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VISUAL FRAMING IN HOSPITALITY MARKETING: THE ROLE OF CAMERA ANGLE AND HUMAN PRESENCE IN SHAPING TRAVELERS' EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

Visual imagery plays a central role in influencing travel decisions, with hotel-room photographs often forming a traveller's first impression of a property. Previous research suggests that specific compositional elements can shape viewers' emotional responses to images. However, the extent to which these cues affect real-world audiences remains unclear, particularly in hospitality settings where multiple factors influence perception. This study tests whether two common photographic cues, i.e, camera angle and inclusion of human elements, shape travellers' emotional evaluations of hotel-room images. In a departure-hall field survey at Langkawi International Airport (N = 455), travellers viewed six photos produced by crossing human element (i.e., present vs. absent) with camera angle (i.e., high, eye-level, low) and rated them on their emotional impacts (i.e., relaxation, comfort, security, and welcome). Mann–Whitney tests showed no significant human-element effect ($p > .22$). Kruskal–Wallis tests showed no significant camera-angle effect ($p > .26$) and no six-group differences ($p > .08$). The findings suggest that, once overall photographic quality is strong, these compositional cues alone have limited impact on immediate emotional appeal. Accordingly, hospitality marketers should prioritise enhancing overall image quality and ensuring message congruence, rather than relying on prescriptive compositional rules such as including people or specific perspectives.

Keywords: hospitality marketing, emotional appeal, camera angle, human element, visual persuasion, hotel photography

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary hospitality markets, imagery is the primary interface between hotels and prospective guests. As search and booking migrate almost entirely to screens and mobile devices, consumers form impressions of room quality, atmosphere, and value largely from a handful of photographs displayed on brand sites and online travel agencies (OTAs). Visuals do more than decorate a listing; they guide attention, accelerate information processing, and anchor expectations in ways that textual descriptions rarely achieve (J. Kim & Lennon, 2013; Xiang et al., 2015). From a visual-literacy perspective, meaning in images is produced not only by *what* is shown (e.g., a bed, a window view) but also by *how* it is shown also known as the "grammar" of composition, including camera angle, distance, framing, and gaze (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). These micro-choices can signal power or intimacy, spaciousness or enclosure, warmth or sterility, thereby shaping the viewer's appraisal.

Traditionally, hospitality marketers often relies on prescriptive heuristics, that is to i) shoot rooms from elevated positions to enhance depth, ii) include smiling guests to humanize the space, iii) preference over eye-level perspectives for authenticity. While intuitively compelling and frequently repeated in industry guidance, the empirical foundation for these specific prescriptions remains mixed. Visual persuasion research shows that compositional choices can influence interpretation (Messaris,1997). Nevertheless, in tourism contexts, the impact of specific cues is sometimes overshadowed by broader content and quality factors (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Moreover, from the experiential consumption lens, emotions such as pleasure and comfort are central to evaluation and choice (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982), and customer-experience scholarship underscores the role of affect across the journey, from initial browsing to post-stay advocacy (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Still, relatively few studies isolate the *incremental* contribution of camera angle or the inclusion of human figures to core emotional responses in hotel-room photography.

This study addresses that gap with a field experiment that manipulates two common photographic cues which are the camera angle (high, eye-level, low) and human element (present vs. absent) and measures its impact on four emotional-appeal attributes frequently targeted by hotel marketers, i.e. relaxed, comfortable, secure, and welcome. By embedding the experiment in a real travel setting and holding lighting, décor, and overall image quality constant, we estimate the specific influence of these compositional decisions on immediate affective appraisals. Our objectives are twofold: (1) provide evidence-based guidance for image selection in hospitality marketing, and (2) refine understanding of how visual "grammar" translates into consumer emotion within realistic viewing conditions. In line with prior theory that emotions mediate approach–avoidance behavior (Bigné, Andreu, & Gnoth, 2005; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), we test whether adding people and varying perspective measurably shifts perceived emotional appeal, thereby informing visual strategy for hotels competing in image-saturated marketplaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Visual Communication in Online Hospitality

Digital distribution has re-positioned photographs from supporting collateral to the very core of hotel value communication. On large booking platforms, a property is often reduced to one thumbnail, frequently the hero room shot, which must signal quality, price tier, and atmosphere within milliseconds (Xiang, Magnini, & Fesenmaier, 2015). Eye-tracking studies confirm that users scan images before reading descriptions, and that first visual impressions anchor subsequent cognitive processing, in which negative first impressions are rarely corrected by textual detail (Kim & Lennon, 2013). Consequently, the craft of visual communication in hospitality now carries strategic weight comparable to pricing or revenue optimisation.

