

A Management Point of View on the Innovative Use of Front Counter Technology in Hotels

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Abstract

The hotel industry places a significant emphasis on technological innovation as a critical strategic management issue. Despite this, much of the current research on hotel technology has concentrated on the processes of technology acceptance, despite the fact that technology adoption is required for the majority of staff. There is a gap in the academic understanding of the company-wide management processes and effects that are related with technological advancement. This study explored the effects affiliated with hotel front desk digitalization by a large and multi hotel corporation. This research has used the service innovation archetypes as a theoretical lens to conduct their investigation. Written interviews with 140 different hotel managers were carried out in accordance with a qualitative methodology. In order to analyse the data, a theme analysis in three steps was carried out. To be more specific, the sequential recruiting, learning, and deploying process that is connected with technological innovation, the outcomes of digitalization, and the experience value were investigated in order to establish a comprehensive operational framework. The framework gives users strategic information on how to successfully create and manage front desk technology.

Keywords: Hotel technology management, Hotel front desk technology, Technology innovation, Service ecosystem view.

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1. Introduction

Hotels have a significant source of sustainable competitive advantage in their reliance on technology (Alrawadieh et al., 2021). The introduction of new technologies results in an improvement in service quality, a rise in staff productivity, and a reduction in operating expenses (Chen, 2007). Research that has already been conducted has revealed that technology is revolutionizing the manner in which hotels engage with their consumers. Although they are of similar or even greater relevance, front desk services such as social have not gotten nearly as much academic attention as other service technologies (Reeves, 2020).

In particular, front desk technologies allow personnel to access huge volumes of client information and integrate that information for the purpose of delivering services to customers in a manner that is both efficient and effective, therefore saving both operational time and expenditure. Consumers of hotels that use efficient front desk technology enjoy experiences with personalised service that are both more prompt and more effective (Lee et al., 2010). It is important to note that employees are required to utilize these technologies. On the other hand, the existing hotel technology study has concentrated primarily on the adoption behavior of employees in contexts where it is elective (Reeves, 2020).

In addition, while the majority of the prior research has focused on the technology adoption processes, it is important to note that having a basic comprehension of these processes is only the first step toward having a comprehensive comprehension of the managerial and operational effects that such technologies have (Shin et al., 2019). Therefore, the objective of this study

was to establish and evaluate, from the point of view of service innovation, an enterprise-wide strategic framework for front desk technology (Bardi, 2003; Sigala, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to make three substantial additions to the existing body of research on hotel technology. A large-scale qualitative research of hotel managers was conducted with the purpose of understanding their perspectives on the implications of front counter innovation on hotel service organizations. This study is the major contribution of this article. In order to analyze the effectiveness of hotel technology and to give guidance for prospective technological efforts, it is vital to have an understanding of how hotel management view and incorporate technology into their businesses (Belias et al., 2019). The fundamental conceptual framework for this research was service innovation, more specifically the service innovation model. Within the confines of this structure, a number of open-ended questions were posed in order to investigate the effects that technological innovation has had on the procedures, products, perceptions, and structures of the front counter (Astuti et al., 2018).

The second significant contribution of this research is a management framework for analysing the effects of front counter technical innovation. This study is an exploratory study; thus, the contribution comes in the form of a framework. This framework not only provides useful guidelines for the successful development and operation of hotel front desk technology, but it also suggests an action plan for future studies into the impact of front counter innovation on the operations of hotels, the employees who work in hotels, and the guests who stay in hotels. More specifically, given that the implementation of a new technology in the workplace can have an effect on widening human resources management practices, the purpose of this study is to provide an initial insight into the effects of front counter technology just on mechanisms of technology implementation as well as the hiring and training of front desk employees. In addition, the purpose of this article was to determine the primary outcomes of technological innovation as well as the impacts of technological innovation on the quality-of-service experiences. In conclusion, this paradigm may also give direction for the development of emerging technologies (Shin et al., 2019).

