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Balancing Technology and Human Touch in Luxury Hospitality: A Qualitative Study of Service Staff Experiences at Hilton Hotels in France

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT 1

1. INTRODUCTION 2

1.1. Background to the Study 2

1.2. Statement of the Problem 4

1.3. Aim, Objectives, and Research Question 4

1.4. Significance of the Study 5

1.5. Scope and Delimitation of the Study 6

1.6. Conceptual Definitions 6

1.7. Organization of the Study 7

2. LITERATURE REVIEW 8

2.1. Introduction 8

2.2. Conceptualizing Luxury Hospitality 8

2.2.1. Defining Luxury in Hospitality 8

2.2.2. Human Touch and Personalized Service 9

2.2.3. Cultural Context: France 10

2.3. Technological Innovations in Luxury Hospitality 11

2.3.1. The Rise of Technology in Hospitality 11

2.3.2. Impact on Guest Experience and Luxury 12

2.3.3. Technology and Staff Experience 13

2.3.4. COVID-19 as Catalyst for Technological Integration and (…) 13

2.3.5. Integrating Technology and Human Touch 14

2.4. Human Touch and Emotional Labor 15

2.4.1. Conceptualizing Human Touch 15

2.4.2. Emotional Labor in Luxury Hospitality 16

2.4.3. Staff Experiences 17
2.5. Balancing Technology and Human Touch 18
2.5.1. Integration Strategies 18
2.5.2. Staff-Centric Perspectives 19
2.6. Theoretical Framework 20
2.6.1. Service-Dominant Logic (SDL) 20
2.6.2. Emotional Labor Theory 21
2.6.3. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) 22
2.6.4. Conceptual Framework 23
2.7. Hilton Technologies and Their Relationship to Human Touch 26
2.7.1. COVID-19 as Catalyst and the Persistence of Change 27
2.7.2. Implications for Guest Interaction 27
2.7.3. Staff Roles, Emotional Labor, and Job Security 28
2.8. Research Gaps 28
3. METHODS 30
3.1. Research Design 30
3.2. Conceptual Foundation 30
3.3. Study Sites 31
3.4. Sampling Strategy and Sample Size 31
3.5. Recruitment and Ethical Procedures 32
3.6. Data Collection Procedures 32
3.7. Data Management and Transcription 33
3.8. Data Analysis 33
3.9. Ensuring Rigor 34
3.10. Ethical Considerations 34

3.11. Fieldwork Timeline 34
4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION 35
4.1. Introduction 35
4.2. Participant Demographics 36
4.3. Theme 1: Technological Infrastructure and the Reconfiguration (…) 37
4.3.1. Property Management and Communication Systems 37
4.3.2. System Failures and Operational Discontinuity 38
4.3.3. The Emergence of AI-Augmented Tools 40
4.4. Theme 2: Guest Perception, Segmentation and the Reshaping (…) 41
4.4.1. Demographic and Cultural Determinants of Technology Preference 41
4.4.2. Anticipatory Personalization through Guest-History Systems 42
4.4.3. The Double-Edged Sword: Efficiency Gains versus (…) 43
4.5. Theme 3: Emotional Labor and the Strategic Preservation (…) 44
4.5.1. Deep Acting and Deliberate Humanizing Practices 45
4.5.2. Face-to-Face Primacy and the Limits of Mediated Communication 45
4.5.3. AI as Assistant, Not Author: Bounded Delegation of Emotional Work 46
4.6. Theme 4: Organizational Culture, Training and the Institutional (…) 47
4.6.1. Structured Onboarding and Continuous Training 47
4.6.2. French Cultural Norms and the "Art de Recevoir" in Practice 48
4.6.3. Resistance to Change and Generational/Technological (…) 49
4.7. Theoretical Contextualization: Service-Dominant Logic, Emotional (…) 49
4.8. Cross-Property and Cross-Brand Comparative Insights 52
4.9. Implications 53
5. CONCLUSION 55
5.1. Introduction 55

5.2. Summary of the Findings 55
5.3. Contribution to Knowledge and Practice 57
5.4. Study Limitations 57
5.5. Directions for Future Research 58
5.6. Final Reflection 59
REFERENCES 60
APPENDICES 72
Appendix 1. NVivo Analysis 72
A1.1. Deductive Codes (Theory-Driven) 72
A1.2. Inductive Codes 73
Appendix 2. Participant Profile Matrix 74
Appendix 3. Thematic Analysis Process Documentation 75
A3.1. Phase 1: Familiarization with Data 75
A3.2. Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes 75
Appendix 4. Transcript Extract 76
Appendix 5. Frequency Analysis Tables 76
A5.1. Technology Tools by Frequency 76
A5.2. Emotional Labor / Humanizing Strategies by Frequency 77
A5.3. Reported System Disruptions 77
Appendix 6. Quotation Matrix by Theme 77
Appendix 7. Negative Cases and Outliers 78
Appendix 8. Data Quality and Trustworthiness 79
Appendix 9. Ethical Considerations in Data Presentation 79
Appendix 10. Recommendations from Participants 79
Appendix 11. Connection to Theoretical Frameworks 80

TABLE OF TABLES

Table 1. Participant Profile Summary 36
Table 2. Summary Mapping of Theoretical Framework to Key Findings 51
Table 3. Deductive Coding Framework 72
Table 4. Inductive Coding Framework 73
Table 5. Comprehensive Participant Profile Matrix 74
Table 6. Theme Definitions and Scope 75
Table 7. Extract from Participant A (Candice) - Section on System Failure (…) 76
Table 8. Technology Tools Mentioned (n=7 participants) 76
Table 9. Humanizing Strategies Mentioned 77
Table 10. System Disruptions Reported 77
Table 11. Representative Quotations for Each Sub-Theme 77
Table 12. Participants Who Deviated from Main Patterns 78
Table 13. Trustworthiness Criteria Applied 79
Table 14. Sensitive Topics and Handling 79
Table 15. Participant Recommendations 80
Table 16. Data Mapping to the Conceptual Framework (Section 2.5.4) 80

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1. TAM Model in Hospitality Management (Hamid, 2019) 23
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework Model 25
Figure 3. Technology Tools Referenced Across Participant Transcripts 37
Figure 4. Reported System Failures and Operational Impact..... 39
Figure 5. Guest Segment and Reported Technology-Channel Preference..... 41
Figure 6. Staff Strategies for Preserving the Human Touch..... 44
Figure 7. Institutional Training and Support Mechanisms Reported 47
Figure 8. Empirical Mapping of the TAM-Emotional Labor-SDL (…) 50
Figure 9. Cross-Property/Cross-Brand Comparison of Technology Reliance (…)..... 52

ABSTRACT

The rapid integration of digital technologies and artificial intelligence has transformed service delivery within the luxury hospitality sector, creating new opportunities for efficiency while raising questions about the preservation of personalized guest experiences. This study examines how technology and human interaction are balanced in luxury hospitality through an analysis of service staff experiences at Hilton Hotels in France. The research seeks to understand how employees perceive and manage the growing presence of digital tools in their daily work while maintaining the high standards of personalized service expected in luxury hospitality environments.

Adopting an interpretivist research approach, the study employed a qualitative methodology based on semi-structured interviews with seven service staff members across three hotel properties, primarily Hilton Paris Opera, with comparative insights from Waldorf Astoria Versailles and a non-Hilton luxury hotel. Data were analyzed using NVivo 15 through reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis was informed by Service-Dominant Logic, Emotional Labor Theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the interaction between technology adoption, employee behavior, and guest service delivery.

The findings show that property management systems, CRM, guest-messaging systems, and AI tools are now central to luxury hotel operations, but system failures often affect service quality more than the technologies themselves. Guest preferences for technology vary by age, nationality, and travel purpose, while staff continue to rely on emotional intelligence, personalized communication, and face-to-face interaction, especially in conflict situations. Although AI can support service delivery, the study confirms that warmth, discretion, empathy, and personalization still depend on human interaction and cannot be fully replaced by digital systems.

Keywords:

Luxury Hospitality; Human Touch; Technology Acceptance Model (TAM); Digital Transformation; Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Luxury hospitality which is described as the third most important aspect of the luxury industry, (D'Arpizio *et al.,* 2024) has long been characterized by exceptional service quality, exclusivity, and the ability to evoke emotional connection through authentic human interaction (Christodoulides *et al.,* 2025). The *human touch* which is expressed through attentiveness, empathy, and personalization, forms the essence of the guest experience and distinguishes luxury brands from mainstream accommodation providers (Harkison, 2017). Over the years, however, the evolution of technology has introduced a paradigm shift in how luxury hotels design, deliver, and manage guest experiences (Qi, 2024).

Technological advancements such as digital check-in systems, AI-powered concierge services, smart room controls, and mobile applications have been integrated into hotel operations to enhance efficiency, convenience, and brand consistency. These innovations enable guests to enjoy seamless and personalized experiences while allowing hotels to optimize resources and streamline communication. Yet, they simultaneously raise critical questions about the erosion of interpersonal warmth and the emotional engagement that define true luxury service *(Mandić et al.,* 2023; Qi, 2024). The balance between automation and authentic connection has therefore become a central concern in hospitality management (Roy and Pagaldiviti, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the integration of technology across the global hospitality industry. With travel restrictions, heightened hygiene protocols, and the need for minimal physical contact, hotels rapidly adopted *contactless* and *digitally mediated* systems to maintain safety and operational continuity. Although these measures were initially implemented as crisis responses, many of the resulting technologies such as mobile keys, virtual guest assistance, and automated check-ins, have persisted as standard practice. Consequently, the pandemic served as a turning point, embedding digital transformation deeply into hospitality operations and permanently reshaping guest expectations of luxury and convenience (El-Said *et al.,* 2024a).

Additionally, while the integration of technology has been largely uniform across global hospitality brands, location and market type (e.g., city hotels vs. resorts) can greatly affect the role technology plays in service delivery. For instance, luxury hotels in urban centers like Paris are more likely to focus on efficiency, convenience, and technological sophistication due to the fast-paced nature of city travel, where guests typically prioritize speed and functionality. On the other hand, resorts such as those in Evian-les-Bains may face a different guest expectation, where personalized attention and relaxation are more prominent, making the human touch more central to the service offering (Mandić *et al.,* 2023).

Within this transformed landscape, Hilton Hotels and Resorts has played a pioneering role. Through innovations like Digital Key, Connected Room, and the Hilton Honors app, the brand has redefined convenience and personalization in the guest journey. Nonetheless, Hilton continues to promote its long-standing service philosophy of "hospitality from the heart," emphasizing empathy, authenticity, and meaningful interaction. This dual commitment to technological sophistication and human-centered care, creates a dynamic tension at the heart of contemporary luxury hospitality (Hilton Worldwide, 2022; Renascence, 2024).

In France, where *l'art de recevoir* (the art of receiving guests or the art of hospitality) is integral to cultural conceptions of luxury and refinement, this balance takes on special significance. Guests expect technological fluency to coexist with warmth, discretion, and elegance (Cheval Blanc, 2025). Service workers at Hilton Hotels in France, including *réceptionnistes* (front desk staff), *concierges*, *serveurs* (room service staff), *femmes de chambre* (housekeepers), and management, therefore operate at a complex intersection: they are expected to deliver efficiency through digital systems while preserving the relational essence of French luxury hospitality. Exploring how these staff members experience and negotiate this balance is crucial for understanding the evolving nature of luxury service in the 21st century.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Technological innovation in the hospitality industry has enhanced operational efficiency and improved guest convenience, yet it also presents challenges to the human dimensions of service. In luxury hotels, where emotional connection and personal attention are core value propositions, technology can both complement and undermine the guest experience (Chen *et al.,* 2025). Service workers at Hilton Hotels in France, including *réceptionnistes* (front desk staff), *concierges*, *serveurs* (room service staff), *femmes de chambre* (housekeepers), and management, therefore operate at a complex intersection: they are expected to deliver efficiency through digital systems while preserving the relational essence of French luxury hospitality (Larivière *et al.,* 2017).

Existing research has primarily focused on technology adoption, system performance, and guest satisfaction metrics, often overlooking the *subjective experiences* of hospitality employees. The nuanced ways in which staff perceive, adapt to, and incorporate technological tools into their relational work remain underexplored, especially in luxury hotels where emotional engagement is just as highly valued as operational excellence, and where market demands vary between urban and resort settings (Tavitiyaman *et al.,* 2024). Moreover, little is known about how organizational culture and national service traditions, such as those found in French luxury hospitality, influence employees' ability to balance technological and human expectations (Wąsowicz-Zaborek, 2025).

This study addresses these gaps by qualitatively examining the lived experiences of front desk staff at Hilton Hotels in France. It seeks to understand how these employees interpret, negotiate, and sustain the balance between technology-driven efficiency and human-centered service within a global brand that embodies both digital innovation and emotional hospitality.

1.3. Aim, Objectives, and Research Question

This study seeks to explore how service workers at Hilton Hotels in France experience and negotiate the delicate balance between technology-driven processes and the human touch that underpins personalized luxury service. Understanding these experiences

provides insight into the ways in which technology complements, challenges, or reshapes traditional notions of hospitality.

The study is guided by four interconnected objectives:

1. To identify the key technological innovations implemented by Hilton Hotels in France that influence service staff operations.
2. To explore the perceptions of service staff on the impact of these technologies on guest interaction and service quality.
3. To examine the strategies employed by staff to preserve emotional connection and personalized service within technologically mediated environments.
4. To investigate the organizational and cultural factors that facilitate or constrain the integration of technology and human-centered hospitality practices.

These objectives collectively inform the overarching research question:

How do service staff at Hilton Hotels in France perceive and navigate the balance between technological innovation and the human touch in delivering luxury hospitality experiences?

By addressing this question, the study seeks to highlight the lived experiences of front desk personnel, with a focus on how they reconcile operational demands with the relational and affective dimensions of service.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study makes a meaningful contribution to the expanding literature on digital transformation and service personalization within the hospitality industry. By examining the lived experiences of guest-facing (service) staff, it enriches theoretical discourse at the intersection of technology, emotional labor, and organizational culture, offering an employee-centered perspective that is often overlooked in hospitality research. In doing so, the study bridges the gap between practical operational concerns and conceptual understanding of the human–technology interface in luxury service settings.

From a practical standpoint, the findings provide valuable insights for Hilton and other luxury hotel brands seeking to harmonize technological innovation with authentic human connection. Understanding how staff perceive, interpret, and adapt to digital tools can inform training programs, recruitment strategies, and service design, ensuring that operational efficiency does not come at the expense of personalized guest experiences.

Moreover, the study offers guidance for hospitality educators and policymakers in developing curricula and frameworks that prepare future professionals to navigate the evolving landscape of luxury hospitality. By emphasizing the integration of empathy and digital literacy, the research supports the enduring value of the human touch, ensuring that luxury hospitality continues to deliver emotionally resonant and memorable experiences even as technological advancement accelerates.

1.5. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This research focuses exclusively on service staff in selected Hilton Hotels located in France, such as Hilton Paris Opera and Waldorf Astoria Versailles. The study investigated employees' experiences, attitudes, and practices regarding the interplay between technology and human service. Non-French Hilton properties are outside the scope. Findings will be context-specific and not intended for broad generalization, but rather for deep, interpretive understanding within the luxury hospitality setting.

1.6. Conceptual Definitions

- **Luxury Hospitality:** A segment of the hospitality industry emphasizing exclusivity, comfort, and highly personalized service experiences.
- **Technology Integration:** The use of digital tools and systems, such as mobile applications, AI interfaces, and automation in hotel operations to improve efficiency and guest convenience.
- **Human Touch:** The affective and relational dimension of service characterized by empathy, warmth, attentiveness, and genuine interpersonal connection.