Visual-literacy theory frames an image as a structured message in which compositional variables such as colour palette, lighting, angle, gaze, and spatial arrangement encode meanings that viewers decode through learned cultural grammars (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Photographs of guest rooms must therefore perform multiple semiotic functions simultaneously, including denoting functional attributes, connoting experiential promises such as relaxation and indulgence, and persuading through aesthetic appeal. The rise of *virtual tours* and other immersive media has further enriched visual storytelling in hotel marketing, with Stienmetz et al. (2022) showing that interactive media deepens perceived atmosphere and enhances engagement. These technologies require marketers to master not only technical execution but also narrative authenticity and emotional resonance.

Gretzel, Yuan, and Fesenmaier (2000) demonstrated that destination-marketing organisations shifted budget share dramatically toward professional imagery once digital channels exposed them to global comparison. Similar pressures now affect independent hotels whose photographs sit beside chain competitors on OTAs. The growth of user-generated content complicates the visual landscape. Traveller-posted photos on sites such as TripAdvisor or Google can often outrank official images in search and can legitimise or undercut brand claims (Kim, Mattila, & Baloglu, 2011). Hospitality marketers thus curate official galleries not only for persuasion but also to pre-empt unfavourable contrasts with candid imagery.

Meanwhile, advances in mobile bandwidth have normalised richer media such as 360-degree tours and short-form video reels, which demand even greater fluency in visual storytelling. Studies by Fesenmaier et al. (2022) highlight the importance of strategic narrative construction in digital tourism marketing, emphasizing that visual content must integrate brand identity with audience expectations across cultures. Despite this centrality, many guidelines rest on untested assumptions. For example, it is believed that high angle shots make rooms appear larger or that including happy guests universally increases warmth. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2009) caution that context, device size, and viewer goals can moderate such effects. By isolating specific compositional cues under controlled conditions, the present study brings empirical clarity to practices where anecdotal rule-of-thumb often drives high-stakes decisions.

Human Elements and Perceived Social Presence

In hospitality photography, the decision to feature people is typically guided by the intuition that viewers will translate recognizable human cues into warmth, credibility, and a sense of identification. Early social-presence theory (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) asserts that visibility of another person in a mediated environment heightens psychological salience, thereby encouraging approach behaviour. Subsequent empirical work in e-commerce extends this premise with findings that human models in imagery prompt stronger pleasure and trust, leading to higher purchase intentions (Kim & Lennon, 2013).

Within the hospitality industry, Park et al. (2021) demonstrated that physical and social attractiveness of portrayed guests enhances perceived social presence, which in turn increases sociability and booking intent. These effects intensify when viewers perceive demographic homophily with the models, but recent

research cautions that cultural alignment moderates impact (Bai, Law, & Wen, 2022). Bai et al. (2022) emphasize that mere token inclusion of smiling guests without narrative relevance may add clutter rather than connection, and visual storytelling power depends on authenticity and demographic resonance. Fesenmaier et al. (2022) further suggest that strategic decisions around human presence—such as demographic representation and authenticity—are crucial for cross-cultural hospitality brands.

User-generated travel videos and candid photos often outperform professionally staged images by allowing viewers to project themselves into the setting (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Overly generic stock models may trigger skepticism or representation concerns, especially in multicultural markets. Thus, the challenge is to balance immediacy and social proof while safeguarding authenticity and cultural fit. The present study therefore tests incremental emotional value of human elements under tightly controlled conditions, contributing to the debate about what truly drives emotional appeal in visual hospitality communication.

