

Towards Inclusive Hotel Interior Design: An Exploratory Analysis of Women Travelers's Preferences

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ABSTRACT

The design of hotel interiors significantly influences guest experiences, yet the specific needs of women travelers remain underexplored in scholarly discourse. This study investigates women's preferences in hotel interior design through an exploratory online survey with 29 participants across diverse age groups and travel purposes. The survey focused on micro-interior aspects, including daylight, curtain choices, room styles, bathroom features, lobby layouts, and sensory cues such as scent and decoration. Findings reveal three key themes: (1) safety as spatial and emotional assurance, emphasizing natural light, non-slip flooring, and secure spatial layouts; (2) comfort as an aesthetic of care, reflected in preferences for warm, cozy interiors enriched with artwork and decoration; and (3) micro-interior details as markers of inclusivity, where small features such as curtain flexibility, mirror placement, and fragrance strongly shaped perceptions of being cared for. The study contributes to hospitality and interior design research by reframing hotel interiors as active mediators of gendered experiences rather than neutral service backdrops. Its novelty lies in advancing the concept of micro-interior inclusivity, underscoring how subtle design interventions can substantially enhance perceptions of safety, comfort, and empathy. Despite limitations in sample size, the study offers theoretical insights and practical implications for inclusive and gender-responsive hospitality design.

KEYWORDS

Inclusive interior design
Hospitality design
Women travelers preferences
Safety and comfort in hotels
Micro-interior elements

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1. Introduction

In the global hospitality industry, women have become one of the most influential demographics. Studies consistently show that women account for nearly 80 percent of travel decisions worldwide, both for individual and family travel (Pereira and Silva 2018; Pitanatri et al. 2025; Dresler 2025b). The phenomenon of solo female travel has grown significantly in recent years, with increasing numbers of women traveling independently for leisure, business, or personal growth (Ghadban, Kamar, and Haidar 2023; Dresler 2025a). In Asia, particularly Indonesia, this trend is highly visible: Agoda (2025) reports that 69 percent of Indonesian women travelers prefer culturally immersive and lesser-known destinations, indicating a strong demand for authentic and safe experiences (WIT 2025).

Within the Indonesian context, preliminary studies reveal that women travelers evaluate hospitality services differently compared to men. Research on female business travelers in Indonesia found that safety, security, and room quality were the most decisive factors influencing satisfaction, far outweighing luxury features or branding (Kharisma et al. 2019). Similarly, an analysis of online reviews of solo women travelers in Bali highlighted that 36.4 percent of women traveled for personal growth, and over 83 percent engaged in allocentric or adventure-oriented activities (Bogicevic et al. 2018). These findings underscore the importance of designing hotel environments that can accommodate both the practical and psychological needs of women guests—balancing safety, functionality, and emotional connection.

Despite these growing insights, significant gaps remain in the literature. First, hospitality studies still concentrate heavily on service quality and customer satisfaction metrics (Ali, Amin, and Cobanoglu 2016; Han and Hyun 2017), with interior spaces often treated as a neutral backdrop rather than as a key dimension of guest experience. Second, inclusive design research has largely focused on accessibility for disabled or aging populations (Imrie and Hall 2003; Langdon et al. 2014; Persson et al. 2015), leaving

gender-based needs underexplored. Third, while environmental psychology has demonstrated that lighting, textures, and sensory cues shape emotional responses (Bitner 1992; Pizam and Tasci 2019), these insights have rarely been applied to the gendered experiences of hotel guests. Finally, Indonesian research has concentrated on management and service perspectives, leaving a notable absence of design-oriented studies that integrate women's voices into interior decision-making (Rusmana and Abigail 2024; Nursari 2015).

