

Room Semantics and Terms in Hotel Chains Communication

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Abstract. Hotel rooms offer a range of amenities as part of a hotel's product offering and these can impact a guests' booking decisions. The paper provides a better understanding of hotel room facilities and attributes through exploration of room offerings by hotel chains. We examined some of the rooms of 155 top global hotel chains websites in order to determine the facilities and services offered; and the terms used in describing the room features. The goal was to investigate successful hotels' communication of room characteristics for the promotion of efficacy and efficiency of planning, promotional and commercialization activities.

To categorize important hotel room attributes, a literature review of recent trends and likely future scenarios was realized. Our findings show that among the room attributes and amenities emphasized in terms of descriptions in hotel websites include beds, bathroom amenities, room size, views, Internet services and entertainment services. The paper contributes to hotel websites communication by providing a comprehensive set of recommendations to hotel chains highlighting opportunities related to improving descriptions of hotel room attributes.

Keywords: Hotel Room, Attributes, Hotel Chains, Semantics

1 Introduction

Hotel rooms and services are the most important aspects when choosing a hotel [26] and [45]. This makes room related attributes the most important determinants of guest satisfaction or dissatisfaction [42].

Hotels should strive to satisfactorily meet the customers' needs, which are usually dynamic, personalized and customizable. Consequently, hotels that offer one-size fits all chain approach may lose out on repeat business and customer loyalty. The modern traveler is more knowledgeable and has a greater level of expectation of service and product offerings [46], this implies that greater detail must be put in every kind of service provided during booking, stay and checkout to meet the guests expectations. Personalized hotel experience is based on continuous innovation [3] in order to adequately meet guests' needs and preferences that are dynamic.

Some studies investigated entire hotel features [13], [29], [45] and [57] and did not focus on specific room attributes. However, the few studies that cover room attributes focus on perception attributes such as lighting, pricing levels, noise levels etc.[20], [6] which are important in building customer loyalty and increasing the overall profile of the hotel. We therefore present one of the first studies that delve into examining the specific attributes of a hotel room provided by hotel websites while focusing on the terms used and their semantics.

We investigated successful hotels and their communication looking for best practices. i.e. which are the rooms' characteristics to be used to promote the efficacy and efficiency of planning, promotional and commercialization activities [38] and building customer loyalty. The efficacy of a message (capacity of communication to accomplish a desired goal) depends on its syntax and semantics [31]

2 Hotel Room Studies

The type of accommodation, its extent and nature determine the volume and value of tourism in a destination [21]. The hotel room space should be a relaxing environment for the guests. Well-designed room environments that consider universally desirable elements such as lighting, heating, texturing, furnishing etc. make people happy and energized [36] and [49]. Many studies focused on determining the key attributes that affect guests' hotel selection, but very few delved into guests' hotel room selection factors, such as [33]. Nowadays, what clients have in their homes is often far superior to anything in the hotel rooms [24]; it is important to keep up with customer expectations for differentiation purposes. The hotel guest continues to be discerning and demands technology and advanced opportunities [47].

In order to achieve the desired impact of translating booking intentions into action, emphasis must be laid on the way information communication is done through both offline and online marketing channels. Websites have to give the “right” information that is content adequate in respect of their strategies, in order to allow users to make a decision about products and services offered by the company [31]. Most online customers are dissatisfied with the inadequate and poor quality of information on hotel websites [40]. Information quality is critical in selling services online because customers rely on detailed and clear information that inspire trust in order to make purchase decisions [55]. Tourists could be motivated to book a hotel if its amenities and sustainability attributes were communicated in a trust inspiring way in the marketing material [43]. High-level information design on hotel websites positively impact on visitors’ emotions and booking intentions of hotel rooms [17]. These studies imply that there must be professionalism in communicating hotel room amenities in order to achieve trust from the visitors and in turn transform their booking intentions into the desired action. This trust can be achieved through the use of appropriate terms and semantics.

Using keywords on the theme ‘hotel room’ and ‘in-room amenities’, we carried out a literature search of studies that consider different hotel room attributes from various sources such as online repositories and research websites. Table 1 gives a summary of findings in studies done on hotel room amenities and features.