The third and last part of this research is an investigation of the management's perspectives of how front counter novelty the service experiences provided by hotels. This study sought a more comprehensive operational perspective of technology effects on both customer and employee service experiences. This is in contrast to the majority of previous hospitality research, which has narrowly focused on client service interactions (Akgunduz et al., 2022). The fundamental idea behind customer database technologies is that data obtained from past encounters with a particular guest as well as from interactions with other guests who are comparable to that guest can assist service organizations in developing more personalised thoughts and feelings. In this research, the perspectives of management on this procedure and its effects on the pleasure and joy of customers were investigated (Shin et al., 2019).

This paper is organized in the following format: Section 2 is providing a Literature review - technology found in hotel front counters. Section 3 explains and presents the method applied for this research study. Section 4 is dedicated for conclusion and future research works.

2. Literature review - technology found in hotel front counters

Historically, numerous hotels having fallen behind some other service and industrial businesses in terms of their use of technology; hotel technology was not viewed as a strategic issue until very recently (Shin et al., 2019). The hospitality industry of today, on the other hand, is characterized by the widespread use of service technology as an integral component of ordinary daily operations, with the goal of improving both the quality of services and the overall efficiency of those operations.

Nearly every hotel corporation requires front counter employees to utilize an advance technology when they way to offer for the purpose of processing check in as well as check out, allocating a bed, authorizing a key, and attaining guest information. This applies to all of the aforementioned tasks as well as the acquisition of guest information. Implementing technology in a way that is effective and efficient is an essential component of running a successful hotel. This allows hotel management to efficiently complete their jobs while also providing excellent service to their customers (Vallen & Vallen, 2009).

In general, there are five distinct areas that make up hotel technology. These categories include the front desk technology, the back-office technology, the meeting and event management system, the dining and banquet management systems, and the client related interfacing technology (Iranmanesh et al., 2022). In this context, the term "front desk" refers to the service interfaces that are located at the primary point of contact between staff members and clients, and which facilitate the generation and exchange of value. The term "front desk technologies" refers to the numerous types of technology that are utilized by front desk staff members to provide services to consumers. It is crucial for effectively managing customer care experiences to make advantage of this technology, which is often employed by workers working at the front desk, cashiers, cleaning, and reservation departments. It is closely related with key moments of truth that occur during service contacts. For example, many hotel clients form lasting impressions of a hotel during their first meetings with front desk workers (Leung, 2019).

The ways in which companies and organizations generate value are strongly impacted by developments in front desk technology and gadgets. It is vital to evaluate the effects of technologies from the viewpoint of the whole firm if one want to have a complete understanding of the value and effects of technologies. The relationship between the firm and technology in the pyramid model may provide significant benefits to a number of different hotel operational procedures, including as property maintenance, data management, and yield management, when technology is integrated in the workplace. Importantly, innovations in technology often have an effect on HRM practices. Although some earlier research has concentrated on the effects of information technologies on traditional human resource (HR) functions (for example, compensation and staffing), the effects of information technologies can broaden to widening HR practices, such as employee hiring, training, and retention. For instance, many hotels place an emphasis on candidates' technical capabilities during the hiring process for frontline staff. However, this requirement can be waived in the event that a new technology is simple to master, which will result in a decreased focus on candidates' technical capabilities and an increased focus on candidates' service skills and inclination. Therefore, enabling a stronger emphasis on applicants' attitudes and mentalities about service (Moyeenudin et al., 2018).