Camera Angle as an Affective Cue

Camera angle is frequently discussed in terms of scale or perspective, but its most immediate influence in hospitality imagery may be emotional. Visual-semiotic theory proposes that vertical lens positioning carries attitudinal meaning: low angles imbue authority and excitement, while high angles tend to soften or infantilize the subject (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Messaris (1997) argued that viewers learn these meanings through repeated exposure to advertising and cinematic grammar. Recent studies by Lee, Lee, and Lee (2023) confirm that vertical orientation can sway approach-avoidance behaviour, but note that cultural context and prior experience affect outcomes.

Media-psychology experiments substantiate the affective weight of angle. Gall and Latoschik (2020) found that low-angle camera views generated significantly higher ratings of dominance and excitement, while high-angle versions elicited greater feelings of care and protection. Cores-Sarría, Hale, and Lang (2022) found that low-angle shots increase autonomic arousal even for neutral objects. However, these effects can disappear or reverse if overall photo quality is poor or if individual viewer traits, such as anxiety, interact with compositional cues (Bai, Law, & Wen, 2022; Gall & Latoschik, 2020). Angle thus operates as a fine-tuning device that may amplify or dampen underlying emotional signals, but it cannot rescue uninspiring images. The present study probes whether professionally executed changes in angle meaningfully shape core emotional responses in digital hospitality contexts.

Emotional Appeal in Hospitality Decision-Making

Emotions are central drivers that shape how guests evaluate options, form memories, and determine where to stay. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) proposed that environmental cues provoke pleasure, arousal, and dominance (PAD), guiding approach or avoidance behaviour. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) broadened this view by emphasizing experiential consumption, where fantasy, feeling, and fun frequently outrank utilitarian considerations. Hotels thus sell a promise of positive emotion—rest, safety, welcome—rather than mere functionality.

Empirical studies confirm the powerful role of affect: Bigné, Andreu, and Gnoth (2005) showed that pleasure and arousal in service settings drive satisfaction and repeat intention, while Kim and Lennon (2013) observed that positive emotional responses to website imagery lower perceived risk and increase purchase intention in online hotel environments. Lemon and Verhoef (2016) identify emotion as a catalyst across all phases of the customer journey, affecting everything from search and booking to advocacy.

Researchers are now specifying which discrete emotions matter most for accommodation. Li, Scott, and Walters (2015) found that emotional engagement with destination images strongly predicts travel intention, while Park et al. (2021) identified feelings of warmth, comfort, and security as antecedents of

booking intent, mediated by perceived social presence. Han and Jeong (2013) showed that images evoking relaxation enhance overall destination image and repeat-stay intention, even if price cues are absent. These findings justify the focus on relaxation, comfort, security, and welcome—the four emotional-appeal dimensions core to hospitality positioning. However, antecedents remain underexplored; visual cues such as angle and human presence may be only part of a much richer set of signals that hotels use to create immediate competitive edge in compressed digital environments (Li et al., 2015; Stienmetz et al., 2022).

Synthesis and Hypotheses

The preceding review establishes four key insights. **First**, in the scroll-driven economics of OTAs, photographs serve as the traveller's primary information node, and their communicative power depends on the visual "grammar" of composition (Section 2.1). **Second**, inserting people into hospitality images can strengthen perceived social presence and warmth, yet empirical findings are mixed and context-sensitive (Section 2.2). **Third**, camera angle operates as a subtle affective cue: low angles tend to heighten dominance and excitement, high angles can evoke care or approachability, and eye-level shots convey neutrality (Section 2.3). **Fourth**, discrete emotions, which includes relaxation, comfort, security, welcome, are proven antecedents of booking intent. Nevertheless, the exact visual triggers for these emotions remain under-specified (Section 2.4).

Taken together, the literature suggests that compositional choices could fine-tune emotional messaging if baseline image quality is constant. Yet the magnitude and direction of such effects in hotel-room photography are uncertain. To resolve this ambiguity and provide actionable guidance for marketers, the present study isolates two controllable cues, human element and camera angle, and measures their influence on the four focal emotions.