These gaps provide the foundation for the present study, which proposes to examine women's preferences at the micro-interior level—including elements such as lighting, curtain types, bathroom ergonomics, lobby seating, and sensory experiences. By foregrounding women's perspectives, this research offers a novel contribution in three ways: first, by shifting attention from macro-level management to micro-level design interventions; second, by positioning women as active subjects whose preferences shape inclusive hospitality; and third, by bridging hospitality management research with interior architecture scholarship, thereby advancing an interdisciplinary approach to inclusive design. The present study addresses this gap by conducting an exploratory survey focused on women's perceptions of hotel interiors. The investigation emphasizes design details at the micro-interior scale, positioning them as determinants of safety, comfort, and emotional resonance. The study is guided by two central research questions: (1) Which aspects of hotel interiors are most significant to women travelers in shaping perceptions of safety and comfort? (2) How do micro-interior elements, such as lighting, bathroom functionality, and sensory design, contribute to feelings of inclusivity and care? The primary objective of the study is to generate an initial empirical understanding of women's preferences regarding hotel interior design, and to contribute to the advancement of inclusive hospitality frameworks by integrating gender-sensitive insights into the discourse of interior architecture.

2. Method

2.1. Reserach Design

This study employed an exploratory descriptive design to investigate women's preferences regarding hotel interior design. An exploratory approach was considered appropriate due to the limited availability of prior research addressing gender-specific interior design in hospitality contexts. Exploratory designs are particularly useful when the phenomenon under study has not been clearly defined in existing literature, as they allow researchers to identify patterns, generate new insights, and establish a foundation for further theoretical development (Stebbins 2001).

The descriptive dimension of the research design enabled the systematic identification of preferences, such as room features, bathroom layouts, and sensory cues, providing statistical profiles of the most valued elements. Descriptive research has been widely applied in hospitality studies to capture guests' perceptions of environmental features and service expectations (Altinay and Paraskevas 2009). At the same time, the integration of quantitative and qualitative elements ensured a more holistic understanding of women's experiences. Quantitative survey questions produced measurable indicators of dominant preferences, while open-ended responses allowed for the exploration of experiential nuances and embodied perspectives often missed in purely numerical studies. Mixed-method approaches are increasingly recognized in design and hospitality research as effective tools to capture both breadth and depth of user experience (Creswell and Clark 2011).

By combining exploratory and descriptive orientations, the study was able not only to document what women travelers prioritize in hotel interiors but also to reveal how these preferences are articulated through narratives of safety, comfort, and inclusivity. This dual perspective ensures that the research contributes simultaneously to empirical mapping and to the advancement of conceptual frameworks in hospitality interior design.

2.2. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through an online survey (google form) distributed via social media and instant messaging platforms. The online format was chosen for its accessibility and its ability to reach a wide demographic of women travelers while minimizing geographical constraints. Online surveys have been recognized in hospitality and tourism research as effective for capturing diverse samples while ensuring anonymity and comfort in participation (Evans and Mathur 2018; Ilieva, Baron, and Healey 2002). The survey instrument was designed with 14 questions organized into five thematic sections, each directly linked to theoretical concerns about safety, comfort, and inclusivity in hotel interiors.

2.2.1. Demographics (age, travel purpose, companions)

This section captured age group, travel purpose, and travel companions. Demographic factors strongly shape spatial needs and risk perception, particularly among women. Research shows that women often act as primary decision-makers in family travel, but also represent a growing segment of solo travelers with heightened concerns for safety and privacy (Jansen-Verbeke and Dietvorst 1987; Wilson and Little 2008; Yang et al. 2022). Including demographics ensured contextual interpretation of preferences across life stage and travel motivations.

2.2.2. Room Interiors (sunlight, curtains, room style, decoration, useful features)

Questions focused on natural light, curtain type, preferred room style, decoration, and furniture use. Environmental psychology highlights that lighting and aesthetics directly influence mood and perceptions of safety (Mehrabian and Russell 1974; Aries, Aarts, and Van Hoof 2015). For women, curtain flexibility signals both privacy and control over daylight, reflecting negotiations between exposure and rest (Alonso and Ogle 2008). Preferences for warm and cozy aesthetics, enriched with decoration, align with feminist critiques that stress the importance of designing with empathy and intimacy rather than sterile minimalism (Kern 2020).

2.2.3. Bathrooms (safety and priority features)

Bathrooms were evaluated in terms of safety features (non-slip flooring, adequate lighting) and functionality (showers, counter space). Prior research identifies bathrooms as critical spaces of vulnerability, where women consistently prioritize safety and ergonomic functionality over luxury features such as bathtubs (Wilson and Little 2008; Kharisma et al. 2019). This section was thus vital in linking practical safety considerations with emotional reassurance, making bathrooms central to the framework of inclusive interior design.

