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**IMPACT OF DIGITALIZATION ON GUEST
EXPERIENCE IN LUXURY HOTELS**

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, public health measures have accelerated the use of contactless technologies, driving a wave of digitalization across all economic sectors, including luxury hotels which is traditionally characterized by human interaction and personalized service. According to Benedetto Meyer (2019), digitalization is the integration of new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and robotics, which profoundly change the way of working and redefine interaction between employees and guests.

Today, the luxury hotel industry is confronting with a fundamental paradox. On the one hand, emerging trends and evolving expectations, compel establishments to embrace digital innovation to maintain their competitiveness. However, the rise of digitalisation raises concerns about the preservation of the essence of luxury hotels, its commitment to authenticity, human connection and bespoke service.

New technologies enable a more personalized services and seamless interactions. However, their growing presence also threatens to diminish the traditional role of employees, who have historically embodied the values of attentiveness, discretion, and personalized care that define luxury hospitality.

This raises a central question : To what extent does digitalization enhance and challenge the guest experience in luxury hotels?

This question highlights the ambivalent nature of digitalization in luxury hotels, both as a potential vector for enhancing the guest experience which is the overall perception and emotional response resulting from all interaction with a service, and as a source of challenges for the traditional values of high-end hospitality.

In order to explore this dual problem in depth, this dissertation is divided into three parts.

First, the part one will present an thorough review of the existing literature organizing into three chapters. It will successively examine the main topics, such as guest experience, luxury hotels and digitalization.

The second part will set out the theoretical and methodological framework for the research. It will explain the context and issues studied, mobilize the relevant theoretical concepts and models, and propose an analytical model to guide the interpretation of the data collected and teste the hypotheses formulated.

Finally, the third and last part will detail the research methodology envisaged, describe the different data collection tools and techniques and present a thematic model that which will permit analyze the data collected.

PART ONE – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction – PART ONE

In a context where guest exigences are constantly evolving, luxury hospitality is at the heart of a profound transformation driven by technological innovations. To better understand the context of the subject, through a literature review, this first part aims to explore and explain the key notions: digitalization, as well as guest experience in luxury hotels.

To begin, the first chapter will introduce the concept of luxury in hospitality, a segment that is distinct from other categories, not only in terms of characteristics, but also customer expectations. As bearers of an image of excellence, the customer experience is placed at the heart of the priorities.

Then, the second chapter will present the concept of digitalization, an important trend in luxury hotels, highlighting the different tools that can be implemented to enhance not only the operational efficiency but above all, the customer experience.

Finally, the third and last chapter will temper the enthusiasm generated by these technologies, by emphasizing the limits and challenges associated with their implementation, because beyond all the advantages, digitalization can also raise issues that deserve to be addressed.

CHAPTER 1: GUEST EXPERIENCE IN LUXURY HOTELS

With economic and social dimensions that have long been associated with aristocracy, the concept of luxury can be linked to a wide range of sectors ([Coquery, 1998](#)). Today, the social and economic scope of luxury's growth allows it as an industry ([Chevalier & Mazzalovo, 2015](#)). Considered as a branch of this sector, luxury hospitality places a particular emphasis on the guest experience which became a central pillar in delivering value and creating strong emotional connections with clients.

1. Defining luxury hospitality and guest experience

1.1 Conceptualization and evolution of luxury

Derived from the Latin “luxus”, the word “luxury” means “excess, debauchery, splendor and even pomp” ([Chersan, 2012](#)). Although the concept has been studied from different perspectives, it is still a very complex term to define, as its meaning is subjective and varies depending on the context: no one universal definition is possible, what is luxury for some, is not for others. According to the Oxford dictionary, “luxury is the fact of enjoying special and expensive things, particularly food and drink, clothes and places”, “a thing that is expensive and pleasant but non-essential”, “a pleasure or an advantage that you do not have often”¹. These definitions highlight that luxury is about rarity and exclusivity. On the contrary, in today's world, luxury goes far beyond the idea of occasional pleasure and it is now available to the mass ([Currid-Halkett, 2017](#)). In fact, it became a major cultural and economic phenomenon, creating its own market and shaping consumer behavior.

Indeed, according to Bain & Company, the “overall luxury market consist of nine segments: luxury cars, personal luxury goods, luxury hospitality, fine wines and spirits, gourmet food and fine dining, high-end furniture and housewares, fine art, private jets and yachts, and luxury cruises...” “Luxury cars, luxury hospitality, and personal luxury goods

¹ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/luxury_1?q=luxury

together account for 80% of the total market.” The chart below by Bain & Company, illustrates the overall luxury market and shows its significant growth across the main sectors².

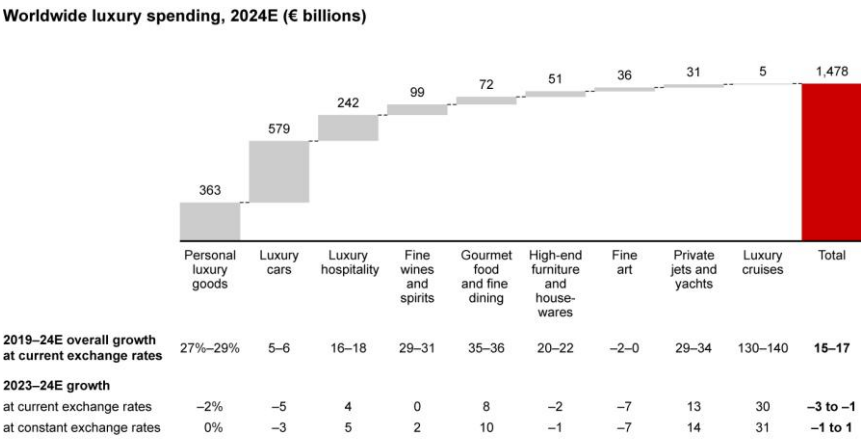


Figure 1: Global luxury market in 2024

As shown in the figure above, while luxury encompasses a wide range of sectors, the luxury hospitality segment stands out as one of the fastest growing. Nowadays, luxury hospitality is considered as the third-largest market share in the luxury market: in 2025, the global luxury hotel market size is estimated at \$139.41 billion, and is expected to reach \$218.7 billion by 2030³. This growth projection highlights the importance and dynamism of the luxury hotels in the global tourism industry. The main players that dominate the market are both independent and part of luxury hotel chains, such as Marriott, Hilton, Starwood, Hyatt, Four Seasons, Shangri La, InterContinental...⁴

The growth of the industry is fueled by the rise in travel, both professional and leisure, and more consumers are choosing luxury travel. They are seeking exclusive experiences, individualized services and complete comfort, driving industry players to innovate even further.⁵

² <https://www.bain.com/insights/luxury-in-transition-securing-future-growth/>

³ <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/luxury-hotel-market>

⁴ <https://luxuryhotel.com/guides/luxury-hotel-statistics/>

⁵ <https://www.globaldata.com/store/report/luxury-hotels-market-analysis/>

1.2 Core characteristics of luxury hospitality

Luxury hospitality is one of the segments of the hotel industry and its fundamental pillars allow it to be distinguished from other accommodation segments.

As the website Fifty Shades Greener states, “when we think of luxury within hospitality, we think of 5 stars hotels and spas, Michelin star restaurants and extravagant comfort”⁶. In fact, according to Talbott (2004), Ms. Barbara Talbott, former Chief Marketing Officer of the Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, identified style, comfort, service, and pampering as the four key factors contributing to a luxury experience. Any hotel, whether chain property or independently owned, rated or unrated, can be considered a luxury hotel if it meets these requirements; four and five-star hotels can be considered luxury hotels if they provide a high-quality experience beyond minimum basic needs. Moreover, according to Chu, luxury hotels are establishments that “provide high-quality amenities, attentive personal service, extraordinary comfort and sophisticated facilities at premium prices.” (Chu, 2014)

Traditionally, luxury accommodations have been rather narrowly identified and thought to possess key characteristics such as premium pricing, large room size, high-end decor, comfort and quality (Harkison et al., 2018). However, as the guests who access them have evolved, the focus has shifted to include experiential elements.

In each definition, the key characteristics highlighted as the essence of luxury hotels are:

- *Exclusivity*: Luxury hotels provide environments where guests can escape public scrutiny and enjoy intimate experiences (Lashley, 2017). Privilege can be created through limited accessibility, private spaces, and experiences not available to the general public.
- *Authenticity*: In luxury accommodations, guests seek genuine experiences rather than standardized services. Luxury hotels emphasize an authentic connection to their location whether through locally inspired design elements, cuisine made with regional ingredients, or exclusive access to cultural experiences not available to the general public (Yeoman & McMahon-Beattie, 2006). As Gilmore and Pine explain,

⁶ <https://www.fiftyshadesgreener.ie/blog/luxsustainability-sustainable-luxury-tourism>

“authenticity has overtaken quality as the prevailing purchasing criterion, just as quality overtook cost, and as cost overtook availability” ([Gilmore & Pine, 2007](#)). Therefore, luxury hotels must embrace this concept by creating unique experiences that integrate local culture and are enriched by genuine interactions with staff.

- *Exceptional care:* Luxury establishments stand out from other properties by providing meticulous attention to detail and flawless service execution. Delivering exceptional service is a must in luxury hotels, where employees are expected to demonstrate kindness, warmth, thoughtfulness, attentiveness, as well as emotional intelligence and cultural sensitivity ([Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010](#)). Exceptional service creates emotional responses and converts satisfaction into loyalty ([Jain et al., 2023](#)).
- *Personalization:* Personalization is also a cornerstone of luxury hospitality as it helps enhance the service quality. It refers to the ability to tailor experiences to each individual's preferences for excellence. A personal touch and a guest-oriented approach is a must in this sector ([Andrijašević, 2021a](#)). In luxury hotels, the personalization means anticipating guests needs and remembering their preferences in order to create unique and memorable stay.

The classification of a hotel in the “luxury” category depends on various criteria all of which vary from country to country. Nonetheless, on a global scale, there are several systems that evaluate and distinguish these establishments. Among them, the most famous are:

a) Forbes Travel Guide

Created in 1958 in the United States, Forbes Travel Guide is considered as a global reference and the most rigorous and prestigious rating system in the world.

Anonymous inspectors evaluate hotels, restaurants and spas, based on up to 900 criteria ([Forbes, 2025](#)), spending at least two nights at the hotel, as a regular guest. The rating system includes 3 levels of distinction: “Five-Star” (exceptional), “Four-Star” (remarkable), and “Recommended” (excellent). The uniqueness of Forbes lies in its weighting: 75% of the rating related to service, while only 25% evaluates amenities - showing that important human dimension matters more than the hotel.

b) The Leading Hotels of the World (LHW)

Founded in 1928 in the United States, LHW encompasses more than 400 independent luxury hotels in 80 countries. The system operates on a membership model: hotels must apply to join and meet strict standards regarding cultural authenticity, architecture, design, gastronomy, and service. Each member hotel undergoes regular anonymous inspections based on more than 800 distinct evaluation criteria, with a minimum of 90% compliance to maintain membership.

c) Relais & Châteaux

Founded in France in 1954, Relais & Châteaux brings together 580 independent hotels and restaurants in 60 countries, united by the “5Cs”: Character, Courtesy, Calm, Charm and Cuisine. This system focuses on gastronomy - (many have Michelin stars) - and it is committed to preserving culinary traditions. Each establishment is evaluated by not only the quality of the facilities and service, but also the uniqueness of the experience offered. Properties are often small or medium-sized (less than 50 rooms), located in historic buildings reflecting local culture and traditions of their region.

Looking at all the characteristics that define a luxury hotel, as well as the different classification systems, it is clear that a greater emphasis is placed on experiential elements and service quality rather than on physical attributes alone. Indeed, today, tourists in luxury hotels “are not expected to have only functional benefits since they also look for value experiential services” ([Correia et al., 2022](#)). In this case, given this evolution in expectations, the notion of guest experience is a central pillar in luxury hotels.

1.3 The importance of guest experience

Today’s consumers want to live memorable experiences and not just buy luxury products or services, and especially in the luxury segment, where experience is at the heart of the preoccupation and serves as a primary differentiator.

According to Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), experience is a component of the customer's behavior that influences his or her fantasies, emotions and perceptions ([Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982](#)).

In luxury hospitality, the guest experience goes beyond satisfaction, it aims to create emotional resonance. As Pine and Gilmore (1999) argue, experience economy transforms service into theatre, where every interaction contributes to a narrative that guests remember long after their stay. Additionally, guest experience is defined as “the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with the company”. Direct contact encompasses interactions related to purchasing, using, and receiving service from the company. Indirect contact refers to unplanned encounters with representations of a company’s products, services and takes the form of word-of-mouth recommendations or criticisms, advertising, news reports, reviews, and others. ([Meyer & Schwager, 2007](#)).

Therefore, the guest experience spans every stage of the hotel circle - before, during and after the stay - as long as there is interaction between the guest and the hotel ([Kandampully et al., 2017](#)). This process is commonly referred to as the “customer journey”, or more specifically, the “guest cycle” in the context of hospitality.

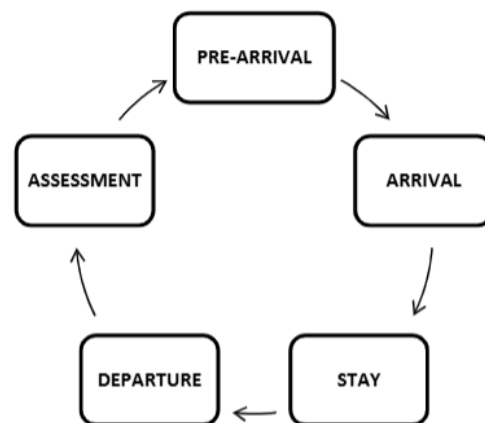


Figure 2: Guest Cycle

As explained by Samal, the guest journey allow analyze the global lived experience and can be conceptualized through five distinct stages ([Samal et al., 2017](#)):

- pre arrival: when the guest seek an accommodation, compare prices, interact with the hotel for information and book;
- arrival: the guest is physically present at the hotel, is welcomed, registered and a room is assigned;
- stay: provide main and additional services and meet the guests expectations, this stage is at the heart of the overall experience and it is a decisive moment for his overall satisfaction;
- departure: check-out process, transportation arrangement, last impressions;
- assessment or post-stay: assess all aspects of the stay, this step is crucial for loyalty and word-of-mouth.

A higher degree of satisfaction during the whole guest cycle leads to higher probability of re-visiting the hotel and in other words, it is strongly connected with the net result of the good guest experiences minus the bad ones ([Meyer & Schwager, 2007](#)). When it comes to luxury, service quality, satisfaction, and positive customer experiences are vitally important, because a positive experience will cause the customer to wish to return or stay longer and recommend the establishment to others ([Nasution & Mavondo, 2008](#)). From this perspective, the human dimension appears to be a fundamental lever for the quality of the customer experience.

2. Importance of human dimension in guest experience

A study by Walls shows that human interaction is at the core of memorable luxury experiences, highlighting that “the emotive elements of luxury hospitality experiences, primarily delivered through human interactions, create lasting impressions that transcend the physical environment” ([A. R. Walls et al., 2011](#)).