In addition, the technology at the front desk of a hotel is an essential component of the service experiences of both the customers and the employees. Because to the proliferation of technology, traditionally "high-touch and low-tech" service experiences have been turned into "low-touch and high-tech" service interactions (Ekhsan et al., 2020). However, emerging technologies have the potential to deliver greater value for both customers and frontline personnel, as well as offer more engaging and tailored service experiences for consumers (Shoukry & Aldeek, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for more study that focuses on the emotions and experiences of front desk staff with technology in order to understand the effects that it has on productivity and client service interactions (Shin et al., 2019). On the other hand, there has only been a little amount of study done on how front desk technology affects the quality of service (Patriani et al., 2018). It is necessary to conduct more research using a more all-encompassing framework in order to get an understanding of the influence that technological innovation has on the service experiences of both customers and employees.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to investigate the effects of front counter technology innovation on the processes, outputs, experiences, and systems.

When it comes to new service development (NSD), the process-based archetype considers service to be a process. The transformation of service is the primary emphasis of this archetype. A transformation of service is any change in the process of creating a service that has an effect on the value in-use of the service, such as on the roles, skills, habits, or behaviors of a company's clients or workers. The process-based archetype can, in general, incorporate innovation antecedents, innovative service performance measures, and customer satisfaction. These three types of factors are cited in the following research: When seen through the lens of technological innovation, the process-based archetype may be understood to refer to advances in technology-based processes that improve the functionality of already existing services. The current research focuses on recent developments in front desk technology and the corresponding effects such developments have had on other aspects of hotel operations, such as the recruiting, training, and implementation of staff members (Cass, 2019).

The output-based paradigm of service innovation often investigates the impact of a new service offering on management performance (such as profitability or sales impact), as well as effectiveness. The most important thing that this typology has contributed is the idea that service innovation should be seen as an economic notion in terms of quantitative accomplishments. According to this typology, service innovation benefits operations as well as stakeholders, which include consumers and staff, since value is incorporated in the service offerings via service exchange (Dai et al., 2019). The output-based paradigm of hotel front counter technology places an emphasis on the improvement in hotel service performance that may result from the use of new front counter technologies for both clients and service providers. As a result, the primary emphasis of this investigation is on how advances in technology at the front desk have contributed to improvements in the effectiveness of work processes, interactions with customers, and overall service levels.

Given that the predominant emphasis of previous hotel technology research has been on technology adoption and efficiency, process- and output-based paradigms have been the primary topics of investigation. Comparatively, the experience and organizational archetypes have not gotten nearly as much attention from researchers interested in innovation. The system dominant reasoning and the service ecosystem may be thought of as the theoretical basis for the subjective and systemic archetypes. The experiential archetype is founded on a phenomenological regard to the individual and personal service experiences; the objective is to get an understanding of how consumers perceive the experiential value that is co-created by technological innovation (Chiang et al., 2021).

There should be a greater emphasis in hospitality research on how the experience value of a new hotel technology is founder for consumers and workers. To continue along this line of thought, the implementation of front counter technology will have an effect on the service experiences of both customers and front desk employees, resulting in the creation of experiential value for both groups (Elziny & Mohamed, 2022). Customers at hotels, for instance, may be able to enjoy both quicker procedures and more personalized care via more contact with staff members as a result of the increased productivity made possible by technological advances at the front desk.

Because no one archetype by itself can offer a full framework, it is essential to take into account the four archetypes and comprehend the connections that exist between them in order to ensure the effective adoption of new technologies and the development of innovative services. As a result, this study makes use of the four archetypes of service innovation to contribute to a better

understanding of the management processes and effects connected with front counter technical innovation in the hospitality sector.

3. Method

In light of the exploratory character of this study, a qualitative method was used in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which front desk technology is influential. An internet front counter software solution that was built in 2016 by the corporate IT team with the active involvement of workers was only recently put into use at one of the world's most prominent hotel chains. The new technology incorporates a number of different systems, such as communication, property administration, cycle lane, sales management, and management of incentive systems. Because it was a relatively new tool that had only been in use for a little over a year, it presented a chance for management to evaluate how they had responded to technological advancements and how those advancements had affected customer service.

Six open-ended interview questions were used to collect data on the procedure, production, and experiential archetypes; the systemic archetype was investigated by evaluating the relationships between the three archetypes. These findings were based on conversations with the senior vice president of technology for the company.