2.2.4. Public Spaces (lobbies, lounges, and restaurants)

Items in this section addressed preferences for lobby seating, lighting, privacy, and restaurant atmosphere. Prior scholarship shows that women frequently evaluate public hotel spaces in terms of safety, privacy, and intimacy, rather than spectacle or openness (Lynch et al. 2021). For instance, cozy restaurant settings were valued over bright and social layouts, confirming that hospitality environments are interpreted not only as functional but as emotional landscapes where women seek belonging and care (Wilson and Harris 2006).

2.2.5. Sensory and Affective Experience (scents and details of care)

Respondents were asked about the importance of scents and small details that made them feel cared for. Sensory dimensions of design have been shown to significantly shape emotional attachment and guest loyalty in hospitality (Spangenberg, Grohmann, and Sprött 2005; Pizam and Tasci 2019). The emphasis on fresh sheets, cleanliness, and minor amenities confirms Kern's feminist reading of space, which argues that micro-interior details are symbolic gestures of empathy often overlooked by conventional design (Kern 2020).

The survey employed multiple-choice, multiple-response, and Likert-scale items, complemented by one open-ended question that invited respondents to describe a hotel feature that made them feel especially cared for. This design reflects a mixed-method approach (Creswell and Clark 2011), enabling the research to document statistical patterns of women's preferences while also capturing nuanced experiential narratives.

2.3 Sampling

A purposive convenience sampling method was applied, targeting women travelers aged between 25 and 60 years. The sampling frame consisted of women who have previously stayed in hotels for work, leisure, or both. A total of 29 valid responses were collected between August 16 and August 20, 2025. Although the sample size is limited, it provides preliminary insight into women's design-related preferences and allows for exploratory pattern identification.

2.4 Data Analysis

Responses were analyzed using a mixed-method strategy: Quantitative analysis was conducted to calculate frequencies and percentages for each categorical response, identifying dominant patterns in preferences (e.g., importance of natural light, preferred curtain type, bathroom priorities). Qualitative thematic analysis was applied to the open-ended responses. Keywords and recurring themes were coded

inductively to reveal design details that contributed to perceptions of care and inclusivity. Findings from both strands were triangulated to ensure coherence, with quantitative patterns supported by qualitative explanations.

2.5 Validity and Limitations

The use of an online survey facilitated rapid data collection but limited the representativeness of the sample. Results cannot be generalized to all women travelers but provide exploratory insights into design elements that warrant further investigation. Validity was addressed by structuring questions in clear, non-technical language, minimizing the risk of misinterpretation. Moreover, the combination of quantitative and qualitative data strengthened construct validity by capturing both preferences and underlying rationales.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Participation in the survey was voluntary, with informed consent implied through survey completion. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and no personally identifiable information was collected.

3. Results and Discussion

The survey generated 29 valid responses from women travelers across diverse age groups and travel purposes. The demographic profile reveals that the largest proportion of respondents were in the 25–35 age range (48%), followed by those aged 36–45 (24%) and 46–60 (21%), with only a small fraction under 25 years old (fig. 1). This distribution suggests that the sample primarily reflects adult women in active career or family-building stages, groups commonly identified as influential in household travel decision-making (Salleh et al. 2016). A clear majority reported traveling primarily for holiday purposes (72%), while a smaller proportion (28%) indicated combining work and leisure. This aligns with previous findings that women frequently integrate leisure with professional mobility, reshaping contemporary patterns of travel consumption (Wilson and Harris 2006).