2.1 The role of employees in shaping the guest experience and the qualities required

In the luxury sector, customer experience is key to building an emotional connection between a hotel and its guests and this delivery is highly dependent on the skills and characteristics of employee. Guests need to feel unique and recognized, and employees of

high-end establishments play a major role in this regard. Indeed, it is employees who make the difference: their energy, creativity, their culture and positivity is the driving force in creating the guest's experiences ([Harkison, 2017](#)). Similarly, as Chantal points out, in luxury hospitality and gastronomy, the service quality is often represented by the human employee and his interpersonal skills ([Chantal, 2014](#)). Each employee must provide a relational elegance to reinforce the quality perceived by guests, because the welcome and interaction are elements contributing to the hotel's reputation. This elegance is crucial in high-end establishments and includes 4 components: dress, verbal, gestural and redactional elegance.

Bharwani and Jauhari introduced the concept of "Hospitality Intelligence" (HI) to highlight the specific qualities needed in luxury hospitality staff. According to them, recruiters in luxury sector should hire and train their employees based on this concept which includes emotional (interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence), cultural and hospitality experiential intelligence, in order to elevate guest experience from a simple interaction to a memorable stay ([Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013](#)).

Ultimately, staff do not act just as service providers, they are also creators of emotional experiences that form lasting memories and sometimes even unforgettable moments that generate a surprise effect.

2.2 Creation of the "Wow effect"

Employees must take the guests out of their routine by surprising them with the exception or the extraordinary, called surprise effect or "Wow effect". This surprise is a "basic, short-lived emotion with a hedonic tone, triggered by unexpected moments that exceed guest expectations and will influence customer's satisfaction". ([Vanhamme, 2008](#))

To create this effect staff must know perfectly his customers, being attentive to their expectations and wishes to place them in comfort and satisfaction - it is the least that luxury hospitality can do. Moreover, they must innovate in terms of services, imaging new attentions and procedures that go beyond their expectations ([Der Sarkissian et al., 2020](#)).

Additionally, the creation of such a meaningful experience requires understanding the expectations of luxury hospitality guests, which continue to evolve in response to demographic changes and broader societal trends.

3. Guest expectations and trends in luxury hospitality

To succeed and always maintain excellent guest experience in the highly competitive environment, that is the luxury hospitality market, establishments must understand who their customers are, what they want, and adapt their strategies to pace with emerging trends.

3.1 Evolving guest profiles: from a traditional clientele to the emergence of a new segment

The luxury hotel industry has undergone a significant transformation in recent decades, with a notable evolution in guest profiles and to stay ahead, hotels must understand who they are.

For a long time, luxury hotels were dominated by an elite clientele consisting mainly of Baby Boomers, Generation X, and aristocratic or upper class individuals. This group, typically characterized by high income, brand loyalty, valued discretion, formal service, opulent decor, and exclusive amenities, all classic symbols of luxury.

Over the years, however, the demographic landscape has shifted considerably with the rise of affluent Millennials, who now represent a significant share of the luxury market. In addition, Generation Z, the digital natives⁷ are beginning to enter the market and redefining luxury travel. These younger guests care less about traditional status symbols and more about authenticity, experiences and personalization, often guided by strong values and social consciousness.

More recently, Generation Alpha has begun to influence family travel decisions. Although still very young, their future expectations can be predicted to further emphasize technology integration, sustainability, and purpose-driven experiences⁸.

3.2 Expectations of luxury hotel guests

⁷ “born into a world filled with technological advances and new devices that empower the consumer” (Fromm & Read, 2018)

⁸ <https://www.tts.com/blog/who-is-generation-alpha-and-are-they-going-to-change-the-travel-industry/>

Luxury hotels cater to a wide range of travelers, whether for business, leisure or personal milestones. As a result, luxury customers are heterogeneous (dissimilar) rather than homogenous (similar) in terms of their needs, wants, and desires ([Pangarkar & Shukla, 2023](#)).

First, today's luxury travelers demand more than just opulent surroundings: they want an experiential travel where culture, adventure, immersion and wellness play a central role⁹. When guests book a room in a luxury hotel, they expect more than just a bed to sleep in, they want to live an unique and personalized experience tailored to their preferences, from a personalized greeting to bespoke room amenities and curated itineraries. This level of personalization is now a standard for luxury establishments, as guests are willing to invest more in experiences that feel memorable. Another key expectation of today's luxury hotel guests is the integration of innovative technologies. They are more and more eager to utilize mobile applications to book and manage their trip and communicate efficiently with the staff. To improve the entire visitor experience, automated technologies have become increasingly important ([Milosh, 2023](#)). Travelers have also a growing interest for sustainable luxury with eco-friendly hotels and social initiatives.

Understanding and meeting guest expectations is critical for hotels to ensure customer satisfaction, loyalty, and a positive reputation.

3.3 A market in constant evolution driven by trends

In this booming sector, change is constant. With guest satisfaction and experience at the core of success, hotels must adapt their offers to align with the trends influencing the market.

First and foremost, today's travelers want more than just luxurious accommodations: they are particularly looking for experiential and immersive journeys that go beyond traditional hotel services. Indeed, there is a rising demand for authentic destinations reflecting the local culture, with exceptional culinary experiences, and personalized wellness programs.

⁹ <https://amplifyxl.com/target-market-for-luxury-hotels/>

On the other hand, more and more guests are concerned about the environment and place sustainability at the forefront of their accommodation choices: travelers are looking for eco-conscious options, such as energy-efficiency buildings, eco-friendly amenities, waste reduction initiatives and dining options with locally sourced products¹⁰. At the same time, the luxury hotel industry is experiencing significant growth stimulated by a rising demand for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), primarily from business travelers attending corporate events and meetings. Moreover, the integration of digital technologies is one of the most notable trends driving the growth of the market. Now, travelers seek seamless digital experiences enhancing comfort and convenience, such as AI-powered personalization, mobile check-ins, smart room features, and contactless service options¹¹.

Finally, there is another evolution with the trend for “bleisure”, the combination of business and leisure, where travelers extend business trips for leisure purposes or seek work-friendly luxury environments for remote work ([Lichy & McLeay, 2017](#)). Again, digital plays a key role by offering optimal connectivity and online accessible services.

Taken together, these trends reflect a profundo transformation of luxury hospitality: ones prioritize personalization, authenticity or digital innovation. At the heart of this evolution lies digitalization, but what does that mean ?

According to Benedetto-Meyer (2019), “digitalization” or “digital transformation” in hospitality, refers to the implementation of digital technologies into various aspects of hotel operations profoundly challenging the ways of working and changing the way how hotel interact with customers and deliver value. Digitalization encompasses a wide range of tools such as mobile applications, chatbots, AI, robots, and big data analytics, etc. ([Collins, 2023](#)).

¹⁰ <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/luxury-hotel-market>

¹¹ <https://luxuryhotel.com/guides/luxury-hotel-statistics/>

To conclude this chapter, the human touch is a very important feature in luxury accommodation, which is a critical point of differentiation in the market. Staff members play an irreplaceable role as creators of guest experiences, delivering unforgettable moments. Nevertheless, the luxury hospitality landscape is rapidly evolving and to remain attractive and competitive, luxury hotels must continue to adapt to consumer demands, such as embracing innovation. This adaptation is particularly becoming urgent especially with the growing number of Gen Z, both as guests and in the workforce. As digitally savvy, this generation is reshaping the definition of luxury, with technology becoming an essential component of premium experiences.

As a result, the following chapter explores how digitalization is transforming and redefining the nature of luxury service delivery, creating new paradigms for guest engagement and satisfaction.

CHAPTER 2: DIGITALIZATION AS A TOOL FOR ENHANCING LUXURY HOSPITALITY

Over the past few decades, the hospitality industry has witnessed one of the most significant developments: the integration of digital technologies. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has undoubtedly accelerated the adoption across the hotel industry. Despite its devastating consequences on the industry, it has allowed the development of new practices. In fact, in order to adapt to the new normal, contactless or touchless technologies have emerged as solutions and are now considered to be the most important emerging trends in the hotel business. While luxury hotels have historically emphasized human service and the physical environment, digital tools now offer opportunities to improve operational efficiency and guest experiences in ways previously impossible. Therefore, this chapter will examine the role of integrating digitalization in luxury hotels and its impacts.

1. The role of technology in luxury hotels

Since guest service is the primary concern of a hotel, as a pleasant stay leads to guest loyalty and recommendations, integrating the latest technologies can improve the overall guest experience.

1.1 Technological integration and practical uses

Digital tools are being integrated into every department of the hotel to improve the overall guest service, experience and efficiency. This digital transformation encompasses a broad spectrum of tools. Among these technologies, there is Artificial Intelligence (AI), which experts define as the ability of machines to understand and use human language, and then operate independently, demonstrating its practical application. Some examples include:

- *Chatbots*: A practical and user-centric form of AI, the chatbot is a software agent capable of replacing the traditional concierge. It can understand several human languages and function as an instant messaging bots or artificial conversational entity. Chatbots can respond to both text and verbal commands ([Ukpabi et al., 2019](#)). By providing 24/7

assistance it can significantly enhance the customer interaction by offering personalized service and immediate responses to booking inquiries, etc.... ([Cunha et al., 2024](#)).

- *Data analysis*: Enables a rapid interpretation and organization of vast amounts of guest data, allowing hotels to gain meaningful insights into both customers and potential customers.

- *Customer service agents*: Robots that provide tourist information to customers who engage with them. Robots can be used in various departments, both front and back office. There are “intelligent physical devices”, and programmable mechanisms with a degree of autonomy determined by their ability to perform intended tasks without human intervention. There are 3 types: industrial, professional and personal service robots, for back office operations (for example, to prepare food, clean room..) and the personal is more likely used in front office as a concierge, room services and entertainment. For example, Henn-na Hotel, Japan, is the first hotel in the world whose service staff is made up of robots (front desk agents, concierge, porters, in-room assistants, vacuum cleaners, robotic arm for luggage storage room and doors of hotel rooms are opened using face recognition) ([Rajesh, 2015](#))

Other technologies include smart room technologies, such as the voice-activated room controls. Guests can order room service, request housekeeping visits, or adjust room settings (like thermostat, blinds, lights...) ([Lukanova & Ilieva, 2019](#)). This seamless interaction between humans and various devices, including smartphones, smart TVs, facilitate a user-friendly experience and enhance the guest convenience and comfort.

In addition, there is the Internet of Things (IoT). It has the potential to transform various devices and applications into “intelligent” objects and they have the ability to transmit and receive data as well as communicate with one another, enhance data collection, increase automation, control and monitor multiple devices from a central hub like smartphones. IoT allows for cost savings, energy consumption, and provide superior customer experience, enables hotel owners to optimize conditions within their establishments, deliver more personalized experiences while minimize guest waiting time (Lukanova & Ilieva, 2019).

Another technology is the ubiquity of mobile technologies. The mobile application is being used more and more for reservations, rewards programs and e-concierge. Another advantage is that you can replace the physical room key with a digital key. Typically, at the reception the check-in process at the front desk can take time and much more when there is a long line. If the key card breaks down or is demagnetized, it stops working and guests have to go to

reception which is frustrating. To face this, the digital key is an intelligent access system that allows access to the rooms simply by using a phone. It helps reduce costs, improve customer experience and make hotel operations more seamless. To activate it, the guest only needs to register in the app and on the day of arrival, he receives an encrypted file with his room number and can go straight to his room once arrive at the hotel ([Torres, 2018](#)).

Virtual Reality (VR), according to Guttentag, is a tool creating a non-physical reality through information and communication systems. VR gives the opportunity to fully experience a property, room, suite or destination before making a booking. The system uses a computer-generated 3D environment called “virtual environment” (VE) that one can navigate and interact with, resulting in real-time simulation of one or more of the user’s five senses. Navigate means move around and explore the VE, and interact refers to selecting and moving objects within the VE. Thus, VR experience is the capacity to provide physical immersion and psychological presence ([Guttentag, 2010](#)).

Similarly, Augmented Reality (AR) which allows businesses to alter customers’ perception of their surroundings. Hotels can use AR to enrich the physical environment they offer. Key features of AR include the combination of real-world and virtual objects within the actual environment, the synchronization of real and virtual elements, and the creation of a highly interactive 3D experience in real time. AR overlays virtual information onto the real world, ([Carmigniani et al., 2010](#)), or through the use of computers to superimpose images on objects ([Ozkul & Kumlu, 2019](#)). Developed In the late 1990s, AR simplified the user’s life by bringing virtual information not only to his immediate surroundings but also to any indirect view of the real-world environment.

By integrating these different tools within luxury hotel environments, the establishment moves towards a “smart hotel”, where interconnectivity and interoperability between systems allow for a seamless, personalized, and data-driven experience ([Li & Jiang, 2025](#)).

Finally, these cutting-edge technologies that can be applied during the stay, offer a distinctive guest experience by giving them access to a wide variety of useful information and entertainment, saving them time and being at their disposable around-the-clock.

2. Transforming and redefining guest experience: creating unique and personalized moments

Perhaps the most important contribution of digitalization in luxury hospitality lies in the ability to enhance personalization beyond traditional capabilities leading to a redefinition of the entire individual experience. Immersive technologies have a significant impact on the customer experience, encompassing the customer's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory and social response to a company's offering, and ultimately reshaping every aspect of the customer journey ([Flavián et al., 2024](#)).

2.1 A digitalized guest journey

The digital tools are reshaping how guests interact throughout their journey, from booking to the after the post-stay. Indeed, the table below illustrates which technologies play a role at each stage of the guest cycle.

	Technologies used at different stages and their specific purposes (Patawari & Bairwa, 2022) (Ivanov, 2019)
Pre-arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- AI search platforms: Research, gather information, compare prices & book accommodation online;- Mobile apps: Book the room and mention their preferences to customize their stay experiences (choose floor, view, room amenities..);- Chatbots: Interact with the hotel virtual assistance through instant messaging to ask questions;- VR: Present a 360° video of the hotel so guests can virtually experience the hotel property before their arrival and encourage them booking.
Arrival	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Robots: Greet and inform guests with multilingual capabilities;- Digital born & mobile app: Instead of waiting in line, guests can check-in and register themselves alone with a self-service kiosk or through the mobile application;- Innovative room key: Unlock the room door with the card on their mobile or through biometric (finger, scanning device). The

	<p>advantage is that there is no need to issue a duplicate key if the guest forgets it while going out.</p>
Occupancy/Stay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Smart room features: Enhance the experience of the guest stay, and permits save energy through captors detecting the presence of guests or not. Guests can also control room facilities like room lighting, music... - In room ordering devices: Often in the form of tablets or voice-activated assistants, placed directly in the room to provide a seamless, personalized experience and a more autonomous stay. - Digital concierge: In few hotels some concierge has been replaced by digital ones, and allows guests to discover cultural attractions, find best activities to unfamiliar inquiries.
Departure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AI: Engagement of the guest to make reviews about the experienced services on various social media sites and will attract future potential customers

As shown on the table, technology is now ubiquitous and customers interact with several tools in every stage of the guest cycle. The guest journey presents multiple touchpoints, each representing an opportunity to go the extra-mile and use technology in a smart way. In other words, technology is simply a means to an end.

2.2 From Mass-personalization to the rise of Ultra-personalization

Luxury hospitality has undergone a paradigm shift in the concept of personalization, reflecting the constantly changing expectations of customers who are more and more demanding experiences that make them feel unique and privileged ([Guendouz, 2024](#)).