Table 1: Hotel room attributes considered in literature

Hotel room feature	Summary of the hotel room attributes study findings	Studies
Accessibility features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility is very important; it improves a hotel’s image and People with Disabilities (PwDs) would opt for other hotels if these features are absent. • There is a huge market potential for accessibility enabled hotels. 	[1], [18]
Acoustic comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acoustic comfort is crucial for guests’ satisfaction. • Embracing noise reduction strategies reduces noise from the external environment and ensures the customers comfort. 	[34], [36],
Aesthetic design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a hedonic experience factor that creates a memorable hotel experience and leads to positive online reviews. 	[7], [32]
Alarm clock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is a highly rated in-room technology. • Guests would prefer to have it unobtrusively. 	[11]
Bathroom & Bathroom amenities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bathroom descriptions are popular in hotel websites. • After the bed, the bathroom is the next important thing and guests prefer it to be clean and well appointed. 	[35], [37]
Bed and Beddings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beddings improve sleep quality. • The bed is a core product of hotel accommodation and an important consideration when choosing a hotel. 	[22], [34], [50]
Cleanliness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A utilitarian factor that increases hotel room occupancy. • It is a positive driver to room ratings. • It represents the hotel’s image and boosts its reputation. • Guests would rather give up Internet for a clean room. 	[7], [12], [30], [33], [44],[52]
Desk and chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is a must have in all hotel rooms. • They expected to be in good condition. 	[23], [41]
Electrical outlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical outlets are essential to guests and should be placed in convenient locations within the rooms. • Guests desire and expect electrical outlets that accept foreign plugs and wireless charging facilities. 	[2], [8]
Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many guests expect hotel entertainment systems to have the same standards as those in their homes. • A color TV in the hotel room is considered important. • Hotels are gradually introducing up-to-date entertainment technologies into rooms. 	[10], [50]

Heating, Ventilation and air conditioning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room temperature and humidity have a tremendous effect on sleep cycles and hence the guest's comfort. It is a mission critical in-room technology. 	[28], [34],[39]
Internet access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free WiFi is important, and it has the strongest effect on initial hotel choice. Free WiFi can increase online Hotel ratings. WiFi is a utilitarian factor whose unavailability is the biggest source of disappointment for hotel guests. 	[9], [11], [12], [16], [22], [26], [50]
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ambient lighting has significant influence on customer behavior and perceptions. Guests have different lighting preferences depending on the activity they are carrying out. 	[19], [49], [51],
Mini bar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hotel guests are willing to pay more for complimentary mini-bars that contain wine and beer. It is regarded as least important by guests. 	[22], [36]
Pet boarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hotels are less friendly than AirBnB for both guests and hosts. There is a difficulty for pests with guest to find proper accommodation. 	[57]
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security is paramount in a hotel room. Security influences perception of quality in hotels. Use of electronic key cards is a highly rated satisfier while safe boxes are considered an important security item. 	[25], [39], [50], [53]
Size of the room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The size of the room is not provided as a filtering option in many hotel sites although it is used by customers to rate hotels. A large room is considered a universally desirable attribute by guests and can forgive design mistakes. 	[26], [36], [37]
Telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an important factor in selecting a hotel room. Guests are willing to pay more for free guest phones. 	[11], [36], [50]
View of the room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is an important criterion in selecting hotels. Hotel guests are willing to pay more for hotels with better views and will give positive reviews. 	[7], [36], [50]

Carefully curating hotel amenities into a compelling value proposition to attract guests is a key responsibility for brand managers [15]. Brand managers and marketers can continuously learn from best practices to improve their online presence. Despite having many studies in literature that focus on hotel amenities, none of these provide an extensive analysis of the terms used in presenting hotel room attributes within hotel websites. This study therefore sought answers to the following research questions:

1. *How are hotel rooms described in relation to communication?*
2. *What terms are used in presenting hotel room amenities in hotel websites?*

3 Methodology

We sought to find out the room information presented on numerous hotel websites. Hotel websites are popular channels for booking hotels [22]. For this reason, the perceived quality including the terms used to describe the rooms on offer should be well thought out.

In September and October 2019, we collected data from hotel websites' rooms' section of top hotel chains. These hotels were randomly sampled from the *2019 list of 325 Hotels special report* accessed from *marketingandtechnology.com*¹. The ranking list of top hotel chains was used due to the fact that they are successful and have some of the best practices as relates to communication efficacy. We created a dataset of hotel chains that includes hotel names, locations, URLs, types of rooms and room

¹ https://www.marketingandtechnology.com/repository/webFeatures/HOTELS/H1807_SpecialReport_Intro.pdf

features. Based on a population of 275 hotel chains in the report, we used Slovin's formula, to calculate a sample of 155 hotels, which we applied in the study. In the sample of 155 hotels, there were a total of 971 room types. We randomly selected the hotel chains and focused on collection of hotel room features and attributes that was carried out via Scrapy², a Python based open source web crawler and later transferred to Microsoft Excel for Storage. The extraction of the terms used to describe hotel room attributes was based on the classification done from literature (see Table 1). Manifest content analysis was then utilized to count the frequency of hotel room features and attributes terms in the sampled hotel websites rooms' section. Using R statistical package, frequency tables of the various hotel room attributes terms were generated.