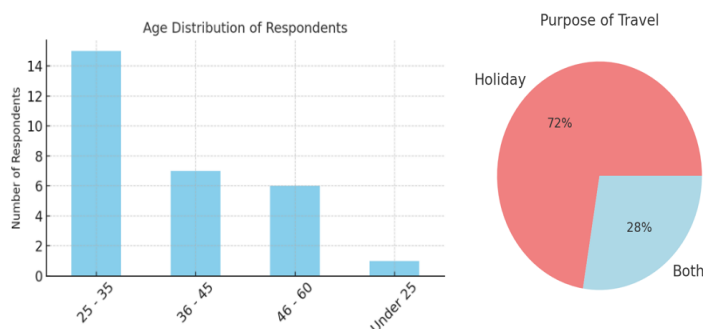


Fig. 1. Age of distribution and purpose of travel

Most respondents reported usually traveling with family or friends (83%), while only a minority indicated traveling alone (10%) or with a partner (7%) (fig. 2). These patterns are consistent with prior hospitality research emphasizing the pivotal role of women in organizing family travel (Jansen-Verbeke and Dietvorst 1987). At the same time, the presence of solo travelers, although smaller in number, underscores the growing importance of independent female travelers who navigate hotels with distinct expectations for safety, privacy, and comfort (Wilson and Little 2008; Yang et al. 2022).

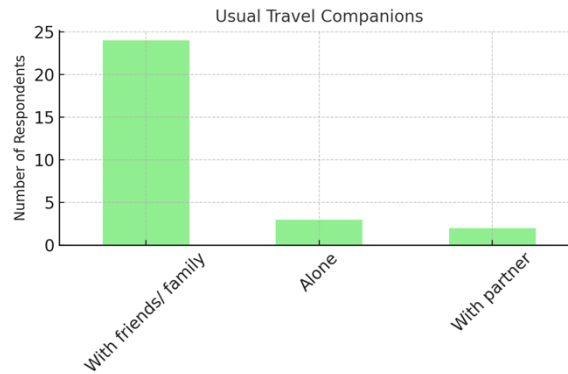


Fig. 2. Usual travel companions

With respect to hotel room interiors, natural illumination emerged as especially important. More than two-thirds of respondents rated sunlight in their rooms as *very important*, confirming earlier environmental psychology research that natural lighting strongly shapes emotional wellbeing, circadian balance, and perceptions of safety (Mehrabian and Russell 1974; Aries, Aarts, and Van Hoof 2015). Preferences regarding curtains further underscored the importance of flexibility: nearly half of the participants preferred both sheer and blackout curtains, suggesting that women negotiate between privacy, daylight, and restful sleep (fig. 3).

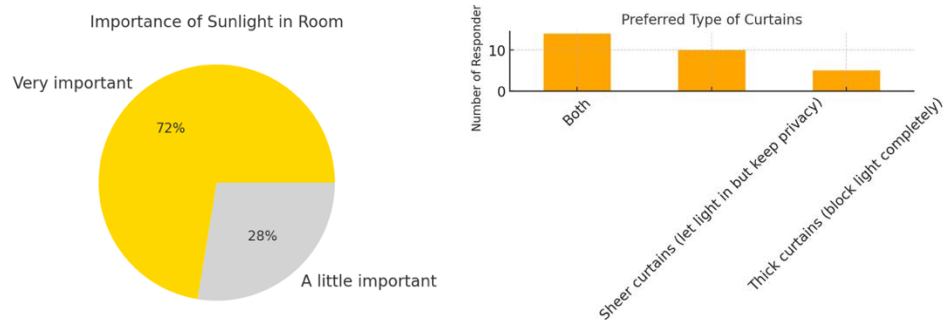


Fig. 3. Illuminations and type of curtains

When asked about interior style, respondents expressed a marked preference for warm and cozy environments over minimalist or modern aesthetics. This inclination reflects an orientation toward intimacy, softness, and warmth—qualities that go beyond functionality and instead communicate *care* and *hospitality*. The preference for artwork and decorative elements further suggests that aesthetic details are interpreted as signs of attentiveness and cultural storytelling, extending beyond utility (Bitner 1992; Pizam and Tasci 2019) (fig. 4).