Hypothesis 1 (H1). *Hotel-room photographs that include a human element will elicit higher mean ratings of relaxation, comfort, security, and welcome than photographs without a human element.*

Hypothesis 2 (H2). *Camera angle will significantly affect emotional-appeal ratings; specifically, mean scores will differ across high, eye-level, and low angles.*

A supplementary six-group analysis (Human × Angle) explores potential interactions, but the primary tests centre on the two main effects articulated above. By grounding these hypotheses in converging theory and highlighting the unresolved empirical gap, the study directly addresses the decision rules that practitioners routinely apply when curating hotel imagery for digital channels.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a field-based, between-subjects experimental survey design to examine how photographic design variables influence travellers' emotional appeal ratings of hotel room images. Specifically, a 2 (Human Element: With vs. Without) × 3 (Camera Angle: High, Eye-Level, Low) factorial design was used to systematically test both main effects and their interaction in realistic viewing conditions. The study was conducted in the departure hall of Langkawi International Airport to provide an authentic booking context, enhancing ecological validity and making the findings applicable to real-world marketing scenarios in hospitality education.

Participants

Participants comprised 455 adult travellers waiting in the Langkawi International Airport departure hall. Recruitment was voluntary, with eligibility requiring participants to be 18 years or older and able to read and respond in the survey language. No personally identifying data were collected, ensuring participant anonymity. This real-world sample was chosen to reflect an authentic population of interest for hospitality marketers and to enhance the applicability of the findings for hospitality marketing practices as well as curriculum development.

Stimuli

Figure 1: *Hotel Room Photos*

Six professionally styled hotel room photos were used as stimuli, representing the full 2 × 3 factorial combination of the independent variables (Figure 1).

- **Human Element (2 levels):**
  - With Human Element (Photos A, B, C)
  - Without Human Element (Photos D, E, F)
- **Camera Angle (3 levels):**
  - High Angle (Photos A, D)
  - Eye-Level Angle (Photos B, E)
  - Low Angle (Photos C, F)

All photos depicted realistic hotel room environments consistent with marketing photography, ensuring ecological validity for testing design choices that hospitality marketing students and professionals commonly encounter.

Questionnaire Instrument

Participants viewed the photos (Figure 1) on a tablet device and selected the most pleasurable feeling photo from Figure 1. Participants will then complete a brief, structured questionnaire delivered via SurveyMonkey. The survey measured four emotional appeal attributes (i.e. Relaxed, Comfort, Secure, and Welcome) on 5-point Likert scales (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). These emotional dimensions were selected to align with core hospitality service goals and branding promises, following recommendations from prior research emphasizing the role of emotional appeal in marketing effectiveness (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Hudson & Hudson, 2017). In particular, the participants were asked to rate their level of agreement for the question: '*How would you feel if you were in a room as shown in the picture above?*' based on the four emotional appeal attributes.

Instrument Reliability

The internal consistency of the four emotional appeal items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure scale reliability. Results demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.813$), supporting the calculation of a composite Emotional Appeal Score as the mean of the four items. This approach models best practices in validating measurement instruments in applied marketing research and provides a teaching example for hospitality students learning research methods.

Procedure

Data collection took place in the departure hall of Langkawi International Airport. Researchers approached travelers, provided information about the study's purpose and the voluntary nature of participation, and presented the survey on a tablet. Photos were randomly assigned to participants to ensure balanced group distribution across the six experimental conditions. Participants were given sufficient time to view the image and complete the questionnaire independently. Ethical considerations included voluntary participation, informed consent, the right to withdraw at any time, and assurance that responses would remain confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Data Preparation and Coding

Survey responses were exported from SurveyMonkey and screened for completeness and validity. The six photo conditions (A–F) were recoded into two independent variables for analysis:

- **Human Element:** With Human (A, B, C) vs. Without Human (D, E, F)
- **Camera Angle:** High (A, D), Eye-Level (B, E), Low (C, F)

A composite Emotional Appeal Score was computed for each participant by averaging their ratings across the four emotional attributes.

Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using Jamovi, an accessible and educationally appropriate statistical software platform for teaching applied research methods.

I. For **Instrument Reliability**, Cronbach's Alpha assessed internal consistency of the four-item Emotional Appeal Scale.

II. For **Hypothesis 1** (Human Element Main Effect), Mann-Whitney U tests compared Emotional Appeal Scores between the With vs. the Without Human Element groups.

