emotion type was represented by an animated character that expresses emotions with the use of movement and sound. The characters were drawn from PrEmo, a non-verbal self-report instrument that measures emotional responses of consumers (see, Author, 2003 for an overview of development and validation of the characters). Respondents first selected one of the 14 given emotions (or inserted an additional emotion) and then reported the causes of this particular emotion in an open field. They were free to report as many emotional episodes as they wanted.

Procedure

The test was completed individually and online by anyone responding to the call for participation. In a short introduction the aim of the study was explained as obtaining an overview of the feelings of hotel guests, and insights in the causes and influences of these feelings. People were free to fill out the questionnaire in as much time as they needed. Data were gathered in a period of two weeks in April 2009.

RESULTS

In total 348 reports of emotions experienced while staying in a hotel were collected; 60 with comments in Dutch, 189 in English, 99 in Spanish. In 62 reports the respondents did not select an emotion character but inserted an emotion word in the open field. Of these words, 23 referred to an emotion that was also represented by the predefined set (e.g. satisfaction, dissatisfaction). In total in eleven cases a word was inserted that either did not refer to an emotion (e.g. tired, being robbed), or referred to an emotion that was not represented by the predefined set (e.g. excitement, relief, grateful). These eleven reports have not been included in the analyses below.

Emotion Type Relevance

Of all reported emotions, 54% was pleasant and 46% was unpleasant, indicating that pleasant and unpleasant emotions were experienced equally. All 14 emotions were selected, indicating that all emotions were experienced by hotel guests, although some seemed to be more common than others. The second and third

columns of Table 1 show the frequencies of each reported emotion. The table indicates that pleasant emotions experienced most often were enjoyment, satisfaction, and admiration; pleasant emotions experienced least often were hope, fascination, and pride. Unpleasant emotions experienced most often were dissatisfaction, aversion, and boredom; unpleasant emotions experienced least often were fear, shame, and contempt.

Table 1
Frequency of Reported Emotions

Reported emotion	Frequency	%
Enjoyment	54	16,0
Satisfaction	51	15,1
Dissatisfaction	48	14,2
Aversion	42	12,5
Boredom	24	7,1
Admiration	23	6,8
Attraction	18	5,3
Sadness	17	5,0
Fascination	16	4,7
Fear	14	4,2
Hope	14	4,2
Pride	7	2,1
Shame	6	1,8
Contempt	3	,9
Total	337	100

Categorisation of Eliciting Conditions

Reports that included more than one eliciting condition (e.g. "the room had an amazing view and the bed was nice and soft") were broken up into separate cases. This procedure resulted in 442 separate cases. Of these cases 33 were not analysed because either no emotion or no eliciting condition was reported. The eliciting conditions of the remaining 409 cases were categorised with the use of a coding system. This system is similar to one developed for emotions experienced in response to durable consumer products (Author, 2002), and food experiences (Authors, 2008). In order to customise coding variables for the current application, the second author created mind maps to represent the diversity of reported eliciting conditions (Author, 2009). The resulting system distinguishes between 21 types of eliciting conditions (Table 2).

Table 2
Categories of Eliciting Conditions

Category number	Category	Examples reported by respondents
1	Delays	No line for check-in; waiting for car
2	Payment	Errors on invoice; paid for by the office
3	Bed	King-size bed; lots of cushions
4	Interior products (other than bed)	Bathtub; television
5	Decoration	attention to detail; boring paintings
6	Space	Bathroom is too small; spacious setup of the room
7	Hygiene	Crisp clean bed sheets; hairs in the bathroom
8	Lighting	Room was too dark; complex lighting system
9	View	Beautiful beach view; boring view
10	Odour	Jasmine odour in reception; muggy smell
11	Food	Delicious food; well-presented buffet
12	Complimentary items	Mint on my pillow; free bottle of water
13	Facilities/Amenities	Free internet; laundry service
14	Maintenance	Noisy elevator; jammed door lock
15	Location	Centre of the city; unclear location directions
16	Hotel Staff	Friendly staff; good looking counter staff
17	Personal mood	Honeymoon vacation; my friend was with me
18	Hotel quality	Luxurious atmosphere; comfortable hotel
19	Other guests	Noisy neighbour; room mix-up

| 20 | Price | Too expensive; good value for money |
| 21 | Other event | Meeting important people; loosing my watch |

Two independent coders coded all reported eliciting conditions. For 16 cases the coders found that the reported eliciting condition could not be categorised because it was unclear (e.g. 'vacation'). The between-coder agreement for the remaining 390 was 83 %. This means that in 66 of the 409 cases the coders disagreed about the category or one of the coders was uncertain about the category. The disagreements were resolved by discussing each item among the two coders.