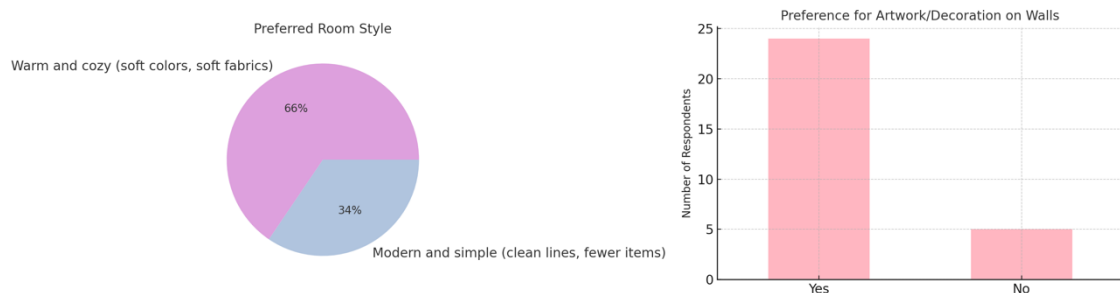


Fig. 4. Interior style preference

Bathrooms were consistently identified as critical spaces where safety and functionality outweighed luxury. Respondents prioritized non-slip flooring, strong showers, adequate counter space, and good lighting, while placing minimal importance on bathtubs. This finding contrasts with common marketing narratives that emphasize luxury amenities and instead underscores that women value practical safety and ergonomic

convenience, confirming earlier studies in Indonesia that identified bathroom functionality as central to female business travelers' satisfaction (Kharisma et al. 2019).

Public areas such as lobbies and lounges were evaluated primarily in terms of perceived safety and comfort. Respondents emphasized the need for private seating, manageable noise, and adequate lighting. This stands in contrast to current hotel trends favoring expansive, bustling lobbies designed for spectacle. Similarly, in hotel restaurants and cafés, the overwhelming preference was for warm and cozy atmospheres rather than bright and social environments (fig. 5). This suggests that women—particularly solo travelers—seek spaces that minimize social exposure and instead cultivate a sense of belonging and care (Lynch et al. 2021).

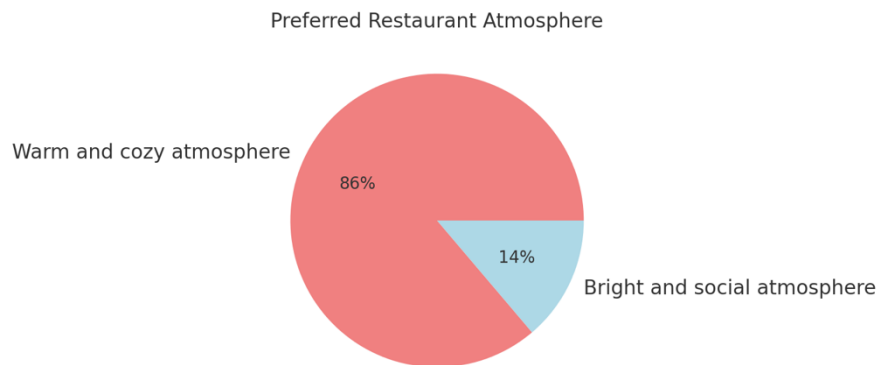


Fig. 5. Restaurant atmosphere preference

Finally, the sensory dimension of design emerged as a strong determinant of women's impressions. A large majority reported that scents in rooms and public areas mattered significantly, reinforcing findings that multisensory cues influence emotional attachment and brand perception in hospitality (Spangenberg, Grohmann, and Sprott 2005; Pizam and Tasci 2019). Open-ended responses further revealed that small details—fresh bed sheets, the presence of trash bins, and general cleanliness—were consistently interpreted as signals of care. These details, while often overlooked by operators, function as affective cues that disproportionately shape trust and loyalty, more effectively than large-scale aesthetic gestures (Kern 2020)(fig. 6).

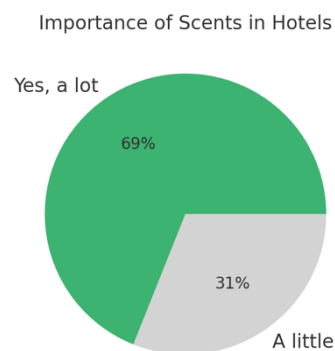


Fig. 1. Scents Preference

Open-ended responses further revealed that small details, such as the freshness of bed sheets, the presence of basic amenities, and even the availability of a trash bin, were interpreted as signals that the hotel cared about guest wellbeing. These narratives demonstrate how micro-interior features function as affective cues, shaping trust and loyalty more effectively than large-scale aesthetic gestures.