Mass-personalization often relied on broad categories offering personalized offers to a wide audience using segmented data. More precisely, it can be a welcome amenity on loyalty status, or sending generic pre-arrival emails, which is useful, but not enough for luxury guests. As already explained before, guests are expecting unique and emotional experiences tailored to their preferences and needs. In this case, digitalization plays a crucial role as it also has the capacity to personalize guest experience especially through hyper-personalization. By leveraging real time data, guest stories and behavior patterns, the hotel

can deliver thoughtful and unique services. Thus, hyper-personalization represents the evolution beyond basic personalization to create uniquely tailored experiences for individuals guests.

Furthermore, as customer service is a critical component of a hotel's strategy and an important lever for differentiation, beyond hyper-personalization lies a more refined and intuitive frontier: the ultra-personalization. In this case, the focus is not only what guests say they want, but it is about anticipating emotions, picking up on subtle cues, and creating moments that feel perfectly timed, and perfectly personal. Ultra-personalization represents the highest level of service excellence in luxury hospitality.

3. Efficiency vs Exclusivity: the digital paradox

The integration of digital technologies into luxury hospitality creates an inherent tension between operational efficiency and perceived exclusivity. While automation and digital systems undoubtedly enhance certain aspects, they also risk undermining the distinctive human dimension. This paradox represents perhaps the central challenge facing luxury establishments as they navigate digital transformation strategies.

3.1 Operational benefits of digitalization

Digital technologies offer significant operational benefits that have accelerated their adoption across the luxury hospitality sector. The automation of repetitive tasks, the integration of digital workflows, and other installations have the potential to reduce operational costs, increase productivity, and optimize hotel processes.

First, for instance, unlike human employees, some technologies can operate continuously without interruption. Digital kiosks, chatbots, and robots can work 24/7 and perform the same task multiple times without fatigue or complaints. For example, digital tools can handle routine requests while humans handle more complex interactions that require emotional intelligence and a personalized service. This task reorganization enables hotels to save salaries ([Ivanov, 2019](#)).

Secondly, digitalization facilitates more coordinated operations and reduces the likelihood of service failures. For example, a Property Management System (PMS) integrated with

Customer Relationship Management (CRM), allows hotels centralizing their customer data and preferences to enable smoother service delivery across departments ([Lukanova & Dimitrova, 2024](#)).

Finally, data analytics enables hotels to forecast demand and adapt in real time, by adjusting staffing levels, room availability or personalized offers based on customer behavior. This allows hotels to respond quickly to change and provide a more efficient experience.

As a result, digitalization offers several major benefits in terms of efficiency, profitability, and cost-effectiveness, particular thanks to the automation of tasks. Nonetheless, alongside these benefits, hotels must ensure that they do not lose the unique aspect that luxury guests are looking for.

3.2 Authenticity vs Mass Production

While digitalization offers benefits and opportunities, it also creates tensions with the traditional values of exclusivity and authenticity that are central to the positioning of luxury hotels.

First, by its very nature, digitalization encourages mass production and standardization, which are at odds with luxury values. As Michel points out, traditionally “the values of luxury are oriented towards rarity, exclusivity and inaccessibility whereas digitalization tends towards accessibility and democratization”. Technology can also contradict the staff creativity, compromising the surprise effect ([Michel et al., 2022](#)). Today’s luxury travelers increasingly value authentic and real experiences. However, interactions with technology can be perceived as less authentic than human encounters. For example, guests may question whether their personalized recommendations come from a genuine staff member or are simply generated by an algorithm processing their data profile. In fact, luxury experiences need to feel spontaneous, not programmed.

That is where the solution comes up: “the high-tech, high-touch” approach.

3.3 “High-tech, high-touch” approach as a solution

Guests not only expect high-end technology, they also want personal attention and relationships, because before anything else, hospitality is all about people. There would be no luxury hotel without personal touch, as it is this human connection that builds lasting relationships and human connection and fosters guest loyalty ([Andrijašević, 2021b](#)).

To address this challenge, a promising solution would be to adopt a “high-tech, high-touch” approach, which involves combining the benefits of the technology (high-tech) with human warmth and emotional attention (high-touch) ([Wunderlich et al., 2013](#)). As a result, technology acts as an “amplifier” of human service, rather than replacing it ([Der Sarkissian et al., 2020](#)).

For instance, AI-driven systems can collect and process guest preferences to help staff provide an ultra-personalized service, from greeting guests by name to remembering room temperature settings or dietary restrictions. The technology is here to complement and help the staff deliver a smoother and more personalized service.

To conclude this chapter, the luxury hotel sector is rapidly evolving due to the exponential digital advances. The pace of change is so rapid that it is pointless to list the novelties of present times - today’s technological sensation may already be outdated tomorrow. Technology has become an integral part of modern travel, shaping everything from travel planning and communication to transactions and beyond. Guests expect a high level of digital maturity from service providers, with some leading the way in using data-driven and digital tools to deliver innovative and personalized experiences.

Today, digitalization stands as a key competitive advantage that drives success. However, besides its many advantages, it also brings challenges that must be navigated.

CHAPTER 3: CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF DIGITALIZATION IN LUXURY HOSPITALITY

As previously discussed, luxury hotels evoke images of historic charm, old-world elegance, and long-standing traditions. However, as a global industry, the increasing integration of digitalization can affect the guest perceptions and undermine the markers of luxury, such as human interaction and artisanal service. In addition, luxury hotels must navigate operational and strategic constraints.

1. Impact on the perception of luxury hotels

1.1 Potential loss of the human dimension or redefinition of the role of employees

One of the major concerns regarding digitalization in hospitality and above all, the luxury segment, is the potential erosion of the human element. This is because the sector has always been characterized by exceptional service where human interactions create the emotional connections that guests value and remember. Some people see technology such as AI and robots as a threat for their jobs are fighting to be replaced, and even guests are fearful.

Similarly, luxury experiences are fundamentally tied to these interpersonal moments where guests feel genuinely cared for and recognized ([Harkison, 2017](#)). When digital systems replace human touchpoints, something essential may be lost. For example, there is a difference between being personally greeted by name by a concierge or a receptionist who remembers your preferences versus scanning a QR code upon arrival.

On the other hand, this transformation also does not necessarily mean the elimination of staff positions, but a redefinition of their role. As noted Larivière et al. (2017) noted, hospitality professionals are increasingly becoming “technology orchestrators” rather than direct service providers and this evolution requires luxury hotel staff to master new skills through ongoing training, while maintaining the warmth and attentiveness that characterize luxury service ([Larivière et al., 2017](#)).

1.2 Technology and emotional connection

A true luxury experience is a deeply built emotional connection with the feeling of being understood, valued and cared for. Digital interfaces, no matter how sophisticated, struggle to replicate the nuances of human empathy and emotional intelligence.

While of course, technology can facilitate certain aspects of the guest experience, the emotional dimensions of luxury service are challenged: facial expressions, tone of voice, acts of kindness, and other verbal and nonverbal cues that humans express, create moments of delight that are highly valued by customers and, in contrast, algorithms and digital devices cannot easily reproduce [\(Neuhofer, B et al., 2015\)](#).

The way technology is integrated into the luxury experience can affect how guests perceive the overall service. If not carefully implemented, it may create a sense of impersonality, which can negatively affect the perception. Yet, technology can play a complementary role in emotional engagement when it is thoughtfully implemented. For example, smart room systems that learn guest preferences over time can create a sense of being “known” by the hotel. Mobile applications that seamlessly connect guests with human staff can strengthen rather than weaken relationships [\(Leung & Buhalis, n.d.\)](#).

1.2 Maintaining the authenticity of the luxury experience

Authenticity is a cornerstone of luxury establishments as guests seek experiences that feel genuine, rooted in place and tradition. “Authenticity serves as a significant motivator for tourists seeking digital disconnection” [\(Hanks et al., 2024\)](#).

Thus, the challenge for luxury hotels is integrating modern technology without compromising the authentic character that makes them special.

According to Gilmore and Pin (2007), authenticity becomes more valuable, not less, in an increasingly digital world. Paradoxically, as technology becomes ubiquitous in everyday life, its absence in certain contexts can become a marker of luxury. Some high-end properties now offer “digital detox” experiences, where the absence of technology is positioned as a premium offering because it is important to offer a break at some point [\(Andrijašević, 2021b\)](#).

To solve this challenge, luxury hotels must adopt a discreet and carefully considered integration of technology, ensuring that digital elements are introduced to enhance guest experience without compromising authenticity and emotional richness.

2. Factors influencing the adoption of new technologies

2.1 Cultural influence

Given that tourism and hospitality involve a constant flow of people traveling around the world, it seems obvious that everyone's perceptions of technology differs according to their origin. With an international clientele that transcends geographical boundaries, hotels attract a diverse range of guests from various nationalities and cultures. Adoption of digital technologies varies widely from country to country: what is considered as innovative in one culture may be viewed as impersonal or intrusive in another.

Indeed, cross-cultural studies reveal differences in technological preferences, perceptions and engagement. According to research by Chen and Peng (2018), cultural background influences both technology expectations and preferences.

Hofstede's (2011) research on cultural dimensions helps explain these differences. For instance, in high context cultures that value relationship building and indirect communication, such as Middle Eastern countries, technology that reduces face-to-face interactions may be perceived negatively in luxury hotels ([Hofstede, 2011](#)). Conversely, in low context cultures and more individualistic countries, technological efficiency may be more readily embraced. Furthermore, in regions where privacy concerns are more pronounced, guests may be more reluctant to adopt technologies that involve the collection, storage and analysis of personal data, such as AI-driven personalization and biometric systems, due to the lack of transparency ([Engström, 2023](#)).

In order to face this challenge, luxury hotels must carefully adapt their strategy to align with cultural expectations of their diverse clientele, to not only enhance guest satisfaction but also ensure competitiveness in a global market.

2.2 Generational gap

As luxury hospitality serves multiple generations simultaneously, navigating these diverse expectations must be a significant challenge.

Demographic and ethnographic differences, such as culture, but also age, may make it difficult for some people to use such technologies in the hospitality industry ([Thaichon et al., 2024](#)). For example, it is suggested that younger people are more likely to perceive technologies like mobile check-ins, chatbots, and smart room controls as enhancing rather than detracting from their experiences. To better understand what each generation values more, it is developed in the table below ([Priporas et al., 2017](#)).

Generation	Characteristics	Expectations to luxury hotels	Relation with the technology
Baby-boomers (1946-1964)	traditional, value status and recognition	formal and perfectly executed service, attention to detail, discretion and confidentiality, comfort and predictability	generally prefer human interaction, use technology out of necessity, appreciate simple and intuitive systems
Generation X (1965-1980)	balance between tradition and innovation, pragmatic, value efficiency	value for money, efficient service without unnecessary frills, balance between luxury and practicality, flexibility	see technology as a facilitator, adaptable to new tools, appreciate the autonomy technology provides
Millennials (1981-1999)	seek unique experiences, social and environmental consciousness, value authenticity	personalized and memorable experiences, local and cultural connection, sustainability and social responsibility, Instagram-worthy design and aesthetics	expect seamless technological integration, actively use social media, seek hybrid experiences (physical and digital)
Generation Z	digital natives, hyper-connected, fragmented	hyper-personalization, instantaneous services, immersive and interactive	technology as an inseparable part of the experience, high

(1997-2012)	attention, value diversity and inclusion	experiences, shareable and unique content	expectations for innovation, interest in AR/VR
Generation Alpha (after 2012)	ultra-connected from birth, consumption habits shaped by AI, strong environmental awareness	intuitive and adaptive interfaces, customized experiences based on data, sustainability as a non-negotiable prerequisite	invisible and ubiquitous technology, AI serving the experience, prefer voice and gesture interactions

2.3 Independent vs brand portfolio

Another element that could influence the adoption of technology in hotels, could be the size.

The luxury hospitality market is shared between luxury independent hotels and luxury hotel chains and the adoption varies between both.

Typically, hotels belonging to a large chain or group have more financial resources that enable them to invest in cutting-edge technologies and implement them into establishments of the chain. On the contrary, independent hotels have the flexibility to adopt or not technologies adapting to their brand identity (Alieva et al., 2023).

On another hand, the integration depends on the localization. Since chains operate on a global scale, they have to take into consideration the local market. For example, they may offer multilingual apps whereas independent hotels have a greater understanding of their specific clientele and they focus on adopting technologies relevant to their target audience for a more tailored experience.

3. Operational and strategic constraints of digitalization

3.1 Financial and logistic implication

A major obstacle that hotels may encounter when undertaking digital transformation is limited financial resources. The large investment of implementing cutting-edge technology in luxury hospitality cannot be underestimated, and it is the primary concern of hotel managers. They must anticipate the return on investment (ROI), as profit is necessary for the growth and survival of their hotel ([Thaichon et al., 2024](#)). Beyond the significant initial investment, hotels must consider that they will be paid for ongoing maintenance, updates, integrated challenges, and staff training. It is not only a financial investment but also time investment. Hotels with a high degree of financial freedom can adopt and implement digitalization in hotel operations faster than hotels with financial constraints.

Staff training is also another challenge because technology implementation fails without human support, especially in luxury hotels where guests expect immediate assistance with any digital feature.

3.3 Security and privacy concerns

As luxury hotels collect detailed guest data to enhance personalization, security and privacy concerns become paramount and create vulnerabilities.

First, hotel operators need to be aware of the various forms and risks of cyber-attacks, which can negatively impact not only on the hotel's image, but also its financial stability and the well-being of both employees and guests. In addition to causing disruption, it can also prevent guests from using the hotel's facilities. Therefore, the hotel must implement strong security measures ([Boto-García, 2023](#)).

As guests increasingly expect personalized experiences, there is growing uncertainty about the collection of personal data. To meet their needs, they have to share their personal data with the hotel. However this creates a responsibility for hotels to handle this information with transparency and strong security measures, to ensure guest trust while delivering

tailored services ([Morosan & DeFranco, 2015](#)). Moreover, as personalization is an increasing expectation, an over-reliance on technology and data-driven systems can paradoxically lead to a standardized guest experience.

3.4 Risk of standardization

Personalization is a key aspect of service quality and a differentiation strategy that helps hotels move beyond standardization ([Lei et al., 2024](#)). However, one of the most striking features is that digitalization can be perceived as a potential risk of standardization, with the potential loss of the unique, artisanal qualities that traditionally define luxury experiences, because technology by nature tends toward standardization and scalability.

Technology inherently lacks a personalized approach. For example, chatbots and robots can provide answers to questions containing key words and can respond with a specific, pre-determined set of answers, but they cannot personalize their response as humans do ([Ivanov, 2019](#)). This limitation directly contributes to standardization in guest interactions, as AI-driven systems operate within programmed parameters that cannot fully replicate the intuitive, adaptive nature of human service professionals.

In conclusion, this final chapter has explored the various challenges and limitations faced by luxury hotels in the context of digitalization, highlighting the tension between technological advancement and the preservation of core luxury values.

Although digitalization can be perceived as a potential threat, and some people are against it, because of the importance of human dimension in delivering a service, the integration of digital tools remains important in today's digital age and in a highly competitive hospitality market.

Nonetheless, hotels must consider certain constraints like the significant investments and risks associated with security, privacy and standardization, as the goal is to enhance the guest experience without alienating customers.

CONCLUSION - PART ONE

To conclude this first part, the literature review reveals a complex relationship between digitalization, luxury hospitality, and guest experience.