Eliciting conditions mentioned most frequently were hotel staff (16,9%), hygiene of hotel and room (10,3%), decoration (8,2%), personal mood (7,7%), and general hotel quality (7,7%). Table 3 shows the frequencies of conditions for pleasant and unpleasant emotions. The table indicates that the attitude of the staff was the most important reported cause of both pleasant (12,7%) and unpleasant (22,5%) emotions. Other often-reported causes of pleasant emotions were decoration (10,9%), general hotel quality (10,4%), complementary items (9,0%), and view from the hotel room (8,1%). Other often-reported causes of unpleasant emotions were a lack of hygiene (18,3%), bad personal mood (7,7%), and bad maintenance (7,1%).

Table 3
Frequency of Eliciting Conditions for Pleasant and Unpleasant Emotions

Pleasant emotions			Unpleasant emotions		
Eliciting condition	Frequency	%	Eliciting condition	Frequency	%
Hotel staff	28	12,7	Hotel staff	38	22,5
Decoration	24	10,9	Hygiene	31	18,3
Hotel quality	23	10,4	Personal mood	13	7,7
Complementary items	20	9,0	Maintenance	12	7,1
View	18	8,1	Facilities / amenities	11	6,5
Personal mood	17	7,7	Decoration	8	4,7
Bed	16	7,2	Delays	7	4,1
Food	16	7,2	Hotel quality	7	4,1
Facilities / amenities	16	7,2	Price	6	3,6
Hygiene	9	4,1	Odour	5	3,0
Space	8	3,6	Food	5	3,0
Other event	6	2,7	Other guests	5	3,0
Interior product	5	2,3	Interior product	4	2,4
Location	4	1,8	Other event	3	1,8
Lighting	3	1,4	Space	3	1,8
Odour	3	1,4	Complementary items	3	1,8
Payment	2	,9	Bed	2	1,2
Price	2	,9	Lighting	2	1,2
Maintenance	1	,5	Location	2	1,2
Delays	0	0	Payment	1	,6
Other guests	0	0	View	1	,6
Total	221	100,0	Total	169	100,0

Table 3 indicates that some conditions were frequently reported as causes for pleasant emotions, and other for unpleasant. The hotel staff, personal mood, decoration, hotel quality, and facilities were reported to evoke both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. The view, food, bed, and complementary items evoked predominantly pleasant emotions; the maintenance, delays, price, other guests, and (to some degree) the hygiene mostly unpleasant.

Correspondence analyses were performed to explore the relationships between eliciting conditions and emotion types: a statistical technique for describing the relationship between nominal variables, while simultaneously describing the relationship between the categories of each variable. It is an exploratory technique, primarily intended to facilitate the interpretation of the data. Separate analyses were performed for the pleasant and the unpleasant emotions. Eliciting conditions with frequency < 4% were excluded from the analyses. The emotions contempt, pride, and shame were not included in the analyses because their frequency was < 10. Figure 1 shows the two-dimensional solutions, visualising the associations between eliciting conditions and reported emotional responses.

Figure 1
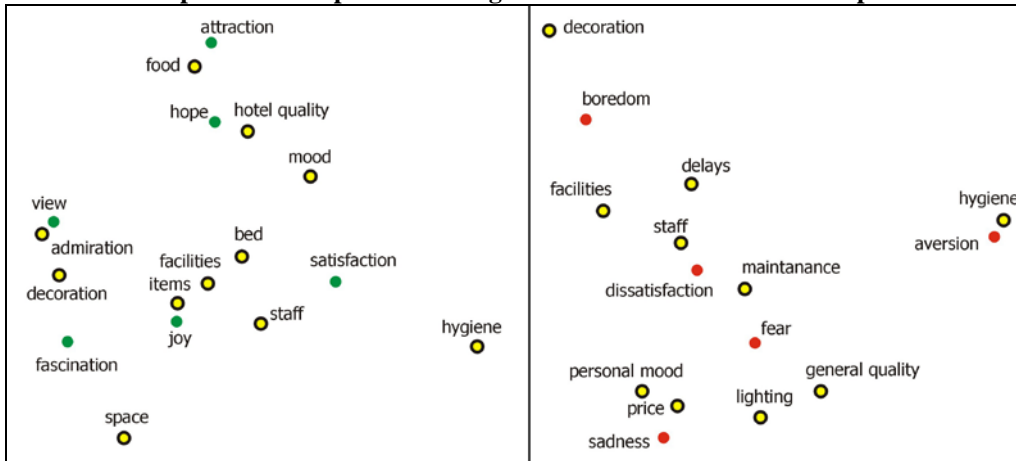**Correspondence Maps for Eliciting Conditions and Emotional Responses**

Figure 1 indicates some relationships between reported eliciting conditions and emotion types. For example, the results indicate a relationship between the hotel's decoration and view from the hotel window and the experience of admiration; the decoration and general space and the experience of fascination; food and hotel quality and the experience of hope and attraction. Joy and satisfaction are mostly experienced in response to the staff, complementary items, facilities and the quality of the bed. On the unpleasant side, aversion is mostly experienced in response to a lack of hygiene. Boredom is elicited by the decoration, hotel facilities, and delays; fear is elicited by bad maintenance, lighting, and general quality.

