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HOSPITALITY IN A HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATION OF THE GUEST-TECH-HOST RELATIONSHIP

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PhD

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HOSPITALITY IN A HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATION OF THE GUEST-TECH-HOST RELATIONSHIP

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## Abstract

Technology has changed the landscape of hospitality in terms of its operation and the guest-host experience. One of the most significant changes is hotel guest empowerment with the use of self-service technologies, blurring the line between guest and host. As technology constantly develops, the interactions and relationships between people also evolve. An area which is currently underexplored within literature is the role of technology within the guest-host relationship. This thesis explores the high-touch, high-tech approach to hospitality service from the perspective of hotel employees and guests. This exploration allows for an understanding of how the relationship between the guest and host is changing.

To understand the relational ties between both guests and hosts, actor network theory and role theory were adopted as a theoretical and methodological lens for the study. To fully explore the guest-host relationship, interviews with both hotel customers and hotel employees were conducted and analysed using thematic analysis. Actor network theory mapping following data collection provides a visualisation of the network that exists between guests, technology, and hosts.

The findings reveal how guests, hosts and technology co-exist, collaborate, and navigate the hospitality servicescape. This discussion provides an understanding of guest and host perceptions and preferences of hotel service, and what role technology plays in the interactions. By understanding how the pre-determined roles of the guest and the host are being modified by technology, the researcher posits a guest-tech-host relationship that exists in a high-tech, high-touch hospitality landscape.

The researcher presents the concept of the guest-tech-host relationship as an original contribution to knowledge, adding to the current body of hospitality literature. A guest-tech-host service dynamic is also presented as a conceptual model. The managerial implications of this research will also allow hospitality organisations to further understand the human implications of implementing technologies within their service environments.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my late grandfather, Thomas Henry Forsyth. He always believed in me and told me I could achieve anything I wanted. As always, he was right.

## Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 09/11/20.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is 80,027 words.

Name: Kate Danielle Harland

Signature:

Date: 04/02/2022

# **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **1.1 Chapter overview**

This thesis explores the role of technology within the guest-host relationship in the context of high-tech, high-touch hospitality. This chapter will outline the overall topic, rationale, and scope of the research. The topic of study will be introduced, offering a view of the literature around high-tech, high-touch hospitality and the guest-host relationship. The researcher will then outline the rationale for the topic selection, and justification for study. The research aim, objectives and questions will be detailed following a discussion around gaps within, and opportunities to expand, the current body of knowledge. The chapter will conclude with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

## **1.2 Research background and rationale**

This body of research is concerned with hospitality service, technological developments, and the guest-host relationship. The development of the high-tech, high-touch concept was first introduced by Naisbitt (1984) as technologies that would be accompanied by human touch. Previous studies have considered that the high-tech, high-touch approach to service is dependent upon supporting technologies being part of the high-tech approach (Ritter & Walter, 2006). However, with the development of more guest-facing technologies within hospitality such as self-service kiosks and mobile applications, the contemporary high-tech element of the approach is more concerned with the overall consumer experience as opposed to only focusing on more operational tasks (Law, Leung, & Chan, 2020). Moreover, hospitality industry press focuses on the future of high-

tech hospitality and the consequential impact on the touch element of service (Gandhi & Dube, 2020). Therefore, for the purpose of this study the researcher is concerned with self-service technologies that guests engage with in place of, or to supplement, personal service in hospitality (such as kiosks, mobile applications, and touchscreens).

Although implementation of self-service technologies is growing in hospitality, there is little research that is specific to the hospitality industry that aids an understanding of the technological service progress in the field (Shin & Perdue, 2019). However, since the Covid-19 pandemic, there is emerging literature on the benefits of contactless service and predicting future practices in hospitality (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Hao & Chon, 2022).

There are three main progression review papers that are considered comprehensive by the researcher, to give an overview of the technological developments in the field. The first paper is a seminal paper by Buhalis and Law (2008), detailing the developments over twenty years in tourism management. This paper details the revolutionary technological progress within tourism and hospitality, which allowed the industry to be managed more effectively, and more accessible to customers. Navío-Marco, Ruiz-Gómez, and Sevilla-Sevilla (2018) continued the research of Buhalis and Law ten years later, reviewing more contemporary developments within technology, and how further customer involvement and engagement was key in those developments, particularly in smartphone development and eTourism research. Another key paper reviewing the major research within the field of progression in information and communication technology within tourism and hospitality by Law et al. (2020) covers 288 papers published between 2014 and 2017.

Research concerning technology has been identified as having a key influence on understanding customer relationships and behaviours (Salazar, 2018). From a customer

perspective, the literature concerned with self-service technologies in service industries covers mainly technology adoption and acceptance (Kaushik & Kumar, 2018; Lee, 2016; Lu, Mao, Wang, & Hu, 2015), co-creation (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Chathoth, Altinay, Harrington, Okumus, & Chan, 2013; Hilton & Hughes, 2008; Kelly, Lawlor, & Mulvey, 2017; Sarmah, Rahman, & Kamboj, 2017), and service evaluations (Beatson, Lee, & Coote, 2007; Robertson, McDonald, Leckie, & McQuilken, 2016; Taillon & Huhmann, 2019). However, from an employee perspective, the literature has a different focus, mainly concerned with job satisfaction (Barnes, Collier, Ponder, & Williams, 2013), job performance (Baradarani & Kilic, 2018), and technology acceptance (Montargot & Ben Lahouel, 2018). There is very little research that focuses on the employee and self-service technology use in hospitality, or the employee role in the guest-host relationship, further supporting the intention of this study.

While the aforementioned perspectives add context to the overall study and will therefore be included in the literature review, it is insufficient as a body of literature to fully understand the development of the guest-host relationship due to the implementation of self-service technologies. Although the studies concerned with technological developments in services are accelerating, there is still a scarcity in literature specifically in hospitality (Law et al., 2020). In a comprehensive review of technological advances in hospitality and tourism studies, Law et al. (2020) stated there was a definitive split between supplier based and customer based research. Further, Vakulenko, Hellström, and Oghazi (2018) describe research concerned with self-service technologies as being mainly in one of three main categories; technology, customer or service oriented research. However, there is a noticeable lack of research that considers perspectives from both customers and employees or organisations in the same study.

Another observation is the frequency of theories used in hospitality studies around IT and ICT developments, with most studies using technology acceptance theory, followed by motivation theory and theory of reasoned action. Surprisingly, of the 288 papers reviewed, 52% had no underpinning theory to the study (Law et al., 2020). There is therefore an opportunity to broaden the theoretical scope to understand the current landscape of hospitality from a different perspective. Technology adoption was highlighted as a primary focus of research from a consumer perspective, particularly around attitudes and motivations of use of self-service technologies. What is not covered in this review are the relationships or roles of either customers or employees within hospitality in relation to technological advance and change. Of the eleven theories mentioned in the paper, actor network theory and role theory are not mentioned as an underpinning theory of research, therefore presenting an opportunity to study self-service technologies within the field of hospitality from a new perspective.

From an industry perspective, the hospitality industry has a reputation for being slow in investing and adopting technological advances (King, 2019). Law and Jogaratnam (2005) predicted a 'technology-based revolution', claiming that hotel managers should be prioritising technology in their future strategy to remain competitive. In a review of digital developments within customer services, a Deloitte report (2019) outlined the importance of placing the customer at the centre of the operation (Deloitte, 2019). A previous report in the series outlined three disruptive forces within this field; rapid technological adoption, changing customer behaviour and increasing competition (Deloitte, 2013). The report calls for a need for the use of omni-channel customer interaction, whereby there is simultaneous use of multiple touchpoints within the service journey, offering customers to engage with the organisation in various ways. Enabling this requires consistency across

touchpoints, customer driven design and creating memorable experiences. This is not a new concept to customer services or the service industry, however when applied to digital platforms and applications, it is extremely important.

The American Hotel & Lodging Association Lodging Survey (AHLA, 2019) detailed the highest implementation of mobile applications and mobile check-in is between the upscale and midscale hotel chains, with the least in the luxury and independent sectors. Mobile applications and technologies to support mobile key entry can be costly to an independent business, however for the luxury hotel market, this figure raises the question if there is a business, or customer need for mobile capabilities within this sector.

It is evident that there is very little research focusing around fully understanding the service encounter based on self-service technology use and the effect on the hotel service industry (Law et al., 2020). There is also little research that attains to the high-tech, high-touch paradigm applied to hotels, and the outcome of this as assumed by a guest or employee. Harris (2007) states that “it is the actions of people inside an organisation that feed the experience of those outside the company” (Harris, 2007, p. 113). This demonstrates that there is an impact to be investigated on a service delivery level from the view of the employee.

A study on customer preferences of self-service and personal service gives insight into the augmented service encounter within hospitality, detailing the practicalities of use of self-service technologies (Kattara & El-Said, 2013). However, what is not fully known, is how digital services are impacting the relationships between the hotel staff and the hotel guest, and it is not yet understood how this dynamic is affected by the implementation and use of digital services (Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree & Bitner 2000). This raises the

question - how can personalised, memorable hotel service be produced and consumed digitally, and what does it mean for both customers and employees.

Work by Bitner, Brown and Meuter (2000) focused on technology infusion in service encounters, the changing nature of services and looking at how service can be improved with the use of technology. This research does call for further study in technology use within the service encounter, however twenty years on from publication, the servicescape is very different in terms of technology offering there is still a need for further understanding. As technology progresses, research concerned with the effects of technological developments needs to develop with it. With the potential that service robots are predicted to be commonplace in hospitality by 2030 (Fusté-Forné & Jamal, 2021), it is essential that there is a clear understanding of how the current technologies are impacting roles and relationships within hospitality, before exploring the new wave of technological offerings in the hospitality service field.

### **1.3 Research aim, objectives, and questions**

It is evident that there is recognition of self-service technologies and technological advances that are changing the way in which customers engage with organisations. However, there is insufficient literature focused on hospitality organisations, particularly offering a perspective of both customers and employees and their developing relationship. The position of the researcher for this study is that hospitality has already advanced to high-tech, high-touch practices, or at least has the potential to. Consequently, this position offers a fresh perspective on how the guest-host relationship is viewed in the current hospitality landscape.

The overall aim of the research is to explore the role of technology within the guest-host relationship in the context of high-tech, high-touch hospitality. To meet the overall aim of the study, the researcher proposes the following research questions, based on four key areas of research: high-tech, high-touch hospitality, self-service technologies, role change and the guest-host relationship. The research questions are detailed in table 1 below.

*Table 1: Research questions*

<b>RQ1</b>	<b>High-tech, high-touch hospitality</b> From the perspectives of both guests and employees, how desirable is a high-tech, high-touch approach to service in hotels?
<b>RQ2</b>	<b>Self-service technologies</b> To what extent is the use of self-service technologies and digital services changing the hospitality landscape and the way both guests and hosts experience hospitality?
<b>RQ3</b>	<b>Role change</b> What perceptions of roles exist between service employees and guests due to self-service technology use within hospitality?
<b>RQ4</b>	<b>Guest-host relationship</b> To what extent can technology be considered to have an active role within the guest-host relationship?

In order to achieve this, the study will be guided by the following the research objectives:

- Provide a critical review of literature to understand the current landscape of hospitality service, the guest-host relationship and self-service technology usage.
- Design a qualitative study to explore the perceptions and experiences of both guests and hosts of technology within the hospitality environment.
- Following reflexive thematic analysis of the data present the findings of the study, offer an understanding of guest and host experiences of personal and self-service in hospitality and the role of technology within the service encounter.
- Explore the concept of a guest-tech-host relationship through a high-tech, high-touch hospitality lens, providing an original contribution to the current body of knowledge.

#### **1.4 Anticipated contribution**

There is a need to re-think the traditional view of the hospitality landscape, particularly in the sense of how technology has changed that landscape. The very nature of interactions in hospitality are interpersonal, therefore between people, and embedded in social activity between guests and hosts (O'Gorman, 2010). However, given the technological advances in self-service technologies and mobile technologies, hospitality service has developed in a way that involves technological interactions. There are both theoretical and managerial contributions from this study. In terms of theoretical contribution, the researcher will be advancing the current body of knowledge on the guest-host relationship and the role of technology within hospitality, which are detailed here.

The study of self-service technologies in hospitality settings is scant in the current body of literature (Shiwen, Kwon, & Ahn, 2021). Given the rapid implementation of self-service technologies in hospitality, the researcher will consider technology to have an active role in the guest-host relationship. The researcher will adopt an actor network theory and role

theory lens, offering an understanding of the interactions between guests, hosts, and technology within high-tech, high-touch hospitality spaces. This study will be the first to explore the relationship with this perspective by using both actor network theory and role theory as a lens to explore specifically the developing relationships between guests, employees, and technology.

This is also a study that explores the relationship between guests, employees, and technology as a network, which is not fully explored in current literature. Current literature takes a view from either service employees or guests as a single perspective, whereas there is no definitive study which considers both groups and including technology as the third group within the service interaction. By understanding the relationship from both a guest and host perspective, it offers a study that appreciates the three actors within the relationship, rather than focusing on either customers or employees.

Following a review of the literature and analysing the findings, an intended key contribution of the thesis is the development of the guest-tech-host service dynamic, a detailing the roles and key interactions within the hospitality service network. It is hoped the exploration of the tech-touch service offering in hospitality and the interactions between guests and hosts with technology will be a key contribution to the current body of knowledge, providing an understanding of how self-service technology has augmented both the service environment and the service encounter. Further, it is intended to offer insight to the circumstances where technology is required, and the service judgements that customers make ultimately deciding on their level of either human or digital interaction, or a mix of both. The guest-tech-host service dynamic is detailed in section

7.6. The model is also key to further understanding the guest-host relationship and subsequently the guest-tech-host relationship, another key contribution.

In addition to understanding high-tech, high-touch hospitality, the research focus is also on the relationships that are formed between the guests and hosts and understanding the role of technology within that relationship. Therefore, it is the researcher's intention to explore the guest-tech-host relationship, adding a new perspective to the current body of literature. The researcher proposes that the traditional hospitality guest-host relationship is reframed to include technology within the relationship, given the guest expectation and reliance of self-service technologies being available detailed in the findings. The guest-tech-host relationship is detailed in section 7.5.

The managerial implications of this study will offer the hospitality industry insight to the experiences and feelings of hotel employees and hotel customers and the use of self-service technology. From an employee perspective, the study will offer an understanding of how self-service technologies affect their role and how they feel about the additional responsibilities of managing those technologies. From a customer perspective, there will be an exploration of customer experiences regarding both self-service and personal interaction. This will allow hospitality organisations to further understand the influence of implementing self-service technologies within hotels, the impact on the role of employees, and the potential blend of technology and human touch within the service delivery process. The contributions of the study will be revisited in the conclusion chapter at the end of the thesis in section 8.3.

## **1.5 Thesis structure**

This chapter has outlined the background and rationale for the study, as well as provide context for the overall aim, research objectives and questions that will be considered.