4 Results and Discussion

It was found that type of beds (king size, queen, double, twin, etc.) was the most mentioned attribute term in the room offering with over 96% of the rooms listing this attribute. Bed size matters to customers and specifying the bed type implies giving the customer an option to choose the kind of bed that he would sleep in thus informing their booking decision; for instance, siblings travelling together may choose a room with double beds. Pillows and linens were the main terms used to describe the beddings on offer with 5.4% and 4.4% of the hotels listing them as part of the room offering.

The use of few accessibility terms in hotel websites concurs with [18] who states that many in the tourism sector are unaware of how to meet the needs of tourists with disabilities. As a confirmation of this postulation, only 10.9% of the hotel rooms studied had descriptions of accessibility facilities implying that most hotels are not well prepared to handle guests living with disabilities. Of the terms used to describe accessibility features, the most popular was 'mobility accessible rooms' at 27.2%, followed by 'grab bars in bathrooms' at 21.7% and 'hearing accessible rooms with visual alarms and notification devices for door and phone' at 20.8% respectively.

Although cleanliness is a salient attribute that affects customers' ratings of hotels, it is considered inherent and consequently it is rarely listed as part of the terms used in room offerings. The term daily housekeeping is most frequently used to assure customers that the rooms are cleaned everyday while weekly house keeping service is the least used probably because it is related to different kinds of accommodations. It is vital to present an acceptable time limit on the cleaning service for instance: 'daily housekeeping' or 'twice daily housekeeping' to assure gets that they will stay in a clean environment.

Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning amenity descriptions were given in approximately 35.79% of the hotel rooms. 71.5% of this amenity was described in terms of air conditioning which confirms the finding by [15] that it has become a necessity and is common in most rooms. Notable is the fact that the term 'fan' was rarely used with only 2.4% of the hotels mentioning it as part of in-room amenities. The 'self control' superlative was used to describe HVAC systems in 4.5% of the hotel rooms, implying guests have the option to personalize environmental settings. The term 'fans' is being phased out probably because many hotel chains are adopting energy saving practices.

Internet is widely offered in hotel rooms as part of the package with over 43% of the rooms listing this service. Internet access was mostly offered with the term WiFi at 92.5% signifying the technology savvy nature of hotel guests utilising mobile devices. 76% of WiFi offering used the superlative complimentary. This finding supports [54] where the term WiFi was found to be frequently used in reviews to rate Internet services and it was regarded as the most useful in-room amenity [22]. Approximately 7% of the hotel rooms use the term "wired Internet access" to show that they cater for travellers who prefer that kind of Internet connection. Superlatives such as "high-speed", 'un-limited' and 'broadband' are used in conjunction with the Internet offering to invoke positive attitudinal interpretations by the users.

Lighting is described in few hotel rooms (22.9%) and the term popularly used is windows. Windows normally bring in natural light giving hotels a natural tone and thus hotel websites have attempted to give attention to this feature by describing the type of windows provided in the hotel rooms. Most windows are described in terms of size. The term blackout drapes is fairly adopted across hotel rooms

² scrapy.org

probably due to the fact that the guest can use it to save energy and create a desired lighting environment.

The description of the hotel room size either in square feet or square meters was used in 73.2% percent of the instances. The use of size measurement is highly recommended as it gives an accurate measurement of the space offering. The term ‘spacious’ would be impactful when used as a superlative to show the superiority in space offering but appears ambiguous and subjective when used independently.

The term “views” is often associated with positive hotel ratings [26] and from our findings only 34.7% of the rooms had used this term in the product offering. This is an indication that many hotel websites need to consider using this term as it could positively impact a guest’s booking decision. The terms mainly used in describing the views feature are; water views (36.1%) and city views (34.9%). Balconies and terraces offer outdoor relaxation by giving a guest the chance to view the surrounding environment. Balconies and terraces were mentioned as part of the attributes presented in 17.4% of the hotel rooms. These terms were used by approximately 83% of the hotel rooms.

Entertainment is a popular part of the room offering with 69% of the rooms in the hotel chains giving descriptions of the various types of entertainment options available. The term ‘television’ is the most popular term used for entertainment offered at 71.1%. This confirms the finding by [5] and [14] which rank the television as one of the most important in-room technologies desired by travellers and it is among the most used amenities. However, it would be more appropriate if the kind of television and service offered were described using words highlighting its features for instance: International Satellite Television, 49 inch LCD rather than just using the term television which leaves the reader begging for more clarifications. Interestingly [27] found docking stations for mobile devices to be among the most popular in-room technologies improving the guest experience, but our findings show that the term is seldom used in description of in-room amenities.