CONCLUSIONS & DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that hotel guests experience a variety of both pleasant and unpleasant emotions. The frequency of pleasant emotions is similar to the frequency of unpleasant emotions, and some emotions are experienced more often than others. Often experienced pleasant emotions are enjoyment, satisfaction, and admiration. Often experienced unpleasant emotions are dissatisfaction, aversion, and boredom. Some conditions were found to elicit both pleasant and unpleasant emotions (e.g. the hotel staff, personal mood, decoration, hotel quality, and facilities), whereas some other conditions are more often causes for pleasant emotions (e.g. the view, food, bed, and complementary items) or unpleasant emotions (e.g. the maintenance, delays, price, other guests, and (to some degree) the hygiene).

Given the explorative nature of this study, these results should be considered indicative. The results do show, however, that hotel guests can experience all kind of emotions in response to all kinds of situations. These situations include, for instance, the behaviour and attitude of the staff, hygiene, and the quality and decoration of the room. Moreover, the results gave some indication that particular emotions are related to particular eliciting conditions. This finding supports the idea that insights in the emotional episodes of hotel guests can be valuable for managing and designing hotel services. Detected unpleasant emotions can serve as signals for failing service quality and related conditions as possibilities for improvements. Detected pleasant emotions can serve as source of inspiration for the hotel staff and as indicators for the hotel's main strengths.

We are currently developing two methods to assess the emotional responses of hotel guests. In the first one, respondents use a mobile device (Figure 2, a and b) to express their feelings towards the hotel during their stay.

Two typical attributes of the method are that (1) emotions are reported during as opposed to after the hotel stay, since emotional responses are best measured at the moment of experience because people can forget relevant emotional experiences when reporting only afterwards (Hektner, Schmidt, & Csikzentmihalyi, 2007), and (2) the basis for reporting is the respondent's feelings, not involving a predefined service feature. The respondent first selects an emotion. The current interface displays expressions of the eight emotions corresponding with the highest frequencies in Table 1. After selecting an emotion (Figure 2, a), the respondent can take a picture, movie and/or a spoken message (Figure 2, b) to motivate this particular emotion. All reported emotions are collected and visualised on service emotion maps. The next steps for this method will be to develop appropriate data analysis procedures, to develop procedures for inviting guests to participate, and to test, evaluate, and validate the device and research method.

Figure 2
Methods Developed for the Report of Emotional Experiences in Services

(a) (b) (c) (d)
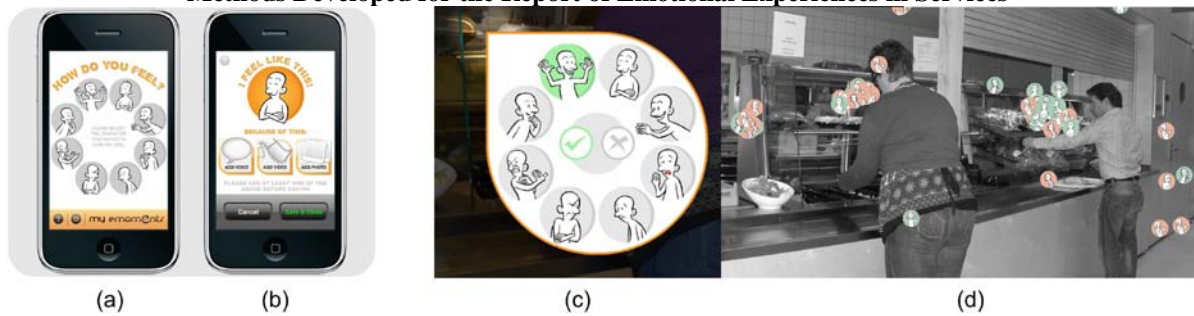
The second method, called Panoremo, is designed to measure emotional responses towards environments. It is a computer based application in which a 360 degrees panorama image of a given environment is shown. By using an interface displaying expressions of the eight emotions with the highest frequencies in table 1, respondents can pinpoint anything that draws their attention within the image, indicate how they feel about it and optionally explain it through the input of a short text. An emotional marker will be placed on every point of the image identified by the respondent.

The results obtained are (clustered) emotional expressions of people which are visualized on the actual image used (Figure 2, d) to qualitatively assess the results. By filtering which set of emotional markers to visualize (e.g. positive only, or a specific emotion), further insights can be obtained.

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