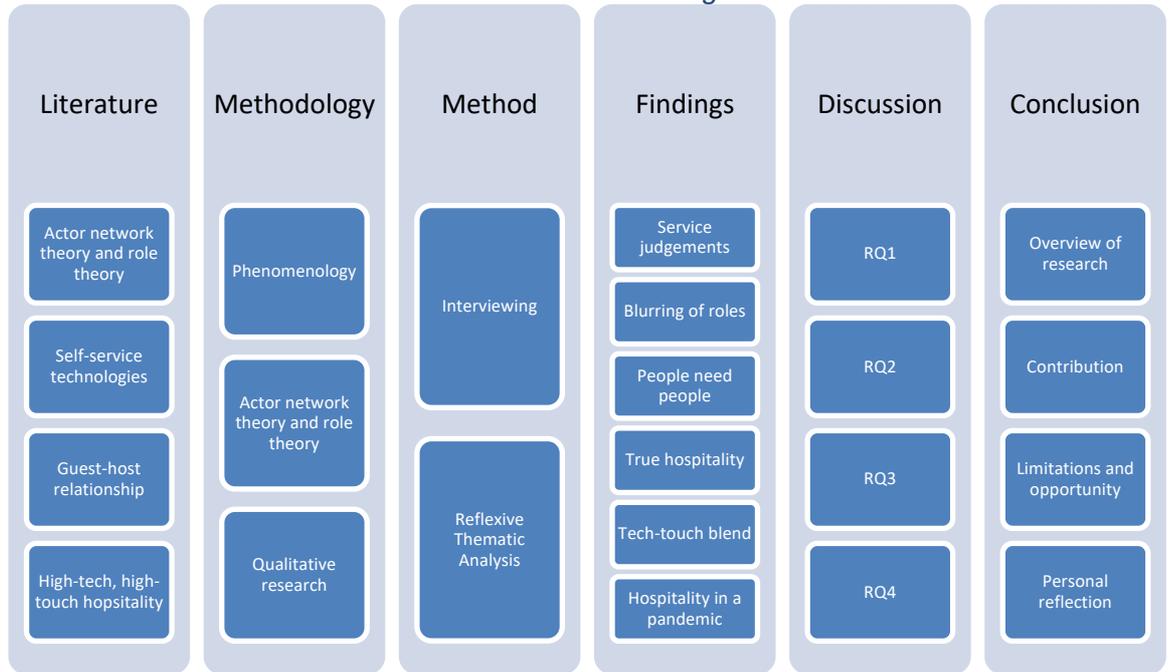
Next, chapters two, three and four provide a comprehensive literature review will scope the current body of knowledge in hospitality, self-service technology developments and guest-host relationship literature.

Once an understanding of literature is complete, the research questions are reviewed to understand the motivations of the researcher and the guidance from the literature.

Chapter five begins with outlining the adopted methodological approach of the study, before detailing the chosen qualitative method of enquiry. The findings are presented in chapter six following thematic analysis of the data, structured by the main themes uncovered in the analysis. Chapter seven provides a discussion synthesising the literature and findings, addressing the research questions of the study.

The study concludes with chapter eight, addressing the research objectives, as well as detailing the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the research. An overview of the thesis structure is detailed in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Overview of thesis structure



## 1.6 Chapter summary

This study therefore aims to provide an understanding of the guest-host relationship in high-tech, high-touch hospitality. In particular, the role of technology within the guest-host relationship will be explored, adding to the current body of literature around technological developments in hospitality. This chapter has outlined the scope, focus and intention of the study. The overall aim and research objectives have provided context and direction, with the research questions addressing a gap in knowledge, and advancing the current body of knowledge. The chapter concluded with an overview of the structure of the thesis.

## **Chapter Two: Framing the study**

### **2.1 Chapter overview**

This chapter will outline the underpinning theory of the overall study. Actor network theory and role theory have been identified by the researcher as being an appropriate lens for the study. The selected theories will be summarised with a review of related literature, how they can inform methodologies, and the limitations of the theories will be explored. A discussion on how these theories can be linked and how they will underpin the research will conclude the discussion.

### **2.2 Theory selection**

The study of self-service technologies has been diverse over the last three decades, with various approaches to understanding the phenomena of self-service technology use such as adoption, how it is integrated into service delivery, the perceptions of technology use, and the quality of technology-aided service. Different perspectives can be adopted for study, either from the customer or employee perspective, or focusing on the development of the technology. Given the rapid development of technology in the last two decades, and the increase in technology aided service integrated in hotels, there is therefore a need for a study to take a perspective that includes both customers and employees, as well as considering technology within the scope of the study.

In a systematic literature review of self-service technologies, Vakulenko et al. (2018) highlighted three main categories of theories that are most used when researching this

topic. They included technology-oriented theories such as technology acceptance (Davis, 1989) and technology readiness (Parasuraman, 2000), customer-oriented theories such as social impact theory (Latané, 1996), and service-oriented theories such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985) and service dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Although these theories are key in understanding self-service technologies within service encounters, they are not appropriate theoretical frameworks for this study, particularly the guest-host relationship. However, these theories will be revisited in the literature review in terms of how they contribute to the overall body of knowledge applicable to this study.

As this study focuses on the relationships of people and the interplay of self-service technologies, customer-oriented theories would allow the researcher to explore the changing nature of relationships and understand how new relationships are formed with technology. However, this study is also concerned with an employee perspective, therefore the adoption of an underpinning theory would need to allow for the dual nature of the research.

It is already understood within the field of study how people use technology in service environments, how technology can affect service quality and outcomes, however studies of interpersonal relationships are scant (Shin & Perdue, 2019). Conceptualisation of customer-service provider relationships when impacted by self-service technology use is an under-researched area (Kelly et al., 2017). Within the body of literature that focuses on the use, perceptions of, and interactions with self-service technologies, there are many different theories that are used to underpin relevant studies in the field (Vakulenko et al., 2018). It is important at this stage to note the multi-disciplinary nature of the selected

theories, which are across social sciences, information systems, psychology and economics. Williams, Nadin, and Windebank (2012) state that there is not just one theorisation for the study of self-service technologies, but that all theories are relevant and can be applied. In the context and focus of the current study, both actor network theory and role theory have been chosen by the researcher as an appropriate theoretical lens for enquiry. The adoption of both actor network theory and role theory as one perspective on a study will allow both the interpersonal relationships of guests, hosts and self-service technology to be explored, as well as consider the roles (and any subsequent change in roles due to the influence of technology) within this relationship. The theories will be discussed in further detail, addressing applicability to the study.

### **2.3 Actor network theory**

Embedded within social sciences, Bruno Latour alongside other academics (Bruno & Callon, 1981; Law, 1992) developed actor network theory over many years, combining both science and technology, concerned with the study of relationships. Payne (2017) describes actor network theory as “a socio-material approach which allows for the consideration of both human and inanimate entities in a social context” (Payne, 2017, p. 118). Seeking to explore the processes by which actors through a variety of processes come to form activity networks of various kinds, this theory defines and describes relational ties between human and non-human actors. The key concepts within actor network theory are presented in table 2 below.

*Table 2: Key Concepts in Actor-Network Theory (Bengtsson & Eriksson Lundström, 2013, pp. 2-3)*

Concept	Definition
Actor	“Any element which bends space around itself, makes other elements dependent upon itself and translates their will into the language of it’s own” (Callon & Latour, 1981).
Actor-network	“Heterogeneous network of aligned interests, including people, organisations and standards” (Walsham & Sahay, 1999).
Translation	The process of the alignment of the interests of a diverse set of actors with the interests of the focal actor (Callon, 1986; Walsham, 1997).
Problematisation	The first moment of translation, during which a focal actor defines identities and interests of other actors that are consistent with its own interests, and establishes itself as an obligatory passage point (OPP), thus rendering itself indispensable (Callon, 1986).
Obligatory passage point	A situation that has to occur for all of the actors to be able to achieve their interests, as defined by the focal actor (Callon, 1986).
Interessement	The second moment of translation, which involves negotiating with actors to accept definition of the focal actor (Callon, 1986).
Enrolment	The third moment of translation, wherein other actors in the network accept (or get aligned to) interests defined for them by the focal actor (Callon, 1986).
Inscription	A process of creation of artifacts that would ensure the protection of certain interests (Latour, 1992).
Irreversibility	“Degree to which it is subsequently impossible to go back to a point where alternative possibilities exist” (Walsham & Sahay, 1999).

In the case of actor network theory, both human and non-humans are then considered to be objects, as opposed to being separate entities. It is then the relationships and the interactivity that brings those objects together within a network, and the objects within that network (also known as an assemblage) are referred to as actors or point within a network (Latour, 2007). The activity of both human and non-human actors is considered as equal, acting in symmetry with the same agency or value as each other, and there is free association between all actors within the network, and how they all work together in harmony within a network (van Der Duim, 2007).

One of the main assumptions is that social processes can be explained by considering not only actions of human social actors, but also the active role played by animals, objects, and even ideas within a network, or a society (Law, 1992). Actor network theory explores the relational ties within a network, which can be a multitude of different things. How actors influence each other and the relationships between these actors is important, therefore by adopting actor network theory, there is a commitment to understanding the relationships within the network between the actors, be it human or non-human. Participation within the network is also a key aspect; the material objects are acting with other actors, not as a redundant object, whereby they have meaning and perform within human and non-human interactions (Bruno & Callon, 1981).

The topic of power is important when discussing actor network theory, as human agency is not only considered, but also the power that objects have, and the various levels of power which in turn affects the relationships between human and non-human objects. Where social sciences are human-oriented, actor network theory offers equal treatment of human and non-human characters and assumes all entities within the network can and should be described in the same terms (generalised symmetry). The argument from Latour is that social science shouldn't just be about the studies that prove order, it should be about understanding the humans or non-human objects that are studied (Barron, 2003). Empirical analysis is generally undertaken to describe rather than explain social activity, therefore allowing researchers to understand how actors work within a society, an organisation, or a network.

### 2.3.1 Power, social determinism and technological determinism

Power is an important factor within actor network theory; the idea that power is passed to an object, and that determines how that object performs within the network (Payne, 2017). Power moves through the network at different levels, and the actors within that network change and reshape the actions as they move through the network. The writing of Foucault and the Machiavellian view of power heavily influences actor network theory (Foucault, 1989). Foucault has a Machiavellian view of power, meaning that power is exerted by technique, using strategy and efficiency, rather than Hobbs' view of causality. Under Foucault's view, power does not derive from a primary source – which aligns with Latour's view of all subjects and objects being equal within a network (Latour, 2007). No single subject or object holds more power over another, and cannot exert power on to another, thereby power moves through the network which can be changed and shaped, rather than the causal view of 'power over'.

In relation to power, here social determinism and technological determinism can be linked to actor network theory. The notion of social determinism is that different social constructs can determine individual behaviour (Payne, 2017), negating external factors, and following power structures within society. The counter-theory to social determinism, technological determinism, posits that technology and technological development and change can determine the way in which society behaves (Hess, 2015). This would mean a society would behave differently in terms of how a technology performs, or what it is able to do for society. Actor network theory does not align with just one of these views but considers both. Social determinism deems that society holds power to change behaviours, and technological determinism deems that technology has power to change a society.

Under actor network theory, power is equal among both subjects and objects, therefore neither society nor technology has 'power over', but act in harmony with each other to perform a desired outcome. Actor network theory is considered a 'non-modern philosophy' (Latour, 2012), in that humans hold no agency or power over other inanimate objects, further postulating in modern philosophy all objects are considered within a hierarchical structure, or can be grouped through processing. In the case of this body of research however, a modern, or futuristic, view is being taken that all objects have equal agency as each other insofar as it is proposed that technology has equal agency to humans within social interactions. Therefore, in the case of this study a 'non-modern philosophy' is being applied to understand a modern phenomenon. There is however a question of morality that looms over actor network theory. Should there be a difference between human subjects and non-human objects? It has been widely discussed by critics of the theory (Fenwick, 2010), with the basis of the argument being that humans hold the power over objects; a view that does not align with this theory.

### 2.3.2 Applicability to study

One consideration of adopting actor network is the formation of the assemblage; a network that requires to be broken down to truly understand how each of the actors work together, however there is no agreed limit (Latour, Jensen, Venturini, Grauwin, & Boullier, 2012). It is therefore the intention of the researcher to use this theory as a methodological lens as well as an underpinning theory to understand the scope of the network within hospitality and how actors within that network interact with each other.

Under the researcher's current study, actor network theory provides the basis of what is known as 'actors' within a network which can be applied to the service environment. As

humans are dependent on more non-human actors such as technology, this theory provides the link between the two groups to further understand how they can co-exist, co-create and co-produce within the service environment. This very basic application leads to much deeper discussion around the formation of a network within a self-service technology exchange. There is also the concept of routine to consider; it becomes a practice to use the technology and a relationship is formed between this practice and the actions of the technology. Consistency comes from this routine practice. This therefore becomes mainstream, a part of daily life, and embedded in individual's routine, holding little resistance to new technological encounters. This is a concept that is of particular interest in the researcher's current study.

Actor network theory has been successfully adopted in tourism research (Johannesson, 2005; van Der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2013), and in research that considers physical and virtual servicescapes (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017). Although the discussion and overview of literature on actor network theory has offered insight to how it is appropriate for this study, there are still areas of this study that require more focus on the relationships formed from the interaction of people and technology. To allow for this, the study and understanding of roles is required. Although actor network theory can allow the researcher to frame the network by identifying the actors within the network and how they interact, there is no consideration of roles that those actors have, and effectively how those roles influence the relationships within the network. Therefore, the researcher suggests that the addition of role theory will add to the theoretical framework of this study. A review of role theory and a discussion on the applicability to the study is therefore offered below.

## 2.4 Role Theory

Embedded within sociology, role theory defines an individual and their responsibilities by the roles that they take (Biddle & Thomas, 1966), developed from studies of the self, status and interaction. Discussions within these studies developed the idea of role taking, and the different roles within these societies. Similar to script theory (Manthiou, Kang, Chiang, & Tang, 2016) and the experience economy (Gilmore & Pine, 2002) that explore patterns or stages, role theory assumes that each actor plays a role on a stage of life. This 'acting' out of roles determines an individual in terms of their status within a society. Roles can also be viewed as "comprising expectations of actors' behaviours that are understood by all participants in the service delivery system and environment and adhered to by the actors" (Ho, Tojib, & Tsarenko, 2020, p. 2).

Status in this discussion is concerned with ranking or prestige, it is the set of responsibilities (or status) of a role which is expected of the individual to play (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). There are certain expectations and responsibilities that are attached to those roles, which are acted out. There are achieved and ascribed roles, both of which have expectations, responsibilities and status attached to them. Individuals typically have multiple roles attached to them (e.g. occupation status, social status, family status) and will need to balance the roles and responsibilities that are demanded by these statuses (Wehner, 2016).

Socialisation is an important concept to consider here, as society sees roles being acted out in others, and can deem the status of an individual's social position, described by Montgomery (2000) as a 'fuzzy' system. Society can determine how individuals behave

and also set boundaries for the roles that should be fulfilled. Regardless if these boundaries are abided by, individuals can act against the expectations of society or organisation (Gong, Shenkar, Luo, & Nyaw, 2001).

Within society, there will be a level of consensus; a set of norms that are universally agreed upon for certain roles. For example, generally expected that an employee arrives to work on time; a status of employee suggests a hierarchy that much be abided by, or that employees are hospitable to customers within their customer-facing roles (Singh, 2000). Tension can be caused if an individual's behaviour does not act to the expectations of society, and vice versa. This social expectation can be influential in the decisions of an individual. Tension can also occur when there is an overlap of roles, or a mismatch of expectations, there is role conflict or role strain which is when a single status contains conflicting roles, therefore when an individual is not able to carry out the responsibilities of the given or achieved role (Singh, 2000).

Role conflict occurs when multiple statuses contain conflicting roles, for example not being able to carry out one of the roles because of another either taking up too much time or space (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). There will be conflicting demands depending on the expectations and responsibilities of the role, and if the decision is dependent on the connections to different roles, a question of importance, and deciding which role will be neglected. This decision is either with the individual or society, depending on the characteristics of the individual. Role exit is a result of role strain or role conflict or can be a role taken away from an individual. Therefore, post-role exit, the individual will need re-define and re-establish relationships with others within a new role that is assigned relating to social status.