- **Service Staff:** This refers to employees who directly interact with guests to ensure their needs are met, including roles like front desk staff, concierges, room service attendants, and housekeeping.
- **Balance:** The dynamic process of harmonizing technological efficiency with personalized emotional engagement to achieve optimal guest satisfaction.

1.7. Organization of the Study

This dissertation is structured into five chapters:

- **Chapter One** provides the introduction, outlining the background, problem statement, objectives, and significance of the study.
- **Chapter Two** presents a review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks on technology adoption, emotional labor, and service excellence in luxury hospitality.
- **Chapter Three** details the research methodology, including design, participants, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations.
- **Chapter Four** presents and interprets the qualitative findings.
- **Chapter Five** summarizes conclusions, discusses implications, and provides recommendations for practice and future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This chapter critically examines scholarly work on the integration of technology and human touch in luxury hospitality, with particular emphasis on service staff experiences. It adopts a thematic approach, moving from conceptualizations of luxury hospitality to technological innovations, the dynamics of emotional labor, and the interplay between automation and personalized service.

The review is framed through Service-Dominant Logic, which positions service as co-created value; Emotional Labor Theory, which illuminates the affective demands placed on staff; and Technology Acceptance Theory, which explains staff engagement with technological innovations. These frameworks collectively provide a lens to understand how service staff negotiate the balance between operational efficiency and the preservation of human-centered experiences.

The chapter is structured to highlight critical debates, identify theoretical and empirical gaps, and situate the study within the specific context of Hilton Hotels in France, where the coexistence of cutting-edge technology and traditional service practices presents unique challenges and opportunities for staff.

2.2. Conceptualizing Luxury Hospitality

2.2.1. Defining Luxury in Hospitality

Luxury hospitality is best described as a curated environment where material excellence and symbolic value align to create experiences that are perceived as rare, emotionally meaningful, and superior to mainstream service encounters (Sharma *et al.,* 2023). In this context, luxury is not defined solely by tangible features such as architectural design, aesthetic refinement, or superior amenities. Rather, it emerges as a multilayered construct shaped by exclusivity, personal significance, and a deliberate orchestration of guest emotions (Heyes, 2021). The distinction from mainstream hospitality is structural

rather than stylistic. Mainstream hotels prioritize consistency, efficiency, and scalability, while luxury hotels organize their operations around scarcity, higher resource allocation per guest, and service processes designed to convey status. Luxury therefore functions as a system of organizational practices that signal prioritization of the guest, supported by staffing models that allow more time, discretion, and autonomy in service delivery. What defines luxury is not the presence of superior amenities but the institutional capacity to mobilize human and material resources in ways that reinforce differentiation (Aksoy *et al.,* 2022; Amatulli *et al.,* 2021; Christodoulides *et al.,* 2025).

2.2.2. Human Touch and Personalized Service

The human touch forms the core of luxury hospitality because it constitutes the main mechanism through which luxury hotels differentiate themselves from standardized service models (Harkison, 2017). Personalized service is not simply the provision of individualized attention; it is a structured organizational practice that depends on staff capacity to recognize guest cues, interpret preferences, and adjust their behavior accordingly. Studies show that these processes rely on situated judgement rather than predetermined scripts, meaning that staff must make continuous assessments of what constitutes appropriate interaction in real time (Harkison, 2017; Shen and Dwayne Ball, 2009). This interpretive work is a core component of emotional labor, which in luxury settings extends beyond the display of courtesy. It involves sustained behavioral regulation, the ability to maintain emotional neutrality under pressure, and the management of tone, pace, and demeanor to align with guest expectations (Xiong *et al.,* 2025).

Studies further notes that this form of labor shapes guest perceptions of service quality because it signals competence, discretion, and attentiveness. Guests evaluate not only the outcome of the service but also the manner in which it is delivered (Manaktola and Shukla, 2017). As a result, the human touch becomes a strategic organizational asset. It allows hotels to create interactions that appear tailored rather than formulaic, distinguishing luxury service from operational efficiency models that prioritize standardization (Chen *et al.,* 2025; Solnet *et al.,* 2019). Scholars argue that this capacity

for nuanced interpersonal engagement constitutes a form of value creation that cannot be reproduced by technological systems, regardless of their sophistication. Automation may streamline processes, but it lacks the interpretive and relational capacities required to manage guest expectations in complex or ambiguous situations (Wang, 2025). Consequently, the human touch remains the defining indicator of luxury, anchoring the guest experience in forms of service that depend on professional judgement, emotional regulation, and cultural sensitivity (Chen *et al.,* 2025).

2.2.3. Cultural Context: France

The French context adds a significant cultural layer to the understanding of luxury hospitality. The practices known as *l'art de recevoir* (art of hospitality) (Cheval Blanc, 2025) and *art de vivre* (art of living) (Batat and Kerviler, 2020) frames hospitality as a refined cultural expression that values grace, attentiveness, and a deep respect for the guest as an honored visitor. This cultural orientation positions hospitality not simply as a commercial service but as a representation of the French identity. It influences how staff are trained, how interactions are structured, and how service quality is evaluated by both guests and managers. Expectations for interpersonal excellence are therefore heightened. Staff must demonstrate not only technical competence but an ability to embody elegance, discretion, and emotional sensitivity. These culturally informed expectations intensify the complexity of emotional labor, since employees must balance professional obligations with cultural performativity. For luxury hotels in France, this cultural heritage shapes service practices in ways that reinforce the primacy of human touch even as technology becomes more embedded in hotel operations. As a result, staff operate within a cultural environment that privileges personal connection, nuanced communication, and a sophisticated understanding of guest expectations (Batat and Kerviler, 2020; Sirivadhanawaravach, 2024).

2.3. Technological Innovations in Luxury Hospitality

2.3.1. The Rise of Technology in Hospitality

Luxury and premium hotels have in recent years (and particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic) adopted a spectrum of technological innovations (El-Said *et al.,* 2024). These include mobile/digital check-in and check-out, keyless room entry (digital keys), smart-room controls (lighting, temperature, digital entertainment), AI-powered concierge/chatbot services, IoT-enabled room and building management systems, robotic service and delivery (e.g. housekeeping, room service), and digital/mobile apps for guest requests, ordering, and communication (Mandić *et al.,* 2023; Osinga, 2023).

These technologies serve multiple functions such as reducing manual, repetitive tasks (check-in, key management, room controls), collecting and using guest preference data for personalization (room settings, service preferences), speeding up service delivery, minimizing physical contact (especially important during health crises), and streamlining hotel operations to cut costs, improve efficiency, or redistribute human labor toward tasks requiring judgement or personal interaction (Mbarushimana, 2024). Smart-room and IoT technologies, for example, allow environmental controls (temperature, lighting, entertainment) to automatically align with guest preferences or be adjusted quickly via apps thus improving comfort, convenience, and perceived personalization (Suanpang and Pothipassa, 2024). AI-based concierge/chatbot services can answer routine questions, handle guest requests, give information and book services, thereby reducing workload on human staff, and providing 24/7 responsiveness (Li *et al.,* 2021).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, adoption of contactless and self-service technologies dramatically accelerated. Digital check-in/out, mobile keys, contactless payment and ordering, robot delivery or cleaning, QR-code menus or information, became necessities to meet health guidelines and restore guest confidence (El-Said *et al.,* 2024).

Thus, technology in luxury hospitality is no longer a novelty or perk; it has become embedded in core operations, guest interaction, and even health/safety strategy.

2.3.2. Impact on Guest Experience and Luxury

The integration of such technologies has clear benefits. For many guests, especially tech-savvy or health-conscious ones, mobile check-in and keyless entry reduce wait times and physical contact. Smart rooms and personalization features increase convenience and comfort. AI concierge and guest-facing apps may offer faster service, immediate access to information, and 24/7 availability. These aspects can enhance perceived quality, convenience, modernity, and even status which are traits often associated with up-to-date luxury. Empirical studies report that guests at “smart hotels” often report higher satisfaction, especially regarding convenience, ease of use, and responsiveness (McCarthy, 2024; Yang *et al.,* 2021).

From a management perspective, hotels may redirect labor, as automation reduces time spent on routine tasks, lowers certain operational costs (energy management via smart rooms, fewer front-desk staff hours, less demand for manual key management), and allows staff to be redeployed toward tasks requiring human judgment, empathy, and service differentiation (Mandić *et al.,* 2023).

However, significant tensions arise. Automation and contactless systems risk eroding the relational and emotional dimension of luxury hospitality. In contexts where part of luxury value lies in personal interactions, attentiveness, and human discretion, replacing or mediating these interactions via technology may undermine perceived luxury or authenticity. Self-service check-in may save time, but it removes the ritual of welcoming a guest, offering guidance, and establishing rapport. Robot room service reduces human interaction in what used to be moments of staff-guest engagement (Mo *et al.,* 2024).

Also, guest perceptions vary. Some value speed and convenience; others may perceive the experience as sterile, impersonal, or insufficiently “luxurious.” The shift may especially affect guests who expect or value human service as part of luxury identity — for them, automated services could degrade perceived quality. Research on “smart hotels” shows that acceptance depends strongly on individual readiness, preferences, and expectations (J. J. Kim and Han, 2022).

2.3.3. Technology and Staff Experience

For staff the shift raises challenges. As one study found among younger hotel employees (e.g. Generation Z), the pandemic and rapid IT adoption changed their perception and behavioral intentions toward advanced technologies (J. J. Kim and Han, 2022). This raises questions about job security, role definition, and professional identity: Are staff now service facilitators, technical support agents, or still responsible for high-touch service? (Echeverri and Åkesson, 2018). Tasks traditionally performed by employees are now automated, creating tension between efficiency and professional identity. Staff perceptions are influenced by training, support from management, and the degree to which technology enables them to maintain high standards of personalized service. As hotels shift tasks to systems or robots, staff may lose parts of their traditional service domain, which can threaten job satisfaction and sense of professional value (Jianu *et al.,* 2025).

Finally, dependency on technology introduces new risks: system failures, data privacy issues, loss of human judgment in unexpected situations, less flexibility in handling unusual or high-touch guest needs (Jianu *et al.,* 2025).

2.3.4. COVID-19 as Catalyst for Technological Integration and Its Long-Term Effects

The global COVID-19 pandemic was a major turning point for technology adoption in hotels. With social distancing, hygiene, and health-safety becoming essential, hotels increasingly adopted contactless check-in/out, mobile keys, digital payments, robot delivery/room-service, and app-based guest communication to reduce physical contact (Osinga, 2023; Rahimizhian and Irani, 2020).

These implementations were often reactive (to minimize health risk) but have persisted beyond strict pandemic restrictions. For many hotels, what began as a temporary safety measure became a permanent feature — due to guest preference for convenience and the operational efficiencies realized. This has effectively accelerated a structural transformation: luxury hospitality is no longer just about human-led service rituals; technology is now embedded as a core service medium (Jaffer, 2021).

This shift recalibrates what “luxury” means. In post-COVID luxury hospitality, luxury may come to include frictionless convenience and technologically enabled personalization as part of the value proposition, alongside or even replacing traditional service rituals (Jaffer, 2021).

2.3.5. Integrating Technology and Human Touch

The interaction between technology and human service is critical in defining luxury hospitality. Whether technology erodes human interaction or merges smoothly with it depends on implementation strategy, guest expectations, and staff roles. In hotels where technology replaces rather than supplements human roles, there is a risk that “luxury” becomes commodified: less about human connection, more about convenience and standardization. In those cases, the meaning of luxury shifts — perhaps acceptable to some guests, but problematic for those seeking traditional luxury rooted in human warmth and personal attention (Frenette, 2025).

Empirical studies are mixed. Some report increased satisfaction and loyalty linked to smart-hotel features (Mbarushimana, 2024). Others caution about reduced perceived authenticity or emotional satisfaction, especially among guests who value human interaction or when staff have limited opportunity to engage meaningfully. Research also highlights that acceptance of technology depends strongly on user readiness, demographic characteristics, and prior expectations (J. J. Kim and Han, 2022).

In hotels where a hybrid model seems to emerge, technology handles routine, predictable, or hygiene sensitive tasks, while humans provide relational, judgment based, or emotionally rich service. This model preserves human touch where it matters (concierge, complex service requests, personal preferences, special amenities) while leveraging technology for efficiency (Jianu *et al.,* 2025; Solnet *et al.,* 2019).

In such hybrid configurations, staff may have more capacity, freed from routine tasks, to deliver high value interactions. This can maintain or even elevate the standard of luxury, if staff are supported and trained to adapt (Jianu *et al.,* 2025).

Nonetheless, technology is most effective when it complements human interaction rather than replacing it. Automated processes can handle routine or operationally heavy tasks, while staff focus on service elements that require judgment, empathy, and emotional engagement. This hybrid approach preserves the relational dimension of luxury service and supports both guest satisfaction and staff professional development. Hotels that successfully integrate technology in this manner maintain a balance between operational efficiency and the human touch that defines the luxury experience (Li *et al.,* 2021).

2.4. Human Touch and Emotional Labor

2.4.1. Conceptualizing Human Touch

Human touch in hospitality encompasses meaningful personal interactions between staff and guests, marked by attentiveness, empathy, and authentic care. It goes beyond the mechanical execution of tasks to include emotional attunement. This means sensing guests' needs, responding with warmth and respect, and often anticipating unspoken expectations. Such human touch plays a critical role in shaping memorable guest experiences, as guests often value not only the physical comfort or material amenities, but also the intangible warmth, personalized attention, and emotional resonance that human interactions can provide. The empathic presence of staff contributes to guests feeling welcomed, understood, and valued which are key ingredients for a hospitality experience to be remembered and recommended (Harkison, 2017; Solnet *et al.,* 2019).

In luxury hospitality contexts, where clientele often has high expectations and seeks individualized, culturally sensitive service, human touch becomes especially significant. Frontline staff must not only provide efficient service but also convey sincerity, emotional intelligence, and a sensitivity to cultural or personal nuances. In effect, human touch serves as a bridge between service delivery and emotionally rich guest experience, helping transform a stay into a lasting positive memory rather than a purely transactional interaction (Harkison, 2017).

2.4.2. Emotional Labor in Luxury Hospitality

The concept of emotional labor was first articulated by Arlie Russell Hochschild in her influential work The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling (1983). In that context, emotional labor refers to the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" required by one's job (Hochschild, 2012). In service industries, such as hospitality, this entails performing emotional work: suppressing, faking, or sometimes genuinely generating emotions to comply with organizational "feeling rules" and meet customer expectations (Shani *et al.,* 2014).

In luxury hotels, emotional labor is particularly salient due to the high standards of service required for discerning, often multicultural clients. A recent study among luxury hotel employees found that frontline staff rely on emotional labor and cross-cultural competence (often referred to as cultural intelligence, or CQ) to deliver personalized and culturally appropriate service, thus contributing to the "luxury experience" (Lam *et al.,* 2022). In these settings, emotional labor may involve deep acting (trying to genuinely feel the emotions) or surface acting (faking the expected emotions), depending on the situation (Kim, 2008).

However, this requirement to constantly manage or display emotions carries costs. Research shows that frequent emotional labor, especially surface acting, can lead to emotional exhaustion, burnout, and deteriorations in mental health over time. A meta-analysis of hospitality and tourism research confirmed that emotional labor strategies, in concert with individual traits and organizational display rules, significantly influence outcomes such as employee well-being, burnout, work engagement, and service quality (Xu *et al.,* 2020).