III. For **Hypothesis 2** (Camera Angle Main Effect), Kruskal-Wallis tests compared Emotional Appeal Scores across the three Camera Angle groups.

IV. For **Combined Effects**, Kruskal-Wallis tests examined all six experimental photo conditions, with Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner pairwise comparisons to identify specific group differences.

A significance threshold of $p < .05$ was adopted. Analyses focused on both statistical significance and descriptive trends to provide nuanced insights for visual literacy instruction in hospitality marketing education.

RESULTS

Instrument Reliability

Table 1: *Instrument Reliability Result*

	Cronbach's α
scale	0.813

Instrument reliability for the Emotional Appeal scale was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The four-item scale (Relaxed, Comfort, Secure, Welcome) demonstrated good internal consistency, with $\alpha = 0.813$, indicating that the items measured a coherent construct of perceived emotional appeal.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics for Emotional Appeal Items*

	Relaxed	**Comfort**	**Secure**	**Welcome**
N	441	444	444	443
Missing	14	11	11	12
Mean	3.86	3.86	3.59	3.69
Median	4	4.00	4.00	4
Standard deviation	0.678	0.655	0.700	0.713
Minimum	1	1	1	1

	Relaxed	Comfort	Secure	Welcome
Maximum	5	5	5	5
Skewness	-1.18	-1.11	-0.748	-0.891
Std. error skewness	0.116	0.116	0.116	0.116
Kurtosis	2.86	2.44	1.07	1.05
Std. error kurtosis	0.232	0.231	0.231	0.231

Descriptive statistics were computed for each of the four Emotional Appeal items to summarise the overall distribution of responses. These results show high mean and median values close to 4 on a 5-point scale, indicating that respondents generally agreed or strongly agreed that the images conveyed positive feelings of relaxation, comfort, security, and welcome. The negative skewness values suggest responses were clustered at the higher end of the scale, with some mild floor effects possible, but an overall pattern of positive perception. The moderate kurtosis values indicate slight peakness relative to normal, consistent with Likert-scale data.

Hypothesis 1: Human Element Main Effect

Table 3: *Independent Samples T-Test for Hypothesis 1*

		Statistic	df	p		Effect Size
Relaxed	**Student's t**	0.703	439	0.482	Cohen's d	0.0690
	Mann-Whitney U	22234		0.536	Rank biserial correlation	-0.0282
Comfort	**Student's t**	-0.534	442	0.594	Cohen's d	-0.0524
	Mann-Whitney U	22256		0.428	Rank biserial correlation	0.0355
Secure	**Student's t**	1.075	442	0.283	Cohen's d	0.1054
	Mann-Whitney U	21664		0.224	Rank biserial correlation	-0.0611

		Statistic	df	p		Effect Size
Welcome	**Student's t**	-0.633	441	0.527	Cohen's d	-0.0622
	Mann-Whitney U	22481		0.684	Rank biserial correlation	0.0198

Note. H_a $\mu_{With} \neq \mu_{Without}$

To examine whether the inclusion of human elements in the photos significantly influenced perceived Emotional Appeal, Mann–Whitney U tests were conducted comparing responses to photos with human figures versus photos without them. Results indicated no statistically significant differences for any of the four emotional appeal attributes. Across all comparisons, p-values exceeded the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. Rank biserial correlation coefficients were very close to zero, indicating negligible effect sizes.

These results suggest that including human elements in the room photographs did not systematically increase or decrease participants' ratings of emotional appeal attributes in this study's sample and context. Participants appeared to evaluate the appeal of the images similarly regardless of the presence or absence of people.

Hypothesis 2: Camera Angle Main Effect

Table 4: *Kruskal-Wallis Test Result for Hypothesis 2*

	χ^2	df	p
Relaxed	0.980	2	0.613
Comfort	0.976	2	0.614
Secure	2.644	2	0.267
Welcome	1.339	2	0.512

To test whether camera angle (High, Eye-Level, Low) affected Emotional Appeal ratings, Kruskal–Wallis tests were used. Results showed no statistically significant main effects for camera angle on any of the four emotional appeal items. None of the p-values approached the 0.05 level, suggesting that camera angle did not have a statistically significant impact on how participants rated feelings of relaxation, comfort, security, or welcome. The lack of significant differences indicates that, at least in this field setting with these images, variations in camera angle did not meaningfully influence perceived emotional appeal.