The concept of 'role' in role theory is very broad as the 'role' can be any given context; social, occupation, political, gender roles, cultural; therefore, it can be difficult to define the set of roles when applying to a particular individual or group. There is also a question of where the norms within a society are created and where they originated from, is it an ideology of what the role should be, or are they socialised norms that have been accepted as 'normative behavioural expectations' (Jackson, 1998).

#### 2.4.1 Applicability to study

There is a functionalist perspective in sociology, which can question what roles are required, how do those roles work on a society, and what the expectations of society are. These questions relate to the overall topic of introduction of self-service technologies and the replacement of traditional service of those within service roles, therefore the theory can be an important addition to the study.

In terms of role tension, role strain, and role conflict in relation to the researcher's study, the customer can in effect become the employee in a self-service technology encounter. This co-creation of services can blur the line between the different roles that a customer is expected to do, considering the other roles that the concerned individuals have. Overall role theory is applicable to the overall research questions, however, to use as an individual underpinning theory would not be sufficient. It is common for role theory to be combined with another theory to underpin research to provide wider context and understanding (Raub, Borzillo, Perretten, & Schmitt, 2021; Wang, Fu, Wang, & Wei, 2021).

Hospitality and service literature underpinned by role theory offers a perspective around employee social behaviours within social relationships (Wang et al., 2021), offering an understanding of perceptions of roles and how roles are acted out within service encounters. Role theory has also been adopted as a way to explore interaction and encounters (Parker & Ward, 2000), hospitality service interactions (Dev & Olsen, 1989) and human staff versus robot staff and service outcomes (Ho et al., 2020).

Although this theory can be used to explore the roles and role changes between employees, customers, and technology, used alone as an underpinning theory for this study it would not allow the exploration of the change in relationships. As role change, and particularly roles within a developing relationship are key concepts within this study, role theory will therefore complement the benefits of actor network theory, to offer a theoretical lens to meet the researcher's overall aim.

## **2.5 Theoretical lens: combining actor network theory and role theory**

There are certain crossovers within the theories that have been discussed in this chapter. They are therefore adopted as a lens to the researcher's current study. By using either actor network theory or role theory as a standalone underpinning theory, it is the view of the researcher that the objectives of the study wouldn't be fully explored. In the following discussion, there will be a linkage with the selected theories.

### 2.5.1 Actor Network Theory – Role Theory

Combinations of theories allow researchers to view their research with a different perspective, adding to the current body of knowledge. Research that links both actor network theory and role theory as a theoretical lens for study is scant. Schulz-Schaeffer (2016) used both theories in a single study, where there was a focus on the overall network using actor network theory, and the expected and perceived roles within that network using role theory. The linkage has also been used as a way to view interaction using actor network theory, and participation using role theory (Bekken, 2014). Although these studies are in technology studies and healthcare respectively, there is evidence within literature that the two theories can be linked in a harmonious way. This study will be the first to adopt both actor network theory and role theory within hospitality research, adding to the current body of knowledge.

Here are two theories which are aligned in terms of their perspective; actor network theory is generally the study of relationships and role theory which is the study of self, status, and interaction. Billig (1997) criticises actor network theory of being a “spiced up version of role theory” (Billig, 1997, p. 115), by allowing researchers to explore networks in a way that dissects a network by its component parts. However, it is this understanding of roles that allows to view the given roles and identities of the identified actors within a network. This criticism offers the researcher an opportunity to combine both perspectives of role theory and actor network theory as a way of exploring a hospitality network. Therefore, the alignment of both theories allows for a more holistic view of a studied network. These two theories align in the sense that they seek to understand and describe relationships and interactions. The concept of power is evident within both theories, and both theories have

similar perspectives on why power as socialisation is key. Humans are more than ever dependent on non-human actors within society such as self-service technologies, in terms of collaboration of services, particularly in co-creation and co-production. This study of co-creation and co-production is important to explore as this can aid understanding of the interaction quality between all actors within the network.

Actor network theory is a way of viewing how actors within a network are associated, how they interact and their connections. It does not assume that all actors are different from each other, either human or non-human, or in terms of their objective or status (Waltz, 2006). One missing element to this perspective is the roles of each of those actors, and what those roles (either given or perceived) mean to each other. Waltz (2006) further uses role theory as a way to extend the understanding of non-human and human connections, interactions and roles within a specific network, allowing for a more holistic consideration and understanding of how the network 'works'. The benefit here of adopting role theory alongside actor theory is that the actors are understood for their role within both society and the network in which they interact. It therefore provides an understanding of their purpose, specific role and involvement in the network (Waltz, 2006, pp. 54-58). This higher-level view of the network allows researchers to see the inner workings of interactions, and how the roles within the network have any potential influence in the connections made.

There is a blurring of lines between roles due to co-creation, especially when considering a network of actors which includes technology. The socialised ideology has a predisposed set of expectations from each actor, therefore when these expectations are disrupted, there can be role tension. Self-service technology exchanges are therefore dependent on a

level understanding between all actors within the network. It can therefore be assumed that all points in the network have equal agency. Actor network theory as a theoretical lens alone would not sufficiently support the exploration of this concept, therefore role theory would support, as there would be an understanding of socialised norms that are given to each role. There are questions that arise from this, which are:

- What is the ideology of what the roles should be within a technology mediated encounter?
- What are the socialised norms between an employee and a customer, and how does self-service technology and technology mediation disrupt these norms?

Within a self-service technology encounter, there are a set of routinised actions, which was covered under actor network theory. The routinised actions are important to consider within self-service technology design, and intentions of use. Transactional activities are developed within the self-service technologies, which are typically designed to be easy to understand, easy to use and remove the routine and process driven tasks from the face-to-face service encounters to create a more meaningful interaction. In the discussion of role tension, this links well to the concept of technology anxiety and trust issues that can affect how self-service technologies are perceived and used by both employees and customers. These concepts will be discussed in the next chapters, focusing on the use of self-service technologies within the service encounter.

### 2.5.2 Actors and roles within the studied network

A key perspective of actor network theory allows a view that both living and non-living actors can be studied as part of an overall network. As discussed in section 2.3,

understanding the interactions and relationships within a network is central to actor network theory, allowing researchers to unpack the social constructs. A key objective of role theory allows researchers to understand the given or perceived roles, and when applied alongside actor network theory, allows the researcher to further identify the actors and their roles, which then provides a deeper understanding of the interactions and relationships within the network.

Often used in nursing and medical research to understand roles and interrelations of humans and technology, Actor Network Theory allows a perspective that both humans and technology are considered as equal actors in a network. Technology can facilitate relationships by allowing people to make connections through the use of technology. Particularly through online communities, the intrinsic connection is between the person and the technology as the first point of contact (Parigi, 2014). This places technology as a key actor within the hospitality interaction, and therefore will be considered as such in this study.

Cresswell, Worth and Sheikh (2010) consider technology to have an active role within a studied network. The authors posit that technology has the ability to shape a social process, discussing socio-technical systems theory as a connector between the technical and the social, further adding to an Actor Network Theory perspective of living and non-living actors. There is a general view that technology is not sentient, even though there is an ever increasing human-digital closeness (Gibert & Martin, 2022). However, the customer decides to trust and/or rely on technology, meaning there is a relationship forming with a non-sentient being (Lavelle, 2020). One of the main views of Actor Network Theory is that actors can be living and non-living things. The focus is the interactions and

relationships between those actors. Waltz (2006) calls for more research which assumes non-humans are social actors. The interactions between humans and non-humans are positioned here as equally important as human-to-human interaction.

In terms of self-service technology use, the customer decides who or what to interact with, be it staff or technology, to carry out the desired service. There are more ways to connect, and the options available to customers offer flexibility and alternative solutions to communicate, allowing for a visible and alternative route to maintaining relationships (Ledbetter, 2017). In turn, the choices people make reflect their preferences for how they want to communicate, and therefore technology is embedded within the social. The role of technology in this case is the mediator and has influence over how people interact. The personal connection is therefore directly made with the technology (hardware and software that people use) before any interpersonal connection is made between people.

Given the perspectives of both Actor Network Theory and Role Theory, it is assumed that there is a network of actors that can be studied in terms of their interactions and relationships, and that there are specific roles assigned to those actors. The researcher therefore proposes that the hospitality environment to be the network of study, and the defined roles within that network are broadly focused on guests (hotel customers), hosts (hotel employees and managers) and technology (customer facing self-service technologies).

## **2.6 Chapter summary**

Chapter two has outlined the underpinning theoretical framework for this study. By providing an understanding of actor network theory and role theory, and how they can

both offer a unique perspective on the guest-host relationship and the role of self-service technologies, the researcher has presented the theoretical lens for the study.

Following a review of the relevant theories, it is clear that the use of two relationship-oriented theories is required for this study, therefore both actor network theory and role theory will be used. Role theory will aid an understanding of the roles of customers and employees, the perceptions of both groups and how technology has impacted the roles. Role ambiguity, role tension and the impact of technology are important considerations within the application of this theory. Actor network theory will allow the exploration of the relationships between customers, employees and technology and how they all work within the same network. By combining both theories together to underpin the study, this gives the researcher opportunity to explore relationships within technology-aided service encounters at a much deeper level. It will allow a further study of the relationship, and as it will be used as a lens for a qualitative study, it will allow for a deep understanding of people and technology, and the future of relationships within service encounters. There is little research that has worked with this approach; therefore, this study will be able to offer a new perspective to the area of research, particularly in the domain of hospitality literature.

The next chapter will focus on a review of relevant literature directly relating to the research questions, including self-service technologies, the guest-host relationship, and the concept of high-tech, high-touch hospitality.

# Chapter Three: High-tech, high-touch hospitality: the guest-host relationship and self-service technologies

## 3.1 Chapter overview

This research study is concerned with the relationship between customers and employees, and the role of technology in the relationship. Therefore, chapter three will focus on the following key areas:

- Self-service technologies within service encounters
- Guest-host relationship and the role of technology
- High-tech, high-touch concept within hospitality

The literature will be organised as follows. The first section (section 3.2) will concentrate on the role of self-service technologies within service encounters. This section will provide an understanding of technologies that are available, how they are used, and the role of technology within the service encounter. After an understanding of what technology exists and how it is used within the service encounter, the second section (section 3.3) is concerned with people, which follows on to understand the guest-employee relationship dynamic and how that is being impacted by technology. Finally, the third section (section 3.4) focusses on the high-tech, high-touch concept within a hotel setting, moving on from the traditional high-touch, low-tech approach to hospitality service. This offers further understanding of how technology is embedded within services and the relationships that occur within this new dynamic.

## **3.2 Self-service technologies within the service encounter**

Technology has been used within all areas of hospitality to improve business overall, with Melián-González and Bulchand-Gidumal (2016) stating the most significant areas that technology has had an impact on are operational and employee productivity, customer service and commercialisation. The idea is that technology can be used to improve customer service overall, improving service quality, and implementing self-service technologies to complement the service encounter. The delivery of service within hotels is traditionally viewed as face to face interactions between an employee and a guest (Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree, & Bitner, 2000). Following a review of self-service technology literature, Kelly et al. (2017) state that self-service technologies are now a normality within the contemporary marketplace, developing traditional service delivery.

The very nature of hotel service is the interaction with people, their subsequent actions and the personalised follow up. This chapter will explore the various definitions of self-service technologies, and the development over time within the self-service economy. Once an understanding of self-service technologies is established, the researcher will then review the literature around the experience of technology-based service encounters within various servicescapes. The chapter will then explore the literature around outcomes of using self-service technologies; adoption and resistance, readiness trust and anxiety, all of which will give an insight in to how these self-service technologies are perceived by both customers and employees.

## 3.2.1 Understanding self-service technologies

### 3.2.1.1 The servicescape

Before exploring self-service technologies, an understanding is required of the environment in which they are placed. Early work by Bitner (1992) discussed the 'servicescape' - the landscape of where service exchanges occur, and the importance of the servicescape on the outcome of the service, for instance customer satisfaction and interaction quality. Hospitality servicescapes are defined as "the manmade environments where hospitality activities, such as dining and lodging, occur" (Kaminakis, Karantinou, Koritos, & Gounaris, 2019, p. 130). More importantly, the benefits for both customer and employee were considered in the paper. When summarising servicescapes, Lunardo, Roux, and Chaney (2016) discuss the external variables that determine positive experiences and engaging customers with tangible and intangible features.

Hanks, Line, and Zhang (2021) detail the importance of the social element within the servicescape, as well as the physical elements, particularly in a hospitality context. This also goes further than interactions between customers and employees, there is also behavioural implications from the presence of other customers. This is therefore a necessary consideration when exploring servicescapes. Customers within the servicescape are aware of other customers in terms of their similarity, behaviours and physical appearance (Brocato, Voorhees, & Baker, 2012), and therefore offer social cues in terms of customer acceptance of a servicescape.

Ultimately the servicescape has the ability to determine a positive or negative customer experience. The servicescape and consideration of tangible and intangible features such

as scent, ambience and music has been proven to have effects on brand image (Baker, Grewal, & Parasuraman, 1994), service quality (Hooper, Coughlan, & R. Mullen, 2013), and product evaluations (Bosmans, 2006).

As people are an important part of servicescapes, employees are also evaluated in the same way as customers would view the overall design of the service environment, as Vilnai-Yavetz and Rafaeli (2011) discuss; customers expect employee appearance to be appropriate to the organisation, which can have effects on brand image and service evaluations. The interactions between employees and customers can also be affected by the physical servicescape, determining the outcome of the service interaction (Kaminakis et al., 2019).

#### 3.2.1.2 Smart servicescapes

Since the development and implementations of self-service technology within service environments, the concepts of smart-servicescapes, e-servicescapes and m-servicescapes were established. Smart servicescapes are considered a modern take on the traditional view of servicescapes, comprising both physical and digital characteristics. Smart servicescapes are theorised as consisting of “aesthetics, social presence, superior functionality, perceived interactivity, and perceived personalisation” (Roy, Singh, Hope, Nguyen, & Harrigan, 2019, p. 1485). This recognition of environment, technology and consumers within a servicescape allows the consideration of a more collaborative service environment, where technology and customers are key in the service processes.

Lee (2018b) refers to m-servicescapes as a service environment in a mobile application context. Mobile applications can allow a customer to carry out tasks and processes that

would generally occur within traditional servicescapes and e-servicescapes, therefore allowing the customer to take control. It is generally understood that self-service technologies are present within all three servicescapes; whether it be during a service encounter with an employee where the technology can assist, in a technology aided service encounter, or remotely via a mobile device. Smart servicescapes, or e-servicescapes, have as much meaning as traditional service environments, as customers make the same judgements and evaluations, however the variables are different, whereby customers seek an aesthetically pleasing virtual servicescape in design (Vilnai-Yavetz & Rafaeli, 2006).

A consideration for this study is to also understand that the servicescape for customers and employees need not be in situ given the development of technologies that allow services to be carried out remotely. Therefore, the servicescape becomes virtual (Ballantyne & Nilsson, 2017). Although the interpretive nature of physical servicescapes is still relevant, the virtual (or smart) servicescape needs to be an extension of that physical space, particularly in terms of aesthetics and interactive opportunity. Another consideration here is also the simultaneous use of the physical and virtual servicescape whereby guests use self-service technologies within the physical service space. Both the physical and the virtual need to be consistent in design and overall aesthetic. The visual appeal, platform design and functionality relate to consumer trust and loyalty (Harris & Goode, 2010). This will be explored further in section 3.4.4.

### 3.2.1.3 Operational definitions

Lee and Cranage (2018) define physical self-service technologies as vending machines, kiosks and web applications, which can also then be further categorised between internet

and non-internet self-service technologies. Fan, Wu, and Mattila (2016) extend the compilation of self-service technologies to also include interactive voice response systems and mobile services. Within technologies used to assist in the service encounter, there are also 'frontline service technologies' (De Keyser, Köcher, Alkire, Verbeeck, & Kandampully, 2019), which are pivotal in providing the link between the employee and the customer in technology-based service encounters.