Given the increasing adoption of automation and AI-based services in hospitality (e.g., chatbots, smart-room technology, self-service check-in, online booking platforms), the importance of balancing technology and human emotional labor emerges more strongly. A recent empirical study among employees in five-star hotels found that AI-induced stress; for example, from new digital workflows or performance monitoring, negatively affects employees' work engagement, mediated by reductions in psychological capital (e.g., resilience, optimism) and moderated by perceived organizational support (Hou and

Fan, 2024). While automation can enhance efficiency and free up staff time, it may also exacerbate stress, challenge staff adaptation, and threaten the capacity for genuine human interaction if not managed well.

Thus, in luxury hospitality, emotional labor remains central to delivering human touch, yet its demands and potential negative consequences underscore the need for careful organizational strategies (training, support, balanced workloads) if guest satisfaction is to be sustained without compromising staff well-being (Carr, 2025).

2.4.3. Staff Experiences

Studies examining staff experiences in hospitality highlight how emotional labor shapes role perceptions, job satisfaction, and work engagement. For instance, in luxury hotels, the combination of emotional labor and cultural intelligence influences employees' job satisfaction: both the capacity to genuinely express emotions (genuine/deep acting) and to manage cross-cultural interactions contribute positively to staff's sense of fulfillment (Lam *et al.,* 2022).

However, when emotional labor is sustained over time, especially via surface acting, it may exact a psychological toll. A longitudinal study of hotel employees found that in the first few months of employment, many experienced increased anxiety and depression, attributing this in part to the chronic demands of emotional labor (Xiong *et al.,* 2023). Other research links high emotional labor demands with burnout, emotional exhaustion, and higher turnover intentions if organizational support is lacking (Salama *et al.,* 2022).

The role of contextual and organizational factors also emerges: the quality of emotional-labor training, the nature of manager–employee relationships, job autonomy, and frequency of guest interactions all influence whether employees resort to "surface acting," "deep acting," or genuine emotional expression (Shani *et al.,* 2014). Where organizations foster supportive environments, encourage staff autonomy, and invest in emotional labor training, employees are more likely to engage in deep or genuine acting, thereby yielding better employee well-being and higher service quality. On the other hand, demanding workloads, repetitive guest encounters, poor managerial support, or a lack of

autonomy/supervision may push staff toward surface acting, increasing risk for exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and turnover .(Ngcobo *et al.,* 2022)

Finally, recent developments in technology adoption in hospitality complicate this picture. As hotels deploy AI and automated systems for routine tasks, staff workloads may shift, but so may expectations for personalized, emotionally rich service. A recent study observed that AI-induced stress correlates with lower work engagement, reduced psychological capital, and lower motivation, particularly when perceived organizational support is weak (Hou and Fan, 2024). This suggests that while automation can support efficiency, it does not eliminate, and may even exacerbate, the need for emotional labor, making organizational strategies to support staff even more critical.

2.5. Balancing Technology and Human Touch

2.5.1. Integration Strategies

As the hospitality industry evolves, many luxury hotels are adopting hybrid service-design approaches that combine automation and human interaction. Rather than viewing technology and human service as opposing forces, contemporary research advocates for models in which automation supports efficiency while human staff deliver emotional and relational value — preserving the “human touch” that defines high-end hospitality (Ku, 2025).

In practice, this often entails automating routine, transactional, or time-consuming tasks — for example check-in/check-out, room-key access, amenity requests, and requests for basic information — via self-service kiosks, mobile apps, digital room controls, or AI-powered concierge systems (Nichols, 2025). Doing so reduces friction in service delivery, minimizes waiting times, and frees guest-facing staff to focus on interactions requiring emotional intelligence, empathy, and personalized attention.

A growing body of evidence suggests that luxury hospitality brands including global chains are experimenting with what is often described as a “hybrid model,” where technology handles background operations and routine guest requests, while human staff remain

central for emotionally rich, personalized, high-value interactions (Puorto, 2025). This enables the property to deliver both operational efficiency and the warmth, authenticity, and trust that human touch brings (Wolfe, 2025).

Such integration strategies are not purely technical, but require thoughtful design: hotels should identify “moments of truth”, key guest-staff interaction points (e.g. welcome arrival, resolving grievances, special requests) and ensure these remain human. Technology works best when it complements these moments, not when it tries to substitute them (Nichols, 2025).

2.5.2. Staff-Centric Perspectives

Integrating technology in hospitality affects not only guest experience but also staff roles, perceptions, and wellbeing. According to a recent empirical study on AI-driven HR systems in hospitality, some employees view algorithmic management (scheduling, performance monitoring, communication) as a mixed blessing: while AI can improve efficiency and consistency, it may reduce flexibility, monotony, and even undermine human judgment and autonomy if poorly implemented (Turčinović *et al.,* 2025).

Managers surveyed in studies of service-robot adoption generally agree that robots are best suited for “repetitive, dull, or dangerous tasks,” while human employees remain preferable for tasks requiring social skills, empathy, and emotional intelligence. This reflects a broader staff-centric perspective that emphasizes maintaining human dignity and role significance even as automation increases (Ivanov *et al.,* 2020).

From an organizational standpoint, embedding technology successfully requires more than installing hardware or software. As shown in qualitative analyses of “digital hospitality” systems, sustainable integration demands supportive HR practices: training (both in digital fluency and soft skills), mentorship, flexible role design, regular feedback, and recognition (Radović *et al.,* 2025). Without such measures, automation risks alienating staff, reducing motivation and emotional engagement, which ultimately undermines service quality and guest satisfaction (Ku, 2025).

Moreover, staff attitudes toward technological adoption influence service delivery. When staff perceive technology as a tool that empowers them, adoption tends to correlate with higher engagement, morale, and better guest outcomes. Conversely, if technology is perceived as dehumanizing or as a replacement for human roles, the quality of "human-touch" interactions may suffer (Radović *et al.,* 2025).

Balancing technology and human touch require more than technological investment. It demands a holistic, socio-technical approach. When automation is carefully deployed for routine, transactional tasks and human staff continue to handle emotionally meaningful interactions, hotels can enjoy the twin benefits of efficiency and warmth. However, achieving that balance depends critically on how technology is introduced, how staff are trained and supported, and how roles are designed. In absence of supportive organizational strategies, technological integration risks undermining both staff well-being and the authentic human touch that defines luxury hospitality.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

The aim of this theoretical framework is to provide a robust, multi-dimensional lens through which to analyze how staff in luxury hospitality negotiate the integration of technology and human touch. By drawing on complementary theories from service management, psychology of work, and information systems, the framework situates staff as active agents whose perceptions, emotions, and resource integration practices mediate between technological adoption and guest experiences.

2.6.1. Service-Dominant Logic (SDL)

The starting point is the recognition that value in hospitality does not reside solely in physical amenities or technological efficiency, but is largely co-created through interactions among staff, guests, and supporting resources. Here, Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), as developed Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, provides a foundational paradigm. SDL argues that service, rather than goods, constitutes the fundamental basis

of exchange, and that intangible operant resources (skills, knowledge, emotional capabilities) are the primary source of competitive advantage. Goods and technology (e.g., hotel rooms, devices, apps) are viewed merely as “distribution mechanisms” that enable service provision. Value emerges not at the point of sale, but in the use context — when operant and operand resources are integrated, often in interaction between staff and customers, yielding what is called value-in-use or value co-creation (Shaw *et al.,* 2011; Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

In luxury hospitality, this perspective implies that human touch which is the attentiveness, empathy, and emotional intelligence of staff provides a core operant resource, central to the guest’s experience and perceived value. However, in a contemporary environment shaped by digitalization and automation, technology too becomes a resource to be integrated. Therefore, SDL offers conceptual justification for seeing technology and human service not as opposing alternatives but as jointly contributing to value creation. Indeed, empirical studies in hospitality have demonstrated that employees and customers alike view co-creation positively: staff often rate co-creation higher than customers, and co-created value positively influences organizational commitment, service quality, and competitive advantage perceptions (Shulga and Busser, 2020).

2.6.2. Emotional Labor Theory

SDL on its own does not sufficiently account for the psychological and emotional burdens placed on staff when they must sustain high-touch service, especially when technology alters work processes. To capture those dynamics, the framework draws on Emotional Labor Theory (initially developed by Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labor theory foregrounds the internal work employees must perform to manage or modulate their emotions to meet organizational or customer expectations. In hospitality, particularly in luxury settings, staff are frequently required to present warmth, friendliness, and composure, even in demanding or stressful circumstances. Emotional labor encompasses both surface acting (faking or suppressing genuine emotions) and deep acting (attempting to feel the required emotions genuinely), and its long-term demands

have been linked to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and psychological strain (Liu *et al.,* 2023).

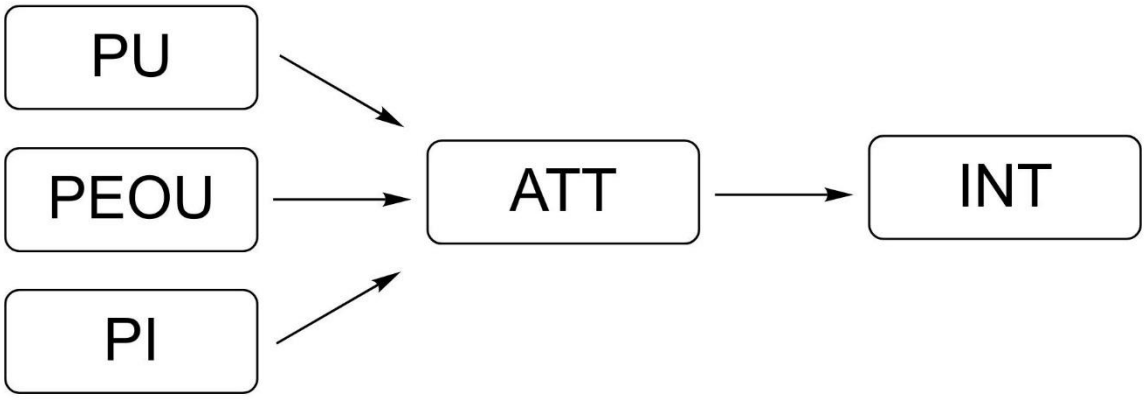
Recent empirical work supports the continued salience of emotional labor in hospitality contexts, especially under heightened stress such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, a study of five-star hotel employees found that different types of work passion influenced the choice of emotional labor strategies, which in turn affected service quality under pandemic-induced stress (Wu *et al.,* 2023). This suggests that even as hotels adopt digital tools, the emotional work performed by staff remains central to service delivery, and may become more demanding if technology changes workload patterns, guest expectations, or interaction frequency. Emotional labor theory thus enables analysis of how shifts in work design, such as automation of routine tasks, might impact staff well-being, authenticity of interpersonal interaction, and sustainability of high-quality service (Pitakaso *et al.,* 2025).

2.6.3. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

To understand how staff respond to and incorporate technology into their work, the framework integrates the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). TAM foregrounds perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) as primary determinants of a user's intention to adopt technology. In hospitality settings, when mobile apps, AI-driven concierge services, self-service check-in kiosks, and other digital innovations are introduced, staff attitudes toward these systems (whether they see them as facilitating their work or as burdensome, whether they find them intuitive) will shape actual adoption, integration into workflow, and ultimately how technology coexists with human service (Figure 1) (Hamid, 2019). Empirical hospitality research supports this: mobile technology adoption among luxury hotels is accompanied by managerial and operational challenges, including process redesign, infrastructure, and alignment with customer management and operations management practices (Han *et al.,* 2021).

However, adoption is not merely binary; a recent study modeling "digital hospitality" as a socio-technical system shows that perceived usefulness and ease-of-use influence not

only adoption but also service outcomes such as personalization, trust, guest satisfaction, and loyalty — but critically, these outcomes materialize only when technology integration is aligned with supportive human resource practices (training, flexible role allocation, mentorship) (Radović *et al.,* 2025). This suggests that TAM must be extended beyond its traditional individual-cognitive focus to capture organizational and social dimensions — a step many contemporary hospitality scholars endorse.



Note: PU = Perceived Usefulness; PEOU = Perceived Ease of Use;
PI = Perceived Innovativeness; ATT = Attitude; INT = intentions

Figure 1. TAM Model in Hospitality Management (Hamid, 2019)

2.6.4. Conceptual Framework

Taken together, these theoretical strands produce a coherent framework: under SDL, hospitality is reconceptualized as an interactive, value-co-creative process; emotional labor theory underscores the human, affective cost and labor involved; and TAM offers a mechanism to understand how staff adopt and integrate technology.

From this synthesis emerges a conceptual model in which technological adoption affects staff not only in terms of workflow efficiency but also in emotional workload and perceptual attitudes; staff responses, mediated by emotional labor and acceptance, influence the quality of staff–guest interactions; and these interactions, in concert with technological efficiency, shape guest experience, perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty. Moreover,

the model implies feedback loops: positive guest responses may reinforce staff motivation and willingness to engage in emotional labor despite technological mediation; whereas chronic emotional strain or negative experiences may lead to disengagement, diminished service quality, and reduced value co-creation.

By applying this integrated theoretical framework (Figure 1), the study can examine not only whether technology improves efficiency, but also how it reconfigures the relational and emotional dimensions of hospitality service, how staff perceive and experience this reconfiguration, and how these dynamics influence both staff well-being and guest value co-creation.

This theoretical foundation provides a lens for exploring staff experiences in-depth, guiding a qualitative research design that captures the nuanced ways technology and human touch intersect in luxury hospitality. It emphasizes understanding staff perceptions, emotional engagement, and interpretive experiences rather than relying on numeric measurement. Using SDL, emotional labor theory, and TAM, the study can examine how staff co-create value with guests, manage the emotional demands of service, and respond to technological innovations within the organizational and cultural context of the hotel. This framework directs attention to the meanings staff assign to their interactions, the strategies they employ to balance efficiency and empathy, and the ways organizational practices, training, and norms shape these experiences. By privileging subjective experiences and rich descriptive data, the qualitative approach enables a deeper understanding of how technology and human touch are integrated in practice and how this integration affects both staff wellbeing and the quality of guest experiences.