In luxury hotels, the guest is at the heart of preoccupations, and these establishments must adapt their strategies to align with the key trends shaping the market, such as the rise of digitalization in recent years. Today, providing a tailored and memorable experience is essential to ensure guest satisfaction and loyalty, which in turn leads to higher profits. Employees play a key role in defining the luxury service experience. Through their expertise, excellence and qualities, they are integral to delivering exceptional, personalized, and emotionally engaging services that elevate the guest experience.

This is where digital technologies can help and play a key role by providing significant benefits. By collecting personal and real-time data, hotels can offer an unprecedented level of service personalization.

On the other hand, digital is not without its challenges and can be seen as a threat. Many guests express concern and struggle with their privacy and security, while others worry that the rise of AI and automation could lead to the replacement of staff leading to a loss of the human dimension, which is very important in luxury.

Considering these different viewpoints, it seems crucial to understand how guests really feel and think about this transformation, and the impact of digitalization has on their overall experience. This context leads to a key question: **To what extent does digitalization enhance and challenge guest experience in luxury hotels?**

PART 2 - FIELD OF APPLICATION AND FORMULATION HYPOTHESES

INTRODUCTION – PART TWO

In the previous section, the literature review helped to establish the context by exploring the main concepts related to the research question: the role of digitalization and its impact on the guest experience in luxury hotels. Now, this second part is dedicated to selecting a reference framework in relation with the dissertation topic.

To achieve this, the first chapter will present the problem statement in relation to the context, reformulating the research question.

Then, the second chapter will explore the various theoretical frameworks that can be applied to the topic, which are considered essential for a deeper understanding and explanation.

Finally, the third chapter, based on the context and the empirical research, three hypotheses will be formulated, followed by the introduction of an analysis model.

CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

In this chapter the problem statement provides a clear understanding of the research focus, as well as the steps that led to the formulation of the problematization.

1. Research context highlight

Traditionally, luxury hotels have distinguished themselves from other categories by offering exceptional personalized service with a meticulous attention to detail, and by creating memorable and emotional experiences, delivered primarily through human interactions ([A. Walls et al., 2011](#)).

With rapid advances in technology, this paradigm is shifting, and the hotel industry is now at the crossroads between tradition and innovation. Although luxury hotels have historically been skeptical about digitalization, after the Covid-19, hotels were forced to adopt contactless technologies. Since then, the luxury hotel landscape has evolved and continues to evolve. With the rise of the digital age, the integration of digital tools, such as robots, AI, mobile applications, and others, became a valuable asset to remain competitive and meet guest expectations. However, even though technology is here to create unprecedented opportunities for hotels, this transformation simultaneously raises many concerns about preserving the essence of luxury hospitality and not only.

Indeed, on the one hand, new technologies allow hotels to improve their performance by minimizing errors and getting work done faster. In addition, digital tools are integrated to enhance the guest experience, to make the stay smoother and even more personalized by with services such as mobile check-in, smart room features and real-time assistance.

On the other hand, there are limits to the integration of technology. As these innovations become ubiquitous and play a role in all aspects of the guest journey, they can compromise the perception of luxury in hotels, which is often defined by personal attention from humans rather than any means of non-humans. Thus, one of the challenges is to strike a balance between using digital tools to enhance the experience without diluting exclusivity and personal connection that distinguishes luxury hospitality from mass-market offerings.

A thorough literature review has made it possible to establish the context and understand the importance of digitalization for hotels and its various issues. However, there are some gaps.

2. Research gap and problematization

First, while there are already numerous studies exploring the phenomenon of digitalization and its impact in the broader sector of hospitality, few have specifically focused on the unique context of luxury hotels, where guest expectations are higher and service standards differ significantly from other segments.

Similarly, most published studies examines either the benefits and limitations of adopting new technologies in hotels ([Ivanov, 2019](#); [Lukanova & Dimitrova, 2024](#)) or the broader conceptualization of luxury expectations. However, the existing literature does not directly address the impact digitalization and various tools on guest perceptions and experiences. Yet while quality and customer satisfaction are essential throughout the hotel industry, nowhere are they more important than in luxury hotels, where guests expect and are willing to pay a certain price not only for comfort and exceptional amenities, but above all for unforgettable and even more personalized experiences. Thus, it appears essential to take a closer look.

The literature review also reveals another important gap related to the guest experience. Luxury hospitality is a globalized industry that caters to travelers from all over the world, of all ages, and for various purposes. As a result, it is clear that customers are diverse and will experience their stay in different ways and feel a range of emotions based on their nationality, culture, age, personality and other individual characteristics. These variations extend to their interactions with technology. Although it may seem obvious in today's society, where digital natives are often assumed to be more comfortable with technology than older people, and guests from digitally advanced countries (like Asian nations) are perceived as more at ease than, for example, Europeans. Despite evident suggestions ([Priporas et al., 2017](#)), this correlation has not been thoroughly analyzed in the context of luxury hospitality.

From all these points onwards, several questions arise, such as how can luxury hotels implement digital solutions that enhance personalization and operational efficiency while preserving the human connections and authentic experiences that define luxury hospitality? How do these establishments integrate digitalization without compromising the essence of luxury and high-end personalized service? Does digitalization really enhance the luxury

hotel experience, or does it create a standardized, less exclusive service? What do customers really prefer to use, digital or human contact, to what extent, for what purpose?

In the end, these different questions led to formulating the following final problem: **To what extent does digitalization enhance and challenge guest experience in luxury hotels?**

Consequently, this research aims to fill the existing gaps. This dual-focused question acknowledges the complex relationship between digitalization and guest experience. Indeed, it will offer a comprehensive analysis and deeper understanding of the impact of digitalization, both positive and negative, on the guest experience. It will explore the mindset of each luxury guest, their true perception and attitude towards the adoption and the factors that influence it. This question will navigate through the paradox of integrating technology in luxury hotels, with the need to preserve the human touch that characterizes a true luxury experience. Ultimately, this study can provide valuable insights for luxury hospitality professionals seeking to develop balanced strategies that leverage technological advancements while preserving the essence of exclusivity and personalization.

In conclusion, chapter one outlined the overall process that led to the formulation of the research question. Now, in order to answer it, the next chapter will examine existing theoretical models related to the topic.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In a context where luxury hotels are increasingly integrating digital technologies like mobile check-in, artificial intelligence, etc., it is becoming essential to understand how customers perceive and adopt these tools, which are reshaping their overall experience.

To do so, it is crucial to rely on several existing theories and models, that can help guide the research and thus better analyze, understand, and predict consumer behavior. The theories and models selected for this research specifically focus on technology adoption, as well as experience, satisfaction, and emotion.

1. Theoretical models

The models make it possible to analyze how technologies influence customer satisfaction, the personalization of services, and the acceptance of digital tools in luxury hotels. The study of the different theoretical models helps to deepen the understanding of the dynamics between digitalization and customer experience.

First, different theoretical models have been proposed to explain the acceptance behavior of end users.

1.1 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

a) Explanation of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is one of the most widely tested models created to evaluate elements that affect the adoption and use of technology. Based on social psychological theory, the TAM is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) developed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1975. The TRA asserts that beliefs influence attitudes that lead to intentions and therefore generate behavior and the TAM focuses specifically on predicting the adoption of information technology.

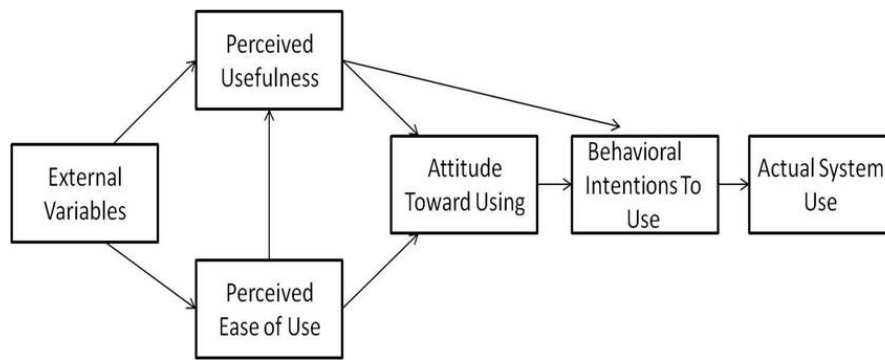


Figure 3: TAM Theory

Correspondingly, Davis introduced in 1986 the TAM in response to a critical need: understanding why users adopt or reject technology. Prior to TAM, researchers and organizations had difficulty predicting the adoption of new technologies and understanding the factors that influence adoption, often resulting in costly failures to implement new systems. As a result, TAM has become the most influential model in the field of information systems and has been empirically validated in numerous contexts, confirming its robustness and relevance ([El Archi & BENBBA, 2023](#)).

The TAM aims to define and understand the determinants factors of technology acceptance. To do so, the model establishes a link between two important elements namely:

- the Perceived Usefulness (PU);
- the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU).

In order to understand the elements affecting the acceptance, TAM offers a large theoretical foundation.

The PU is the extent to which a person believes that using a certain system will improve his work performance. In other words, PU measures the user's perception of the functional benefits they could derive from using a technology. It can be answered by the question: "Will this technology help me accomplish my tasks more effectively?"

For instance, the typical measurement indicators would be the productivity improvement, increased efficiency, time saving, improved quality of results, task simplification and overall utility ([Rizkil et al., 2024](#)).

As Rizkil (2024) argues, the PEOU is the degree to which one believes that using a particular system will be free of effort. It evaluates the perception of the effort required to use the

technology, and could be answered with the question : “Will it be easy for me to learn and use this technology?”

This component can be measured with the ease of learning, clarity and comprehensibility, interaction flexibility, ease of becoming skillful, ease of control, and the mental effort required.

Both elements are crucial because they will influence the three other components: the Attitude Toward Using (ATU), the Behavioral Intention to Use (BI), and the Actual System Use:

- The Attitude Toward Using represents the user’s positive or negative evaluation regarding the technology and it is directly influenced by the PU and PEAU. This component allows to understand the emotional and cognitive approach that customers have towards the technology. For example, a positive attitude is synonymous with a future intention to adapt the digital tool.
- The Behavioral Intention to Use which is the subjective likelihood that an individual will actually use the technology and it is influenced by the ATU and PU. This is an indicator to predict whether customers will use the technology or not.
- Finally, the Actual System Use refers to the actual use of the technology by the individual, which is primarily determined by behavioral intention. This factor measures whether the technology is actually used once it has been adopted and may differ from the intended use: it is not enough for the user to have the intention to use it, he must actually use it.

b) Link to the research and practical application

In luxury hotels, the practice of digitalization is difficult to implement due to the highly personalized service acceptance mentality of the guests in this type of hotels ([Thaichon et al., 2024](#)). As explained, TAM provides a particularly relevant theoretical framework for analyzing the acceptance of digital technologies and the impact they may have on the guest experience in luxury hotels. First, luxury hotels incorporate a wide variety of digital tools (mobile applications, smart rooms, AI..) ,which can be evaluated individually via the TAM model. Moreover, the model allows to analyze the acceptance of technology

by a variety of stakeholders, as it will be possible to interview guests, employees and even managers of luxury hotels in order to get the perception of a maximum number of people. Since guest experience at the core focus in luxury hospitality, using this model to measure perceived usefulness is highly relevant.

To illustrate with a concrete example, the TAM model can be applied to analyze the acceptance of mobile digital check-in by guests in luxury hotels.

1. PU: This describes the guest's perception of the use of the digital check-in. The objective is to know if the mobile application really enhances the experience by offering tangible benefits like time efficiency, convenience, and access to information.

For example, one guest used the app to skip the queue at the front desk. He will evaluate the usefulness of this option compared to traditional check-in. If he finds that the app improved his experience by reducing the wait time, this will increase the perceived usefulness of the app. Some questions to be asked: Did you find the mobile app easy to navigate?; Does the app offer language options that make it easy to use?

2. PEOU: To know if the mobile application is difficult to use, because even if it is useful, guests abandon it. This dimension evaluates the ergonomics of the app and whether it is easy to use. This usability can be assessed through its interface design, the ease of navigation, language options, error handlings and technical requirements.

For example, if the guest has difficulty checking in with the app (due to a technical error or others..), this may lead to a negative perception of the app, despite its perceived benefits. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze the steps where guests have difficulties in order to improve them. Some questions: Did you find it easy to use the app to check-in? Did you encounter problems?

3. ATU: This reflects the guest's overall evaluation of using the mobile check-in experience, which will influence their future behavior. If they have a positive attitude, they may use the app again.

For example, if the guest is satisfied with the mobile check-in experience, he can have a positive attitude and use the app again in the future. Some questions: Would you be willing to use the app again for your next stay? Would you recommend this option to others?

4. BI: To measure the willingness to reuse the app in the future: it predicts whether guests will reuse the technology or not.

If a guest responds positively to questions about their willingness to reuse the app, it indicates a high behavioral intent to adopt the technology. For example, the guest may prefer this method at future hotels if they find it more seamless than traditional check-in. Some questions to ask: After using it, will you be willing to use it again for your next stay?

5. Actual System Use: It is important to measure the actual usage because while the guest may have attitude, they may not actually use the application. This final outcome measures the adoption rate by how many guests actually use mobile check-in, the usage patterns and the completion rates.

The hotel can measure the true adoption with data such as the number of guests that really used the app compared to the number of guests who did a traditional check-in. Data: How many guests actually used the app compared to those who chose a traditional check-in? How many guests have used other features of the app after check-in?

Finally, this model will allow to measure and analyze the factors that influence the adoption and the use of technology. It will help to understand the guest's perception of the usefulness and ease of use in order to anticipate their future usage intentions and the actual adoption. The TAM will help to identify levers for improvement which is essential to ensure that the guest experience remains personalized, convenient and highly satisfying to meet the expectations of luxury hotel guests.

1.2 UTAUT 2 Model

a) Explanation UTAUT 2 (Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2)

In 2003, Venkatesh proposed an alternative and more complete theoretical model to explain the acceptance and the use of technology. She extended TAM to develop the UTAUT model which incorporates social influence and facilitating conditions along with performance expectancy and effort expectancy.

This theory provides a deeper framework for analyzing how individuals respond differently to technology influenced by social factors and contextual elements. Originally, this model was designed to be applied it in an organizational context that means, analyze the acceptance of the technology by employees ([Venkatesh et al., 2003](#)). However, as this model was too dedicated to the working world, the author extended the model in 2012 into UTAUT 2 in order to understand the acceptance of technology by the general public, including customers ([Venkatesh et al., 2012](#)) .