Taking a different perspective, Robertson et al. (2016) discuss the concept of 'self' within self-service technologies, in that it takes a customer to actively participate in using the technologies available to them. Collier, Breazeale, and White (2017) also discuss the applicability of 'self' in self-service technologies, whereby customers still require assistance in times of service failure, nullifying the self in self-service. In times of unfavourable encounters, more of which will be covered later in the chapter reviewing service failure and recovery literature.

### **3.2.2 The service encounter as the experience**

Work by Bitner, Brown, and Meuter (2000) focuses on technology infusion in service encounters, the changing nature of services and looking at how service can be improved with the use of technology. Service as a concept is traditionally described as interaction with customers (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990), within the self-service economy. The self-service economy is defined as "a substantial and growing population of household expenditure is invested in durable goods which enable people to produce services for themselves" (Williams et al., 2012, p. 1182).

The development of IT and communication technologies has been key in facilitating the progress of the self-service economy. Within the experience economy, the focus is on the experience rather than the service. Gilmore and Pine (2002) suggest that just the act of selling services is not sufficient, and that the experience should be the primary selling point, and that customers should be engaged in the service in a more memorable way. In hospitality particularly, there is a focus on both service and experience, with guests placing higher value on service that offers an experiential element (Chang, 2018). This is true of face to face personal interaction too, therefore it can be suggested that the focus of self-service technology is purely a digital transaction.

It is necessary to explore the experience from two perspectives; social science approach, and from a consumer behaviour approach (Volo, 2013) to understand an overall view of the importance of the experience within the service encounter. This also allows understand the consumer in a personal way in relation to their wants and needs (Mehmetoglu & Engen, 2011). From a social science perspective, the attitudes, motivations and meaning needs to be understood to gauge the value of the experience within the service encounter (Sandström, Edvardsson, Kristensson, & Magnusson, 2008). It is important to consider the experience to a consumer, and what the role of technology is within that exchange. The employee plays a pivotal role within the experience, as they are in close contact with the customer and can therefore build knowledge on the customers wants and needs (Baradarani & Kilic, 2018). From a consumer behaviour perspective, the quality of the experience is explored alongside satisfaction, as well as evaluating the overall experience. Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung (2007) discuss tourism related to the experience economy as being concerned with entertainment, education, escapism

and aesthetics, whereby the participation and immersion of the consumer within the experience is explored.

Harris (2007) discussed the introduction of technology within the customer experience and postulated that it is creating lasting social change. This social change is developing as technology is developing and becoming increasingly embedded into social exchanges. Sipe and Testa (2018) posited that all actions within hospitality should engage customers in a more memorable way, and create memories and emotional value, as opposed to consistency and functional value. To add to this, the usage of self-service technologies affects multiple departments throughout a hotel, presented in table three below, based on the researchers practical experience of working in the hotel industry. Technologies in these circumstances are used back of house by employees, and front of house as customer facing technologies, however it gives an insight in to how many customer touchpoints there are that are affected by self-service technologies, as well as opportunities to enhance the overall experience.

*Table 3: Hotel departments affected by self-service technologies*

Self-Service Technology Available	Department affected
Making / amending reservations	Reservations
Check-in / out	Front Desk
Keyless entry to bedrooms with app	
Pay bedroom bills	
Pre-arrival information (e.g. directions, upgrades, pre-orders)	
Managing guest loyalty accounts	

Order room service	Restaurant
Book a meeting/event	Event Sales
Event final details / payment	
Vending machines / kiosks	Multiple departments

Following a study of customer use of self-service kiosks, Günay and Erbuğ (2015) suggest three main goals of designing self-service technologies to allow customers to engage in a positive service experience; engagement, feeling special and personal connections. Mobile applications are also proven to create memorable and interactive experiences (Lu et al., 2015), as they are widely used and convenient, therefore adding value to the customer. Value is an important factor to consider within the concept of the experience. From the implementation of self-service technologies allowing co-creation of service, the customer has more control within the service encounter, and can therefore be part of engineering their own experience (Åkesson, Edvardsson, & Tronvoll, 2014). The authors further discuss that there are societal issues that are important to consider within the service encounter, such as social norms and rules, therefore placing great emphasis on personal interactions.

Hyun H. Kim and Rob Law (2015) discussed the concept of service value, and how it can be a crucial in affecting consumer evaluations, which ultimately affect satisfaction and future behavioural intentions. This confirms that the focus on the service encounter is significant, as it can have consequential influence on service evaluations. Value fusion, as studied by Larivière et al. (2013) suggests that there are benefits of consumers using mobile applications and social media as a way of co-creating value, and allows

organisations to engage with consumers in a meaningful way, therefore adding to the overall experience. However, customer expectations of using self-service technologies can differ from the experience expected within face to face interactions. Wei, Torres, and Hua (2017) explore the attributes of service experience and found that customers are satisfied when they have the information they require, can reduce wait times or queues, and can complete a task via self-service technologies.

### **3.2.3 Technology within the guest-supplier interaction**

As modern consumers are driven by technology, there is a higher expectation that service providers adapt to enhance the customer experience (Srivastava, Kishore, & Dhingra, 2021). Lee, Barker, and Kandampully (2003) discuss the benefits of technology infusion within the service encounter, and that it can provide improved service and efficiency, as well as strengthening consumer-firm relationships. Regarding customer facing technologies, Kucukusta, Heung, and Hui (2014) state that service providers should be promoting the benefits of self-service technology use, whilst still focusing on delivering personalised service, therefore offering a synergy between technology and human relationships. Wang, Xiang, Law, and Ki (2016) predict that the development of mobile technology, smartphones and mobile applications will be the next technological wave to transform the hospitality industry. With these issues in mind, an understanding of the readiness, acceptance and adoption and outcomes of use of self-service technologies is required.

### 3.2.3.1 Technology readiness

Parasuraman (2000) described technology readiness as “people’s propensity to embrace and use new technologies for accomplishing goals in home life and at work” (Parasuraman, 2000, p. 308). According to Liljander, Gillberg, Gummerus, and van Riel (2006), there are four dimensions that determine technology readiness; drivers to use technology; optimism, innovativeness, and inhibitors to technology use; discomfort and insecurity. Each dimension has meaningful characteristics to a consumer, and how they perceive the self-service technology, therefore feelings and meaning have a significant impact on whether customers will feel are ready to use self-service technologies, which in turn could then lead to technology adoption. Poushneh and Vasquez-Parraga (2018) discuss the concept of customer-readiness, in which there is a level of knowledge, skills and motivation that the customer will possess that will determine the likelihood of using self-service technologies. There is a relationship between consumer’s readiness to use self-service technologies, and the perception and behavioural intention to use self-service technologies. Son and Han (2011) found that there was a relationship between innovativeness and influence of usage patterns, in that innovative technologies and functions prove greater customer satisfaction.

Where self-service technologies are used to replace traditional face to face service, this can result in forced use of technologies (Lee, Castellanos, & Choi, 2012). Although a customer may possess an intention to use technology over traditional service methods, the readiness to use such technologies can differ. Clausing and Holmes (2010) argue that where technology is launched without any regard to technology readiness, it can lead to dissatisfied customers. The effect on technology readiness can therefore be seen as

negative, as forced use on an uneducated consumer of the technologies used can lead to service failure and negative attitudes towards future self-service technology use. Ferreira, Da Rocha, and Da Silva (2014) explain that firms must market self-service technologies in such a way that encourages and educates customers so that they are ready to use them. Tsiriktsis (2004) found that there are significant gender and generational differences in terms of technology readiness, with males being pioneers of new technologies, and both genders being younger than 45 years of age, demonstrating readiness to use the technologies. Parasuraman (2000) calls for further research on technology readiness cross-culturally, to internationalise the study of the concept.

It is clear from the literature around the concept of technology readiness that there are issues from both a consumer perspective, as well as from an organisational perspective, that need to be explored prior to implementing customer facing technologies. It is also shown to have further impact on technology adoption and resistance.

### 3.2.3.2 Technology Trust and Technology Anxiety

Technology trust and technology anxiety are important concepts when trying to understand both customer and employee perceptions. Technology trust is defined as “the trustworthiness of the new technology and/or the provider as rated by the potential adopter” (Bahmanziari, Pearson, & Crosby, 2003, p. 46), whereby the adopter of the technology evaluates their personal level of trust with a particular technology and can influence overall technology adoption. Meuter, Ostrom, Bitner, and Roundtree (2003) suggested that studies that focus on technology anxiety are better indicators of technology adoption. A definition is offered as “the user’s state of mind regarding their ability and willingness to use technology-related tools” (Meuter et al., 2003, p. 900). The authors

state that technology anxiety not only influences the technology adoption rate, but can also influence positive and negative word of mouth and satisfaction evaluations.

Lee et al. (2012) discusses the research of Parasuraman (2000), as important work to further understand individuals' attitudes towards self-service technologies. These attitudes are highly affected by forced use of technology, which can lead to technology anxiety, and a loss of trust. Liu (2012) explored the impact of forced use of self-service technologies and reported that technology trust and technology anxiety are the two main psychological constructs that can affect satisfaction, therefore forced use leading to technology anxiety and loss of trust and can in turn lead to negative perceptions of the service provider. This is also confirmed in a study by Reinders, Frambach, and Kleijnen (2015) whereby mandatory or forced use of self-service technologies can lead to technology anxiety, and ultimately affect adoption and service evaluations. The authors suggest that the more expertise a customer has of the technology, the more likely they are to trust the technology for continued or future use.

Kim, Mejjia, and Connolly (2017) discusses the transaction of intangible products such as hotel services, and how by using self-service technologies this may lead to technology anxiety. This links to further literature around trust in the context of self-service technologies (Johnson, Bardhi, & Dunn, 2008). Technology trust and anxiety can also lead to role ambiguity between the employee and the consumer (Oh, Jeong, Lee, & Warnick, 2016). Therefore, as self-service technology is more available to a consumer, it may confuse the message of which tasks need to be performed by either an employee or a consumer. Meuter et al. (2003) claim that to avoid technology anxiety and build technology trust, self-service technologies in particular should be designed with the

consumer in mind, provide adequate information about the new technologies to educate the customer, and provide alternatives to using self-service technologies.

Gelbrich and Sattler (2014) stated that there are two variables that are related to self-service technology use in public settings that can result in technology anxiety; perceived crowding and perceived time pressure. These sociological pressures are perceived by the customer as they use, either forced or voluntarily, self-service technologies. Fan et al. (2016) note the presence of other customers can add a further element of questioning of power, in the sense that the customer's power and ability to control their own service encounter is judged by others that witness the service failure. Depending on the customer, whether they feel in control of the technology, this failure is either attributed to the technology failing, or the lack of skill from the customer which can add lead further to technology anxiety.

### 3.2.3.3 Technology acceptance, adoption, and resistance

Technology adoption is dependent on whether an individual has either trust or anxiety towards the technology in which they are subjected to. Technology trust leads to adoption, whereas technology anxiety can lead to technology resistance (Liu, 2012). In an early paper on looking at the impact of technology on customer-supplier relationships, Han (1997) posited that if there was not a mutual knowledge of the technology between the supplier and the customer, then it would lead to low adoption of the technology and also conflict. Studies of technology acceptance are generally underpinned by the technology acceptance model, which evaluates how individuals perceive a new technology, and how that can then inform the behavioural intentions to use technologies (Davis, 1989). At a basic level this is a matter of perceptions; how individuals perceive technology, how useful

it is and how easy it is to use, therefore perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. The technology acceptance model assumes people plan their behaviour through rational and intentional use, however depending on certain external factors the behaviour may be irrational and not based on a considered approach to the decision-making process (Bagozzi, 2007). Hospitality literature underpinned by the technology acceptance model, has allowed academics to provide customer and employee behavioural intentions to adopt technologies (Yang, Song, Cheung, & Guan, 2021; Zheng & Montargot, 2021).

Using the technology acceptance model as a framework, a study concerned with tourists' adoption of self-service technologies within resort hotels (Oh, Jeong, & Baloglu, 2013), explored the balance of need for interaction-based service encounters and use of self-service technologies for privacy. The authors address a varied scale of adoption based on specific needs and requirements of the tourist, which is not fully explained by using the technology acceptance model alone, suggesting that the theory as a framework for researching adoption and resistance, in some cases, may be inadequate. Kallweit, Spreer, and Toporowski (2014) added an additional variable of perceived enjoyment to the technology acceptance module to understand why users choose self-service technologies over personal interaction with an employee. By doing this, it is understood that customers make an informed decision on how they perceive the service delivery, and what outcomes they want.

The technology acceptance model cannot determine this as a theory used alone. The theory of reasoned action can also be used alongside the technology acceptance model to underpin the understanding of behavioural intentions to use technology. Both intention models were used by Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw (1989) to further understand

consumer's acceptance of computer technology. Perceived usefulness was the strongest influence on technology acceptance and adoption from this study, whereby customers are making reasoned decisions based on their needs, prior to deciding whether to adopt the technology. Dabholkar (1992) suggested that adoption of self-service technology is dependent on the need for interaction, however with more frequent use of self-service technologies, the need for interaction decreases as customers are more confident with the new technology, leading to higher adoption rates.

As a development to the research involving customers' attitudes towards technology, Collier, Moore, Horky, and Moore (2015) explored situational influences that can affect adoption or resistance. Wait time and convenience were the main factors to have an influence on technology adoption or resistance. Fisher and Beatson (2002) suggested that the growth of globalised business and the focus of implementing self-service technologies for efficiencies and cost saving, there is little understood about how these technologies are suitable across all cultures, and how that will affect adoption. Lee (2016) took a cross-cultural view of self-service technology adoption and that consideration is required from international hotel chains. This casts doubt that there can be a global, standardised approach to self-service technologies as they are perceived differently in different cultures. It may also be an informed decision that there is an under-utilisation of self-service technologies, particularly within hospitality.

In a study by Rosenbaum and Wong (2015), results showed that customers intended on taking 'technological pauses' whilst on vacation, and therefore avoided the use of self-service technologies in favour of face to face interaction. The benefit of self-service technologies is questioned here, as although the technology may be efficient and offer an

alternative to customers, the service environment and context needs to be a good fit. It also suggests that whilst customers may be knowledgeable of how to use self-service technologies, and are openly accepting to them, they may still wish to decline use in certain situations or service encounters. As the literature suggests, there are many different factors that need to be considered, and different approaches that can be adopted, to fully understand self-service technology adoption and resistance.

#### 3.2.3.4 Self-serving bias and service failure and recovery in technology mediated encounters

Service failure and recovery literature is typically concerned with traditional, face to face service organisations, however with the development of self-service technologies, there is more of a concern in relation to understanding recovery techniques (Forbes, 2008).

According to self-serving bias, when the outcome is negative, a customer is less likely to take responsibility for a bad outcome, which can cause problems for the service provider, as this can lead to negative service evaluations (Jin & Devaney, 2011). Therefore, as consumers have perceived control over the use of self-service technology, when there are unfavourable incidents with the technology, there is no responsibility taken from the consumer as the failure is attributed to the technology.

As the customer plays a participatory, active role within self-service situations, the success is determined by the consumer being able to successfully use the self-service technologies (Lee & Cranage, 2018). Where self-service technologies are being implemented to create value, it has been proven that the use of self-service technologies can lead to value co-destruction (Shin & Perdue, 2019). Employees are called upon to assist in service recovery in times of service failure in self-service situations. Although

there was initially no need for interaction, the result of a self-service failure leads to personal interactions with an employee as they can directly determine the recovery outcome (Chang, 2006). Co-created service recovery however can lead to positive recovery outcomes, as when customers are involved in the process involving self-service technologies, as it re-affirms their ability and control over the technology (Dong, Evans, & Zou, 2008). Therefore, in some cases it is possible for customers to recover in a service failure situation by using their own knowledge and experience of self-service technologies (Zhu, Nakata, Sivakumar, & Grewal, 2013). The authors use expectancy theory to study how customers are motivated and engaged in their own effectiveness and suggest a positive outcome that this also leads to favourable evaluations and repeat usage.