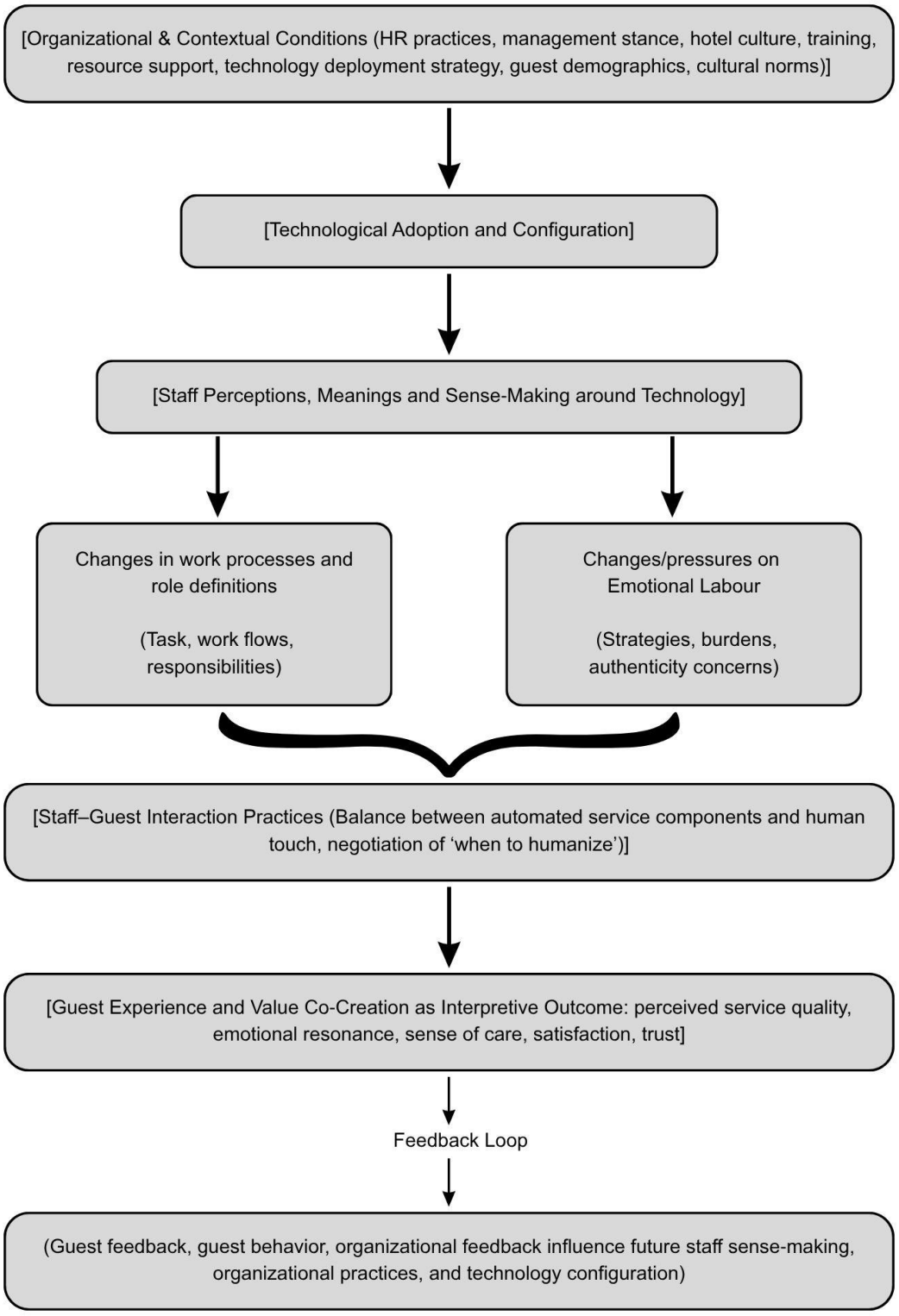


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework Model

2.7. Hilton Technologies and Their Relationship to Human Touch

Hilton's Connected Room launched in December, 2017 is the firm's most explicit formulation of a digitally mediated luxury room. The platform links the Hilton Honors mobile application to in-room systems so that guests can check in, select room preferences, unlock the door, and control lighting, temperature, blinds and television from their personal devices. The Connected Room is designed as a software platform that can push new features to in-room devices over time, enabling persistent personalization of room settings across stays and allowing guests to transfer preferences from device to device. This architecture foregrounds convenience and continuity of experience while shifting control of many routine interactions from staff to guest devices (Hotel Online, 2018; Peravali, 2018).

The operational effects of Connected Room and allied systems are threefold. First, they reduce transactional burdens on the front desk by enabling mobile check-in and digital room keys; this shortens queues and reduces time spent on administrative tasks. Second, they create a data stream that can be used to preconfigure rooms or to surface personalized offers, which management frames as a move toward data-driven personalization rather than ad hoc personalization conducted by staff. Third, because the Connected Room platform is updateable, Hilton can incrementally add functionality without wide hardware replacement, making technological change more sustainable as a capital investment. These features reconfigure where and how personalization is produced: personalization becomes partly a systems function rather than exclusively an interpersonal function (Mandić *et al.,* 2023; Sehgal *et al.,* 2024).

Hilton's earlier and complementary innovations matter for how staff relate to guests. Digital Key and the Hilton Honors app exemplify the transfer of routine access and information tasks to guests' own devices. The robot concierge pilot, Connie, demonstrates a different trajectory: using AI to answer routine questions and recommend local options, explicitly to supplement rather than replace human concierges. Connie's deployment illustrates Hilton's strategy of positioning automation as a first-line responder for standardized information while preserving human staff for judgmental, affective, and

complex service tasks. Together, these technologies signal a deliberate distribution of tasks between algorithmic systems and human workers (Linxi, 2021; Morch, 2025).

2.7.1. COVID-19 as Catalyst and the Persistence of Change

The pandemic functioned as an accelerant of digital adoption across the industry. Contactless check-in, mobile keys, app-based guest communication, and robotic delivery were rapidly expanded in order to reduce physical contact and comply with health protocols. These measures were widely adopted as temporary health measures, but many operators retained them after restrictions eased because they produced measurable operational efficiencies and matched evolving guest expectations for contactless convenience. Systematic reviews of smart hotel research document this acceleration and identify post-COVID normalization of many contactless practices. The pandemic therefore, altered the baseline of guest expectations and institutionalized certain technologies that now compete with, and sometimes substitute for, human interactions (Liu *et al.,* 2024).

2.7.2. Implications for Guest Interaction

Empirical studies on guest acceptance of automation and robots show mixed but instructive results. Adoption tends to be higher among guests who value convenience, speed, and perceived usefulness; acceptance declines when guests equate luxury with interpersonal warmth and ritualized service (Ivanov *et al.,* 2020). Research on humanoid and service robots finds that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, safety and trust, and anthropomorphic cues are significant determinants of guest acceptance and revisit intentions (Kim *et al.,* 2021). The implication for Hilton is straightforward: Connected Room and Digital Key increase convenience for many guests, but they also risk eroding ritualistic touchpoints that some guests regard as essential to luxury (Renascence, 2024). Consequently, the effect of these technologies on perceived luxury is conditional on guest segment, context, and the degree to which technology frees staff to provide higher-value interactions.

2.7.3. Staff Roles, Emotional Labor, and Job Security

The redistribution of tasks from human to digital systems reshapes staff roles in predictable and ambiguous ways. Predictably, automation reduces time spent on routine, transactional work such as key management and manual check-in processes. This reallocation can enable staff to focus on more complex, judgement-based interactions that require emotional intelligence. Ambiguities arise because staff often acquire new responsibilities such as system monitoring, troubleshooting guest device issues, and managing exceptions when technology fails. These activities can increase cognitive load and shift the nature of emotional labor rather than remove it (Turčinović *et al.,* 2025). Evidence from service robot research and studies of smart hotel adoption suggests that technology may reduce the volume of low-skilled, repetitive labor while heightening requirements for technical literacy and discretionary interpersonal skills. Concerns about job security appear when automation extends into domain areas previously seen as core to professional identity, such as concierge or room service (Radović *et al.,* 2025). The result is a reconfiguration of professional identity and an ambiguous trajectory for job quality that depends on training, managerial support, and organizational choices about task allocation (Mukherjee *et al.,* 2021).

2.8. Research Gaps

First, the majority of studies focus on guest acceptance, implementation feasibility, or operational performance metrics. There is a relative scarcity of research that centers the perspectives of frontline staff in luxury settings, especially qualitative work that explores how employees interpret and negotiate changing role boundaries, skill requirements, and emotional labor demands. Existing bibliometric analyses of smart hotel research confirm a concentration on technological descriptions and guest or managerial outcomes rather than on staff experience (Liu *et al.,* 2024).

Second, the cultural specificity of luxury matters. Much of the empirical work on guest acceptance and technology deployment originates from East Asia, North America, and selective European studies. There is limited context-specific research on how technology

interacts with established service cultures such as France's art of receiving. This gap is consequential because cultural service norms mediate both guest expectations and staff performances; therefore, findings from other contexts cannot be assumed to transfer unchanged (Kim *et al.,* 2021).

Third, longitudinal and qualitative studies are rare. Most empirical work uses cross-sectional surveys, experimental designs, or bibliometric mapping. The longer-term effects of sustained automation on staff career trajectories, job security perceptions, emotional labor trajectories, and service quality remain underexplored. We need studies that trace staff experiences over time as hotels move from emergency adoption to routinized practice.

Fourth, research seldom interrogates the micropractices through which technology and human touch are integrated in situ. That is, we have limited granular descriptions of moment-to-moment interactions in which staff use digital data to augment personal service or where staff must repair failed automation in front of guests. Understanding these micropractices is essential to assess whether technology complements human touch or displaces it in practice.

Fifth, evidence on managerial strategies that successfully mitigate staff anxiety, preserve job quality, and sustain emotional labor capacity is fragmentary. Comparative case studies of chains that have different integration models, and cultural anchoring would clarify which organizational practices sustain staff wellbeing while leveraging digital advantages.

Hilton's Connected Room, Digital Key, and pilot AI initiatives such as Connie illustrate a deliberate strategy to locate routine service functions in technology while reserving affective and discretionary tasks for staff. COVID-19 accelerated this trend and normalized many contactless practices. Available evidence shows that this strategy enhances convenience and can enable higher-value staff work, but it also produces role ambiguity, new technical demands, and real concerns about job security and the erosion of ritualized human service (Linxi, 2021). The gaps identified above justify a qualitative, context-sensitive study of frontline staff at Hilton properties in France to examine how employees experience these shifts, how emotional labor is reconfigured, and what managerial approaches sustain both service quality and staff wellbeing.

3. METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how service staff at Hilton Hotels in France negotiated the balance between technological innovation and the human touch in luxury hospitality. The qualitative approach was chosen because the study aimed to reveal staff perspectives, emotions, meanings, and interpretations, which cannot be accessed through quantitative measures (Lim, 2024). Luxury hospitality work, particularly within technologically mediated environments, is layered, affective and situational, and therefore required a methodological strategy capable of eliciting depth, nuance and contextual understanding.

3.2. Conceptual Foundation

The research was guided by a conceptual framework that integrates the Technology Acceptance Model with Emotional Labor Theory (Figure 2). This integration shaped the research not as an abstract theoretical exercise but as a practical roadmap that determines what data to collect, from whom, and how to interpret the resulting narratives. The model proposed that staff experiences emerge through a sequence: the organization's technological configuration influences staff perceptions, which in turn shape staff–guest interactions and eventually guest experiences. The feedback loop embedded in the model suggested that staff sense-making, guest responses and organizational norms continuously influence one another. This framework therefore determined that interviews must explore several domains: staff interpretations of technology usefulness and usability, their emotional regulation strategies, and their daily negotiation of automated and human-centered service elements. Every methodological decision, from sampling to analysis, was grounded in this conceptual logic.

3.3. Study Sites

The study was conducted across three hotel properties that collectively represent the diversity of the French luxury hospitality landscape. Hilton Paris Opera has been selected because it is a major urban luxury hotel with intense business and leisure traffic. Waldorf Astoria Versailles in the Ile de France region provides a contrasting historical and palace-like environment where luxury identity is strongly tied to human-centered service rituals. A third non-Hilton property, INNSiDE by Meliá Paris Charles de Gaulle, was included opportunistically to provide an external comparative perspective. Conducting the study across these settings permits a cross-contextual understanding of how technology and human touch operate within different luxury hospitality ecologies in France. It also allowed the research to consider how place, type of guest, organizational routines and technological configurations interact to influence staff experiences.

3.4. Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who are positioned at the intersection of technology and human service delivery (Palinkas *et al.,* 2015). Eligible participants were service staff whose roles involved direct and regular interaction with guests. These roles included receptionists, concierge staff, guest relations officers, housekeeping staffs who engaged in personalized service. Staff in technical, administrative or purely back-of-house roles were excluded because their work does not involve daily guest interaction or emotional labor.

The study aimed to include 15 service staff members across three properties, principally Hilton Paris Opera, supplemented by comparative data from Waldorf Astoria Versailles and a non-Hilton property. This number provides sufficient information power in line with qualitative methodological principles (Vasileiou *et al.,* 2018). The size was large enough to identify cross-cutting themes yet small enough to allow deep, interpretive engagement with each narrative.

3.5. Recruitment and Ethical Procedures

Formal approval was sought from hotel management at each site, followed by ethical approval from the university review board. After institutional access was granted, staff received a participant information sheet distributed through internal channels. This sheet contained the study's aims, expectations, confidentiality protections and the voluntary nature of participation. Staff who expressed interest were contacted privately by the researcher to schedule a brief introductory call where questions could be answered. Written informed consent was obtained before interview schedule.

3.6. Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This method was chosen because it enables exploration of personal experiences, emotional processes, and interpretive meaning-making in a way that aligns with both Emotional Labor Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model. Each interview lasted between 20-30 minutes. The interview began with narrative questions about the participant's role history and typical workday to establish rapport before moving into targeted questions about their experiences with mobile check-in systems, digital keys, automated room allocation, service robots, communication apps, or any other technologies relevant to their hotel.

Participants were encouraged to describe specific interactions where technology either facilitated or complicated their emotional labor and service delivery. The interview schedule was shaped directly by the conceptual framework. Questions probed how staff perceive the usefulness and ease of use of technologies, how these perceptions shape their willingness to adopt or resist technological tools, how they regulate their emotions when technology mediates or disrupts guest encounters, and how they determine when to prioritize personal interaction over digital efficiency.

Interviews took place either physically at the hotel or online depending on the participant's preference. Online interviews were conducted on a secure platform, and each session was recorded with consent. The researcher took reflective notes immediately after each interview to document contextual cues and emerging insights.

3.7. Data Management and Transcription

All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim. For interviews conducted in French, transcription was completed in the original language and then translated into English. The translation process included verification steps such as back-checks to preserve the integrity of meaning. Transcripts, consent forms and recordings were stored in encrypted, password-protected digital folders compliant with GDPR. Identifiable details were removed at the transcription stage.

3.8. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process began with repeated reading of transcripts while listening to audio recordings to ensure immersion in the data. Early notes focused on staff emotions, technological practices, interaction routines and the complexities of balancing efficiency with relational service.

Coding proceeded inductively and theoretically at the same time. Descriptive codes captured concrete experiences, while interpretive codes linked these experiences to perceived usefulness and ease of use from TAM, and to surface acting, deep acting and emotional dissonance from Emotional Labor Theory. Through iterative review, codes were refined into candidate themes that reflect patterns in how staff negotiate the boundary between automation and personalized service. Themes were assessed for coherence within and across hotel sites and reviewed against the conceptual framework to ensure that the final analysis explains not only what staff experience but how these experiences arise within organizational and technological systems.

The final stage involved constructing a fully theorized narrative that showed how staff perceptions of technology shape their emotional labor, how emotional labor practices influence guest interaction quality and how these processes collectively produce the balance between technological innovation and human touch.

3.9. Ensuring Rigor

Several strategies strengthened the credibility and trustworthiness of the analysis. Member checking occurred through the sharing of short interpretive summaries with participants (Creswell, 2013; Coleman, 2022). A reflexive journal documented analytic decisions, interpretive challenges and positionality reflections throughout the research process (Birt *et al.,* 2016). Peer debriefing with experienced qualitative scholars tested interpretations and surface alternative readings. Thick description allowed readers to assess transferability. An audit trail documented coding decisions, theme development and analytic revisions. These practices ensure dependability and confirmability.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and that declining or withdrawing would not affect their employment. Confidentiality was strictly protected, and no identifying details appeared in any publication. Because the research took place in France, GDPR requirements applied, and data storage followed institutional protocols for encryption, access control and retention.

3.11. Fieldwork Timeline

Fieldwork was organized in phases: obtaining hotel permissions, recruiting staff, conducting interviews, and completing transcription. Recruitment and interviewing at each hotel required two to three weeks, with transcription occurring concurrently. Full analysis took between eight and ten weeks, allowing adequate time for iterative coding, theme refinement and theory integration.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from qualitative interviews conducted with seven service staff members employed across Hilton-branded properties in France, together with one comparative interview conducted at a non-Hilton property. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using NVivo software (version 15) (Appendix 1), following the reflexive thematic analysis approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) (Appendix 3). The chapter is organized around four major themes, in correspondence with research objectives of the study (Appendix 6): (1) Technological Infrastructure and the Reconfiguration of Daily Operations, (2) Guest Perception, Segmentation and the Reshaping of Service Interaction, (3) Emotional Labor and the Strategic Preservation of the Human Touch, and (4) Organizational Culture, Training and the Institutional Scaffolding of Balance. Each theme is examined through participant responses, supported by the conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, which integrates Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008), Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983), and the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989); the mapping between this framework and the empirical data is set out in Appendix 11 (Table 16).