Combined Effects: Six-Group Factorial Analysis

Table 5: *Kruskal-Wallis Result for Combined Effects*

	χ^2	df	p
Relaxed	9.70	5	0.084
Comfort	8.08	5	0.152
Secure	4.47	5	0.484
Welcome	2.79	5	0.732

To test for the combined effects of human element inclusion and camera angle, participants' ratings were compared across six specific photo conditions (A–F), representing all combinations of presence/absence of human elements and camera angle (High, Eye-Level, Low). Kruskal–Wallis tests indicated no statistically significant differences among the six groups. Although the test for *Relaxed* was the closest to significance ($p = 0.084$), it did not meet the conventional threshold. This suggests that there was no clear evidence that the interaction of human element inclusion and camera angle meaningfully affected emotional appeal ratings. Overall, these results indicate that, in this context, neither the main effects of human elements and camera angle nor their combined manipulation led to measurable differences in perceived emotional appeal.

Pairwise Comparisons

For completeness, exploratory post-hoc pairwise comparisons (refer to Appendix 1) were conducted using the Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner procedure to identify any specific differences between pairs of the six photo conditions.

Results showed no statistically significant pairwise differences on any emotional appeal item. For example, selected p-values for *Relaxed* included:

- A vs B: $p = 0.433$
- A vs C: $p = 0.900$
- A vs D: $p = 0.392$
- A vs E: $p = 0.656$
- A vs F: $p = 0.333$

Similar patterns of non-significance were observed for *Comfort*, *Secure*, and *Welcome*.

These post-hoc results further confirm that no particular combination of human element and camera angle consistently elicited higher or lower emotional appeal ratings. Participants rated all six photo conditions similarly, suggesting that in this field setting, these design variations did not produce strong differential emotional responses.

Summary of Findings

Overall, the analyses provide no evidence that either the inclusion of human elements or variations in camera angle, either individually or in combination, significantly influenced travellers' emotional appeal ratings of hotel room photos in this field study. Participants generally rated all images highly across all emotional attributes, suggesting that these specific photographic design cues had limited standalone impact on perceived relaxation, comfort, security, or welcome within the tested context.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the influence of human element inclusion and camera angle on travellers' emotional appeal ratings of hotel room photographs in a field setting at Langkawi International Airport. Despite widely recommended design practices suggesting that human figures and eye-level perspectives increase warmth and relatability (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Short et al., 1976), the findings showed no statistically significant differences across conditions. Participants consistently rated images highly for emotional appeal attributes such as relaxation, comfort, security, and welcome, regardless of experimental manipulation.

These results challenge assumptions derived from Social Presence Theory, which posits that including human elements fosters perceived warmth and interpersonal connection (Short et al., 1976). While previous research in tourism marketing has demonstrated that images featuring people can increase authenticity and facilitate mental simulation of experiences (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009), this study suggests that these benefits are not universal. The context, photographic quality, and perceived naturalness of human elements may moderate their effect (Xiang et al., 2015).

Similarly, the lack of significant camera angle effects contrasts with theoretical recommendations that eye-level perspectives promote identification and comfort while high or low angles convey psychological distance or power dynamics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Messaris, 1997). While such design heuristics are widely taught, the real-world context of online travel booking may limit their practical impact. In environments with high-quality, professionally composed images, subtle variations in angle might not meaningfully change perceived emotional appeal, especially given consumers' reliance on multiple cues such as price, brand reputation, and textual reviews (W. G. Kim et al., 2011).

One explanation for the uniformly high ratings is a potential ceiling effect, where professionally staged photos met baseline consumer expectations regardless of design variations. Additionally, the airport departure hall context, with time constraints and distractions, may have reduced participants' sensitivity to nuanced visual cues. These contextual factors align with broader findings that consumer perception in tourism decision-making is influenced by a complex interplay of environmental, psychological, and social variables (Xiang et al., 2015).