Although the most common objective for co-creation of services is economic benefit to the organisation, to the consumer there are psychological benefits through self-serving bias, as the consumer becomes both engaged and responsible for the outcomes (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). However, further research on recovery suggest that the outcomes are more circumstantial. Collier et al. (2017) conducted three experiments with customers using self-service technologies, and customers proved happier when an employee took control to recover the failure. Furthermore, customers would be happy to continue to use self-service technologies if there were employees to fix a problem if no other customers were present, which also links back to the discussions around technology anxiety. This suggest that there are further social complexities that are not yet known within customer-self-service technology-employee encounters. The concept of co-creation will be discussed further in chapter three.

### **3.3 Customer-supplier relationship and the role of SST within the customer-supplier interaction**

The development of self-service technologies within service industries means that an understanding is required of the interplay between the self-service technology, and the employee interaction. As more technology is introduced into service, the less artistic and more business-like it becomes (Sundbo & Darmer, 2008). Lee et al. (2012) describes the supplier-customer relationship as 'fragile' and that further examination is required to understand the key attitudes towards developing technologies within the service encounter. As explained by Kelly et al. (2017) it is well documented within service management literature that the customer plays a vital active role within the service encounter. Within this role, customers look for cues within the service encounter, which enables them to evaluate the service they are receiving (Bitner, 1992). These cues are generally sought in the interactions between people, typically the employee and the customer.

In discussing attitudes towards technology use, Kim et al. (2017) observes that although the customers enjoyment of the technology is key to adoption of technologies, employees are not influenced by the 'fun' aspect, rather they will be seeking for ease of use and performance. This highlights that there are differing needs of the same technologies from the viewpoint of the consumer and the employee. Gronroos (1988) defined the characteristics of service as being intangible, activities rather than things, produced and consumed simultaneously and includes customer participation throughout the production. These characteristics could also be applied to self-service technologies. This co-production of service will be discussed throughout the chapter.

### 3.3.1 Customer-supplier interaction and relationship

The customer-service provider relationship has a very important role in terms of profitability for an organisation, and customer satisfaction and loyalty. With the inclusion of self-service technologies within service encounters, there has been a change in how the relationship is both formed and maintained between customers and service providers. Johnson (2001) questions whether customer service needs to be dyadic, and that any interaction, be it face to face interaction, or an encounter with self-service technology, is just as important as each other. Payne (2017) states that “people and their unique relationships are subject to constant flux and change, even where there is apparent permanence” (Payne, 2017, p. 122). This section will be concerned with literature around service provider and customer relations, the value of those relationships and the need for interaction, and what that means for self-service technology use.

#### 3.3.1.1 Supplier and customer relations

Bove and Johnson (2001) posit that there is not a common understanding of the customer-supplier relationship, however the common themes within the construct of the relationship is closeness, quality and strength to determine the relationship as a concept. Guenzi and Pelloni (2004) discuss the impact of interpersonal relationships, and that generally, the closer the employee is to the customer, the more loyal the customer will be as the employee can positively impact customer satisfaction. Building personal relationships as part of a customer relationship management strategy has been proven not only to increase profitability and build customer trust, but also retain more loyal customers (Rahimi, 2017). Aided with technology, there is a heavy control from people to

establish and maintain those relationships. Reinartz, Krafft, and Hoyer (2004) argues that without the people of the organisation, the employees, there would be a disconnect between the customer and the organisation, and that a customer focus is necessary to achieve a positive relationship.

Barnes, Ponder, and Hopkins (2015) discuss the value of the employee within the customer-employee relationship, and that it is integral in the success of the service provider and can be seen as a key quality indicator. To categorise the value of customer-supplier relationships, Walter, Ritter, and Gemünden (2001) suggest there are four categories of customer relationship which determine their value; low or high performing, selling relationships or networking relationships. This paper was researched from a supplier perspective; however, it shows that value is an overarching quality within the relationship.

The customer-supplier relationship can also be used for innovation creation, as discussed by Charterina, Basterretxea, and Landeta (2017) organisations can engage customers in innovation of new services or products, by building and maintaining positive and trusting working relationships with a network of customers. Wirtz et al. (2018) posit that employees have a deep understanding of the wants and needs of a consumer, and that they can convey genuine emotion within a service encounter. The customer-supplier relationship is not however a one-sided construct. The customer needs to feel similar benefits for maintaining relationships with brands and organisations. Trust is an important factor to the customer in customer-supplier relationships, and where this breaks down, leads to negative evaluations or break-away from the brand or organisation (Laequddin & Sardana, 2010).

Trust within a customer-supplier relationship and the quality of that relationship is proven to have direct links with customer loyalty through a strategy of commitment, communication and competence (Oly Ndubisi, Kok Wah, & Ndubisi, 2007). It is clear there is great value placed on this interaction to maintain personal interaction and relationships, which can be difficult in a competitive marketplace.

### 3.3.1.2 Need for interaction

The discussions around need for interaction are mainly embedded within psychology literature. Baumeister and Leary (1995) discuss the need for interaction as being a sense of belongingness and maintaining stable, interpersonal relationships. The authors suggest that although all humans have this basic social need, there are varying degrees to which people wish to 'need' interaction. The need, or desire, for interaction is described by marketing academics as a requirement to attain personal interaction with an employee within a service encounter (Curran & Meuter, 2005; Oh et al., 2013). In service encounters, customers may have a need for interaction and need to develop interpersonal relationships with service employees to mitigate any risk in being involved in an intangible service encounter (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). Therefore, the personal relationship acts as the tangible factor that ties the customer to the brand or organisation.

The need for interaction can be a determinant between a customer choosing to seek out an employee within a service encounter or choose to self-control the outcome by selecting to use self-service technology. Dabholkar (1992) discusses the dehumanisation of the service interaction by integrating self-service technologies, and that for some customers the higher the need for interaction, the more negative attitude to self-service technologies there will be. Giebelhausen, Robinson, Sirianni, and Brady (2014) discuss technology can

create a barrier that can inhibit social exchange. In this case, rapport building is minimal, as social interaction is limited. Lee (2017) discusses that the need for interaction can deter customers from using self-service technologies, however if a customer chooses personal interaction, this does not necessarily mean that customers prefer not to use self-service technologies.

Gelderman, Ghijsen, and van Diemen (2011) discuss the element of consumer choice between self-service technology use and personal interaction. Results showed that if a consumer demonstrated a strong need for interaction, there was an overall negative effect on self-service technology usage, therefore preferring personal, face to face interaction over an automated process. Generally, a consumer need for interaction can affect consumers intention to use self-service technologies, especially within a hospitality context (Kaushik & Kumar, 2018), which can cause issues with interaction and affect service evaluations. Typically, customers look for cues from employees to guide them through the service encounter. When using technology in place of face to face service, not only is the personal interaction lost, but also the tangible cues that assist customers (Beatson et al., 2007). This can be particularly disadvantageous for hotels, as the customer-supplier relationship is built upon the cues and feedback between the two groups.

Discussed earlier in section 3.2, within the servicescape customers look for cues about an organisation's quality and capability (Bitner, 1992) and therefore can start to make evaluations based on the service environment and the cues and feedback within the service exchange. Once technology is added into this service environment, there are limited cues that consumers can evaluate as the interactions via technology are process

driven and systematic. A customer's need for interaction can lead to a positive customer-employee relationship, however that can also pose risk to the organisation as the customer has formed the relationship with the service employee, not the organisation (Guenzi & Pelloni, 2004). Therefore, there are managerial implications in customer-employee relationships that need to be considered. In a study by Kim and Yang (2018), it was proven that perceived interactivity has a positive effect on the overall service experience.

In a retail setting, the view of self-service technologies was dependent on the levels of technology readiness and user control are the main success factors of technology-mediated encounters. There were three components identified within this study as being critical to perceived interactivity; user control, two-way communication and responsiveness. The interactivity here is dependent upon the customer preferring technology mediated service encounters, over personal interaction. Lee, Leung, Lo, Xiong, and Wu (2011) compare internet communication with face to face interaction and measure quality of life. Socially and psychologically, the increase of internet use for communication had a detrimental effect on the mental health of the participants. This suggests there are deeper issues to consider from an organisational perspective, when deciding to increase self-service technologies, as there is still a need for personal interactions.

The literature on need for interaction is very much focused from the customer perspective, and what outcomes can be leveraged from an organisational point of view, however there are few studies that look at interaction from an employee perspective. The co-creation of services not only happens at a customer-self-service technology level, but also a

customer-service employee level, with instances of self-service technology mediating the service encounter. Di Pietro, Pantano, and Di Virgilio (2014) discuss employee attitudes of self-service technologies, focusing on job performance. Although this paper gives insight into how employees perceive self-service technologies and comparisons with face-to-face interaction, there is no great understanding of how the employees feel about the loss of interaction with customers. There is also scant literature on the employees need for interaction, as the literature mainly focuses on the customer's need for interaction with an employee (Lee, 2017).

### **3.3.2 Collaborative service delivery**

The collaboration and co-creation of services is a well-researched area in literature, whereby understanding the objectives, motivations and evaluations are key. The following section will detail literature around co-creation of services and the shift in roles between employees and consumers, then explore the concept of prosumption, whereby the consumer becomes the producer. Service delivery will then be explored, between transactional tasks carried out via self-service technologies, as well as collaborative tasks with employees.

#### **3.3.2.1 Co-creation of services**

A main underpinning theory of the study of service co-creation is service-dominant logic. Service-dominant logic is concerned with the process and the social exchange of service, and the characteristics behind it (Smith & Maull, 2014). The fundamental principles are based on the service being the basis of exchange and that the customer is key in co-creation of service to add value, which is created through interaction (Lusch & Vargo,

2006). Service is the idea of what meaning it has, how image enhancing it can be and exchanging of information is key; therefore, knowledge and skills are the fundamental characteristics (Ordanini & Parasuraman, 2011). A basic premise of service-dominant logic is that value is created in service for service encounters, through knowledge and skill exchanges. In a service-for-service exchange, the focus is on the knowledge that is exchanged, rather than a product (Vargo, 2009). Collaboration is a core paradigm within service-dominant logic, as co-creation and co-production are two key concepts (Scherer, Wunderlich, & Wangenheim, 2015).

Studies within hospitality and tourism that have utilised service-dominant logic have focused on value creation from smartphone application use within hospitality (Kim & Law, 2015), customer roles within tourism self-service technology encounters (Kelly et al., 2017), and value of self-service technology (Scherer et al., 2015). Although these studies offer industry specific insight to co-creation of services and subsequent value creation, they are customer-centric in focus.

The development of technology has allowed consumers to perform more service tasks themselves. Kelly et al. (2017) describe the co-creation of services using self-service technology as a partnership, in which the consumer is central within the partnership. Although the consumer takes control, the authors discuss many roles that consumers take when using self-service technologies, such as convenience seeker, motivated worker, judge, enforced worker, unskilled worker, and assistance provider. This demonstrates that there is a blurring of roles between consumers and employees, which is facilitated by the use of self-service technologies. Ryan (2012) suggests that co-production should be a shared process between customer and organisation, in the sense that power should be

equal, and that customers should be engaged with the organisation, rather than being a passive user.

In the first qualitative study to focus on the employee and the perceived usefulness of self-service technologies, Montargot and Ben Lahouel (2018) explored the change of roles and boundaries between the employee and the consumer. Now there are shared systems (self-service technologies) to allow co-creation of services, meaning the employees 'role' has experienced a shift in responsibilities. The concept of consumer productivity within the co-creation of services through the use of self-service technologies is discussed by Anitsal and Schumann (2007). From a consumer perspective, they found that customers can perceive self-service technologies as labour, therefore there needs to be a balance between the co-production of service, with the benefit for the consumer for it to be a favourable co-creation.

A similar study by Hilton and Hughes (2008) researched co-production of services by using service-dominant logic from a customer's perspective, and stress consideration to not only value from co-production, but also productivity. Here social and psychological factors alongside the technology are considered, before a customer decides on the value of the output from the co-creation. Stokburger-Sauer, Scholl-Grissemann, Teichmann, and Wetzels (2016) discuss the value of selling personalised experiences, and also value co-creation between a customer and an organisation. This co-production, or co-creation of services is a crucial point in the service encounter, as depending on the outcome of the interaction with self-service technologies, it will determine the outcome of the customer's evaluations of the organisation. In a paper concerning co-production of services and empowerment, Harrison and Waite (2015) argue that by empowering customer, co-

production is not always an indicator of value, however. The authors found that with some customers more information and more power was actually overwhelming and led to disempowerment. This research therefore suggests that there are more managerial implications of co-production that need to be considered before full integration of self-service technologies. This is an important consideration for the overall study, which will be further explored in section 3.4, relating to the balance of high-tech, high-touch service delivery.

Bendapudi and Leone (2003) discuss that when a customer believes they have the expertise and experience to co-create service by using self-service technologies, they attribute positive outcomes and evaluations from their own beliefs. However, a customer with technology anxiety that may be in a forced use of self-service technology situation, may exit the co-creation of services for another organisation.

### 3.3.2.2 Prosumption

Linking to the concept of co-creation of services, the concept of prosumption, or prosuming, created by Toffler (1980), which is concerned with production and consumption. A 'prosumer' would be an individual that is producing and consuming service at the same time. Ritzer (2017) describes forced prosumption as work that is done by a consumer that would normally be paid work of an employee, under the term 'McDonaldisation society'. Technology plays a considerable role within the concept of prosumption, as technology is seen as the enabler to allow consumers to control and carry out tasks that would otherwise be managed by an employee (Humphreys & Grayson, 2008). Therefore, process driven tasks and transactions can allow customers to carry out the work via self-service technologies. Without this link from technology, there

are limited capabilities of what a consumer can do. These transactional tasks are able to be processed via the use of self-service technologies. Gelderman et al. (2011) posit that automated, transactional tasks are generally offered by self-service technologies such as kiosks, which to a customer can be seen as time saving. However, could it be viewed as collaborative service delivery between a customer and the organisation? Self-service technologies typically allow process driven, transactional tasks to be carried out by a customer that is a non-professional in service delivery, however the development of mobile technologies and applications allows for more collaboration between a customer and an organisation (Schuster, Proudfoot, & Drennan, 2015).

Lewis and McCann (2004) suggested from a study that most common service problems in a hotel setting evolve from the processes of service delivery, rather than the outcome. This suggests that processes that can be automated by the use of technology could avoid problematic events that lead to service failure. The view of Oh et al. (2016) is that self-service technologies exist as a transactional facility, the function of which should not be to replace or support complex service delivery.

There have been various developments of the original prosumption concept. There is the idea that 'collective production' can be achieved by a network of consumers, which can take place to produce value to an overall community (Muniz Jr & Schau, 2005). The concept of prosumption has been developed further to a consumer-as-creator revolution, as described by Nadeau (2007), whereby firms are reaching out to consumers to be involved in not just the production, but the design of new products and services. This dramatic shift in roles is significant, considering the future implications it has on customer-organisation relationships. To add to this re-shaping of prosumption, craft consumption

(Campbell, 2005) encapsulates customisation and personalisation in the production of a product or service.

It is not a concept that comes without critique, however. One of the main debates within prosumption is the question of unpaid labour. Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010) claim that if the consumer is both producing and consuming their own service without the need for an employee or representative from a firm, it can therefore be classified as unpaid labour which would otherwise be taken care of in a traditional face to face service encounter, without the use of technology. Andrews (2018) questions why consumers would work more for less without any tangible benefit, in a society where technology and the idea of prosumption is leading to less employment in services.