Participants sample comprised of seven interviews: five at Hilton Paris Opera, one at Waldorf Astoria Versailles, and one comparative interview at INNSiDE by Meliá Paris Charles de Gaulle, a non-Hilton property included opportunistically to provide an external point of comparison. This purposefully retained sample nonetheless achieved sufficient information rigor for the study as they yielded a focused, role-homogeneous population of guest-facing luxury hospitality staff (Vasileiou *et al*., 2018), and the implications of this deviation for transferability are revisited in Section 5.4.

4.2. Participant Demographics

The sample consisted of seven participants: five females and two males, aged between 26 and 39 (one participant, Françoise, fell within the 35-44 bracket with 24 years of hospitality experience). Roles ranges from full guest-facing spectrum implied by the scope and delimitation of the study (Section 1.5): housekeeping, front office, duty management, concierge, and front-of-house leadership. Tenure at the current property ranged from four months (Participant D) to almost four years (Participants A and E), while total hospitality experience ranged from three years (Participant F) to twenty-four years (Participant G). This variation in data structure enables the analysis to capture both the disorientation of early-tenure staff still learning the technological ecosystem at Hilton and the reflective, comparative judgement of long-serving staff who have witnessed multiple generations of hotel technology. The details of participants are presented in Table 1 below, with matrix cross-referencing provided in Appendix 2 (Table 5).

Table 1. Participant Profile Summary

ID	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Role	Property	Tenure (property)	Tenure (industry)
A	Candice	Female	25-34	Housekeeping Supervisor	Hilton Paris Opera	~4 years	8 years
B	Laura	Female	25-34	Front of House Director	Hilton Paris Opera	3.5 years	Not explicitly stated
C	Margot	Female	25-34 (30)	Duty Manager	Hilton Paris Opera	~3 years	8 years (3 Hilton hotels)
D	Pierre-Antoine	Male	25-34 (26)	Front Office Supervisor	Hilton Paris Opera	4 months	4 years (incl. USA)
E	Raphael	Male	35-44 (39)	Concierge	Hilton Paris Opera	~4 years	9 years
F	Soukayna	Female	25-34	Front Office Receptionist	INNSiDE by Meliá Paris CDG*	~1 year	3 years
G	Françoise	Female	35-44	Front of House Manager	Waldorf Astoria Versailles	3 yrs 11 months	24 years

**Participant F is employed at a non-Hilton comparator property and is treated throughout this chapter as a source of cross-brand triangulation rather than as representative of the operating model at Hilton (see Section 4.8 and Appendix 7).*

4.3. Theme 1: Technological Infrastructure and the Reconfiguration of Daily Operations

Objective 1 was to identify the technological innovations implemented by Hilton hotels in France that influence service staff operations. Across all seven transcripts, participants described a common technological core, supplemented by property-specific tools, that assists in every task of the working day. The frequency with which each tool was referenced is summarized in Figure 3 below, with the corresponding deductive coding framework set out in Appendix 1 (Table 3).

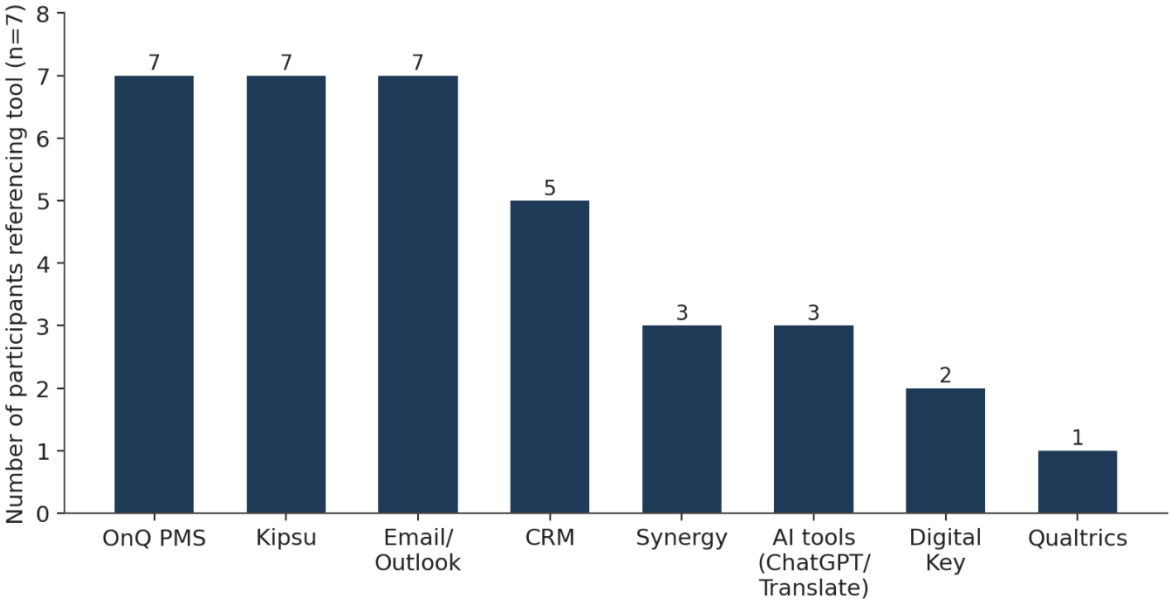


Figure 3. Technology Tools Referenced Across Participant Transcripts

4.3.1. Property Management and Communication Systems

Every participant identified the OnQ property management system (PMS), Kipsu guest messaging, and email/Outlook as the support of daily operations. This finding is in line with the study of Han *et al*. (2021), who reported that mobile and cloud-based PMS platforms have become the central nervous system of contemporary hotel operations. Candice (Participant A, Housekeeping) described how the CRM embedded within OnQ enabled staff to record and act on guest-specific preferences:

> *"If we have a regular guest... he has really specific things he wants in the room. So, we update his file and it allows us to put everything because he asks... it's going to upgrade the guest satisfaction."* (Candice, Housekeeping Supervisor)

This anticipatory function of the CRM is consistent with what was reported by Wang (2025), who observed that generative and data-driven guest-profiling tools increasingly allow hospitality staff to personalize service before a guest ever states a need explicitly. Margot (Participant C, Duty Manager) and Laura (Participant B, Front of House Director) both concur that Kipsu had, in under two years, displaced the telephone as guests' primary channel of contact, a shift that Laura attributed directly to a Hilton-mandated ten-minute response standard: "Hilton give us 10 minutes to answer to the guest, which means that we had to readjust the team." This finding extends the concept of the technology-mediated "Service Encounter 2.0" as put forward by Larivière *et al*. (2017), in which response-time expectations, rather than physical proximity, increasingly define service quality.

Synergy, the maintenance-request system, and Qualtrics, the guest-feedback platform used at Waldorf Astoria Versailles, were mentioned by a smaller subset of participants (three and one respectively). This shows role-specific rather than universal adoption. Pierre-Antoine (Participant D, Front Office Supervisor) noted that Synergy "is the main system that we use to communicate with the maintenance department", illustrating how digital ticketing has replaced the informal, paper-based service requests once typical of hotel back-of-house operations (Mo, Mai and Yang, 2024).

4.3.2. System Failures and Operational Discontinuity

Four disruption events were reported separately with the respondents and they are minor to severe in their importance to guest service, as shown in Figure 4 and Appendix 5 (Table 10).

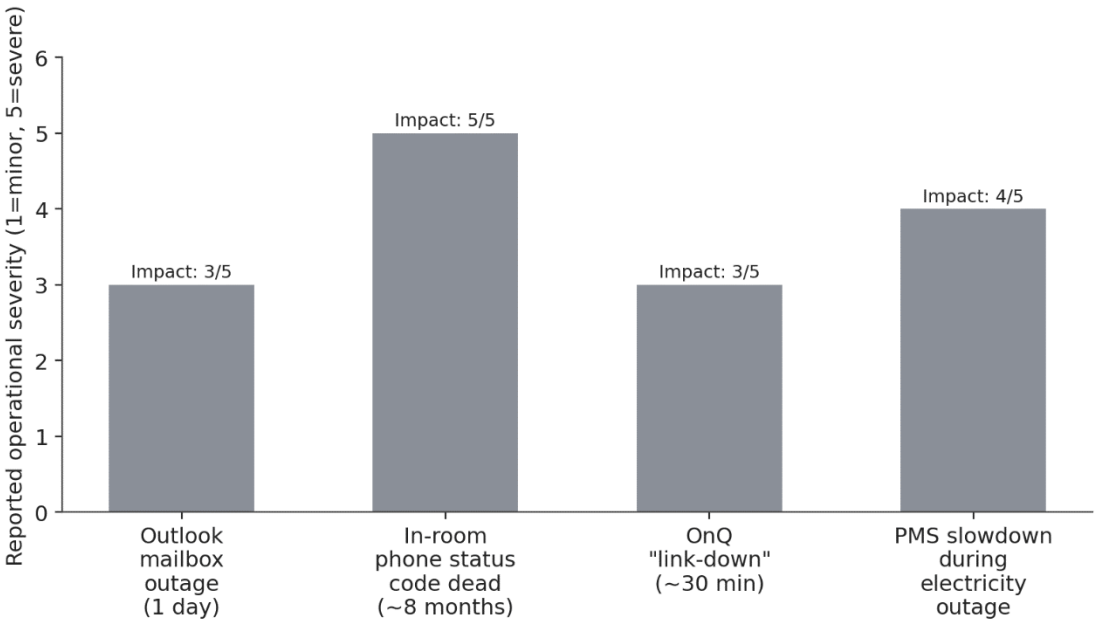


Figure 4. Reported System Failures and Operational Impact

Candice, described an eight-month failure of the in-room phone code system used to update housekeeping status, which, when it unexpectedly reactivated, reverted every room in the hotel to its last saved status:

> *"The system remembered the last status we saved through the phone, and so it changed all the status of all the room in the hotel... we had to check rooms to rooms if there is some guest... about 200 discrepancies."* (Candice, Housekeeping Supervisor)

This is in line with the study of Jianu, Ashton and Lugosi (2025), who describe the brittleness of algorithmic management systems, whereby staff are left to manually absorb the consequences of automation failure without any corresponding reduction in guest-facing responsibility. Pierre-Antoine similarly described a thirty-minute "link-down" of OnQ's central reservation hub, during which the property could not access last-minute reservations, requiring an emergency call to Hilton's central software engineering team. Similarly, Soukayna (Participant F) reported disruption caused by an electricity outage, which forced her property to revert temporarily to a paper-based check-in process, resulting in guests being unable to pay the City Tax and deposit. Hence, these suggest

that technological reliability, rather than technological sophistication per se, is the main factor affecting staff experience of the human-touch/technology balance, a nuance not fully captured by the traditional emphasis placed on perceived usefulness and ease of use by the Technology Acceptance Model, considered in isolation from system uptime, as reported by Han *et al*. (2021) and Radović *et al*. (2025).

4.3.3. The Emergence of AI-Augmented Tools

This sub-theme explained artificial intelligence as a category of workplace tool, separate from the established PMS/CRM infrastructure. Laura responded that Hilton-developed AI system analyses and aggregates Kipsu conversations to extract recurring guest concerns: "Hilton created a new report generated by the artificial intelligence to read our conversation with the guest and to extract the topic." She also described AI-based training simulations in which staff verbally respond to simulated guest complaints and receive automated feedback on tone and content. This is in line with the study of Tavitiyaman, So and Chan (2024), who found that AI-supported training positively determines staff engagement outcome rather than resistance to, new technology.

Raphael (Participant E, Concierge) reported an ed AI delegation, and described his use of ChatGPT to draft and translate guest emails while explicitly retaining human oversight of the final output: "I use ChatGPT to help me organize the email... but I still need to read everything to see if there isn't anything strange." This pattern of AI-assisted, human-verified communication supports the argument put forward by Wang (2025), that generative AI functions most effectively in luxury hospitality as an amplifier of staff productivity rather than a substitute for staff judgement, and diverges from more deterministic accounts of automation displacing frontline labor, as noted in the study of Li *et al*. (2021).

4.4. Theme 2: Guest Perception, Segmentation and the Reshaping of Service Interaction

Objective 2 sought to examine staff perceptions of how technology affects guest interaction and service quality. Participants were of the view that guests are not a homogeneous mass but a segmented population whose channel preferences vary predictably by age, travel purpose, and nationality, as illustrated in Figure 5 and further evidenced in the quotation matrix at Appendix 6 (Table 11).

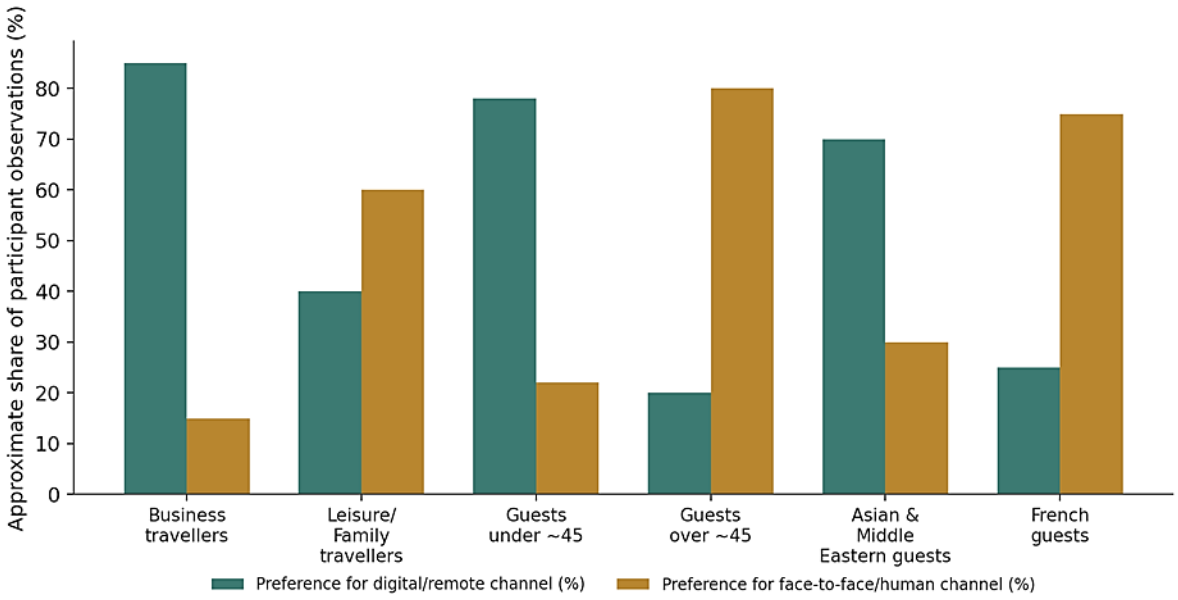


Figure 5. Guest Segment and Reported Technology-Channel Preference

4.4.1. Demographic and Cultural Determinants of Technology Preference

Age is frequently cited as a determinant of guest technology preference. Laura reported a generational threshold around 45-50 years: "People after I would say 45, 50, 60, they won't use the app or the technology. They want to talk to us because they're used to it... the new generation between 18 and I would say 40 years old, we were born with a phone in our hand." This finding is consistent with the study of Wąsowicz-Zaborek (2025), that national and generational culture systematically moderates guest evaluation of hotel service technology, and extends the work on smart-hotel technology acceptance carried

out by Yang *et al*. (2021) by situating the age effect within a specifically luxury, French context.