Electrical outlets were not frequently mentioned across the hotel websites since only 3.33% of the hotels listed them as part of the room offering. The term power outlet was the most popular with nearly half (45.5%) of the hotels using it. USB ports and international power ports were also common terms while electrical adaptors were rarely mentioned. This highlights the need to consider international travellers who would benefit from such information and influence their booking decisions.

The bathroom amenity is quite important as it contributes more to the final hotel rating [20]. Of the rooms analyzed, 63.9% mention “ bath and bathroom” terms as part of the room offering which concurs with the finding in [48] that most hotel websites have bathrooms in their room offering. The bathub is the term with the highest frequency at 25.6% followed by the bathroom (24.15%) and shower (23%) respectively. Very few hotels (4.18%) mention the type of shower and shower heads offered which would further enrich the information on the bathroom amenities.

Of the hotel rooms analyzed 56.7% outline bath and bathroom accessories. Of the bathroom accessories, the most popular is hair dryers (38.75%) followed by toiletries (23.6%), then bathrobes (12.8%) and slippers (10.36%) respectively. The popularity of the term “hair dryers” could be attributed to the fact that it is a key product requirement for female guests as pointed out by [4].

The mini-bar amenity was used in only 21% of the rooms in the hotel chains’ websites confirming the finding by [15] of the fading popularity of this in-room amenity that is rarely used by guests. Notable is the fact that most hotels rarely mention whether the mini-bar service is complimentary or chargeable, a factor that could impact decision-making on usage. Bottled water was rarely mentioned as part of the terms used in in-room amenities contrary to the finding by [16] that it has a strong effect on return visits and revenue and for this reason it should be used often.

Guests rank telephone services among the top 10 important in-room features [47]. Of the rooms analyzed only 21% described telephone services. 36.8% of these used the term “Phone” rather than specifying the type of phone service offered e.g. Direct line telephone, telephone with voicemail etc. which would be of great importance in determining the capabilities of the service. This is an important in-room service that needs to be properly highlighted in the website description.

Terms describing alarms and wakeup services are found in approximately 11% of the hotel rooms, which confirms the finding by [16] that hotel guests do not use this amenity often. Over 60% of the hotels offering alarm and wake up services do provide the clock radio and clocks.

Security and safety amenities descriptions are provided in 34.1% of the rooms analyzed. The term “safe” was the most common in over 85.3% of the rooms followed by electronic keys and smoke detectors at 5.3% each. Superlatives such as ‘digital’, ‘in-room’ and ‘ large safe that can fit a laptop’ are used in the terms to further describe this attribute that is considered important by the hotel guests.

Some guests consider pets as family members and would like to travel with them and even host them in their rooms. Provision for pet accommodation seemed quite unpopular as a paltry 0.2% of the hotel rooms analyzed gave descriptions for pets’ accommodation/non-accommodation. 65% of these used the terms ‘pets welcome’ and ‘pet friendly’ while the remaining 35% explicitly used the term ‘pets not allowed’. This finding concurs with that of [57] who found hotels as less pet friendly than AirBnB, a fact that makes the latter offer a better home feeling in some guests overall experiences.

5. Conclusion and future work

This paper examined the terms and semantics used to describe hotel room amenities in globally ranked hotel chain websites. The study found that most hotel chains offered term and semantic descriptions for beds, room size, entertainment attributes, bathroom amenities and Internet services probably because of their importance to the customers. Amenities such as telephone services, security and safety, pet provision, accessibility features and HVAC services were not satisfactorily described and frequently mentioned in the hotel chain websites. Appropriate and specific terms can enhance the communication efficacy of in-room hotel amenities for instance; Internet would be described as follows: complimentary WiFi and Broadband Internet access, while the bed would be described as king size bed 180cm. It was realized that improvements could be made in the term and semantics used to describe some of the hotel room amenities. Since the modern traveller is more knowledgeable and has a great level of expectations, superlatives can be used to enhance the description of amenities and services which would in turn inform the guest when making online hotel booking decisions.

The study recommends that hoteliers learn from successful hotel chains the terms they should adopt in presenting hotel room amenities on their websites. Hotels should use appropriate and consistent amenity terms to improve content integrity of a hotel chain website and boost its SEO rank. Continuous research of customer needs is of great importance in order to present the desired attributes using appropriate terms.

Further research will utilize the findings of this study in analyzing the terms used for room descriptions for consistency so as to eliminate disorientation among guests, and in the formalization of a domain level ontology for personalized hotel rooms.

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