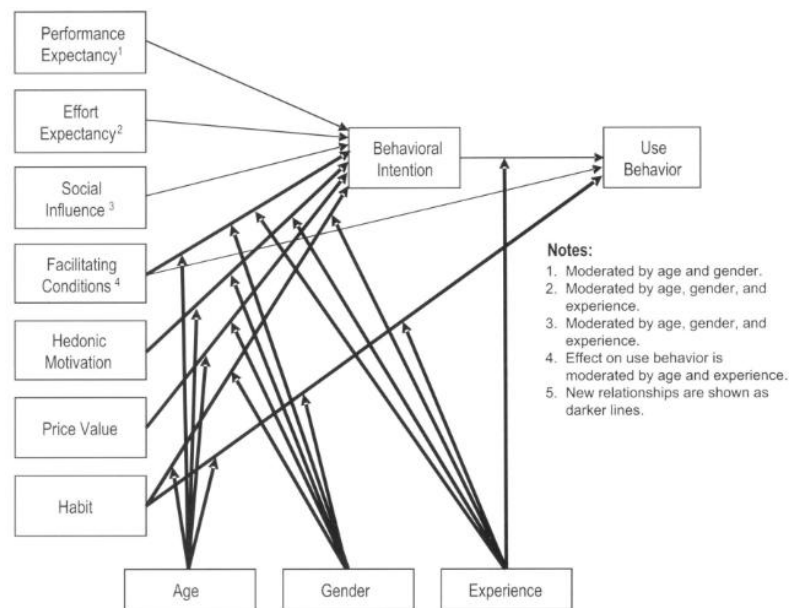


Figure 4: UTAUT 2 Model

The UTAUT 2 model recognizes seven different variables determining the acceptance or non-acceptance of technology:

- the Performance Expectancy (PE), which is the degree to which the use of technology will help customers perform certain activities;

- the Effort Expectancy (EE), which describes the degree of ease associated with consumer's use of the technology;
- the Social Influence (SI), which refers to the degree to which guests believe that the opinion of others is important in using the technology;
- the Facilitating Conditions (FC), which is the extent of the belief of an individual that the existence of organizational and technical infrastructure supports the use of technology;
- the Hedonic Motivation, refers to individual experience pleasure derived from using a technology;
- the Price Value, defined as a cognitive tradeoff between the perceived benefits of the application and the monetary cost for using them;
- the Habit, refers to the degree to which individuals tend to use a particular technology ([Melián-González et al., 2019](#)).

As shown on the figure, UTAUT 2 also identifies several key moderators influencing each variable such as the age, experience and gender “to enhance its predictive power and make this model different from the other acceptance model” ([Dwivedi et al., 2019](#)). ([Akinnuwesi et al., 2022](#)).

b) Link to the research and practical application

This model is also particularly relevant to apply to the topic of research. Indeed, UTAUT2 has already been used in various fields, to explain the adoption of variety of technologies such as software, mobile applications, chatbots ([Melián-González et al., 2019](#)), Internet banking ([Arenas-Gaitán et al., 2015](#)), etc.

UTAUT 2 is particularly efficient to link with the research because it provides a comprehensive theoretical framework that examines multiple factors that influence the technology adoption, including social, emotional and contextual dimensions, that complement the TAM model. It offers a broader view of guest behavior taking into account their gender, age and prior experience, which is important because luxury hotels cater to guests with demographic variations. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze these factors to see the differences in usage between each guest. By applying this model in luxury hotels, it allows a deeper understanding of how guest's expectations and emotional drivers affect their willingness to use or not use the technologies available to them.

An example of how it could be applied in the research would be to analyze the use and guest perception of the mobile check-in app.

1. PE: Ask guests if they think the mobile check-in app will help them to save time and have direct control over their room during their stay. For example, do you think this mobile app will help you time-saving by not having to wait at the front desk?
2. EE: Ask guests if they find the mobile interface simple and easy to use. For example, Do you find the mobile app easy to navigate? If some find it complex, it will affect the adoption.
3. SI: Evaluate the extent to which their guest friend or personal influence, guests use the app. For example, Did you already hear about the hotel check-in mobile app before your arrival?
4. FC: Analyze whether the external conditions such as the wifi or the compatibility of the app with the guest's mobile phone play a role. For example, Did you have problems accessing wifi when using the mobile app?
5. Hedonic Motivation: To observe if the use of an app creates a pleasant experience?
6. The habit: To see if the guest used to use a check-in mobile app. For example, Did you already check-in in a mobile app previously?

Moreover, by grouping respondents into different categories, the factors of the age, gender and previous experience of guests can be compared. This will be valuable to understand if these demographic factors influence the acceptance and use of the mobile check-in, in order to adapt hotel strategies according to guest preferences.

Finally, as explained in the example, UTAUT2 makes it possible to understand the different factors influencing the adoption of a technology in luxury hotels, by analyzing the guest's perception from the perceived usefulness to the social impact and understanding the reasons why guests reject or accept the technology.

1.3 SERVQUAL Model

Another relevant model connected to the topic is the SERVQUAL model.

a) Explanation of the model

Created by Zeithmal, Parasuraman and Berry in 1988, this model allows measuring the lived service by evaluating the gap between expected service and perceived service, through 5 dimensions ([Saleh & Ryan, 1991](#)):

- Reliability: the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
- Responsiveness: the willingness or readiness of employees to provide customers a prompt service
- Assurance: the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence
- Tangibles: the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personal
- Empathy: caring, individualized attention provided to customers

b) Link to the research and practical application

This model is particularly relevant to the topic research as it can provide a comprehensive framework for assessing how digitalization affects each dimension of service quality in luxury hotels as it allows measuring the gaps between guest expectations and perceptions in both digital and traditional service delivery. It is important to be aware of how customers perceive service quality and the factors affecting their perception. Thus, SERVQUAL directly addresses the central research question about the enhancements or challenges of digitalization across each service quality dimension of luxury services, with the aim of examining the specific tensions arising when implementing digital solutions in the context of luxury hotels.

To illustrate the model, SERVQUAL could be applied to analyze the guest experience with mobile digital check-in in a luxury hotel.

- Reliability: To measure both expectations and actual experience. Before arriving at the hotel, the guest expects its reservation to be recognized immediately. If the

application displays correctly, this creates confidence in the system's reliability and, even more so if the room preferences are already confirmed. However, if upon arrival the digital key does not work, even though the app confirms completion, this creates a significant confidence gap.

- Assurance: To assess the guest's confidence in the security and accuracy of the system compared to their confidence in the interaction with human staff. The guest seeks assurance through clear confirmation screens, secure payment processing, and visible security measures for personal information, rather than gaining confidence from the knowledgeable receptionist's greeting. For instance, if the app offers helpful suggestions based on previous stays, it creates a sense of recognition and builds trust.
- Tangibles: To measure how the digital "tangibles" such as interface design, image quality, and responsiveness meet luxury expectations compared to physical tangibles like marble lobbies and uniformed staff. An elegant designed interface with hotel-specific imagery and smooth animations reinforces the premium positioning of luxury hotels whereas a poorly designed app with generic photos does not convey luxury.
- Empathy: This dimension particularly faces the greatest challenge in digital transformation as it allows comparison how personally understood and valued guests feel when using mobile check-in versus traditional methods. When a guest completes mobile check-in and receives a generic confirmation, he misses the warmth of being personally welcomed to the hotel. However, if the app incorporates personalized elements, empathy can be digitally conveyed.
- Responsiveness: To measure how quickly guests receive service and problem solving through digital channels compared to in-person interactions. An instant confirmation satisfies immediate response needs, but what happens if a guest faces an issue without clear explanations, timeframes, responsiveness suffers. The best implementations include visible support options like "tap here to speak with our guest services team" that maintain human responsiveness alongside digital efficiency.

1.4 Experience Economy Model

In the hospitality industry, and especially in the luxury segments, the creation of experience is central to the value proposition.

a) Explanation of the Experience Economy Theory

The Experience Economy Theory grew out of Pine and Gilmore's observations of economic evolution across multiple industries. They analyzed how companies created value through experiences rather than just goods or services. The theory was introduced in 1998 and represents a fundamental shift in the understanding of economic value creation. This theory proposes that modern economies have evolved through four stages: agrarian (commodities), industrial (goods), service, and finally experience economies, with each stage offering progressively higher economic value ([Mehmetoglu & Engen, n.d.](#)).

The Experience Economy framework categorizes experiences along two dimensions: customer participation (passive to active) and connection or environmental relationship (absorption to immersion). These dimensions create four "realms" of experience:

- Entertainment: Passive participation, absorption - when the customer passively observe or absorb experience
- Educational: Active participation, absorption - when the guest actively engage his mind to absorb knowledge or skills
- Esthetic: Passive participation, immersion - when the customer is immersed in an environment but remain passive
- Escapist: Active participation, immersion - when the customer is actively involved in an immersive environment

b) Link to the research and practical application

This framework is particularly relevant to the present research on the impact of digitalization in luxury hotels. First, what luxury hotels sell goes far beyond simply providing a place to sleep or dine: they deliver a memorable, emotional, and sensory experience that justifies the premium pricing. Secondly, digital technologies are fundamentally changing how the guest experience is designed, delivered, and consumed across all four domains.

Therefore, the theory provides a relevant framework for assessing the extent to which digital tools enhance or impoverish the overall guest experience by discussing the emotional and experiential aspect of the technology.

This model can be applied to each digital tool separately to analyze how each influences the creation of a true high-end experience. To illustrate, it can be applied in the research to analyze the check-in on the mobile app.

- Entertainment: To evaluate whether the app makes the check-in more enjoyable or fun for the guest in terms of visual or playful interaction. For example, if it includes an animation, such as a virtual 3D visit, or an interface that engages the user, which could turn a simple check-in into a more interactive experience.
- Educational: To analyze if the app gives detailed information about hotel facilities, tourist and cultural activities or personalized recommendations, which could add educational value to the guest experience.
- Esthetic: To analyze the app is aesthetic and in line with the image of luxury, in terms of design, interface. For example, if the interface has a modern design with high-quality visual elements and smooth navigation to highlight the global aesthetic of the guest cycle.
- Escapist: To evaluate whether the app creates a sense of escape, immersion, or personalization of the experience. For example, it allows guests to customize their experience by choosing the lighting, temperature, and music in their room to create an immersive and evasive experience.

By analyzing each dimension, it makes it possible to know whether the technology meets the high expectations of luxury hotel guests by enhancing their experience or, on the contrary, if it impoverishes it by creating an impersonal standardization.

Finally, this model is fundamental to understand that a simple integration of digital tools is not enough in luxury hotels: what matters is the emotion generated and the hotel's ability to create a unique moment for the guest.

To conclude this chapter, these theoretical frameworks provide complementary explanations for the research question. TAM and UTAUT2 offer insights about the factors influencing the adoption of technologies whereas Experience Economy Model enables the perception of the importance of the emotional experience in luxury hotels.

Moving forward, based on the literature review and the theoretical foundations, the next chapter will present the hypotheses to address the research problem.

CHAPTER 3: HYPOTHESES AND ANALYSIS MODEL

This chapter will address the hypotheses and propose an analysis model that will guide the exploration of the impact of digitalization on guest experience.

1. Formulation of hypotheses

The hypotheses addressed serve to narrow the purpose of the study and help answer the problematization: **To what extent does digitalization enhance and challenge guest experience?** This research will explore the dual impact of digitalization, where it can enhance certain aspects of the guest experience while potentially diminishing others. The goal is to identify the optimal balance between digital and human touchpoints that is critical in luxury hotels.

Based on the results of the literature review findings and the theoretical framework, the following three hypotheses are proposed to answer the research question:

- Hypothesis 1: Digitalization enhances the ultra-personalization of services in luxury hotels, leading to higher guest satisfaction.

This hypothesis suggests that digital tools help luxury hotels meet guest expectations and preferences by using and analyzing data. In luxury hospitality, personalization is crucial and is a fundamental characteristic of this type of establishment: guests come not just to sleep in a room, but to have memorable experiences and feel unique. Thus, the hypothesis is that digitalization plays a crucial role in anticipating guest needs and creates opportunities to offer highly personalized experiences, such as room settings automatically adjusted based on personal preferences, dining recommendations based on previous choices, or personalized services. Through intelligent data collection, digitalization would enable a higher level of personalization, namely ultra-personalization than human memory and

communication between staff and guests can reach. Therefore, this ultra-personalization would significantly contribute to guest satisfaction by making individuals feel valued and uniquely understood, which is a fundamental expectation in luxury hotels. This hypothesis will particularly be tested by examining the integration and impact of digital personalization tools across the overall guest cycle and by evaluating the relationships with the satisfaction level.

- Hypothesis 2: Despite the efficiency provided by digital tools, luxury hotel customers prefer human interactions.

This second hypothesis recognizes that while digital tools can simplify many aspects of the hotel experience, the human connection remains deeply rooted in the essence of luxury hospitality. Indeed, it is for this reason that technology can be difficult to implement in luxury establishments due to the expectations of guests seeking for human interaction and highly personalized services. This hypothesis implies that while guests may appreciate technological efficiency for basic time-saving services like digital check-in, mobile room keys, automated check-out, and others, there is a likelihood that they will appreciate and prefer human interaction for experiences essential to luxury hotels. Indeed, nothing beats the presence of an employee, their kindness, empathy, creativity and spontaneity. They are hired to be at the guest's disposal and to facilitate their stay. For services that convey emotions or require a detailed understanding such as concierge recommendations, gastronomic experiences, or wellness treatments, because, above all, employees are at the guest's disposal and must facilitate their stay. Therefore, the hypothesis recognizes that digitalization creates a potential paradox since on the one hand technology enhances simultaneously certain operational aspects but, at once, can diminish the emotional and human connection that characterize luxury experiences. Also, since the experience is unique to each individual, it is not possible to draw a general conclusion, which is why the hypothesis will be tested. Thus, to test it, it is essential to identify all the touchpoints in the customer journey that benefit from digitalization and those that are better served by human interaction, to find an optimal balance between efficiency and authentic connection.

- Hypothesis 3: Cultural background and generation influence guest's adoption and comfort level with digital tools in luxury hotels, impacting their experience.

This hypothesis recognizes that digital preferences in luxury hotels are not universal and are strongly influenced by cultural and generational factors. Indeed, hotels cater to a wide variety of guests from all over the world. It seems clear that everyone is different and guests from diverse cultures may have different expectations and perceptions regarding the use of technology in hotels. Some cultures may favor face-to-face interaction as a sign of respect and care, while others prioritize the efficiency and control offered by digital tools. For instance, it may seem evident that Asian cultures such as Japan, which is highly digitalized and technologically advanced, will be more comfortable than guests from less digitally developed countries such as Europe.

Similarly, generational differences can play a crucial role. For example, it seems obvious that digital natives, younger guests, are more likely to be comfortable using technology, unlike older generations. They may expect seamless technological integration throughout their stay and ultimately be disappointed by the lack of digital options. Conversely, traditional luxury customers may find excessive technology intrusive in the authentic luxury experience they seek. Also, while the cultural dimensions are studied by Hofstede, it is not possible to draw a general conclusion here. The experience and perceptions are subjective and depend on each individual. Thus, it would be interesting to cross-reference these variables because, for example, a digitally literate older person might be more comfortable than a digital native, and vice versa. This research will analyze the influence of these demographic and cultural factors on expectations and satisfaction with digital tools, thus obtaining insights to adapt digital integration approaches to different customer segments.

Globally, these three hypotheses examine the impact of digitalization in luxury hotels through three interrelated dimensions: service enhancement and authenticity, personalization capabilities and adoption factors. In order to structure the research clearly, after announcing the hypotheses, it is important to construct a conceptual model in order to have a global vision of how the data will be analyzed and compared.

2. Creation of pertinent analysis model

Firstly, in order to construct an appropriate analysis model, it is essential to distinguish the independent variables, dependent variables, moderating variables and, analysis dimensions.

In this research, digitalization serves as the *independent variable* that negatively or positively affects the guest experience, which is the *dependent variable*. The cultural and generational factors serve as *moderating variables*. Thus the relationship between digitalization and guest experience is examined through the lenses of personalization, service efficiency and human connection.

The following model will guide the research analysis and help to interpret the results according to the relationships.