There is a notion of freedom under prosumption that allows a consumer to have control, and the freedom to make decisions and be responsible for certain outcomes (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Organisations allowing this to be possible however, illustrates a balance of power between the consumer and the organisation. There is however a difference in a consumer being voluntarily active in prosumption, to being forced into the process. This links with the discussions later in section 3.4, around the replacement of traditional face to face services with self-service technologies.

### 3.4 High-touch, high-tech approach

Within the literature there are typically two stances on the implementation of self-service technologies. It is argued that self-service technologies are seen as a separate entity (Salomann, Kolbe, & Brenner, 2005), or that a technology-based service encounter, is still a service encounter regardless of how the service is received (Curran, Meuter, & Surprenant, 2003). The juxtaposition of using standardised, self-service technologies and personal, face to face interactions within service encounters is rarely evaluated. Dickinson et al. (2014) highlight the growing academic interest in understanding the shift to technology mediated encounters, which are changing customer's perceptions of activity, place, and time. Through this integration of technology within the service encounter, there have been discussions around how the traditional low-tech, high touch approach to service delivery, as is typically adopted in hotels, is being changed (Giebelhausen et al., 2014).

Within this section, literature around multi-channel service delivery will be reviewed, which adds to the discussion around how service can be delivered with a high-tech, high-touch approach. This then leads to whether self-service technologies are seen as a replacement of face-to-face service, or if self-service facilitates traditional service delivery. More recent research questions the development of mobile applications and how self-service technologies are integrated into daily use (Lee, 2018a). The ease of use as well as the availability to instantly access self-service technologies has a great impact on frequency of use and perception of usefulness (Kamboj & Gupta, 2018). Not only are mobile applications an extension of the branded hospitality product, but they also put the customer in control of the service outcome.

After an understanding of what has been researched around this topic, a view of the service versus the experience, and standardisation versus uniqueness will be discussed. This will give an insight into how a multi-channel service delivery approach has an impact on how the overall service experience is perceived. This direct impact on how self-service technologies are perceived by both service providers and customers leads to the final section of the chapter around critical outcomes. By understanding how the use of multi-channel service delivery impacts the outcomes, this will inform how service delivery has changed over time and give an insight for future studies. By reviewing the relevant literature around these topics, this will give a clear understanding of the current body of knowledge around the high-tech, high-touch approach that is currently changing the way hospitality services are delivered and received. Not only will this address what is currently known, it will also provide an understanding of what areas are currently under-researched.

### **3.4.1 Tech-touch concept**

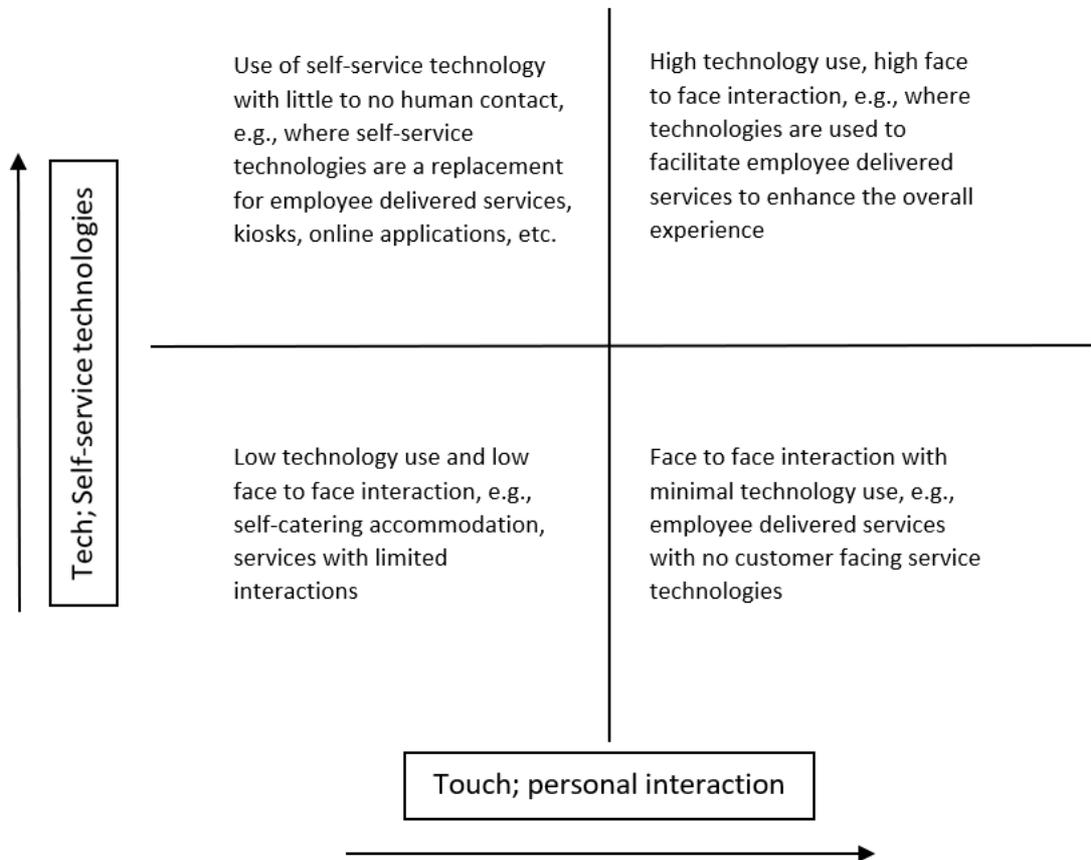
It is clear from the literature that conventional service encounters are being reduced and impacted by technology (Curran et al., 2003; Kucukusta et al., 2014), however it is also noted that it is a combination of technology and personal interaction that can lead to a positive outcome (Giebelhausen et al., 2014). Following an understanding of the high-tech, high-touch approach in hospitality service environments and multi-channel service delivery, a review of literature will follow on different technologies that are involved in service delivery.

### 3.4.1.1 Tech-touch mix

Before considering multi-channel service delivery, it is first necessary to understand the tech versus touch concept. The varying levels of the touch-tech concept are further described in figure 2. Traditionally, service delivery was seen as low-tech, high-touch, given the nature of how personal service is delivered (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). As discussed in the previous chapter, interpersonal service is dependent on the personal interaction of an employee and a customer (Guenzi & Pelloni, 2004). This would be regarded as a high-touch approach in a service context; high personal contact with a low technology input. With development of technology and the gradual implementation of self-service technologies over time in service industries such as hotels, this general view of how service is delivered has become outdated.

Technology is changing the way in which service is delivered and received (Sur, 2011), and is therefore impacting the touch versus tech concept. Where technology is used to supplement the service encounter along with personal, face to face interactions, this is conceptualised as high-tech, high-touch. In favour of a high-tech, high-touch approach to service delivery, a study by Ritter and Walter (2006) claimed that technology competence and personal relationships between service providers and customer led to both profitability and fulfilment, however there needs to be a balance between technology competency and relationship management for a positive outcome to occur.

Figure 2: Tech-touch concept



There are conflicting views within the literature that hotel service should remain as low-tech, high-touch delivery, and it is debated in both academic literature and trade press whether the future of hospitality could lead to a high-tech, low-touch industry with the development of new technology (Taillon & Huhmann, 2019). Literature around keeping a low-tech approach in service industries (Bitner et al., 2000) is argued by the balance of studies around high-touch and high-tech within hospitality environments (Jones & Brewer, 2001; Salomann et al., 2005). A study by Brochado, Rita, and Margarido (2016) discussed that there is a generational preference to high-touch, whereby Generation-X and younger are most likely to require a high-tech hotel, with an overall majority wanting a digital or

smartphone option to typical hotel services such as checking in/out, keyless entry to rooms, and ordering room service to create a better experience. Salomann et al. (2005) suggest integration of self-service technologies which complement personal service simultaneously. What is still evident from the literature is that there is still a requirement for personal service, which is a view that is supported by academics within the field (Beatson, Coote, & Rudd, 2006; Harris, 2007; Jones & Brewer, 2001). It is therefore apparent that a multi-channel service delivery approach would be required to achieve the high-touch, high-tech approach in hospitality.

#### 3.4.1.2 Multi-channel service delivery

Multi-service channel delivery is described as “the use of alternative modes of contact by customers to interact with and obtain service from an organization” (Cassab & Maclachlan, 2009, p. 53). By offering both interpersonal service as well as quality self-service options, this approach can be seen as both high-tech and high-touch. The service experience blueprint was created by Patrício, Fisk, and Falcão E Cunha (2008) which is a method for investigating technology-enabled multi-interface service experiences, within the banking industry. This method takes into account customer experience requirements as; “identified as usefulness, efficiency and personal contact” (Patrício et al., 2008, p. 322), and the paper calls for further investigation into the interrelationships of self-service technologies and service provider-customer interactions.

It is evident that both thoughtful technologies and interpersonal service is required to meet with the expectations by the customer. This was further explored in a paper concerned with e-service quality in multi-channel services, whereby the results suggest that channelling services via the internet may reduce e-loyalty intentions (Sousa & Voss,

2012). This is also evident in a study by Scherer et al. (2015), that reports that customers are most likely to exit a service relationship if only one channel of service is used, which therefore supports the importance of multi-channel service delivery. The concept of multi-channel service delivery is not new to sectors such as retail and banking, however when applied in the context of delivery of hospitality services, it is a growing concern. Where self-service technologies are available, customers can now choose how they would like to receive their services delivered to them; via face to face interaction, via self-service technologies within the service environment such as kiosks. This 'augmented service' approach is explored by Santos (2003), and states that by utilising technology, there is potential to increase firm attractiveness, create positive word of mouth and increase customer retention.

The development of mobile applications as self-service technologies within hotels is fast growing, predominantly within the midscale to upscale chains with a 20% growth over the last four years (AHLA, 2019). Mobile applications have been introduced to allow full customer management of reservations, billing and further hotel services. Therefore, the introduction of mobile applications within hotels has changed the way in which customers engage with hospitality services (Dickinson et al., 2014). Typically, self-service technologies are fully automated, however developments within mobile applications allows further connectivity with service employees via chat services. The mobile application is therefore being used as a facilitator of delivering service to a customer but could also fully replace the human interaction between the customer and the service provider. The intention to use mobile applications is dependent on perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use from a study using the technology acceptance model as a framework (Lu et al., 2015).

### 3.4.2 Replacing or Facilitating?

Following a review of the literature in multi-channel service delivery and building on the knowledge of hospitality services in practice, an understanding is required if self-service technologies are perceived as replacing or facilitating hospitality service delivery. In the case that traditional face to face service is being replaced, the displacement of the experience needs to be explored, as well as the transactional versus collaborative service concept to understand how services are being changed by technology.

#### 3.4.2.1 Replacing traditional service methods

This section follows on from discussions around prosumption in section 3.3. Many industries are adopting self-service technologies and customer-facing technologies to replace human contact to save labour costs and streamline their operations, such as retail. (Shaw, Curth, & Alexander, 2004). The notable objectives of replacing traditional face to face service with self-service technologies and robotic technology are that it improves efficiency and can save on labour, however it can drive unemployment in certain areas (Sachs, Benzell, & LaGarda, 2015). Although it is proven that automation of tasks and availability of self-service technologies can replace certain job roles, it has also been noted that it can improve efficiency and increase labour in other areas of a business (Autor, 2015). From this literature, it is clear most objectives for the replacement of traditional face to face service are for the benefit of the organisation, particularly efficiency and profit. Self-service check-out machines are not a new concept to consumers, and have replaced the need for dedicated check-out staff in retail settings (Andrews, 2018).

The context of research by Lee et al. (2012) was the airline industry, whereby self-service technologies are being installed to save on labour costs. However, in both the supermarket retail and airline examples given, there are subsequent issues that are a result of using such self-service technologies in place of face to face, personal service. In the supermarket retail example, although labour costs have been saved by implementing self-service technologies, there have been issues with computer errors and consumer theft, which are unaccounted for in the rationalisation for use (Andrews, 2018). Therefore, there is a forced use of self-service technologies, as there is no alternative. As customers begin to question the perceived usefulness of self-service technologies, they begin to make their own evaluations of the service provider, without having any direct human contact (Liu, 2012).

In sectors where self-service technologies are now commonplace such as retail, there are still issues with providing the correct level of service. An example from the retail chain Wal-Mart where there were limited traditional, employee manned check-outs, they received complaints and a decline in custom, whereby executives questioned their self-service technology strategy (Banjo, 2014). Although the objective of using self-service technology is different to that of hotels, it is well documented within literature that forced use of self-service technologies can lead to anxiety and dissatisfaction (Kim et al., 2017), which will be covered in depth further in the chapter.

#### 3.4.2.2 Facilitating traditional service methods with technology

The discussion around forced and voluntary use aligns with multi-channel service delivery. Within the hospitality sector, offering the choice of personal or technology-mediated encounters supports the high-tech, high-touch service delivery approach. Technology can

be utilised to increase overall service offerings, as well as raising standards in the service industry (Santos, 2003). The future of traditional sharing of tourist information is discussed by Dickinson et al. (2014), who recommend that tourism providers need to be proactive in how information is delivered in a mobile context. This is in line with the predictions of Kim et al. (2017), exploring how mobile applications will change service delivery to a 'person-to-computer dyad', rather than the traditional interpersonal relationship between an employee and a customer.

Majra, Saxena, Jha, and Jagannathan (2016) discuss the inseparability of the service and customer experience, and the role that technology now plays in that relationship. It was proven in their study that there was a significant positive relationship between self-service technology use and the customer experience by facilitating service with technology, rather than replacing traditional service methods, which is in line with the high-tech, high-touch concept. With a focus on service robots, a paper by Wirtz et al. (2018) state that tasks that require emotional input or have complex needs are likely to be delivered by humans, supported by robots. There are two ways of viewing this; technology is not yet developed enough in emotional intelligence to deliver service with empathy and emotion, or there is a need for consumers to have face-to-face interaction when a situation requires emotion. Considering both cases, there is still a requirement for technology-based solutions to support interpersonal relationships rather than replace them.

### **3.4.3 Standardisation versus uniqueness; service versus experience**

From the literature reviewed in the previous section, it is evident that self-service technologies remove the transactional activities from the service encounter, allowing the employee to deliver a more collaborative experience. It is argued within the literature that by removing the functional transactions, the face to face service encounter becomes more memorable and offers an 'experience' (Gilmore & Pine, 2002). Ding and Keh (2016) examined standardisation and customisation and found that there are two stances on what a customer may want; a utilitarian approach where they would prefer a standardised service, or a hedonic approach where personal customisation and uniqueness are required. Therefore, the organisation needs to adapt its service offerings to suit the customer to ensure positive evaluations are made.

Uniqueness theory determines an individual's similarity to another individual, and an individual's uniqueness is dependent on the type of person (Snyder & Fromkin, 2012). In relation to uniqueness theory, Lynn and Harris (1997) explored the relationship between customers pursuit of uniqueness and consumption, and that there is a need for innovativeness and customisation. Tian, Bearden, and Hunter (2001) discuss consumers' need for uniqueness, the drive to achieve differentiation, and using consumption as a way to achieve this. Therefore, consumers are making their decisions based on the outcomes, rather than the processes. Piccoli, Lui, and Grün (2017) suggest the importance of self-service technology personalisation, as there are proven links with customer engagement, positive evaluations and financial benefits. The very nature of using self-service technology however, means that the processes and responses can be very structured and

standardised as they are generally static systems. This standardised approach is a stark contrast to traditional face to face service, whereby personal interactions can lead to further actions. The standardised approach can also be seen as a production line approach to service, whereby there are repetitive tasks that can be reproduced (Levitt, 1972).