3.2. Women' Preferences on Hospitality Interior Design

The findings of this study confirm that women consistently evaluate hotel interiors through three interrelated dimensions: safety, comfort, and affective care. These preferences were not abstract ideals but

were articulated through attention to specific micro-interior features such as lighting quality, flooring materials, curtain options, and sensory details.

Safety emerged as a foundational concern. Respondents emphasized that lighting, non-slip bathroom flooring, and secure lobby layouts are integral to their sense of wellbeing. This resonates with Bitner's *servicescape model*, which underscores how environmental cues influence perceptions of trust and security (Bitner 1992). Similarly, Mehrabian and Russell's environmental psychology framework highlights that spatial design not only regulates functional visibility but also affects emotional states (Mehrabian and Russell 1974). In this sense, safety for women is not only the absence of risk but a psychological assurance embedded in material design. Lighting, for instance, does not merely illuminate but also conveys trust; flooring is not only functional but signals anticipation of risk and care for the guest.

Comfort was expressed as an aesthetic of care, where women valued warm and cozy interiors enriched with artwork and decoration over stark minimalism. These preferences reflect the argument of Kern that space is gendered, and that environments designed without sensitivity to women's embodied experiences risk becoming alienating or impersonal (Kern 2020). The preference for intimate and decorated spaces also expands the discourse on hospitality design, shifting the emphasis from efficiency and luxury toward empathy-driven atmospheres. This supports Pizam and Tasci's notion of the *experienscape*, where multisensory environments shape affective responses and attachment to place (Pizam and Tasci 2019).

The third theme concerned the interpretation of micro-details as signals of inclusivity. Respondents highlighted elements such as curtain flexibility, mirror placement, fragrance, and even the availability of trash bins as decisive indicators that the hotel valued and respected its guests. Although often overlooked by operators, such details carried disproportionate weight in shaping perceptions of belonging. This observation aligns with feminist critiques of the built environment (Churchman 2000), which argue that design frequently neglects embodied and everyday practices that are particularly significant for women. In the hospitality context, these small gestures of care—clean bedding, convenient furniture ergonomics, pleasant scents—function as material affirmations of attentiveness and inclusivity.

Taken together, these findings extend existing scholarship on servicescapes and environmental psychology by integrating gendered interpretations of design. While prior research has emphasized how environmental cues influence general satisfaction (Ali, Amin, and Cobanoglu 2016; Han and Hyun 2017), this study demonstrates that women interpret design not merely as a backdrop but as an active medium of safety, empathy, and care. The contribution lies in advancing the concept of “micro-interior inclusivity”, whereby minor design interventions acquire symbolic significance in shaping women's perceptions of safety, comfort, and hospitality.

3.3 Toward Inclusive Hospital Design Theory

Taken together, the findings of this study contribute to hospitality design theory by challenging existing frameworks and proposing new conceptual directions. Traditional perspectives on hospitality design have largely centered on functionality, efficiency, and aesthetic luxury (Ali, Amin, and Cobanoglu 2016; Han and Hyun 2017). Within such paradigms, safety is often relegated to operational or managerial protocols—such as surveillance systems or staff training—rather than considered as an embedded condition of space. Yet, the survey results highlight that for women travelers, safety is experienced both materially and emotionally, where the interplay of lighting, flooring, and spatial layout produces a sense of trust. This suggests that hospitality design theory must be reframed: safety cannot be treated as external to design, but as inseparable from spatial and aesthetic qualities. In doing so, the findings extend Bitner's *servicescape* by arguing that the physical environment does not merely influence customer behavior but can act as a guarantor of psychological wellbeing (Bitner 1992). A second contribution concerns the emergence of what can be termed an aesthetic of care.

Conventional design discourses often valorize minimalism, efficiency, and neutrality as universal ideals of sophistication. However, the findings show that women overwhelmingly prefer warmth, intimacy, and culturally embedded aesthetics, regarding them as signals of empathy. This directly challenges the assumption of neutrality in design, echoing feminist critiques that argue the built environment has historically been shaped by masculine norms (Kern 2020; Churchman 2000). By foregrounding warmth, decoration, and storytelling, the aesthetic of care posits that interiors must not only function but must actively communicate attentiveness. This reconceptualization situates hospitality spaces not as sterile environments of consumption but as environments of belonging.