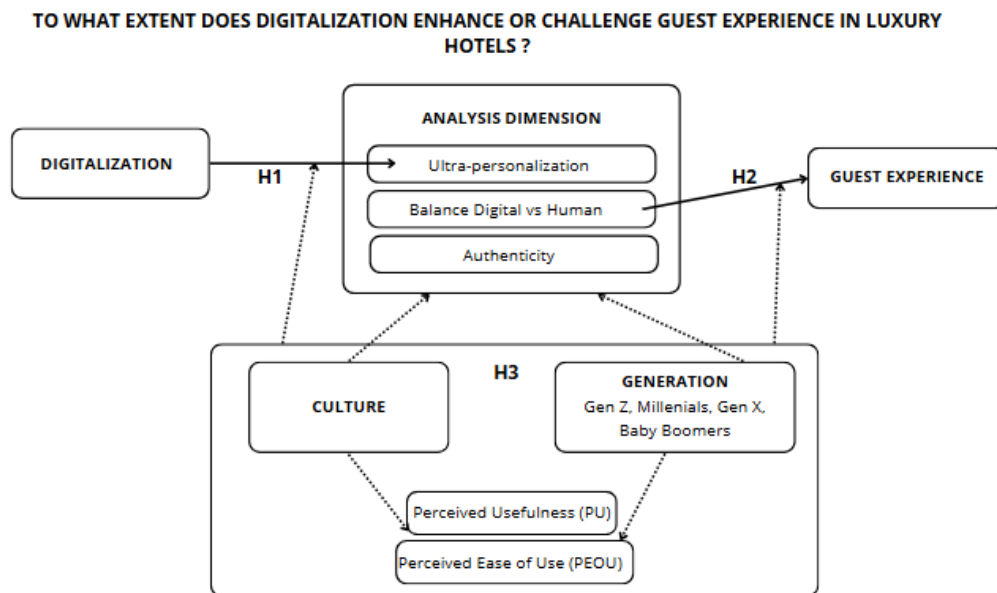


Figure 5: Conceptual Model - Valentine Lely

In the model, digitalization encompasses all the digital tools at the hotel (mobile app, AI, smart room technologies..). The guest experience refers to the overall perception of the guest during his stay: his satisfaction, loyalty, perceived value and quality of the service. The

analysis dimensions are the mechanisms by which digitalization affects the guest experience. The three are:

- Ultra-personalization, which refers to the ability to adapt the experience to each guests' preferences;
- Balance between human and digital, which is the balance between efficiency and personal interaction;
- Authenticity, which is the preservation of the essence of luxury in a digitalized environment.

The moderating variables are the cultural (values, norms and expectations related to the culture and country of origin of the guest) and generational factors (differences in acceptance between the ages of people). The PU and PEOU from the TAM model have also been added. PU is influenced by the culture and PEOU is linked to generational factors. Through these dimensions, guests evaluate digital tools and that modify the relationship between the presence of digital tools and the real impact on the guest experience. Integrating these two dimensions from TAM enhances the credibility of the research, as this model has been validated.

Then the model illustrates the three hypotheses to better explain the relationships:

- H1: Explains that digitalization improves the personalization and leads to higher satisfaction;
- H2: Despite the efficiency provided by digital tools, luxury hotel guests prefer human interaction;
- H3: The cultural origin and generation influence the adoption and comfort with the use of tools.

Finally, this model will help and structure the data collection.

In this third chapter, after remaining the research question, in order to answer it, three hypotheses have been announced. Then, a conceptual model was established aiming to help guide the data collection method and analyze the results.

CONCLUSION PART 2

To conclude this second part, the first chapter enabled to review the key elements of the literature. While there are already numerous scientific and academic articles addressing the key topic of this research, such as guest experience, digitalization and luxury hotels, several gaps which have been identified, leading to the formulation of the research problem.

Then, the chapter 2 explored existing models and theories relevant to the subject, particularly those related to technology acceptance, guest experience... These frameworks offer valuable support to enrich the research and can be applied to consolidate and strengthen the study.

Finally, based on the literature review and theoretical framework, the third chapter formulated three hypotheses in order to answer the research problem. Additionally, a conceptual model was developed to guide the data collection, which will be detailed in the following part.

PART 3 - METHODOLOGY AND FIELD OF APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION – PART 3

After having established the theoretical foundations and conceptual framework that cover the subject of the dissertation, this third and last part will now focus on a methodological approach, in order to guide the empirical investigation of the research question. This section is crucial as it outlines the process to follow to test and verify the hypotheses formulated earlier.

First of all, the first chapter is devoted to give an overview of the different methodological approaches used in a research, qualitative, quantitative or mixed. Moreover, it will explain the chosen methodology, which will be implemented next year in order to collect the data.

Then, the second chapter will detail the different methods of collection, whether primary and secondary, and explain how these data will be collected as part of the research on the impact of digitalization on guest experience in luxury hotels.

Finally, the third chapter will present the methods envisaged for analyzing the data once it has been collected. It will also address the challenges and limitations encountered so far, in order to consider areas of improvement, and outline the next steps to be taken in Master 2.

CHAPTER 1: FROM METHOD SELECTION TO DATA QUALITY: ENSURING SUCCESS IN RESEARCH DATA COLLECTION

In order to investigate the dual impact of digitalization on luxury hotel guest experience, it is crucial to select a thoughtful methodology.

To begin with, data collection is the methodological process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest enabling answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes ([Gunaseena et al., 2024](#)). The main goal is to capture quality evidence that then translates to rich data analysis and allows building of a convincing and credible answer to questions that have been posed.

1. Understand the concept of data collection and its different approaches

1.1 The qualitative method

Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena through exploring meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals or groups. The data collected are typically non-numerical, taking a descriptive or nominal form, and are often expressed through words and sentences. In most cases, data captures feelings, emotions, and subjective perceptions of something ([Creswell & Creswell, 2018](#)).

Qualitative methods include focus groups, document review, groups discussions, and interviews which are the most commonly used:

- Observation: When a researcher observes the behavior and activities at a research site in order to take field notes. The researcher records in an unstructured or semi-structured way (using some prior questions that the inquirer wants to know) activities at the research site.
- Interviews: A researcher engages a focus group with six to eight interviewees in each group, or conducts face-to-face or telephone interviews with participants. Generally, interviews involve unstructured and open-ended questions that are few in number

and intended to elicit views and opinions from participants. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

Collecting data through a qualitative approach gives many advantages. This method provides rich, in-depth and contextual data about human experiences and allows flexibility in data collection and analysis. It involves a smaller sample size and facilitates the exploration of complex phenomena that may be difficult to quantify. Also, this method enables researchers to establish rapport with participants potentially yielding more authentic responses ([Denzin & Lincoln, 2011](#)). However, this method is not without constraint. The data collection and analysis process is time-consuming and the results cannot be easily generalized to a wider population.

1.2 The quantitative method

In contrast, quantitative research collects data in a more structured manner than in qualitative. This method emphasizes the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables within a framework of statistical procedures. This approach typically involved random and larger sample sizes and standardized data collection instruments such as surveys and questionnaires, that generate outcomes simple to explain, contrast, and interpret. Moreover, quantitative methods are particularly useful for testing hypotheses, identifying patterns, and generalizing findings to broader populations ([Sadan, 2017](#)). For example, the most common instrument used in quantitative research is the questionnaire, where participants have to fill in responses on a paper or computer. In unstructured questionnaires, participants are required to give their own responses whereas in structured questionnaires, questions are either open-ended or closed-ended. In hospitality research, quantitative approaches are used to measure guest satisfaction, service quality, and behavioral intentions.

According to Kabir ([2016](#)), in quantitative approaches, the main advantage is the ability to generalize collected data to larger populations that extend beyond the sample studied. Additionally, quantitative methods reduce researcher bias by following standardized procedures. Furthermore, quantitative methods are cheaper to implement and allow precise measurement of variables and relationships.

However, one of the main constraints lies in their limited ability to explore and explain unexpected similarities or differences between variables. These methods lack the flexibility to understand complex or unanticipated phenomena that do not lend themselves to strictly numerical measurements. In addition, a low number of participants is a factor that limits the effectiveness of quantitative approaches.

1.3 The mixed method

Mixed-method research combines elements of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods within a single study. This “mixing” of data provides a more comprehensive approach with an “in-depth” as well as a “broad” understanding of the research problem ([Lall, 2021](#)). This integration can occur at various stages of the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

The different methods collection used are sequential designs, concurrent designs, transformative designs and explanatory or exploratory sequential designs.

Mixed-methods are useful when the research questions are complex and the use of either quantitative or qualitative approaches in isolation is inadequate to address this complexity ([Öhlén, 2011](#)). One of the main advantages is that the method gives a more complete understanding of the research problem, allows for triangulation to enhance validity and reliability, and compensates for the weaknesses of single methodologies. Thus, it offers multiple perspectives on a complex phenomenon. However, one of the main constraints to take into consideration is the intensive time in data collection and analysis, and a research expertise. Also integrating different types of data presents challenges and may be difficult to resolve divergent findings.

2. Selecting an appropriate method

After carefully considering the different methods available, the most suitable approach to answer the research question is the qualitative one, combining in-depth interviews and observations, for several key reasons.

2.1 Why choose a qualitative approach?

To begin, it is important to recall the problematization: **To what extent does digitalization enhance and challenge guest experience in luxury hotels?** In other words, this question aims to analyze the impact of digitalization, both positive and negative, on the overall guest experience. The goal is therefore to have a nuanced understanding and identify how the different technologies implemented can influence the guest experience throughout its whole journey, from pre-arrival to post-stay.

Firstly, on the one hand, the study seeks to explore the positive effects, for example if the customer feels that the tools help to improve personalization of services, or enhance comfort in the room with smart tools. Secondly, on the other hand, digitalization can have negative effects. For example, if the customer finds it difficult to use digital tools, or perceives the technology as a threat and possibly leading to a loss of human interaction etc.... However, the impact of digitalization is highly subjective and depends on each individual, because perhaps obstacles for some are perceived as advantages for others and vice-versa.

Because customer perceptions and experiences are highly subjective, qualitative methods are best suited to capture these nuances. This method involves an interpretive approach, in which the researcher plays an active role in making sense of participants' experiences and perspectives. As Walsh (2003) highlights, the qualitative research is aimed at understanding the "how" and "why" a member views a particular issue and the ways he behaves as a result. [\(Walsh, 2003\)](#) Through "rich, thick descriptions", a qualitative method allows one to clearly understand what people think and substitutes the researcher's view with the respondents own interpretations, offering a more authentic understanding of their experiences".

Thus, by choosing this method for the subject, it will provide valuable insights into "how" technologies are reshaping the guest experience and "why" guests may or may not adopt digital tools depending on several factors. Conducting interviews will enable a deeper exploration of the subject. Indeed, it will allow gathering the diverse viewpoints because the open-ended questions give to the respondent the freedom to develop their answers, thoughts and, most of the time give unexpected insights that a closed survey format would likely miss. Also, these conversations with hotel managers, employees and guests, will give different perspectives of the impact of digitalization and offer the flexibility to dynamically adjust questions based on each participant's responses, allowing for a richer and more personalized experience. Using the results of in-depth interviews, the researcher can analyze the interview

transcripts and categorize key themes that emerge from respondents after attempting to develop constructs and logical relationships between them, leading to a deeper understanding of the phenomena under study. Finally, the rapid evolution of technologies means that understanding their impact requires flexible methodological approaches capable of adapting to emerging findings.

In conclusion, since the subject is sociological and subjective, since it involves the study of behaviors and feelings that are unique to each individual, the qualitative approach is the most suitable to elucidate, understand and interpret nuances. By collecting everyone's explanations, it will provide new perspectives, ideas and experiences that have not been elaborated in the existing literature. In addition, this method will provide a deep and complex understanding of how technologies affect customer experience in luxury hotels.

2.2 Why not choose a quantitative approach?

While the quantitative approach is often used as a method collection in the tourism and hospitality industry to provide valuable insights in many research contexts, this approach presents significant limitations for this particular topic.

First of all, as explained earlier, quantitative approaches limit the ability to understand a subjective phenomenon because they privilege measurement over meaning. Indeed, the data collected are often numerical and answers to closed-ended questions, where the respondent is not free to develop and explain his point of view in detail. Experience is highly personal and unique to each individual, and it would not allow the necessary depth and flexibility to explore personalized, emotional and cultural dimensions.

As explained by Walsh (2003), "the challenge with quantitative research is that it often reports empirical findings without being able to explain why they occurred". However, it is important to find the "why" in the topic. Indeed, on one hand interaction between digitalization and luxury hotels varies considerably from one type of hotel to another: not all establishments are equipped with the same level of technology, whether independent or belonging to a chain. Also, the impact of digitalization on the guest experience differs from

every customer, since everyone is different and has unique preferences and needs. Thus, this variability is complex and needs to understand all the factors influencing, making any standardized and generalized data impossible.

On the other hand, in hospitality and in luxury hotels, digitalization is a recent trend that is still evolving, making the development of standardized measurements tools premature. Emerging hotel technologies require exploratory investigation before meaningful quantification can take place.

In addition, to keep pace with the different themes encompassed by the topic, questions posed to respondents require flexibility to adjust the investigation as new ideas emerge, which quantitative approaches often limit.

Finally, while quantitative methods can provide broad patterns across larger samples, they would sacrifice the depth needed to understand the nuanced opinions that guests have about digitalization and their experiences.

3. Field of application

The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select the participants and location to help understand the problem and research question. As opposed to quantitative method where the sample can be chosen randomly and selecting a lot of participants, in the case of qualitative method, Miles and Huberman (1994) identified four aspects to respect: the setting (where the research will take place), the actors (who will be observed or interviewed), the events (what the actors will be observed or interviewed), and the process (the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors within the setting). ([Miles, 1994](#))

3.1 Geographic field

Hospitality industry is a broad sector that encompasses different types of establishments, from economic to luxury segment. The current study aims to identify the digitalization in luxury hotels in a global context. Luxury hospitality represents a distinctive segment

characterized by exceptional service standards, exclusivity, and heightened guest expectations, but there is no universal definition.

For this first year of Master and in the literature review, the research focuses on luxury hotels in a global context. The luxury hotels market is shared between independent luxury establishments and chain luxury hotels. Also, this segment of the market encompasses several types of hotels from urban luxury hotels to heritage hotels. Thus, one interesting thing to explore would be to compare the different hotels. The goal is to make a comparison between independent properties and chain hotels to reveal the differences and understand the strategic decisions behind them. This is relevant to analyze how organizational structure, resource availability and brand philosophy influence digital adoption.

While the phenomenon of digitalization in luxury hotels is global, the research necessitates a more focused geographical scope. To do so, it will be reduced in Master 2 with the internship. However, for the moment it is unknown but one idea is to go to Singapore in a luxury hotel brand part of Accor, like Pullman. If it is the case, the quantitative method will be generally applied within the hotels, and then comparison will be realized with other luxury hotels of the city.