#### 3.4.3.1 Viewing hospitality as a systemscape

Bryman (2004) introduces the concept of the systemscape, a standardised service environment linked to globalisation, and the Disneyization of society. “Consumption lies at the heart of Disneyization” (Bryman, 2004, p. 149), offering an insight in the systemisation of services. The systemscape suggests that efficiency and predictability are key in creating a homogenous service, in a controlled environment, with a link to Fordism. Taking the characteristics of McDonalds service offering homogeneity and standardisation, and the characteristics of Disney theme park service offering variety and customisation through theming, the two brands have global brand recognition and globally recognised systems.

Bryman considers that symbols contribute to brand recognition and meaning. When considering this perspective, particularly in terms of hospitality and tourism, the standardised service and recognisable brand logos (or symbols) can offer customers emotional engagement (Buhalis & Park, 2021). This is taken further in the context of technology inclusion by allowing customer co-creation through the use of SMART and self-service technologies, claiming that this can reshape the customer-brand relationship (Buhalis & Park, 2021). In the context of global hotel chains, the standardisations and efficiency of the systemscape suggested by Bryman (2004), and the brand affirmations

and co-creation through technology suggested by Buhalis and Park (2021), this could effectively be achieved through their consistency and standardised practices across the hotel portfolio.

Technological standardisation can be a result from the globalisation of brands, whereby it can be beneficial to have standardised marketing strategies and systems. However, this standardised approach may not give a unique and memorable experience to a customer (Yu, Byun, & Lee, 2014) as the technological experience remains the same. Sipe and Testa (2018) studied the concept of standard service which satisfies needs against a unique experience which evokes emotion. Memories and emotional value were preferred by customers in the study, opposed to service with consistency and functional value. Within this study there was a clear focus that the service employee is the main facilitator of enhancing guest engagement.

Chih-Hung Wang (2012) reported that organisations should provide self-service technologies that are engaging and entertaining in order to provide a unique and memorable experience. Within hospitality where every guest wants to feel valued, using self-service technologies can often be seen as a missed opportunity. The intervention of staff during the first guest-employee interaction can be prosperous for guests within hotels. Upgrades, free services and elevation of the guest experience (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013), are all outcomes of personal, face to face service. When using self-service technologies these opportunities may be lost without human intervention, which in turn can affect the overall experience. van Riel et al. (2013) suggest a service constellation approach to designing self-service technologies, so that the innovations are designed from a customers' perspective. This way, the wants and needs of the customer would be

considered within the self-service technology design, which would not only personalise a unique service delivery option, but it would allow customers to use a more tailored system. In terms of a hospitality context, it would also offer a distinction between budget and luxury offerings.

Although the suggestions of a systemised and standardised approach, including the additions of technology within the service offering may be valid, the potential challenges and consequences of this need to be explored. Augmenting a service offering within hospitality, which is traditionally a personalised interaction involving face to face service delivery, can add challenges. Although smart and self-service technologies are widely accepted within society in terms of usage (Foroudi, Gupta, Sivarajah, & Broderick, 2018), there are still considerations of forced use of technology and technology anxiety.

Literature concerning technology anxiety and forced use was covered in section 3.1 in terms of perceived pressures and how that can be related to service failure. Perceived crowding and perceived time pressures are key contributors to technology anxiety, particularly in public or open settings (Gelbrich & Sattler, 2014). Given the public nature of hotel reception areas where self-service technologies are used, this is a key issue to consider in hospitality service planning.

Systemisation and standardisation of services removes the personalisation and potential for interaction within the service delivery. Particularly in hospitality services, this shift in how service can limit employee creativity and engagement with customers. Lai, Lui, and Hon (2014) detail that “frontline employees do more than just deal with unstructured issues; they exercise their creativity in novel ways to help and advise customers (Lai et al., 2014, p. 1355). The authors further argue that customer interaction is important within

the service sector, and that variation allows to empower employees and impress customers. This further establishes a need for understanding what elements of service should be standardised, replaced, or facilitated by technology within service delivery.

### **3.4.4 Service Evaluations**

From reviewing the literature on a multi-channel service delivery approach and the impact of technology-mediated encounters, it is essential to understand the service evaluations and implications of customers using self-service and customer-facing technology (Meuter et al., 2000; Robertson et al., 2016). Although this research study is concerned with the relationships between customers, hospitality employees and technology, it is essential to understand the overall implications of these relationships in the overall hospitality service environment.

#### **3.4.4.1 Satisfaction**

When considering customer outcomes of service transactions, there is a notable link between satisfaction and profitability, customer loyalty and customer retention (Yeung, Ging, & Ennew, 2002), therefore it is necessary to consider a discussion regarding satisfaction in relation to self-service technology use. Service quality models such as SERVQUAL and the GAP model of service quality focus largely on key dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, communication, knowledge and trust, with more contemporary models including interaction quality, people, processes, service environment and outcome quality (Yarimoglu, 2014).

Yarimoglu (2014) posited service quality could be organised in to three main categories: physical environment, people and process. Compared with the qualities for favourable self-service technology encounters from Dabholkar (1996); speed of delivery, ease of use and enjoyment, and reliability. These groups of qualities are very different for what consumers expect of either face to face service, or technology-based encounters. Therefore, customers are choosing self-service technologies for convenience and efficiency. As discussed in section 3.2, technology readiness is noted as an antecedent to satisfaction, in that positive technology readiness can influence customer satisfaction and future use intentions (Lin & Hsieh, 2007).

Overall customer perceptions of using self-service technologies are an important consideration in a customer's evaluation of service, and therefore satisfaction (Fernandes & Pedroso, 2017). According to Johnson et al. (2008), technology trust and overall control are drivers of satisfaction within self-service technology encounters. Control is also discussed in a study by Chen, Chen, and Chen (2009), whereby perceived control that customer have in using self-service technologies positively influences satisfaction levels. To add to this, the outcome of satisfaction from using self-service technologies according to Robertson et al. (2016) is associated with future use intentions, positive word of mouth and trust in the service provider.

Personal interactions are also seen as important particularly in relation to satisfaction. Beatson et al. (2006) expressed concern that satisfaction may be lost due to technological interactions as employees have no influence in the service encounter when replaced with technology. Although many studies around satisfaction and the use of self-service technologies are focused on the consumer, from an employee perspective, Moon, Hur,

and Hyun (2019) examined work motivation, and how employees that are able to be more creative and spontaneous within the service encounter, the more customer oriented, satisfied and motivated they were within their work. Overall, there is a significant lack of research around satisfied employees through the use of self-service technologies. As satisfaction is noted as an antecedent to delight, the following section will continue to look at customer evaluations, and the likelihood of customer delight following the use of self-service technologies.

#### 3.4.4.2 Delight

The concept of customer delight has been addressed in the literature as a positive surprise (Oliver, Rust, & Varki, 1997), a relationship between an employee and a customer with hedonic qualities within the interaction (Barnes, Ponder, & Dugar, 2011), which can also lead to profit enhancement (Yeung et al., 2002). It is necessary to look at delight from different perspectives; customer, employee, and self-service technology, to understand how delight can be achieved when employee delivered hospitality services are facilitated by technology. From a consumer perspective, a study by Verma (2003) suggests that human interactions are the most important dimension to achieving customer delight. The study revealed the following staff attributes that lead to customer delight; “politeness, courtesy, care, friendliness, understanding customer and respect” (Verma, 2003, p. 130). To add to this, Barnes et al. (2015) discuss the antecedents of customer delight. Employee effort and employee skills, particularly in personalisation and customisation are noted to have an impact on overall customer delight. Personal interactions and positive relationships are therefore key to achieving customer delight,

leading to the assumption that for delight to be achieved there needs to be a positive interaction between a service employee and a customer.

Understanding delight from an employee perspective, customer delight has been proven to have a positive impact on employee job satisfaction (Barnes et al., 2013; Barnes, Collier, & Robinson, 2014). This links with a study by Moon et al. (2019), where employees are more creative when involved in service encounters, they become more motivated to positively increase job performance. It has been proven that both employee effort and employee skills are important factors within customer delight (Barnes et al., 2011), and that the customer perceives this as a positive effect. Although there are many studies around customer delight and the importance of the employee within that concept, there is very little literature around the concept of customer delight within technology-based service encounters.

From a self-service technology perspective, customer delight can be a result of either use of the self-service technology itself, or the additional, personal service that supplements it. In a paper by Griffy-Brown, Chun, and Machen (2008), it was suggested that customer delight may be possible through the use of self-service technologies, however it is dependent on the sophistication of the technology. This would be a case of the technology going beyond the customers' expectations in the capabilities of such systems. Customer delight has also been discussed as having a detrimental effect on overall satisfaction over time. As Rust and Oliver (2000) pose, expectations are raised following the previous instances of customer delight, therefore it can be harder to delight again and maintain the same level of satisfaction. It may be the case that customers will turn to self-service technologies when they are happy with the product or brand, therefore giving a feeling of

confidence. It has also been noted that by exceeding customers' expectations and delighting the customer, it has a direct impact on customer loyalty and retention (Torres & Kline, 2013).

#### 3.4.4.3 Loyalty

It is well known in literature that satisfaction is noted as an antecedent to customer loyalty (Lee, Fairhurst, & Lee, 2009; Shankar, Smith, & Rangaswamy, 2003), however with regards to self-service technology use, further questions that remain are that around loyalty and if a customer likely to be loyal to a company where there is no personal interaction (Curran et al., 2003). Butcher, Sparks, and O'Callaghan (2001) discuss the predictors of loyalty being evaluative judgement, personal trust, and barriers, all of which are dependent on the customers overall evaluation of the service encounter, or organisation.

In a paper concerned with technology based remote service encounters, Sur (2011) discussed the customer interaction with remote self-service technologies, and that those experiences ultimately affect satisfaction and loyalty. It is clear that customers require a favourable technology interaction to build upon the positive interactions with service employees. Taillon and Huhmann (2019) detail two views of service evaluations from self-service technology use; customer-centric view, which includes loyalty and trust, and a firm-centric view, which covers profitability and economic value. Although this study provides the connection between the customer and the organisation, there is no consideration of employees, therefore further establishing a gap in knowledge in terms of perspective.

It is stated by Chuang, Chan, Wang, and Chung (2010) that satisfaction and loyalty should be paramount in the planning processes of self-service technology implementation. Chen and Wang (2016) discuss how co-created value can lead to loyalty, and how satisfaction with the self-service technology is an antecedent to satisfaction and loyalty. Therefore, this demonstrates the further the use of self-service technology and the more the customer is involved in the production of the service, the more loyal to the organisation. Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2016) explain that increased levels of coproduction of services with self-service technologies will only create loyalty to a certain point. Once the customer is aware that there is little interaction or relationship building, the loyalty with the organisation diminishes. Perceived value and satisfaction are seen as significant to achieving loyalty according to research by Demirci Orel and Kara (2014), however it may be determined by the experience as a whole, including any contributions or involvement from service employees during the time the customer is engaging with self-service technologies.

Convenience is also noted as a positive evaluative effect and can influence customer loyalty, particularly based on factors such as efficiency, speed and accuracy (Barnes et al., 2013). However, customers that require face to face interaction, linking back to the discussion on need for interaction from section 3.3, are unlikely to build loyalty to an organisation that mainly utilises self-service technologies. Although the current study is not concerned with the overall evaluations or consequences of utilising self-service technologies, it is still important to understand the repercussions on customer outcomes of using self-service technologies over traditional face to face service.

### 3.5 Chapter summary

It is clear from the breadth of literature around attitudes, motivations, and feelings of technology use, that there are many issues to consider before an organisation can integrate self-service technologies into their business. In the discussions around servicescape, there is evidence that the service encounter has external variables that need to be considered to truly understand the customer interaction with the organisation, particularly in technology mediated encounters, and how those encounters affect the customer-supplier relationship. From reviewing literature around technology adoption and resistance, there is a clear indication that there are many variables to consider, and therefore there is not one single theory that can fully explore the reasons for adoption or resistance.

Within the literature around service failure and recovery it is clear that there are further issues to explore around the social and psychological aspects of the interaction with self-service technologies, customer and employees. Therefore, there is more research that needs to be done in order to fully understand the thoughts and behaviours around self-service technologies. It is evident from the review of literature that there is a discord between the objectives of self-service technology use from both an organisational point of view and consumer understanding. Whilst there are economic benefits and efficiency gains that can be achieved from an organisational point of view, there are pressures and consequences of use from a consumer point of view, which can have social impacts which are yet to be fully explored.

Section 3.3 was concerned with the customer-supplier interaction and the impact of self-service technologies. The personal relationships that exist between customer and service

employees are now extending from a dyadic relationship to a triadic relationship to include technology as the third actor. It is clear from the literature that there has been a great impact on the services industry from the development and implementation of self-service technologies. This development has not only filtered through the operation of organisations, but also through the personal interactions and relationships between customers and employees. There are deeper social and psychological issues that need to be explored in terms of the increased use of self-service technologies over personal interaction.

Whilst co-creation of services allows the customer to be closer to organisations and determine their own service outcomes, technology can be seen as both the link binding both customers and employees together, and also the barrier between both groups. Literature around shared value, productivity, and power within co-creation of services, explores the benefits of both customers and employees, and what outcomes both groups are set to achieve from the relationship. What is unknown, is the long-term effects that the development of self-service technologies has on not only personal relationships, but how customers and employees will communicate and form relationships whilst technology is in between both groups. The terms of how technology can work as a facilitator of service, rather than a human replacement, and how customers, employees and technology can work together, was also considered.

Throughout section 3.4 the concept of a high-tech, high-touch approach to service delivery was explored, as well as the outcomes from the interception of technology within the traditional service encounter setting. Through a review of literature, it is evident that technology has not only improved the delivery of services, but also changed the

landscape in which services are delivered. Mobile application development has extended the hospitality product to customers, giving access to services regardless of location, therefore strengthening the high-touch concept of service delivery. This extension of both the hospitality product and the brand is important to understand, as it affects how traditional, face to face service aligns with technology-aided service. The idea that self-service technologies are used to facilitate rather than replace is critical in the future of hospitality services in terms of customer-employee relationships, customer evaluations and patronage.

By using self-service technologies to create a unique service encounter, rather than standardising the service encounter with routine tasks, this would give the customer a memorable, immersive experience, as well as give organisations a competitive edge. Given these factors, it is still important to consider the outcomes and evaluations of using self-service technologies, therefore giving further insight in to how an organisation can adopt a high-tech, high-touch approach to service delivery. Now that the literature has been reviewed, there is an understanding required of how this affects the relationships between the supplier and customer.

The next chapter will provide an overview of the literature in terms of this study, as well as identifying the gaps in knowledge. This discussion will then detail how the researcher will take the study forward to address the research questions set out in the introduction chapter.

## Chapter Four: Literature Review Summary

### 4.1 Literature overview

From the literature it is clear that self-service technologies have developed immensely during the last decade, and these technologies are impacting service delivery. From practice, it is also evident that technology will continue to be infused with traditional service delivery to enhance, facilitate, and even replace frontline service employees in some cases. Technology infusion within servicescapes literature has been a widely researched area, with a focus on the service environment and the purpose of using self-service technologies. This utilitarian approach to researching use of self-service technologies provides a basis of understanding on the usefulness and purpose of such technologies. Transactional activities that were once performed by people, are being replaced by technology, where the practical intention is to enrich the interactions that take place face to face. Given the importance on the experience within hospitality, in practice the influence of technology on the experience and guest-host relationship is yet to be explored.