Another determinant is nationality, as Candice described differences in nationality in both housekeeping expectations and communication-channel choice: "American people use a lot Kipsu... Middle East, they never send Kipsu. They always call." Margot from the front desk reported that French guests, including herself as a hotel guest, rarely used Kipsu, whereas Chinese and Japanese guests, often facing a language barrier, relied on it heavily. Business travelers across nearly every transcript were characterized as prioritizing speed and minimal interaction, while leisure and family travelers, particularly first-time visitors to Paris, were described as more demanding of both time and personalized attention. Pierre-Antoine reported that leisure guests "tend to expect to have the best stay possible... they have a high expectation of it, and they tend to be demanding because they want their stay to meet their expectations," an observation consistent with the comparative account of personalization expectations in luxury hotel management provided by Qi (2024).

4.4.2. Anticipatory Personalization through Guest-History Systems

Apart from channel preference, participants described the CRM and guest-history systems as an enhancement to qualitatively different, anticipatory mode of service in which staff pre-empts guest needs rather than merely responding to them. Candice's account of the CRM entry created to protect a bereaved regular guest, instructing staff never to mention his late wife, illustrates the affective sensitivity embedded within what might otherwise appear a purely administrative system: "He came alone, because she died. And so, we wrote it... never mention the wife." This is in line with the study of Shen and Dwayne Ball (2009), who caution that technology-mediated personalization is only experienced positively by customers when the underlying data is used with discretion and emotional intelligence rather than mechanically.

Françoise (Participant G, Front of House Manager, Waldorf Astoria Versailles) gave account of the limits of the current CRM, noting that it does not surface a returning guest's

full stay history at the point of check-in: "You can still say, 'Oh, this is your first time,' and actually, 'No, no, actually I've been coming for 20 years,' and you feel ridiculous." This negative case is theoretically important: whereas most participants presented CRM-enabled personalization as an unambiguous benefit, Françoise's twenty-four years of hospitality experience allowed her to identify a specific functional gap between the ambition of anticipatory personalization described in Section 2.3.2 and the system's present-day capability. This negative case is presented in Appendix 7 (Table 12), and supports by the study of Radović *et al*. (2025), that technology-driven personalization outcomes materialize only when data architecture, not merely front-end interface, is aligned with service intent.

4.4.3. The Double-Edged Sword: Efficiency Gains versus Communication Overload

The section is concerned with the unintended costs of channel proliferation. Several participants described guests using multiple channels, email, Kipsu, and telephone, to make the same request, producing duplicated labor rather than the efficiency gain the technology was intended to deliver. Margot explained: "He texted us, emailed us, and he also called us, because he wanted to make sure that his two rooms would be next to each other... it can be a bit tricky to double-answer the same request." Laura reported an almost identical pattern from the Front Desk, describing it as a situation in which "we double the communication." This finding utilized Service Encounter 2.0 framework by Larivière *et al*. (2017) who reported friction point which is absent from that model: guests' simultaneous, redundant use of multiple technological channels can increase, rather than decrease, staff workload, this is in line with the study of Echeverri and Åkesson (2018) in their account of front-line employees' discretionary coping strategies as presented in Table 9, Appendix 5.

Soukayna gave a different account, the divided attention created by mandatory computer steps during face-to-face guest interaction: "Sometimes guests are speaking to me while I need to complete mandatory computer steps. I feel like I'm dividing my attention between the guests and the screen." This corroborates with the finding reported by Mo, Mai and

Yang (2024), that smart-hotel workflows, while reducing certain categories of manual labor, can simultaneously increase the cognitive load associated with simultaneous human and digital task management.

4.5. Theme 3: Emotional Labor and the Strategic Preservation of the Human Touch

Objective number 3 examined the strategies staff employ to preserve emotional connection and personalized service within technologically mediated environments. Across the interview dataset, participants described a consistent repertoire of deliberate, effortful practices through which they actively re-inserted warmth into interactions that technology had rendered faster but potentially more impersonal, as shown in Figure 6 below and Appendix 1 (Table 4).

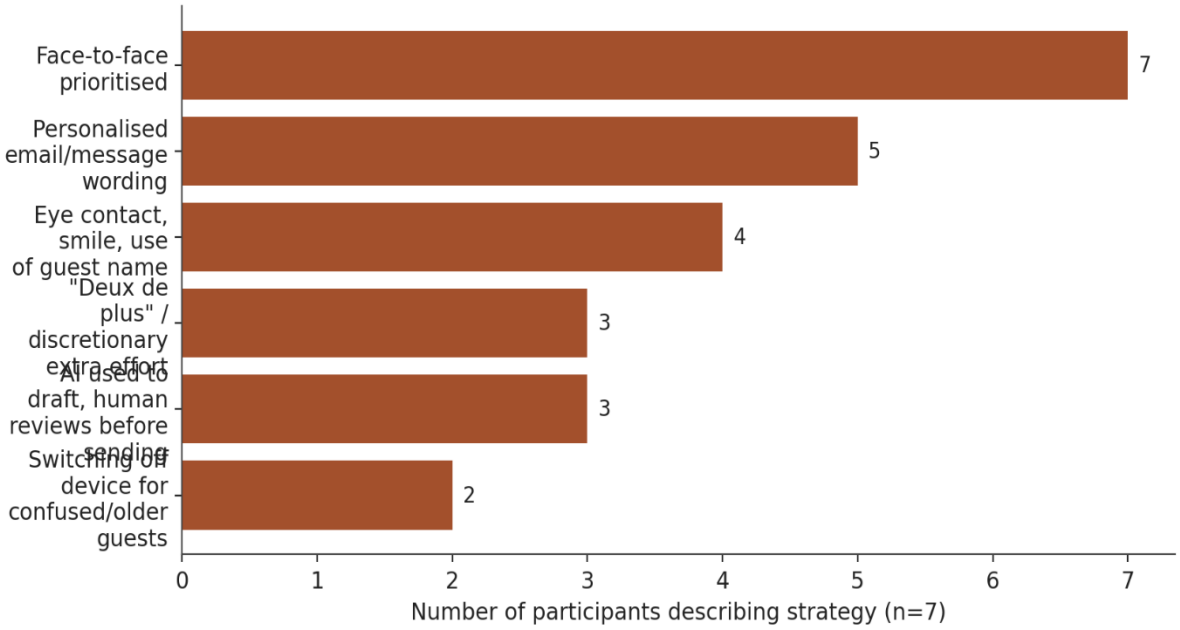


Figure 6. Staff Strategies for Preserving the Human Touch

4.5.1. Deep Acting and Deliberate Humanizing Practices

Consistent with the foundational distinction between surface and deep acting drawn by Hochschild (1983), participants described effortful, internally generated warmth rather than scripted courtesy. Candice referenced a specific Hilton service norm, "deux de plus" ("two more", or going the extra distance), which she applied selectively when serving French-speaking guests: "It will be easier for us to do that if they are French... I will want to speak with them more." Margot described a parallel discipline of individualizing every written communication: "I don't do like same email to every guest... I try to say it back to them, like to make sure I understood everything." This granular, message-by-message customization is in line with the study of Solnet *et al*. (2019), who reported that the human touch in service settings is best understood not as a single trait but as an accumulation of small, deliberate acts of attentiveness.

Soukayna described a specific behavioral repertoire for maintaining connection while working at a screen: "I maintain eye contact, smile, explain what I'm doing, always try to use the guest's name because it feels more personal." This is consistent with the meta-analytic finding reported by Xu, Cao and Huo (2020), that visible, embodied emotional display remains one of the strongest predictors of guest-perceived service quality, independent of the efficiency of the underlying digital process.

4.5.2. Face-to-Face Primacy and the Limits of Mediated Communication

All seven participants, without exception, asserted that face-to-face interaction remained superior to any digital channel for resolving sensitive or ambiguous situations. Candice was unequivocal: "It's never as much as if you see them face-to-face, personally, talk with them, and it's more intimate... always better, always." She further noted that email "can lead easily to misunderstanding", whereas physical presence allows tone and intent to be read directly, a point that is in line with the report by Harkison (2017), that the luxury guest experience is fundamentally co-constructed through embodied, not merely transactional, presence.

Soukayna's account of an elderly couple struggling with self-service tablet check-in provided the clearest behavioral evidence of this principle being enacted rather than merely stated: "I stopped using the tablet and completed everything face-to-face. They were much more comfortable after that." This spontaneous channel-switching illustrates what Xiong *et al*. (2023) describe as adaptive emotional labor, the moment-to-moment recalibration of service delivery mode in response to observed guest distress, and stands in contrast to more rigid, protocol-driven models of hotel technology deployment (Sehgal *et al*., 2024).

4.5.3. AI as Assistant, Not Author: Bounded Delegation of Emotional Work

This section, is concerned with explicit boundary participants drew between using AI to accelerate communication and allowing AI to originate the emotional content of that communication. Raphael's report examined this: "I want to give a human answer but with the help of the AI." He also reported deliberately distrusting ChatGPT's restaurant recommendations, because "sometimes he gives restaurants that doesn't exist, restaurants that they are closed", preferring his own first-hand neighborhood knowledge, gathered by walking the area, as the authoritative source of guest recommendations.

This bounded delegation of labor, in which AI accelerates drafting and translation but is denied authorship over judgement and emotional tone, is consistent with the finding reported by Wu *et al*. (2023), that hotel employees' emotional labor strategies during periods of heightened technological change are shaped as much by individual professional identity as by organizational mandate. It also expands the classic account of emotional labor and burnout by Kim (2008), by suggesting that AI, deployed selectively, may in some instances reduce rather than intensify the administrative burden that typically precedes emotional exhaustion, provided staff retain final authorial control. A matrix illustrating this bounded-delegation strategy alongside the other Theme Three sub-themes is provided in Appendix 6 (Table 11).

4.6. Theme 4: Organizational Culture, Training and the Institutional Scaffolding of Balance

Objective 4 assessed the organizational and cultural factors that facilitate or constrain the integration of technology and human-centered hospitality practice. Participants consistently credited a dense institutional infrastructure of training and cultural reinforcement with making the technology/human-touch balance achievable in practice, rather than treating it as an incidental by-product of individual staff disposition. These mechanisms are summarized in Figure 7 below and the participant-level recommendations arising from this theme as presented in Appendix 10 (Table 15).

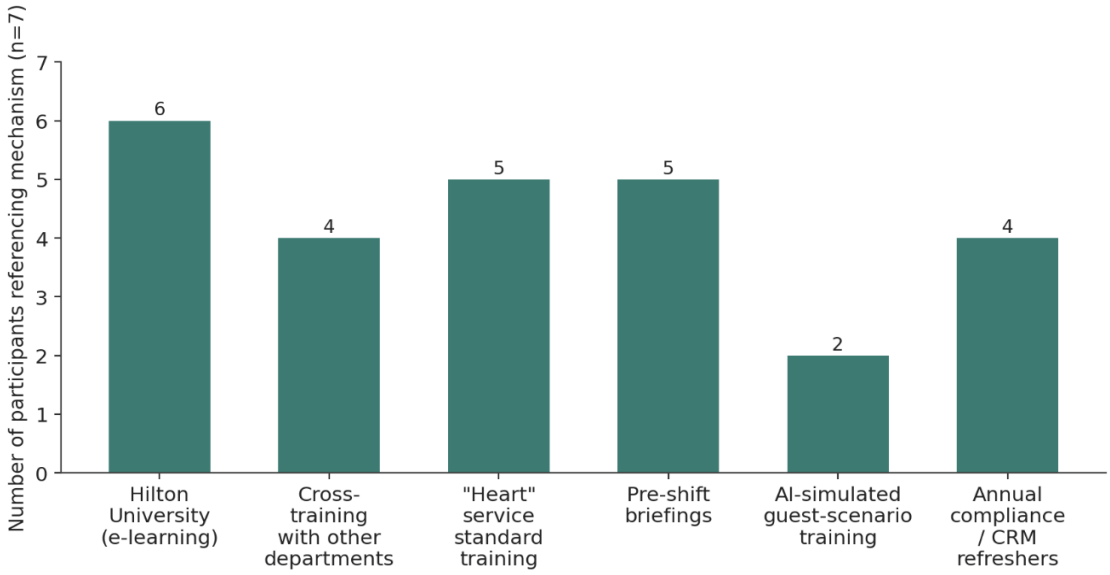


Figure 7. Institutional Training and Support Mechanisms Reported

4.6.1. Structured Onboarding and Continuous Training

Every participant referenced some form of structured onboarding or ongoing training, most commonly Hilton University, cross-departmental training, and the Hilton "Heart" service-standard program. Candice described an onboarding experience that deliberately paired technical and relational training: "We have a lot of training to do on computer, regarding our services, but not specific, not only... they also do cross-training... spending

a day with somebody else from another department, to know how they work." Pierre-Antoine confirmed that the Heart program functions as an explicit relational counterweight to system training: "Hilton has a policy that they called the 'Heart' system, which is basically a process to show you how to greet and talk with a guest in the Hilton way."

This dual-track training model is consistent with the finding reported by Tavitiyaman, So and Chan (2024), that hotel employees' willingness to adopt new technology is conditioned by the perceived adequacy of accompanying human-skills training, and supports the study of Radović *et al*. (2025), that positive technology-mediated guest outcomes depend on alignment between digital tools and human-resource practice, rather than on technological sophistication alone. Margot's account of Hilton University, offering short, optional refresher videos alongside compulsory annual compliance modules, showed layered training architecture that accommodates differing individual learning needs across a large, high-turnover workforce.

4.6.2. French Cultural Norms and the "Art de Recevoir" in Practice

In line with the cultural context explained in Section 2.2.3, participants described specific French service norms operating alongside, and at times independently of, the global standards set by Hilton. Margot described a personal, non-negotiable linguistic ritual: "I never greet a guest in English, I always say 'Bonjour.' I think it's really important for the guest... to feel like they are in Paris, they are in France." This is in line with the study of Batat and Kerviler (2020), who argue that the French concept of art de vivre operates as a distinct competitive resource within the luxury sector, one that cannot be replicated through technological means alone.

Margot also reported how staff mobilize the historic character of the property itself as a relational asset rather than merely an operational constraint: "We are like a historic monument... we do know our weaknesses, and it's important to always keep them in mind because you can use it on your advantage with the guest." This finding extends the account of l'art de recevoir as reported in the study of Cheval Blanc (2025), by showing how frontline staff actively narrate a property's imperfections as part of an authentic, non-

standardized luxury experience, a strategy with no direct equivalent in the technology-acceptance literature.

4.6.3. Resistance to Change and Generational/Technological Divides Among Staff

A final and important sub-theme concerned resistance to technology among staff themselves, a dimension largely absent from guest-facing accounts of the technology/human-touch balance in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Candice described active resistance among housekeeping colleagues to an incoming tablet-based reporting system, rooted partly in surveillance concerns and partly in language: "Many of them speak Lingala... there is not this type of language on it... they did like a paper, everybody signed to say no." She linked this resistance explicitly to a fear of visibility: "It's because they know that we're going to be able to see since when they're in the room. How long they are taking."

This finding is consistent with the study of Turčinović, Vujko and Mirčetić (2025), that algorithmic monitoring embedded within ostensibly neutral operational technology can be experienced by frontline staff as surveillance, generating resistance that is frequently misread by management as mere unfamiliarity with new tools. It also nuances the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) as applied in Section 2.6.3, since Candice's colleagues' concern was not primarily with perceived usefulness or ease of use, but with the social and disciplinary consequences of increased visibility, a dimension the model does not directly capture, as discussed by Jianu, Ashton and Lugosi (2025) (Appendix 4).