3.2 Sample and target population

In order to test the hypotheses and cover all aspects of the problem, several types of participants will be targeted.

a) Luxury hotel guests

Since they are at the heart of the research problem and those who live the experience during their stay in luxury hotels, guests are the primary target. Specifically, to test hypothesis 3 and conclude the extent to which cultural and generational factors influence their behavior and perception, guests with diverse ages and nationalities are targeted. More precisely, the research seeks to include traditional luxury consumers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z and diverse cultural backgrounds with emphasis on Western and Eastern European, North American and Asian guests. Moreover, it is interesting to gather data from guests travelling for diverse purposes, from business to leisure, and guests with loyalty

programs or not. Collecting data from this diversity of people will provide a broad perspective on their different behavior and the reasons they act like this. Finally, another angle to explore is to compare a guest using a traditional experience without using technology with a full digitalized experience, in order to identify changes in customer expectations.

c) Managers

The second target are the managers of luxury hotels. These participants aim to give strategic perspectives on digital implementation decisions, challenges faced, and how they balance technological advancement with the essence of luxury hospitality. Including both managers from independent and chain hotel will reveal contrasting approaches and priorities.

d) Employees

Another important target are the employees working in different departments, such as reception, concierge, F&B, housekeeping. These participants are crucial as they represent the pillar of the guest in delivering them an experience. They also represent the human interface between guests and digital systems. Their insights will illuminate how technology changes their roles, enhances or challenges their ability to create authentic connections, and their observations of guests responses to digital innovations. Also, the variety of departments is crucial to have a complete overview of the impact of digitalization within all the hotel and not only with guests. Finally, in premium and luxury hotels there is often a Guest Experience or Guest Relations Department where employees are in charge of enhancing the overall guest satisfaction, personalizing their experiences and creating unique moments, and managing guest feedback. This is why it is crucial to also have their opinion about digitalization and the impacts.

To conclude this chapter, the qualitative method appears to be the most appropriate for this research. By targeting a diverse range of respondents, the goal is to gather a broad spectrum of opinions: how individuals define a luxury experience, their perceptions and feelings about digitalization, the impact on guest experience, and even within hotels impacting the role of staff. Furthermore, understand the factors influencing the implementation of technologies, which can differ between establishments. Overall, this qualitative approach will provide deep and nuanced insights to address the research objectives. Now, to understand more precisely the method used for data collection, the next chapter will present the different approaches considered.

CHAPTER 2: DATA COLLECTION

In research, two types of data are collected, primary and secondary. This chapter will explain how and what data will be collected to answer the research question and test the hypotheses.

1. Primary collection

First of all, primary data are those directly collected by researchers from original sources, typically through methods like interviews, surveys, observations... Gathered first-hand and tailored to the specific purpose of the study, these data are unique and have not been previously published elsewhere ([Baggio & Klobas, 2017](#)).

In this research, primary data forms the cornerstone, allowing for direct engagement with luxury hotels to gather fresh insights on digitalization's impact on guest experience. In order to answer the research question and test the hypotheses, observations and in-depth interviews will be realized.

1.2 Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews are chosen as a tool because the goal of this dissertation is to analyze consumers' perception of digital tools, what they think about them and the impact they have on their experience. Unlike the unstructured interview, which is a free conversation where questions are asked as the exchange progresses, the semi-structured interview follows an interview guide with questions that are prepared in advance but which can be adjusted according to what the respondent says. This type of interview will enable to gather descriptive data: by answering open-ended questions, respondents are free to express and develop their opinions without being influenced.

a) Interview participants

Since the core of the research problem is the guest experience, the most important participants to interview are obviously the **luxury hotel guests**. Moreover, it is also relevant to discuss with **luxury hotel managers** to understand the strategic reasons behind the implementation of different technologies, why they decide to implement some while others are not. Finally, **employees** will be interviewed, as they are ones directly involved in customer interactions throughout the whole stay and play a key role in creating the experience that customers will ultimately enjoy. To gain an overall view and do comparison, employees from several departments (such as reception, F&B, housekeeping) will be interviewed. Similarly, the **Guest Experience Manager** is also highly important to interview, as is responsible for optimizing every stage of the guest cycle to deliver a smooth and memorable experience.

Profile	Nb of respondents	Objective
<p>Luxury hotel guests (diversified profiles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 Baby Boomers - 2 Generation X - 2 Millenials - 2 Generation Z <p>2 different cultures to each Generation, for example, interview</p> <p>1 Asiatic and 1 European Baby Boomers</p>	8-10	<p>Guests are living the experience, their perception is crucial to understand how technology influences their satisfaction, comfort and emotion.</p> <p>Each experience is subjective so everyone will respond differently.</p> <p>The variety of culture and generations will particularly enable test the second hypothesis about the potential influence of the cultural and generational backgrounds.</p> <p>At the end, the variables will be compared to try to find correlations.</p>
General Manager	1-2 (depending on availability)	They are the ones taking decisions on the introduction of technologies. They will be able to explain their objectives, (such as enhance operational efficiency, reduce costs...) and

		<p>their challenges (if it is an expensive investment...).</p> <p>The goal is to understand why they integrate some and not others</p>
<p>Employees from different department</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 reception - 1 F&B - 1 housekeeping 	4	<p>Interview several departments to have a global vision.</p> <p>Employees are at the heart of the interaction between technology and guests, they can explain how they use digital tools to deliver an experience, observe the reaction of guests and can say what effect it has on their work organization (loss of positions or redefining role for example..)</p>
<p>Guest Experience Manager (or Guest Relations Manager if not Guest Experience Department)</p>	2	<p>They have an overall vision of the guest journey and are to ensure a memorable stay, they can explain the feedback of guests (complaints, advice..) and can talk about future projects.</p>

The more diverse the sample, the more the analysis of the collected data will be nuanced and rich. The goal is to cross the variables and find relationships between them.

a) Interview design and structure

To conduct a successful interview, it must be structured and prepare each information in advance. For each respondent, the interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes and will take place in person. The interview will be conducted in English, French, or Spanish, depending on the respondent's preferred language. With the participant's consent, the interview will be recorded so that data can be transcribed and analyzed.

For each participant's categories, a standard grid has been constructed in order to adapt the questions. To test the hypotheses, the questions are grouped by theme, with 3 to 4 per hypothesis.(see annexe A). The different steps for the interview protocol are as followed:

1. Introduction: As explained in the grid, the interview will begin by with an introduction of the researcher and the research purpose, as well as an explanation of confidentiality protocols and data protection measures. Also, the respondent's permission for audio recording will be asked. The introduction will last approximately 5 minutes and aims to put the person at ease, establish a climate of trust and set a comfortable tone. The first questions are designed to gather basic demographic and professional information.
2. Core questions: As developed in the interview grid, during 30 to 45 minutes, predefined open-ended questions will be addressed. They are grouped by themes to answer the hypotheses and are tailored to the participant category. The questions are opened to let the respondent develop their answers, to get a deep understanding and think.
3. Conclusion: After all the questions answered, a summary of key points is discussed, it is the opportunity for participants to add information and explore perspectives. To cloture the interview, express gratitude to the respondent and explain the next steps. This step will last 5 to 10 minutes.

c) Interview implementation process

1. Pre interview preparation: A grid is prepared in advance with questions adapted to each participant category. It is essential to test the questions with 2-3 persons before in order to refine and adjust questions. Before the interview, it is important to prepare the record and the notes.
2. Interview execution: The interviews will take place during the internship next year at the hotel to interview guests, employees and managers. To avoid biasing the answers, it is crucial to use active listening techniques, letting the respondent talk without interrupting him. During the talks, real-time notes will be taken of non-verbal cues and emerging themes.
3. Post-interview processing: After the interview, it is essential to reread and complete notes immediately, so as not to forget anything.

d) Interview content focus

As explained previously, an interview grid is adapted to each category in order to adapt the questions and thematic areas.

1.4 Observations

The second method of efficient data collection is the observational method. It is especially relevant to use this method particularly “when the nature of the research question to be answered is focused on answering a how or what type question” (Kabir, 2016). Here, observations data will provide valuable insights and thick descriptions of “how” digital tools are actually implemented and used in luxury hotels environments. The main objective of the observations in research is to witness behaviors and interactions that participants might not articulate in interviews.

a) Observation design and framework

The structured observations will take place at the hotel during the internship in the public areas within the hotel, such as reception, where digital tools will be implemented. Principally, the different technologies observed will be digital check-in and others integrated in public areas. It is important to predetermined observation categories linked to research hypotheses. A standardized form is created in advance (see annexe B). The session observation will be 1 hour and at different times of the day, in the morning and afternoon to see if there are differences.

b) Observation implementation process

1. Pre-observation planning: Before observation, it is crucial to get the permission of the hotel management, to choose the best moments to observe, for example, according to the occupancy rate, prepare the material of the observation (grid, notes) and inform the employees clearly about the aim of the research.

2. Observation Execution: During observation, it is very important to be unobtrusive in the natural environment so as not to influence the guest behavior. It is interesting to mix the observation approaches, some disclosed observations where staff awareness is necessary and some discrete observations of public interactions. During the observation, multiple notes will be taken to collect most of data.
3. Post-observation analysis: Just after the observation, all the notes will be developed to obtain more details, and the observed phenomenon will be categorized. At the end, the data will be crossed with those of the interview.

c) *Observation focus area*

The observation will focus on key elements about the guest-technology interaction and the cultural and variational elements. The observations will examine the frequency and ease with which guests use digital tools. They will also measure the amount of time spent on a digital tool compared to an employee. The observations will allow to see if guests are frustrated or satisfied with the technology used and the demographic patterns. the protocol will investigate cultural and generational variations. Particularly to test hypothesis 3, observations will examine on differences to technology use among guests from different nationalities: particularly if there are language and cultural barriers in technology adoption or if guests prefer digital or human assistants across demographics. Finally, observations will analyze to see if the staff use different techniques for different guest profiles.

To conclude, the observations will provide additional data to those collected during the interviews. The data will be cross-referenced to compare words with actions. The aim is to identify if there are contradictions between reported and observed phenomena. Therefore, these data will also be supplemented with secondary data.

2. Secondary data collection

Secondary data complements primary sources by providing broader context, industry trends, and theoretical foundations. These data have previously been collected by another researcher, usually for a different research question ([Heaton, 2008](#)). Obviously, it is important to choose relevant sources in order to produce quality research.

For this dissertation, secondary data have been instrumental in laying the foundations of the subject. In coherence with the subject and in parallel with primary data collection, secondary data are gathered to support the empirical findings and enrich the analysis. These data are collected across different types of sources.

2.1 Academic and scientific resources

First, many resources are available online and cover different topics related to the research question. Pre-reviewed journal articles from international journals of hospitality, such as the International Journal of Hospitality Management, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, which provide valuable insights about guest experience management, technology adoption in hospitality, and luxury service standards. These articles are principally published on key academic databases including ScienceDirect, Emerald Insight, SAGE Journals and Google Scholar.

Additionally, academic books and dissertations are relevant for the subject. There are numerous doctoral and master's theses previous graduate research on topics related to this subject which help to provide a methodological guidance and comparative findings. The main topics covered are luxury hospitality management, guest experience, the theories of technology adoption..

2.2 Industry Reports

The industry reports are other pertinent sources for the subject. The data can be collected through annual luxury hospitality trends reports such as Deloitte, McKinsey, Bain & Company, industry associations publications like Leading Hotel of the World. These industry reports give insights to the market trends, the key figures.

Finally, the secondary data will help conceptualize the findings, identify benchmarks and highlight best practices or divergences ac

In conclusion, this comprehensive data collective, including both primary and secondary, ensures robust and multi-perspective insights into how digitalization both enhances and challenges guest experience in luxury hospitality, while specifically addressing the hypotheses regarding personalization, human interaction preferences, and cultural and generational influences. After collecting all the data, it is essential to now, develop an analytic framework.

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION IN MASTER 2

To transform data collected into meaningful insights, it is essential to develop a analytic framework.

1. Analytic method

First, data will be analyzed with a thematic analysis, which enables identify, analyze and report data into different themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

1.1 Thematic Analysis

According to Braun & Clark (2006), this method consists of six steps:

- 1) Familiarization with the data: First, data from interview transcripts and observation notes are reread to fully understand them. While reading, it is important to take notes such as recurring themes or anything that stands out.
- 2) Generating initial codes: After reading, becoming familiar with the data and generating a list of ideas, the goal is to start “coding”, which is the process of labeling parts of the text with keywords. It is essential to create a coding framework based on the research hypotheses structure the analysis, while remaining open to new ideas. Interviews need to be coded line-by-line and, observational notes too.
- 3) Search for themes: This goal of this step is to group codes into broader themes. Codes are grouped together when they seem to belong into potential themes, and sometimes create sub-themes. Additionally, a thematic maps is created to explore how codes and themes connect in order to identify the overall patterns that respond to the research hypotheses.
- 4) Reviewing themes: The purpose of this stage is to verify that the themes are solid and meaningful. This is done by comparing themes with the coded extracts and the whole data set. Then, to ensure coherence and distinction, the themes are refined (merged, split, or reorganized). Peer review by other researcher is recommended to validate the preliminary themes.

- 5) Defining and naming themes: To explain clearly each theme. Is necessary to write a precise definition for each theme (what it is and what it isn't) to give them a clear and relevant name. Then, explain how each themes are related to the research question.
- 6) Producing report: Finally, to present effectively the findings, compelling excerpts from data have to be selected to illustrate each theme. The last step is to conduct a final analysis linking the results to the research question and existing literature, to after, contextualize the findings in a rigorous way.

This thematic analysis aims to identify, gather and understand the key themes of the interviews and observations. It help to better structure the many information collected and link the data to the hypotheses and research problem.

In addition, another analysis could be relevant for the subject, which is the comparative analysis.

1.2 Comparative analysis

To examine and compare multiple dimensions of the research, such as independent vs. chain hotel, cultural differences, and generational variations, a structured comparative analysis will be used.

The first step in comparing data is to clearly define the comparison categories. For this subject, the comparison will be between independent luxury hotels and chain luxury hotels. In particular, to verify hypothesis 3, the second category will be between the different cultures: European, American and Asian. Furthermore and the last category will compare the generations (Generation Z, Millenials, Generation X..).

Then, the primordial step is to develop structured matrices to organize the data for systematic comparison. For the research, a matrix will be created to compare each tools and the attitude of guests across categories. As followed, an extract of the comparison categories:

Tools	Gen Z	Millenials	Asian	European
Mobile check-in	-	-	-	-
Smart room features	-	-	-	-

In cross-analysis, as in thematic analysis, it is important to first code the interview and observation data related to each hypothesis, to identify consistent patterns and note the variations and exceptions. It is then important to develop explanations for why certain patterns occur and test these explanations against each comparative category. It is essential to individually analyze each case, hotel, cultural or generational comparison to compare across cases to identify similarities and differences.

The next step is to create a table of key dimensions related to the hypotheses, such as personalization, efficiency, human touch, to show how they manifest across the comparison categories and to identify how the dimensions interact for different categories. Then, analyze each category separately to identify key themes and compare it to the other categories to identify similarities or differences.

Finally, to test the hypotheses, the comparison will be analyzed.

For example, for hypothesis 1, compare how the personalization is perceived by hotel type and by guests from different cultures and generations. For hypothesis 2, compare the context where guest prefer human, for which service and who. For the hypothesis 3, to analyze the influence of cultural and generational backgrounds, compare guests and technologies they adopt.

Finally, to validate the results is important to make a peer review from professionals.

Thus, this comparative analysis will allow to show the differences between the categories and explain the “why” theses differences exist. It will allow to verify the hypotheses with clear answers.

In conclusion, both methods are crucial for analyzing the collected data. They will allow for structuring structure all the information and understand who thinks what and why? This is important because the research should not merely, describe but seek to understand the behavior of people.

2. Future steps

1.1 Limitations

This study has faced certain limits that must be taken into account in order to improve the continuation of the dissertation.

First of all, the literature review is neither complete nor exhaustive. There are many articles related to the subject and it is difficult to study all the existing articles. Consequently, certain concepts or ideas could be studied in greater depth.