The people that participated in the research were hotel managers from a prominent hotel chain in the USA. This group included general managers, lodging line managers, and the front counter supervisors. Only management level personnel were included in this research since its primary objective was to determine how the implementation of new front counter technologies will affect the functioning of the hotel as a whole. These managers were given the opportunity to participate in an open-ended interview conducted via Qualtrics. For each question, they were given the opportunity to provide up to three replies. An email study ad was distributed by the hotel business headquarters to the choices with regard at each hotel property. The email included a request for the managers to voluntarily take part in the research as well as a link to the Structured questionnaire survey that was engrained in the advertisement.

Study respondents were sought using this method. After a week had passed, the hotel's corporate office followed up with a reminder email that was also sent out through email. There was a total of 140 respondents who finished the survey, representing a response rate of 31%. The survey advertising was sent to 600 hotel managers all across the globe. Participation in the survey was completely optional, and there was no monetary reward offered for doing so.

There were 1004 response comments totalling 19,010 words that were left in response to the solution answers for the seven questions. In accordance with the methodology, a three-step thematic analysis was carried out for each of the research questions with the use of the qualitative analysis tool.

4. Conclusion

Hotels that want to be creative in their operations and the quality of the services they provide often do things like introduce new technologies. Despite this, there has only been a little amount of study done in the direction of gaining an all-encompassing comprehension of the management processes and repercussions of technological innovation. In light of the fact that the front office of a hotel serves as the "nerve center" for the hotel's services, it is essential to investigate the holistic and integrated managerial processes as well as the associated effects of the front side table in order to have a fundamental understanding of the strategic repercussions of effective front counter technical innovation. The framework that has been provided gives a

methodology for how to create and operate front counter technology by critically assessing specific technology operation procedures, outcome, and sensory values. This may be done in order to improve the overall guest experience.

This project, which is in the form of an exploratory study, aims to make three substantial additions to the body of research already done on hotel technology. Technology innovation in the workplace may provide considerable insight into service effectiveness and experiences, although most previous hospitality research has concentrated on technology implementation (adoption) procedures by concentrating on the interaction between technology and workers. Technology innovation in the workplace can offer significant insight into service effectiveness and experiences. It is required to comprehend how hotel operators interpret and incorporate technology into their company, a major qualitative study of hoteliers was carried out with the purpose of comprehending management perspectives of the consequences of front counter technology innovation on hotel service companies. By adopting a viewpoint based on service innovation archetypes, this method offers a strategic perspective on hotel front-counter technology applicable throughout the whole organization. The classification of archetypes into process, product, emotional, and systemic provides a wider management perspective into the effective management and growth of front office technology.

Second, the research offers an organizational framework for understanding the effects of front counter technology innovation and offers suggestions for the effective management and development of front desk technology. Both of these aspects are included in the study. In particular, the findings of this study provided more evidence that simplicity of operation and utility play an essential part in the technology adoption process when viewed from a qualitative perspective. According to the TAM, consumer adoption of new technology is significantly impacted by both the perceived ease of use and the perceived utility of the innovation. It is argued that front office systems should be simple and straightforward to use. The findings of this study not only corroborate the findings of earlier research, but they also identify additional aspects that contribute to user acceptance that is effective.

For instance, a user-friendly design and functionalities that integrate with one another make it possible for workers to utilize the technology without encountering any difficulties. This feature enhances the flexibility of employee roles; at peak periods, hotels may effectively deal with front desk visitors by sending personnel from those other departments to engage in the front counter department. In addition to this, the web-based integrative platform improves information accessibility, which leads to improved levels of self-assurance and knowledge about the services provided. The quicker transaction times made possible by technology contribute to increased levels of workforce productivity and effectiveness (Manoharan et al., 2019). Not only is it necessary to take into account these aspects for efficient technology operation at the front desk, but doing so is also essential for effective technology development.

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