4.7. Theoretical Contextualization: Service-Dominant Logic, Emotional Labor Theory and TAM in Practice

The conceptual framework developed in Section 2.6.4 (Figure 2) proposed that technological configuration determines staff perceptions, which in turn affects emotional labor and guest interaction, producing guest value co-creation within a continuous

feedback loop. The findings of this chapter provide empirical support for this sequence while also refining it (Figure 8).

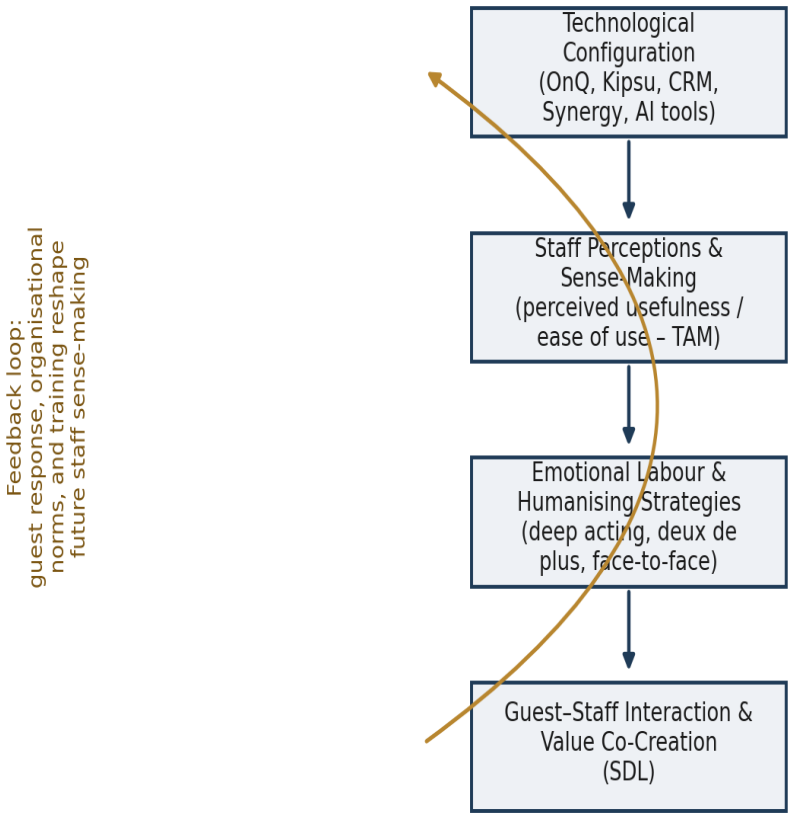


Figure 8. Empirical Mapping of the TAM-Emotional Labor-SDL Conceptual Framework onto Hilton France Findings

The presence of Service-Dominant Logic, in which value is co-created through the integration of operant resources such as staff skill and emotional intelligence with operand resources such as PMS and CRM systems, as reported in the study by Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008), is self-explanatory in Candice's account on CRM-mediated anticipation of a bereaved guest's needs and in Raphael's Google Maps-supported restaurant recommendations. In both cases, technology functions as described by Shaw, Bailey and Williams (2011), as a distribution mechanism that enables, rather than substitutes for, staff judgement. However, the findings also extend SDL by showing that value co-creation

can be actively undermined by system unreliability (Section 4.3.2): when OnQ or the in-room phone system failed, staff could not integrate operant and operand resources at all, regardless of their own skill, a boundary condition not fully theorized in the account of hospitality value co-creation given in the study of Shulga and Busser (2020).

Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983) is supported in this study, hence: nearly every deep-acting strategy described in Section 4.5, deux de plus, personalized written communication, eye contact and use of guest names, was undertaken voluntarily and reflectively rather than merely performed as surface compliance. This is consistent with the study of Liu *et al*. (2023), that deep acting, while more psychologically demanding than surface acting, is also more protective of staff wellbeing over time, provided it is not compelled by unsustainable workload, a caveat directly relevant to Laura's account of Kipsu response-time pressure straining a short-staffed night team.

Finally, the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) is embedded in the concept of the study and supported, but requires the extension proposed in Section 2.6.3: perceived usefulness and ease of use shaped adoption in every transcript, but two further determinants emerged empirically that TAM does not explicitly theorize, reliability of the underlying system (Section 4.3.2) and perceived surveillance risk (Section 4.6.3). This is consistent with the socio-technical extension of TAM proposed by Radović *et al*. (2025), that suggests that in luxury hospitality settings specifically, technology acceptance is best modelled as a function of usefulness, ease of use, dependability, and perceived organizational trust, rather than usefulness and ease of use alone. The connection of the three frameworks onto the empirical data is presented in Table 2 below and reproduced with section cross-references in Appendix 11 (Table 16).

Table 2. Summary Mapping of Theoretical Framework to Key Findings

Framework	Core Proposition	Empirical Support	Empirical Extension
Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008)	Value is co-created via integration of operant and operand resources	CRM-mediated anticipation of guest needs (Section 4.4.2); concierge use of digital tools alongside local knowledge (Section 4.3.3)	Co-creation collapses entirely during system failure (Section 4.3.2)

Emotional Labor Theory (Hochschild, 1983)	Staff perform surface or deep acting to meet display rules	"Deux de plus"; personalized messaging; face-to-face primacy (Section 4.5)	Staff draw an explicit boundary around AI's role in emotional labor (Section 4.5.3)
Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989)	Adoption is driven by perceived usefulness and ease of use	Universal adoption of OnQ, Kipsu and CRM (Section 4.3.1)	System reliability and perceived surveillance risk emerge as additional determinants (Sections 4.3.2, 4.6.3)

4.8. Cross-Property and Cross-Brand Comparative Insights

Because the achieved sample spanned three distinct properties, an urban flagship (Hilton Paris Opera), a heritage palace property (Waldorf Astoria Versailles), and a non-Hilton comparator (INNSiDE by Meliá Paris Charles de Gaulle), the data permit a functionally limited but theoretically valuable cross-property comparison (Figure 9).

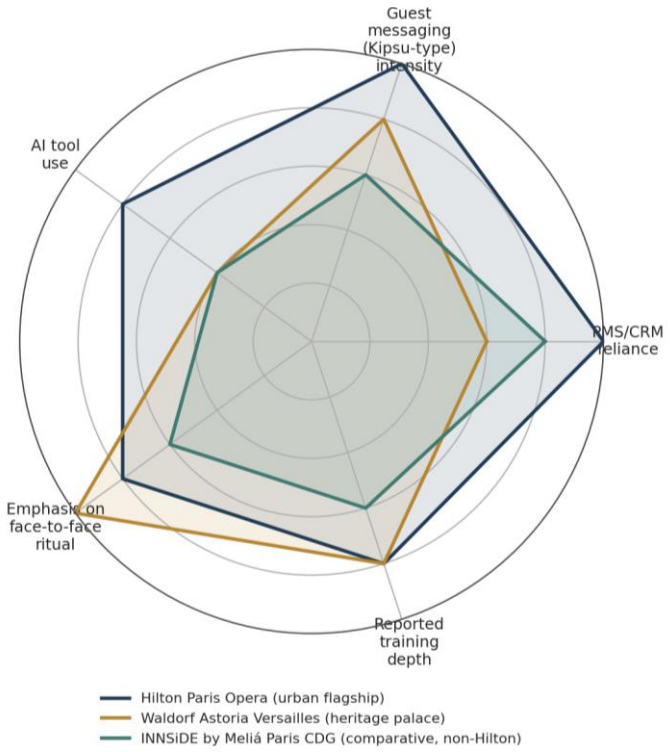


Figure 9. Cross-Property/Cross-Brand Comparison of Technology Reliance and Human-Touch Emphasis (illustrative, 1-5 scale)

Françoise's account of Waldorf Astoria Versailles suggested a property where ritualized, embodied service (ceremonial greeting, discreet handling of VIP status, and physical presence at daily briefings) is weighted more heavily relative to digital-channel intensity than at the urban, higher-volume Hilton Paris Opera, consistent with Section 3.3's characterization of Waldorf Astoria Versailles as a setting where "luxury identity is strongly tied to human-centered service rituals." Soukayna's account of INNSiDE by Meliá Paris Charles de Gaulle, included here as a deliberate negative case (Appendix 7), offers a valuable point of contrast: although not a Hilton property, and therefore outside the study's formal scope (Section 1.5), her account converged strongly with Hilton participants on the central finding that technology should support rather than replace hospitality: "I hope technology will not replace a human touch... it cannot replace empathy, kindness, or the ability to understand someone's emotions." The convergence of this independently branded property with Hilton's own internal training philosophy strengthens confidence that the study's core finding reflects a genuine industry-wide tension in contemporary luxury hospitality, rather than an artefact of Hilton-specific branding language (Roy and Pagaldiviti, 2024).

4.9. Implications

The findings indicate that the balance between technology and human touch at Hilton properties in France is neither a fixed organizational policy nor a matter of individual staff disposition alone, but an actively and continuously negotiated accomplishment, shaped by system reliability, guest demographic composition, individual emotional labor, and institutional training architecture operating together (Sections 4.3-4.7).

Practically, the recurrent system-failure narratives in Section 4.3.2 suggest that Hilton's technology investment strategy should weight system resilience and downtime contingency planning alongside feature development; guests and staff alike appeared more forgiving of a system's limitations than of its unpredictable unavailability. The resistance identified among housekeeping staff in Section 4.6.3 further suggests that technology rollouts should incorporate explicit, upfront communication about the purpose

and limits of any data visible to management, alongside translated training materials for a linguistically diverse back-of-house workforce.

Theoretically, the extension proposed in Section 4.7, incorporating system reliability and perceived surveillance risk into the Technology Acceptance Model, offers a modest but empirically grounded refinement for future luxury-hospitality technology research. The cross-property comparison in Section 4.8 further suggests that the appropriate balance point between technology and human touch is not uniform even within a single brand portfolio, but should instead be calibrated to a property's specific market position, historic character, and guest composition (Qi, 2024; Wąsowicz-Zaborek, 2025).

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

This study examined how service staff at Hilton Hotels in France perceive and navigate the balance between technological innovation and the human touch in delivering luxury hospitality experiences. Through seven qualitative interviews, the study revealed a workforce that actively, continuously, and often invisibly labors to preserve relational warmth within an increasingly digitally mediated operating environment. This chapter revisits the study's aim and objectives, summarizes the key findings, outlines the contribution to knowledge and practice, acknowledges the study's limitations, and proposes directions for future research.

5.2. Summary of the Findings

The research question asked how service staff at Hilton Hotels in France perceive and navigate the balance between technological innovation and the human touch in delivering luxury hospitality experiences. In relation to objective 1, to identify key technological innovations, the findings showed a stable core infrastructure (OnQ PMS, Kipsu messaging, CRM, Synergy) supplemented by an emergent layer of artificial intelligence tools (AI-generated conversation analytics, AI-simulated training, and generative AI for email drafting and translation). This technological core was, however, punctuated by recurrent and operationally severe system failures, including an eight-month malfunction of the in-room status-code phone system and a full day of email outage, which participants experienced as more disruptive to service quality than any inherent limitation of the technology itself.

Regarding objective 2, staff perceptions of impact on guest interaction, the research found that technology preference is firmly predicted and segmented by age, nationality, and travel purpose, with business travelers and younger, digitally native guests to favor Kipsu and self-service channels, and older guests and certain nationalities, notably French and

Middle Eastern guests, favoring direct human contact. CRM-enabled anticipatory personalization was widely valued, though Participant G's account revealed a persistent functional gap in guest-history visibility that undermines this ambition in practice (see Appendix 7, Table 12).

With respect to objective 3, strategies for preserving emotional connection, participants described a consistent, effortful repertoire of deep-acting practices, personalized written communication, deliberate use of guest names, and an unequivocal preference for face-to-face resolution of sensitive matters, alongside a carefully bounded use of AI as a drafting assistant rather than an authorial substitute. This finding supports the emotional labor theory presented by Hochschild (1983) and extends it by showing how staff draw an explicit, self-imposed line around which categories of communication AI may and may not originate. A full summary of humanizing strategies by frequency is provided in Table 9, Appendix 5.

Finally, in relation to objective 4, organizational and cultural factors, the research identified a dense institutional scaffolding, Hilton University, cross-departmental training, the "Heart" service program, and French cultural norms such as always greeting guests with "Bonjour", that actively supports staff in achieving the technology/human-touch balance. However, the research also surfaced staff-level resistance to new technology rooted in surveillance concerns among housekeeping colleagues, a dimension largely unaddressed by existing institutional training, and revealed variation in the technology/human-touch balance point across property types (urban flagship, heritage palace, and non-Hilton comparator).

These findings align with the Service-Dominant Logic presented by Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008) in demonstrating that value is genuinely co-created between staff, guests, and technological resources, while also showing that this co-creation collapses entirely during system failure, a boundary condition meriting further theoretical attention. The findings likewise support and extend the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) to identify system reliability and perceived surveillance risk as empirically significant, but currently under-theorized, determinants of staff technology acceptance in the luxury

hospitality context. This mapping of findings to theory is summarized in Table 2 (Section 4.7) and Appendix 11 (Table 16).

5.3. Contribution to Knowledge and Practice

Empirically, this study contributes one of the few staff-centered, France-specific qualitative accounts of the technology/human-touch balance in luxury hospitality, addressing a gap identified in Section 2.8, where prior research has more often examined guest perceptions or manager-level strategy than the lived, moment-to-moment experience of frontline and near-frontline staff (Echeverri and Åkesson, 2018; Solnet *et al*., 2019). Theoretically, the study offers a modest but grounded extension of the Technology Acceptance Model, incorporating system reliability and perceived surveillance risk as determinants of staff technology acceptance alongside the traditional constructs of perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis, 1989; Radović *et al*., 2025).

Practically, the findings provide Hilton and comparable luxury hospitality brands with specific, actionable insight: technology rollouts should be accompanied by explicit communication about data visibility and its intended use, particularly for housekeeping and other back-of-house staff; investment in system resilience and downtime contingency may matter as much to guest experience as feature innovation; and training architecture should continue to pair technical instruction with relational, culturally specific service training, such as Hilton's "Heart" program, rather than treating the two as separate curricula.

5.4. Study Limitations

The study utilized seven participants, while methodologically appropriate for the qualitative, interpretive depth sought (Vasileiou *et al*., 2018) is smaller than the fifteen participants anticipated in Section 3.4, and is concentrated primarily at a single property, Hilton Paris Opera (five of seven participants, as shown in Table 1). This limits the extent to which findings can be generalized across the wider Hilton portfolio in France, and the

inclusion of one non-Hilton comparator, while analytically valuable for triangulation (Section 4.8), however, falls outside the study's initial scope and delimitation (Section 1.5). The limitation of the data pool is also attributed to staff response and willingness to be interviewed due to personal reasons and the busy work schedule at the hotel; this was particularly experienced at the Waldorf Astoria Versailles where we only succeeded in interviewing the Front of House Manager.

Interviews were conducted in English with participants for whom French was frequently the first language; while participants demonstrated strong English proficiency throughout, some nuance may have been lost relative to interviews conducted in participants' first language. The cross-sectional design captured a single point in time for each participant rather than tracking how the technology/human-touch balance evolves over the course of a career or a major system rollout, such as the housekeeping tablet implementation described by Participant A as still pending at the time of interview. Finally, the study did not include guest perspectives, hotel management or corporate technology strategy perspectives, meaning the balance described here reflects staff experience specifically rather than a full, multi-stakeholder account.