Third, the study advances the notion of micro-interior inclusivity, a concept that foregrounds the symbolic and practical significance of small-scale design interventions. While environmental psychology

has long demonstrated the role of sensory cues in shaping emotional responses (Mehrabian and Russell 1974; Pizam and Tasci 2019), these insights have rarely been integrated into hospitality research with a gender lens. The emphasis on curtain flexibility, mirror placement, room fragrance, and cleanliness demonstrates that women interpret these micro-details as tangible evidence of whether a hotel is inclusive and attentive. This finding disrupts dominant design frameworks that privilege grand gestures and signature aesthetics, instead proposing that micro-design decisions carry disproportionate weight in communicating inclusivity.

By integrating these insights, the study contributes to bridging the long-standing gap between hospitality management research and interior design scholarship. Whereas the former has prioritized service delivery and operational excellence, and the latter has often focused on aesthetics or functionality, this study demonstrates that interiors must be theorized as active agents of care and inclusivity. The proposed framework of *micro-interior inclusivity* therefore lays the foundation for a new theoretical direction in hospitality design: one that recognizes the gendered nature of spatial perception, embeds safety into aesthetics, and elevates micro-details as key indicators of inclusivity.

In this way, the study not only extends existing theories such as the *servicescape* (Bitner 1992) and *experientscape* (Pizam and Tasci 2019) but also critiques their limitations by foregrounding the embodied and gendered experiences of women guests. The proposed framework challenges scholars and practitioners to move beyond universalist models of space and towards a more contextual, empathetic, and inclusive hospitality design theory.

4. Conclusion

This exploratory study examined women's preferences in hotel interior design as a means to advance gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches to hospitality. Survey findings from 29 women travelers highlight three interconnected themes. First, safety emerged as a spatial and emotional assurance, expressed through the importance of daylight, non-slip bathroom flooring, secure lobby arrangements, and well-lit vanity spaces. Second, women emphasized comfort as an aesthetic of care, where warm, cozy, and decorated interiors are perceived as empathetic and culturally resonant in contrast to minimalist or impersonal design. Third, respondents interpreted micro-interior details—such as curtain flexibility, mirror placement, room scent, and cleanliness—as decisive indicators of inclusivity and attentiveness, underscoring the symbolic weight of design choices that are often overlooked in conventional hospitality practice.

These findings extend and critique existing hospitality frameworks such as Bitner's (1992) *servicescape* and Pizam & Tasci's (2019) *experientscape*, which have traditionally emphasized the impact of physical environments on satisfaction but rarely addressed their gendered interpretations. By foregrounding women's voices, this study proposes the conceptual framework of micro-interior inclusivity, which recognizes that small-scale spatial interventions carry disproportionate significance in communicating empathy, safety, and care. The research also contributes to the development of an inclusive hospitality design theory, one that embeds safety within aesthetics, redefines comfort through the aesthetic of care, and positions hotel interiors as active mediators of gendered experience rather than neutral backdrops.

Nevertheless, several limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size ($n=29$) and reliance on purposive convenience sampling limit the generalizability of the results. The online survey method may have skewed responses toward women with greater digital access, while cultural diversity within the sample was not systematically examined. These constraints leave open questions regarding how preferences may differ across cultural backgrounds, age groups, or travel motivations.

Future research should address these gaps by employing larger, more representative, and cross-cultural samples. Mixed-method approaches combining surveys with in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, or design-based experiments would capture the embodied dimensions of women's spatial experiences more fully. Comparative studies across Southeast Asia could illuminate cultural variations in women's expectations, while experimental testing of interventions such as lighting schemes, bathroom layouts, or scent design would provide actionable evidence for hospitality operators. By articulating women's perspectives on micro-interior design, this study demonstrates that inclusivity in hospitality is not only a matter of service or policy but is materially embedded in the sensory and spatial environment. Designing with women in mind ultimately fosters hotels that are safer, more empathetic, and more competitive, advancing both the scholarship and practice of hospitality interior design.

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