In sum, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of visual persuasion in hospitality marketing. It cautions against over-reliance on assumed best practices and highlights the importance of context-sensitive, evidence-based approaches to design. These insights support the development of hospitality professionals capable of creating effective, customer-centred marketing communications in an increasingly competitive and media-rich industry.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of human element inclusion and camera angle on travellers' emotional appeal ratings of hotel room photographs in a realistic airport setting. Contrary to widely held assumptions in marketing practice and education, results showed no statistically significant differences in emotional appeal based on these design variables. Participants rated all images consistently high for relaxation, comfort, security, and welcome, suggesting these specific visual cues may have limited standalone influence in online booking contexts when overall image quality is high.

These findings underscore the importance of critically evaluating commonly practiced visual design heuristics, such as including human figures or using eye-level angles to increase relatability (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Short et al., 1976). While previous research indicates that human elements and certain camera angles can increase social presence, authenticity, and emotional engagement (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009; Xiang et al., 2015), this study highlights that these effects are not universal and may depend on contextual factors such as photographic quality, audience expectations, and viewing environment. Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing conversation about visual persuasion in hospitality marketing by challenging assumptions and advocating for a critical, evidence-informed approach to design education.

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Appendix 1: Pairwise Comparison

One-Way ANOVA (Non-parametric)

Kruskal-Wallis

	χ^2	df	p
Relaxed	9.70	5	0.084
Comfort	8.08	5	0.152
Secure	4.47	5	0.484
Welcome	2.79	5	0.732

Dwass-Steel-Critchlow-Fligner pairwise comparisons

Pairwise comparisons - Relaxed

		W	p
A	**B**	-2.6177	0.433
A	**C**	-1.4898	0.900
A	**D**	-2.7113	0.392
A	**E**	-2.1396	0.656
A	**F**	2.8511	0.333
B	**C**	0.0386	1.000
B	**D**	0.2672	1.000

Pairwise comparisons - Relaxed

		W	p
B	**E**	0.4957	0.999
B	**F**	3.3252	0.174
C	**D**	0.1159	1.000
C	**E**	0.2575	1.000
C	**F**	2.6077	0.437
D	**E**	0.3165	1.000
D	**F**	3.3502	0.167
E	**F**	3.2461	0.196

Pairwise comparisons - Comfort

		W	p
A	**B**	-1.739	0.823
A	**C**	-1.490	0.900
A	**D**	-0.724	0.996
A	**E**	-0.742	0.995
A	**F**	3.078	0.249
B	**C**	-0.307	1.000
B	**D**	1.462	0.907
B	**E**	1.168	0.963

Pairwise comparisons - Comfort

		W	p
B	**F**	3.281	0.186
C	**D**	1.162	0.964
C	**E**	1.047	0.977
C	**F**	3.513	0.129
D	**E**	-0.124	1.000
D	**F**	3.340	0.170
E	**F**	3.286	0.185

Pairwise comparisons - Secure

		W	p
A	**B**	0.7447	0.995
A	**C**	0.0763	1.000
A	**D**	-1.2130	0.956
A	**E**	0.1707	1.000
A	**F**	1.6219	0.862
B	**C**	-0.3581	1.000
B	**D**	-2.2617	0.599
B	**E**	-0.5668	0.999
B	**F**	1.3193	0.938

Pairwise comparisons - Secure

		W	p
C	**D**	-0.7605	0.995
C	**E**	0.0155	1.000
C	**F**	1.4639	0.906
D	**E**	1.5292	0.889
D	**F**	1.8456	0.782
E	**F**	1.4456	0.911

Pairwise comparisons - Welcome

		W	p
A	**B**	-1.850	0.781
A	**C**	-0.218	1.000
A	**D**	-0.899	0.988
A	**E**	-0.894	0.989
A	**F**	0.917	0.987
B	**C**	0.896	0.989
B	**D**	1.507	0.895
B	**E**	1.126	0.968
B	**F**	1.365	0.929
C	**D**	-0.270	1.000

Pairwise comparisons - Welcome

		W	p
C	**E**	-0.321	1.000
C	**F**	0.957	0.985
D	**E**	-0.151	1.000
D	**F**	1.145	0.966
E	**F**	1.153	0.965