On the other hand, since there is no universal definition of a luxury hotel, the current study is too broad. Although, luxury hospitality is already one segment of the hotel industry, it is still too large. In fact, it encompasses a wide variety of categories, such as luxury urban hotels, luxury resorts, luxury boutique hotels, luxury heritage hotels and castles, and palaces. Therefore, although they belong to the “luxury category”, each type is different in terms of amenities and service delivery.

Thus, all these limitations lead to recommendations to continue and master the dissertation next year. In Master 2, a six-month internship need to be completed and it is mainly during this professional experience that the data will be collected through a qualitative method. Thus, from the moment the location of the internship will be known, that is the country and the host hotel, the scope can be reduced.

In addition, to collect data efficiently, the ideal place for an internship will be in a luxury hotel. However, it is important to take into that this sector is more difficult to access, and securing an internship is not guaranteed. Similarly, managers and employees may not always have the time to engage in discussions. Regarding the interviews with guests, they may not be willing to give up 30 minutes of their time to share their experiences and feelings, so it is normal to encounter refusals. Thus, it is important to note that while luxury hotels are at the heart of this research, conducting interviews and observations require rigor and significant time, which can be challenging.

Finally, another limitation is that technologies evolve rapidly and what appears innovative today may become standard practice tomorrow, so information change every time.

1.2 Research perspective and continuation in Master 2

In order to continue the research in Master 2, it is important to take into account all the limitations encountered so far to improve and precise the study. As explained before, the scope is too broad and it will be reduced according to the place of the internship. The reduction will enable to continue and deep the literature review. Moreover, digitalization and customer expectations preferences are subjects that evolve over time. Therefore, it is important to continue reading articles to update the information.

On another hand, the perspectives for next year will be to collect the data directly from the field. For that, it would be ideal to complete the internship in a luxury hotel in the Guest Experience department, to observe and interact closely with both guests and staff. The plan is to complete this experience abroad, in Asia, like in Singapore, to discover a new culture and analyze different guest expectations and behaviors in an international context. Having an experience in a luxury hotel chain of the Accor group, like Pullman or others, would allow for comparing the research and data collected data with that of other luxury hotels of this group, like Fairmont, Sofitel... Also, the internship location would offer the opportunity to compare the data collected with others several luxury hotels in the city. If the internship does not take place in a luxury hotel, the research will be adapted to the establishment where the internship will be conducted or, the study will focus on the luxury hotels in the city where the internship will take place.

3. Ethical considerations

When studying human experiences and organizational practices, research ethics is fundamental not only to ensure the protection, respect, and integrity of participants, but also to maintain the credibility and validity of the research (Allmark & Boote, 2009).

3.1 Informed consent and participant protection

With the participant's consent, interviews will be audio-recorded for later transcription and analysis. Participants will be fully informed about the research objectives, confidentiality measures, and their rights as research subjects before any interviews. A consent form will be provided and signed, with options for anonymity and withdrawal from the study clearly outlined.

On another hand, when conducting observations, an important ethical consideration concerns the extent to which the research objective should be disclosed to those being observed. For this study, hotel staff and management will be fully informed of the research objectives and methods. For guests observed in the hotel's public areas, a more nuanced approach will be adopted: any direct interaction will only occur with their consent. However, general observations of interactions between guests and technology will be conducted discreetly and without identifying and mentioning individuals in the research notes.

All collected individual information will be anonymized through pseudonyms and removal of identifying details.

3.2 Research Integrity and reciprocity

The researcher's position in luxury hospitality, necessitates acknowledgment of potential biases that may influence data interpretation. A reflexive approach will be maintained throughout the research process, documenting how background and experiences might shape understanding of the data.

Another fundamental ethical commitment is the transparency in reporting methods and findings without compromising confidentiality.

The research embraces the principle of reciprocity, providing added value to the hotel and participants through the sharing of anonymized analyses and recommendations.

In conclusion, first, this chapter has outlined the methodological approach to analyzing the complex relationship between digitalization and guest experience in luxury hospitality. This process of both thematic and comparison analysis will ensure a rigorous interpretation of the collected data. This methodology provides a solid framework for addressing the research problem and generating meaningful results. However, it is important to take into consideration the difficulties encountered this year, which are likely to modify certain aspects of the methodology and others.

PART 3 – CONCLUSION

This last part of the dissertation has established a robust methodological foundation for the empirical investigation of the research question. After detailing all the possible methods of data collection, the qualitative approach has been chosen and interviews and observations will be realized to collect efficient and complete data.

Also, these investigative techniques proposed will enable an in-depth exploration of how digital technologies can both enrich and challenge the customer experience in luxury hotels. At the same time, the methodology developed recognized the ethical considerations to guarantee respect for participants and the protection of sensitive data. Thus, this methodological framework, containing both primary and secondary data from scientific and academic articles, will provide answers to the hypotheses formulated.

However, the limitations encountered so far should be considered in order to improve and refine the research next year, such as narrowing the scope, which will also result in adjustments to the theoretical approach.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Base on this research, and the literature review, although there is no universal definition of a luxury hotel, one element is always present: the importance of the guest experience. Indeed, guests pay a high price not only for the comfort and amenities, but above all, for an authentic, memorable, personalized and emotionally rich experience. This experience relies heavily on human interaction, where the warmth of a smile or the assistance of attentive staff plays a fundamental role.

However, with the rapid evolution of digital technologies, particularly since the Covid 19, digitalization is becoming ubiquitous and deeply integrated in the society. Faced with new market trends, the rise of digitalization and ever-changing customer expectations, hotels need to adapt to remain competitive and meet these new demands. While the integration of digital tool can enhance the services and personalization, this phenomena is not without challenges and can contradict the essence of luxury: while on one hand digitalization enhances and personalize services, on the other hand, it can be perceived as a threat for employees and question the central role of staff.

In this context, a research question and hypotheses have been formulated. The objective of this study is therefore to analyze the duality engendered by digitalization in luxury hotels and to find a balance between innovation and tradition.

To answer this question and test the hypotheses, a qualitative approach will be appropriate, as the customer experience is subjective and requires a thorough understanding of customer motivations and behaviors, understand the “how” and “why”. Through observations and semi-structured interviews with various profiles, employees and guests, rich and comprehensive data will be collected.

The field of study will be, as far as possible, a luxury hotel, as part of the Master internship. This will enable focusing the analysis on a precise geographical perimeter. However, certain limitations must be taken into account: access to luxury hotels is restricted and both employees and customers have little time to participate in lengthy interviews. These constraints need to be anticipate to optimize the pursuit of research in Master 2

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ANNEXE A – Interview grid for guests

INTRODUCTION	PRESENTATION	GENERAL QUESTIONS	
The beginning of the interview aims to bring trust and confidence to the respondent. It will explained to him that it is anonymous and respect his confidentiality. Ask his consent to be recorded.	Explain to him the context: <i>"Currently in Master Tourism and Hospitality, I am doing a Master research about the impact of digitalization on guest experience in luxury hotels. Thank you for having accept to be interviewed. The goal of this semmi-directed interview would be to explore and understand your perception, and guest experience and feelings about digitalization in luxury hotels..."</i>	1. In your opinion, how do you define a luxury hotel and what are its values associated to it?	
		2. To what extent do you frequent luxury hotels? Which kind (independant or part of a chain)?	
		3. Can you tell me your age and where are you from?	
To what extent does digitalization enhance and challenge guest experience in luxury hotels?			
THEME	SUBTHEME	QUESTIONS	RELANCE
Hypothese 1: Digitalization enhances the ultra personalization of services in luxury hotels, leading to higher guest satisfaction	Digital personalization	1. Can you describe a moment when technology was useful to personalized your experience in a luxury hotel?	
		2. Which digital tools enhancing personalization have you been meet and used?	
		3. Do you think hotel understand better your preferences through digital tools?	

	Expectation vs Reality	1. How do you evaluate the digital tools to anticipate your needs to compare with the employees?	Does the digital personalization meet or exceed your expectations?
		2. Have you ever been disappointed by a digital service that felt too generic or impersonal?	
		3. Which difference can you make between personalization with AI and those with human attention?	Which one do you prefer? Can you give an exemple?
		4. How do you react when a digital system recommend you activities based on your profile and your previous behavior?	Do you think it's pertinent or intrusive?
	Influence on satisfaction and loyalty	1. Would a personalized digital experience make you more likely to return to a luxury hotel?	
		2. How important is personalization in your overall evaluation of luxury hotel?	
		3. Would you recommend a hotel more strongly if it used digital tools effectively for personalization?	
Hypothese 2: Despite the efficiency provided by digital tools, luxury hotels customers prefer human interactions	Value of human interaction	1. In your opinion, what role does staff interaction play in luxury hotel hotels and in influencing guest experience?	
		2. Do you believe the human presence is a key	

		differentiator for a luxury hotel comparing with other types?	
		3. How would you describe the staff's contribution to creating a memorable customer experience?	
	Authenticity and emotional bound	1. How do you describe the emotional connection that you feel during your journey in a luxury hotel?	Is this connection impacted by the use of digital tools?
		2. Do you think that a digitalized service can deliver the same warm and sens of hospitality that a human can do?	Explain why and describe
	Comparison between human and digital interactions	1. When you have the choice, do you prefer speaking to a person or using a digital tool for services like check-in?	Why? Can you explain and give an example
		2. Can you describe a situation when a human has enhanced your experience in luxury hotel?	What did it make it so special?
		3. According to you, is digital interaction more efficient than human interaction in luxury hotels?	But is efficiency the priority for you in luxury hotels?
		4. How do you feel when a service is 100% automatized compare to a service delivered by an employee?	Have you ever been frustrated? Do these emotions influence your perception on luxury hotels?

Hypothese 3: Cultural background and generation influence the adoption and comfort level with digital tools in luxury hotels	Convenience and comfort	1. Does the use of technology (apps, tablets, room controls...) make you stay more convenient?	Which tools do you use the most?
		2. How comfortable are you using these tools? Do you need assistance?	
	Generational attitudes	1. Do you consider yourself tech-savvy?	Why or why not?
		2. Do you think your preferences are different from those of younger/older guests than you?	
	Cultural impact	1. Do you think your cultural background influence your perception/expectations and the ease of use of digital tools?	
		2. Have you already travelled in other countries and stay at others luxury hotels? Did you see differences in implementation between these establishments?	If yes, in what ways? Can you develop where have you been and which hotel? Describe your perception
	Preferences	1. Have you ever felt a hotel was "too digital" or "not digital enough" for your needs?	Why?

ANNEXE B – Observation grid

General Information		
<i>Observational Date & Time:</i>		<i>Duration:</i>
<i>Location:</i>		<i>Type of observations (overt or covert):</i>
<i>Observer(s):</i>		
Guest-technology Interaction		
Observed element	Observations	Additonal notes
Type of technologies used	What type of digital tools guests are using? and in which area?	Check-in kiosk, mobile app...
Frequency of digital tool us	How often guest interact with them?	Difficulties in understanding or using digital tools
Ease of use	Do guests face any technical difficulties?	If some have difficulties in understanding or using digital tools
Frustrations or satisfaction	Are guests frustrated or satisfied with th technology?	Visbile emotions: frustration, satisfaction...
Wait times or interruptions	Are there signifiant wait times or technical isses?	Are they waiting for assistance?
Guest behavior and factors influencing		
Behavior based on age	Do young and old generations guest interact differently with technology?	Who use which tools? Who interact more with the satff?
Behavior base on culture	Are there differences in how guest from various cultural backgrounds use technology?	Who use which tools? Who interact more with the satff?
Comfort level with technology	Do guests seem comfortable or hesitant with digital tools?	
Guest-staff-technology		
Staff assistance	Does staff assists guests with digital tools?	Type of assistance, reactive?

Quality of interaction	Is the interaction between staff and guest positive?	Smiles?
Technology failure management	How does staff react when technology fails or have issues?	Solutions provided, attitude of the staff
Non-verbal cues (gestures, expressions)	Observe the staff gestures and facial expressions during interaction	Indicators of staff confidence and engagement
Staff behavior		
Staff engagement with technology	Is the staff use digital tool during guest interaction?	For ex, staff uses tablets to answer guest requests
Managing technology issues	How does staff handle a technology failure or malfunction?	Reactions
Technology and personalization	How is technology used to personalize guest experience?	Use guest data to tailored service?

TABLE OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AI: Artificial Intelligence

AR: Augmented Reality

BI: Behavioriam Intention

PU: Perceived Usefulness

PEUO: Perceived Ease of Use

TAM: Technology Acceptance Model

UTAUT: UniFIED Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology

VR: Virtual Reality

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BACK COVER

Abstract

This study examines the paradoxical impact of digitalization on the customer experience in luxury hospitality, a sector traditionally defined by excellence in personalized service and high-quality human interactions. In an era where luxury hotels are progressively integrating advanced digital technologies, this thesis analyzes the emerging tension between technological innovation and the preservation of the fundamental values of luxury. The central research question explores the extent to which digitalization both enhances and challenges the customer experience within this specific segment of the hospitality industry.

Structured around three complementary hypotheses, this study investigates how digitalization enables ultra-personalization of services while questioning the enduring preference for human interactions, and analyzes the influence of cultural and generational factors on technology adoption. The methodology adopted relies on a qualitative approach combining in-depth interviews with industry professionals, field observations in international establishments, and secondary data analysis from academic publications and industry reports.

This research contributes to the literature on innovation in luxury hospitality by proposing a nuanced analytical framework for assessing the impact of digitalization. It also offers industry professionals strategic recommendations for developing a balanced approach that capitalizes on the advantages of technology while preserving the authenticity and exclusivity that characterize the luxury hotel experience.

Keywords: Luxury hospitality, Digitalization, Customer experience, Personalization, Technological innovation, Human interactions

Résumé

Cette étude examine l'impact paradoxal de la digitalisation sur l'expérience client dans l'hôtellerie de luxe, secteur traditionnellement défini par l'excellence du service personnalisé et les interactions humaines de haute qualité. À l'ère où les établissements hôteliers de luxe intègrent progressivement des technologies numériques avancées, ce mémoire analyse la tension émergente entre innovation technologique et préservation des valeurs fondamentales du luxe. La problématique centrale explore dans quelle mesure la digitalisation améliore et simultanément défie l'expérience client dans ce segment spécifique de l'hôtellerie.

Structurée autour de trois hypothèses complémentaires, cette étude examine comment la digitalisation permet l'ultra-personnalisation des services tout en questionnant la persistance de la préférence pour les interactions humaines, et analyse l'influence des facteurs culturels et générationnels sur l'adoption technologique. La méthodologie adoptée repose sur une approche qualitative combinant entretiens approfondis avec des professionnels du secteur, observations sur le terrain dans des établissements internationaux, et analyse de données secondaires issues de publications académiques et rapports sectoriels.

Cette recherche contribue à la littérature sur l'innovation dans l'hôtellerie de luxe en proposant un cadre analytique nuancé pour évaluer l'impact de la digitalisation. Elle offre également aux professionnels du secteur des recommandations stratégiques pour développer une approche équilibrée qui capitalise sur les avantages de la technologie tout en préservant l'authenticité et l'exclusivité caractéristiques de l'expérience hôtelière de luxe.

Mots-clés : Hôtellerie de luxe, Digitalisation, Expérience client, Personnalisation, Innovation technologique, Interactions humaines