5.5. Directions for Future Research

Future research should include: a longitudinal study following the Hilton Paris Opera housekeeping tablet rollout described by Participant A from pre-implementation through adoption, to examine how staff resistance rooted in surveillance concerns evolves once a system is operational; a larger, multi-property comparative study explicitly designed to test the illustrative cross-property pattern proposed in Section 4.8 and Figure 9; research incorporating guest-side data alongside staff interviews to examine whether staff perceptions of guest technology preference (Section 4.4.1) are corroborated by guest self-report; and further theoretical development of an extended Technology Acceptance Model incorporating system reliability and perceived surveillance risk as formal constructs, tested across service industries beyond hospitality.

5.6. Final Reflection

This study presented how service staff at Hilton Hotels in France experience and negotiate the balance between technology-driven processes and the human touch that underpins personalized luxury service. Established frameworks, Service-Dominant Logic, Emotional Labor Theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model, provided a robust perspective through which to interpret these experiences, while the qualitative interviews themselves surfaced dimensions, system fragility, staff-level technology resistance rooted in surveillance concerns, and property-specific variation in the balance point, that extend and refine these frameworks. Hence, the research suggests that the human touch in luxury hospitality is not eroded by technology so much as it is actively, effortfully, and skillfully defended by staff who understand precisely which parts of their work technology should accelerate, and which parts must remain irreducibly human.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. NVivo Analysis

A1.1. Deductive Codes (Theory-Driven)

Table 3 presents the deductive coding framework applied to the transcripts, derived directly from the study's conceptual framework (Service-Dominant Logic, Emotional Labor Theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model) and coded in NVivo 15.

Table 3. Deductive Coding Framework

Code Category	Code	Definition	Example Quote
Technology Infrastructure	TECH-CORE-SYS	References to OnQ, Kipsu, CRM, Synergy as core daily tools	"We use OnQ, which is the main system we use in Hilton hotel" (Participant A)
Technology Infrastructure	TECH-FAIL	References to system outages or failures	"It's not working anymore. The system... died" (Participant A)
Technology Infrastructure	TECH-AI-NEW	References to emerging AI-based tools	"I use ChatGPT to help me organize the email" (Participant E)
Guest Perception	GUEST-SEG-AGE	Age as a determinant of technology preference	"People after 45, 50, 60, they won't use the app" (Participant B)
Guest Perception	GUEST-SEG-NAT	Nationality as a determinant of technology preference	"Middle East, they never send Kipsu. They always call" (Participant A)
Guest Perception	GUEST-CRM-ANTIC	CRM used to anticipate guest needs	"It allows us to anticipate... their needs" (Participant A)
Emotional Labor	EL-DEEP-ACT	Deliberate, effortful humanising practice	"I don't do like same email to every guest" (Participant C)
Emotional Labor	EL-FACE-PRIMACY	Preference for face-to-face over mediated contact	"Always better, always" (Participant A)
Emotional Labor	EL-AI-BOUND	Bounded delegation of communication to AI	"I want to give a human answer but with the help of the AI" (Participant E)
Organizational Culture	ORG-TRAIN	References to formal training systems	"We have Hilton University" (Participant C)

Organizational Culture	ORG-FR-CULTURE	References to French cultural service norms	"I always say 'Bonjour'" (Participant C)
Organizational Culture	ORG-RESIST	Staff resistance to new technology	"They did like a paper, everybody signed to say no" (Participant A)

A1.2. Inductive Codes

Table 4 presents the inductive coding framework, developed through open coding of the transcripts and subsequently organized into parent and child nodes within NVivo 15.

Table 4. Inductive Coding Framework

Parent Node	Child Node	Code	Definition	Frequency
Technological Infrastructure	Core Systems	PMS-DAILY	Daily reliance on OnQ/PMS	7
	Messaging	KIPSU-STD	Kipsu response-time standard	5
	System Failure	SYS-DOWN	Outage or link-down events	4
	AI Tools	AI-DRAFT	AI used for drafting/translation	3
Guest Perception	Age Segmentation	AGE-PREF	Age-linked channel preference	4
	Nationality Segmentation	NAT-PREF	Nationality-linked channel preference	5
	Anticipation	CRM-PROFILE	Guest profile/preference recording	4
	Channel Overload	MULTI-CHANNEL	Guest use of multiple channels for one request	3
Emotional Labor	Deep Acting	PERSONAL-MSG	Individualized written communication	4
	Embodied Presence	EYE-SMILE-NAME	Eye contact, smiling, use of guest name	3
	Channel Switching	SWITCH-OFFLINE	Abandoning device for face-to-face resolution	2
Organizational Culture	Training	TRAIN-DUAL	Combined technical and relational training	6
	Cultural Norms	FR-NORM	French service ritual (e.g., greeting)	3
	Resistance	TECH-RESIST	Staff resistance linked to surveillance concern	1

Appendix 2. Participant Profile Matrix

Table 5. Comprehensive Participant Profile Matrix

ID	Property	Role	Key Technology Challenge	Key Humanizing Strategy	Notable Contribution
A	Hilton Paris Opera	Housekeeping Supervisor	8-month in-room status code failure; paper-based reporting	"Deux de plus" with French guests; face-to-face resolution	Detailed account of system failure and staff resistance to tablets
B	Hilton Paris Opera	Front of House Director	10-minute Kipsu response standard under night-shift constraints	AI-supported training simulations; personalized replies	Quantified Kipsu response-time improvement (20 to ~10 minutes)
C	Hilton Paris Opera	Duty Manager	Guests using multiple channels for one request	Individualized email wording; local French greeting ritual	Reflection on historic-building constraints as a relational asset
D	Hilton Paris Opera	Front Office Supervisor	OnQ central hub "link-down" for ~30 minutes	Hilton "Heart" greeting protocol; language accommodation	Comparative perspective from prior USA hotel experience
E	Hilton Paris Opera	Concierge	High guest-to-staff ratio limiting WhatsApp/Kipsu response	Bounded use of ChatGPT for drafting only, not authorship	Clearest articulation of AI-assisted, human-authored communication
F*	INNSiDE by Meliá Paris CDG	Front Office Receptionist	Electricity outage disabling Opera PMS	Reading body language; switching off tablet for older guests	Cross-brand comparative/negative case (non-Hilton)
G	Waldorf Astoria Versailles	Front of House Manager	CRM does not surface full guest stay history	24 years of accumulated relational expertise; ritualized training	Most senior participant; identified specific CRM functional gap

**Participant F's property falls outside the Hilton portfolio and is retained for cross-brand triangulation (Section 4.8; Appendix 7).*

Appendix 3. Thematic Analysis Process Documentation

A3.1. Phase 1: Familiarization with Data

Activities undertaken: initial reading of all seven transcripts; second reading with preliminary note-taking against the conceptual framework (Section 3.2); identification of recurring words and phrases; documentation of initial impressions in a reflexive journal (Birt *et al*., 2016).

Key recurring phrases identified: "Kipsu" (mentioned by all 7 participants); "human touch" / "personal touch" (mentioned by 6 participants); "face-to-face" (mentioned by 5 participants); "training" (mentioned by 7 participants); "AI" / "ChatGPT" (mentioned by 4 participants); "Bonjour"/French cultural norms (mentioned by 3 participants).

A3.2. Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Table 6. Theme Definitions and Scope

Theme	Definition	Sub-themes	Coding References
Theme 1: Technological Infrastructure	The technological systems staff rely on daily, and the disruptions and emergent AI tools that shape this reliance	Core systems; system failures; AI-augmented tools	41
Theme 2: Guest Perception and Segmentation	How staff perceive and respond to segmented guest technology preferences	Demographic/cultural determinants; CRM anticipation; channel overload	33
Theme 3: Emotional Labor	Strategies staff use to preserve emotional connection amid technological mediation	Deep acting; face-to-face primacy; bounded AI delegation	29
Theme 4: Organizational Culture and Training	Institutional and cultural factors enabling or constraining the technology/human-touch balance	Training; French cultural norms; resistance to change	27

Appendix 4. Transcript Extract

Table 7. Extract from Participant A (Candice) - Section on System Failure and Staff Resistance

Transcript Text	Codes Applied	Memo
"It's not working anymore... about eight months... suddenly, the system came back... it changed all the status of all the room in the hotel."	SYS-DOWN; TECH-FAIL	Extended system failure with cascading operational consequences; strong candidate quote for Theme 1.
"We had to check rooms to rooms if there is some guest, and it was crazy... about 200 discrepancy"	SYS-DOWN; ORG-WORKLOAD	Illustrates the manual labor required to compensate for automation failure.
"Many of them don't even know how to read French... they don't have [Lingala]... they did like a paper, everybody signed to say no."	TECH-RESIST; ORG-LANG	Reveals language exclusion and organized resistance ahead of tablet rollout.
"It's because they know that we're going to be able to see since when they're in [the room]."	TECH-RESIST; SURVEILLANCE	Surveillance concern as the underlying driver of resistance, distinct from usability concerns in TAM.

Appendix 5. Frequency Analysis Tables

A5.1. Technology Tools by Frequency

Table 8. Technology Tools Mentioned (n=7 participants)

Tool	Participants Mentioning	Percentage
OnQ PMS	7	100%
Kipsu	7	100%
Email/Outlook	7	100%
CRM	5	71%
Synergy	3	43%
AI tools (ChatGPT/Google Translate)	3	43%
Digital Key	2	29%
Qualtrics	1	14%

A5.2. Emotional Labor / Humanizing Strategies by Frequency

Table 9. Humanizing Strategies Mentioned

Strategy	Participants Mentioning
Face-to-face prioritized over digital channel	7
Personalized email/message wording	5
Eye contact, smile, use of guest name	4
"Deux de plus" / discretionary extra effort	3
AI used to draft, human reviews before sending	3
Switching off device for confused/older guests	2

A5.3. Reported System Disruptions

Table 10. System Disruptions Reported

Disruption	Duration	Property	Reported Severity (1-5)
Outlook mailbox outage	1 day	Hilton Paris Opera	3
In-room phone status-code failure	~8 months	Hilton Paris Opera	5
OnQ central hub "link-down"	~30 minutes	Hilton Paris Opera	3
Opera PMS slowdown during electricity outage	Several hours	INNSiDE Paris CDG	4

Appendix 6. Quotation Matrix by Theme

Table 11. Representative Quotations for Each Sub-Theme

Sub-theme	Representative Quotation	Participant
Core systems reliance	"So, we're going to use every day our Outlook box... OnQ, which is the main system."	A
System failure	"The system... died. Just died."	A
AI-augmented tools	"Hilton created a new report generated by the artificial intelligence to read our conversation."	B

Age-based guest segmentation	"People after 45, 50, 60, they won't use the app."	B
Nationality-based segmentation	"Middle East, they never send Kipsu. They always call."	A
CRM anticipation	"It allows us to anticipate... their needs."	A
Channel overload	"He texted us, emailed us, and he also called us."	C
Deep acting/personalization	"I don't do like same email to every guest."	C
Face-to-face primacy	"It's never as much as if you see them face-to-face... always better, always."	A
Bounded AI delegation	"I want to give a human answer but with the help of the AI."	E
Structured training	"We have Hilton University which is really nice tool."	C
French cultural norms	"I never greet a guest in English, I always say 'Bonjour.'"	C
Resistance to change	"They did like a paper, everybody signed to say no."	A
Cross-brand convergence	"I hope technology will not replace a human touch."	F

Appendix 7. Negative Cases and Outliers

Table 12. Participants Who Deviated from Main Patterns

Participant	Deviation	Analytic Significance
F (Soukayna)	Employed at a non-Hilton property (INNSiDE by Meliá), formally outside the study's delimitation (Section 1.5)	Retained deliberately for cross-brand triangulation; her account converged with Hilton participants on the core finding (Section 4.8), strengthening confidence that the technology/human-touch tension is industry-wide rather than Hilton-specific
G (Françoise)	The only participant to identify a specific, named functional limitation of the CRM (absent full stay-history visibility) rather than describing CRM/PMS tools uniformly positively	Her 24 years of hospitality experience appear to enable a more critical, comparative evaluation than shorter-tenured participants; illustrates how tenure moderates the interpretive lens applied to the same technology (Section 4.4.2)
D (Pierre-Antoine)	The only participant with prior hospitality experience outside France (United States)	Provided a comparative benchmark suggesting technological expectations are converging internationally, complicating a purely culture-specific reading of guest technology preference (Section 4.6.2)

Appendix 8. Data Quality and Trustworthiness

Table 13. Trustworthiness Criteria Applied

Criterion	Strategy Applied	Source
Credibility	Verbatim transcription; direct quotation with attribution; reflexive journal maintained throughout coding	Lincoln and Guba (1985); Creswell (2013)
Dependability	Audit trail of code development from deductive framework through inductive refinement (Appendix 1)	Lincoln and Guba (1985)
Confirmability	Coding decisions cross-checked against raw transcript extracts (Appendix 4) prior to theme finalization	Birt *et al*. (2016)
Transferability	Thick, role- and property-specific description provided (Table 5) to allow readers to judge applicability to other contexts	Lincoln and Guba (1985)

Appendix 9. Ethical Considerations in Data Presentation

Table 14. Sensitive Topics and Handling

Sensitive Topic	Handling Approach
Guest bereavement/personal loss (Participant A's account of a widowed regular guest)	Reported at a level of detail sufficient to illustrate the CRM's emotional-sensitivity function without identifying the guest
Staff resistance to management-visible monitoring data (Participant A)	Reported descriptively as an organizational dynamic rather than attributed to named individuals or teams
Participant F's employment outside the formal study scope	Disclosed transparently in the main text (Sections 4.1, 4.8) and in Appendix 7 rather than silently omitted or silently incorporated as if in-scope

Appendix 10. Recommendations from Participants

Participants were asked what single technological change they would make if given the opportunity (the "magic wand" question). Their responses are reproduced in Table 15.

Table 15. Participant Recommendations

Participant	Recommendation
A (Candice)	Remove paper-based housekeeping reporting entirely in favor of tablets linked directly to the CRM and room-status system
B (Laura)	An AI system able to answer routine guest emails automatically, escalating only questions requiring human judgement
C (Margot)	Tools that assist staff without replacing them, paired with guests being encouraged to be more patient with human response times
D (Pierre-Antoine)	Continued technology-assisted ease of process (e.g., digital key, tablet-based document signing) without loss of front-desk human contact
E (Raphael)	Continued AI development for drafting support, provided it never replaces the concierge's own local knowledge and sympathy
F (Soukayna)	Better-integrated hotel systems so guest information does not need to be entered multiple times across platforms
G (Françoise)	An upgraded CRM/PMS able to surface a guest's full historical stay record at the point of reservation or check-in

Appendix 11. Connection to Theoretical Frameworks

Table 16. Data Mapping to the Conceptual Framework (Section 2.5.4)

Framework Element	Supporting Data	Section Reference
Service-Dominant Logic: value co-creation	CRM-enabled anticipation of guest needs; Raphael's Google Maps-supported recommendations	Section 4.7
Service-Dominant Logic: boundary condition	Value co-creation collapses during system failure (8-month phone-code outage)	Sections 4.3.2, 4.7
Emotional Labor Theory: deep acting	"Deux de plus"; personalized email wording; eye contact and use of guest name	Section 4.5.1
Emotional Labor Theory: bounded AI delegation	"I want to give a human answer but with the help of the AI" (Participant E)	Section 4.5.3
Technology Acceptance Model: usefulness/ease of use	Universal adoption of OnQ, Kipsu, CRM across all participants	Section 4.3.1
Technology Acceptance Model: proposed extension (reliability)	Four independently reported system-failure events (Table 10)	Sections 4.3.2, 4.7

Technology Acceptance Model: proposed extension (surveillance risk)	Housekeeping resistance to tablet rollout linked to visibility of time-on-task	Sections 4.6.3, 4.7