In terms of technology acceptance, it is evident that customer attitudes and behavioural intentions are important stages to consider. Given that there are many external variables to consider within the decision-making process, there have been various studies that have explored this construct, highlighted in the literature review. There are however few studies that have confirmed that customers are generally accepting of the technology that is being developed within the field of hospitality, and that there are positive perceptions of the

outcome of using such technologies. Nevertheless, it is evident in literature that employee intervention is still required for service failure and recovery situations, and that at this stage, technology is therefore overruled in these situations given the nature of the tasks required. This collaborative approach to service delivery is important to consider, as this is the basis of technology use between guest and employee.

It is clear that there needs to be a focus of research on the high-tech and high-touch approach to service delivery, particularly within hospitality, given the rapid developments of technology and the need for personal interaction. When comparing self-service technology use in other industries such as retail and banking, there is an established high-tech, low-touch operation given the transactional nature of service. However, the hospitality industry, has far greater interaction needs considering the breadth and fragmentation of services. This is still cause for debate in current literature and is currently changing the landscape of hospitality service. Traditional forms of hospitality service are being adapted to accommodate technology in response to consumer demand, as well as aiding, and in some cases replacing, frontline employees for organisational benefit. The concept of high-tech, high-touch is now an important topic particularly within hospitality literature, as traditionally the core concept of hospitality service is high-touch, low-tech.

## **4.2 Gaps in knowledge**

Over time, the relationship between employees and customers is being altered by the use of technology. Fewer personal interactions, less customer dependency on employees and more co-creation of services, means that there are new relationships being formed with the technologies that allow customers to interplay with service delivery. As technology is

overtaking personal interactions, it is unknown how dependent or reliant guests are on technology to provide service. It is this interplay that is yet to be fully explored, and what the future of the employee and customer relationship will be, particularly in hospitality where traditionally the industry depends on personal interactions to achieve guest satisfaction and in turn build brand loyalty. Adding technology to this construct means that not only are customers given additional roles and power, but there is also less power and less of a service role for the employees. The personal interactions and personal connections between employee and guest are yet to be explored using self-service technology as a third actor within the service encounter. In a service context, the same tasks are performed, however there is a shift in performance of roles.

What is lacking is the perspective from employees, as what was evident from the review of literature, was the focus on customer-centric or organisation-centric research. The employee perspective is particularly important when considering guest-host relationships in hospitality. Literature that focuses on the employee within hospitality service-related research is more aligned with personal values such as culture (Sun, Lee, Law, & Zhong, 2020), job position and experience (Sun, Lee, Law, & Hyun, 2020) and adoption (Zheng & Montargot, 2021). The perceptions of both employees and customers of how these roles are changing, how they are being performed and expectations of outcome are still unknown. Although co-creation of services is not a new concept, how the roles are performed, and how that changes the dynamic within this network is yet to be explored. By understanding these roles, and the social dynamic between employees, guests and technology, this will inform whether a high-tech, high-touch approach to hospitality can be effectively practised.

### **4.3 Application of actor network theory and role theory as a theoretical lens**

Actor network theory allows consideration of multiple actors within an interaction, or network. By applying this theory, it can therefore be assumed that the triad of actors within the hospitality environment; employees, customers, technology, are all of equal importance to each other. When discussing technology within social interaction, Johnson (1988) describes technology as “delegated non-human actant” (Johnson, 1988, p. 302), placing technology within the network of equal importance, regardless of being non-human. Although the assemblage of the network is important to explore, the specific roles of the actors cannot be fully explored by using actor network theory alone. By understanding the roles, and how those roles are changing, both in expectation and perception, it is necessary to use role theory to complement actor network theory to fully explore this phenomenon. By using role theory, the allocation and shift of roles between these actors can therefore be explored. It is clear from literature that the traditional roles of both customers and employees that are socially accepted within society, are changing. The co-creation of services blurs the line between what is expected of an employee, and the increasing empowerment of customers within the service encounter.

With the above discussion in mind, by combining both actor network theory and role theory as a theoretical lens for the study, there is an appreciation for understanding how employees, guests and technology socialise together within a network, as well as understanding the shift in roles. By using this lens as well as what is known from current literature, it is then possible to understand the construct of the relationship between the actors, and how that impacts the overall delivery of hospitality service. The application of

both actor network theory and role theory under this study allows the researcher to explore the research questions.

## 4.5 Research questions

At this stage, it is important to review the research questions of the study to give further focus and direction leading to the methodology. The overall aim of the research is to explore the concept of high-tech, high-touch hospitality through an understanding of the use of self-service technologies and the guest-host relationship. To do this, the integration of self-service technology within the service encounter needs to be explored to understand the interplay between traditional forms of service and technology-aided service. An understanding of self-service technology use and the interaction between the guest and host will be explored, to distinguish common perceptions from both guests and hosts. This will then allow the researcher to explore if hotels can effectively adopt a high-tech, high-touch approach to service delivery, and explore the guest-host relationship further. Therefore, before the methodology is presented in chapter five, the following research questions are posed.

### 4.5.1 Research question 1:

*High-tech, high-touch hospitality: From the perspectives of both guests and employees, how desirable is a high-tech, high-touch approach to service in hotels?*

It was evident in the review of literature that self-service technologies are used to both replace and facilitate traditional service methods, therefore this can be used as a basis to understand further perceptions of self-service technologies from both the guest and

employee perspective. The outcomes of using self-service technology have been covered within current literature, such as findings on service failure and recovery, satisfaction, delight and loyalty and technology trust and anxiety. This knowledge will enable an exploration into the consideration of a high-tech, high-touch paradigm, whereby guests, employees and technology are equal actors within a social network. This will raise further discussion on service value and perceived quality considering the topic of the study.

#### 4.5.2 Research question 2:

*Self-Service Technologies: To what extent is the use of self-service technologies and digital services changing the hospitality landscape and the way both guests and hosts experience hospitality?*

Within the literature there are studies that have examined the accessibility of self-service technologies (testing ease of use and perceived usefulness through application of the technology acceptance model), the customer as a co-creator of value within a service exchange and value of self-service technology use (through application of service dominant logic), however neither of these theories take in to account the holistic service experience with multiple actors within the service encounter (customer, employee, technology) or explored the relationships between all actors. This research question covers that exploration, as well as leading to further study of the current hospitality service landscape, showing the development from the traditional face to face service to a technology-aided service exchange.

#### 4.5.3 Research question 3:

*Role changes: What perceptions of roles exist between service employees and guests due to self-service technology use within hospitality?*

Using both actor network theory and role theory as a theoretical lens will aid understanding of how the three actors (service employees, guests, and technology) within a hospitality network interact. This exploration of interaction will determine the changing roles between employees, guests, and technology. It will also assist in establishing common perceptions of roles, and the changes over time due to increased technology use. By understanding these changes, this will further add to the high-tech, high-touch discussion.

#### 4.5.4 Research question 4:

*Guest-Host Relationship: To what extent can technology be considered to have an active role within the guest-host relationship?*

It is important to reconsider the literature around both the organisational objectives of implementing self-service technologies, creating efficiencies through time and labour saving (Lee et al., 2003), and also the customer intention of using self-service technologies through application of the self-service technology attitude-intention model (Curran et al., 2003). It is also known from previous studies that self-service technologies can act as a barrier between the employee, and the guest, therefore inhibiting social exchange, however technology needs to be considered as the third actor in the relationship. The long-term guest-host relationship is yet to be explored with the addition

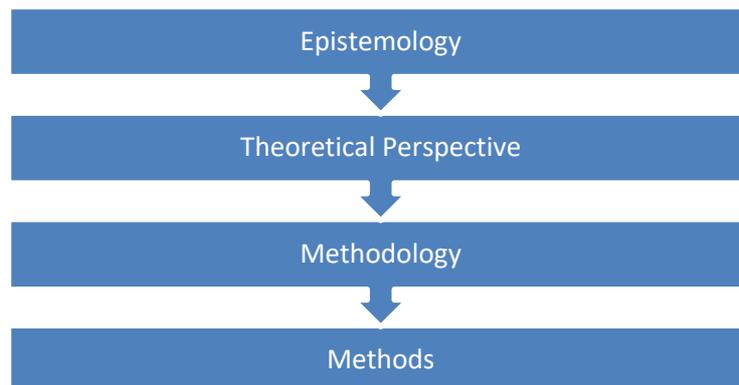
of technology, particularly in a hotel setting whereby relationship building is critical. By understanding the key drivers of guest use of self-service technologies from previous literature, this creates the foundation for the study of exploring the interactions of guests, employees, and the role of technology within that interaction, in a hotel setting. By understanding this relationship through observing interactions, perceptions from both guests and employees can be explored further, to develop a deeper understanding of the service interplay.

# Chapter Five: Methodology and methods

## 5.1 Introduction

On describing a methodology, Scotland (2012, p. 9) states it is “concerned with why, what, from where, when and how data is collected and analysed”, and the choice of methods (tools of enquiry) are derived from the methodology. The structure of the methodology and methods chapter will follow the scaffolding model as detailed by Crotty (1998, p. 4) as shown in figure 3.

*Figure 3: Methodology structure*



This chapter will start with a discussion on the research objectives, which leads into the interpretivist methodological approach to the study in relation to the purpose and motivation of the research. First the philosophical approach and position will be explained, followed by the theoretical perspective in relation to the current body of knowledge. The theoretical and philosophical assumptions will be explained, which provides a framework for the data collection. This leads to a discussion on the method adopted, research design

and sampling technique. This chapter will also outline the challenges and modifications in data collection to allow the research to reach its full potential. The analysis technique adopted will be reviewed, and personal, critical reflections will be included which provides insight into the overall research experience. This leads to a discussion on the validity, reliability and rigour of the methods adopted to carry out the data collection. Ethical and practical considerations will be covered in the chapter, along with a discussion around the research questions and how the data collected will allow for meaningful analysis before concluding with the value and contribution of the research.

## **5.2 Research philosophy and approach**

*“The study of hospitality allows for a general broad spectrum of enquiry, and the study for allows studies that support the management of hospitality” (Lashley, 2005, p. 72).*

This section is concerned with understanding the subject of study, why it is studied, how it can be studied, and how it is ultimately shaped by the researcher. This will position the research in terms of its methodological assumptions and establish the methodological decisions of the researcher. This is essential to understand prior to discussing the selected method, which will then detail how the research will be carried out (Slevitch, 2011). First, the researcher will establish what is known (ontological position), how it is known (epistemological position) and how it can be explored (methodological position and methods). Following an understanding of the methodological assumptions, the methods will then be discussed to detail how the research will be carried out.

For context, the researcher has fourteen years of experience of working in the hospitality industry in both employee and managerial roles, therefore has first-hand knowledge of

hotel service environments as well as the technologies that are being implemented into the service encounter. This allowed the exploration of a current topic within the industry, to provide an academic understanding of an operational issue, which is yet to be fully explored in terms of relationships. With this practical experience in mind, the appropriate methodological lens needs to be adopted to allow the study to reach its full potential.

The second research objective of this study is to design an appropriate study to explore the perceptions and experiences of both guests and hosts of technology within the hospitality environment. The way in which this objective will be met is through qualitative enquiry, as the focus is on understanding and exploration. To return to the scaffold model (Crotty, 1998) which introduced at the beginning of the chapter presented in figure 3, the methodological approach of this research is outlined in table 4 below, and will be discussed in further detail.

*Table 4: Overview of methodological approach*

<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Interpretivist - Phenomenological	Phenomenology - ANT and Role Theory	Qualitative - Reflexivity - Actor Network Theory	Interviewing - Reflexive Thematic Analysis - Visualisation using ANT Mapping

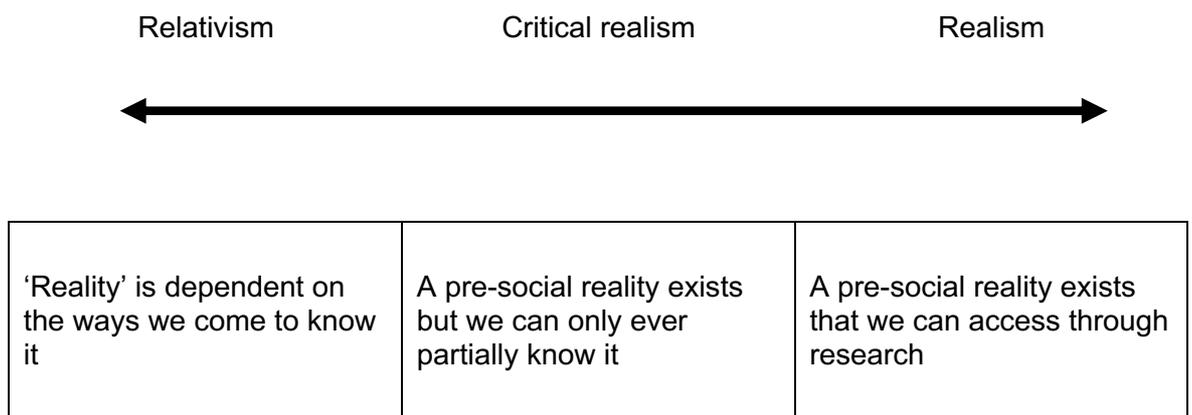
As Crotty explains, the foundation of research is not a set sequence that should be followed. Furthermore, each perspective can lead in to each other and inform each other (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, the perspectives detailed in table 4 lead into each other. For example, the researcher has adopted an interpretivist, phenomenological epistemology, however that also informs the theoretical perspective for the overall study. Furthermore,

both the theoretical and methodological assumptions of actor network theory are central to this research. Such is the ‘messiness’ of qualitative research, the ‘mess’ of which will be discussed later in the chapter.

### 5.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

First the question of ontology will be discussed. Ontology is defined as “the study of reality or things that comprise reality” (Slevitch, 2011, p. 74). and “the study of being” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). The ontological positions are detailed on a continuum shown in figure 4 below.

*Figure 4: Ontological positions (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 26)*



This continuum shows the differences in ontological positions, between realism whereby the reality is identified through research independent of interpretation, to relativism where phenomena is studied subjectively and dependent on the view and interpretation of the researcher.

Crotty believes that to discuss ontology and epistemology separately would be difficult conceptually (Crotty, 1998). To understand what it is known (ontology) and making sense of it (epistemology), particularly if the researcher is subjective in their approach, can lead to a clash of assumptions. Crotty further suggests that ontological issues can be emergent, but the theoretical perspective can offer much more context in terms of what is being studied and how. For example, in terms of this study, how is it known what exists or what is reality, without knowing what it is to know? When taking a subjective approach, the view of the world and the ways of the world are the focus, and not what the world is. For this study, the researcher is concerned with why things are the way they are, finding meaning and making sense of experiences and relationships. Therefore, the following discussion will focus on the epistemological position of the researcher.

In the production of knowledge, it is important to consider the epistemological assumptions of the study in relation to the understanding of the researcher, methodological choice and how the knowledge is created (Breuer, 2003). This research is concerned with social constructs, behaviours, and perceptions. Lashley (2015) supports the move away from a positivist or pragmatic view of hospitality, whereby the focus should move on from the operational ('how-to-do agenda') to a more critical understanding of the phenomenon of hospitality (Lashley, 2015, p. 372). The author further posits that hospitality is a series of experiences to be explored, rather than operationalised from generalisations. Generalisations through quantitative enquiry could not fully allow the researcher to search for meaning and understanding of experiences and relationships. Therefore, an interpretive approach and subjective nature of study will allow an exploration of experiences, rejecting the positivist tradition with the author further positing that "interpretivist research emphasizes the hermeneutics and perception of the social

world, and the interactions between individuals and the surrounding context” (Carminati, 2018, p. 2096).

Constructivist and interpretivist researchers share the goal of understanding the experience from the point of view of those who have experienced. Most methodologies with these views are qualitative, as they look to understand and describe relationships and interactions (Crotty, 1998). Empirical analysis is recommended to describe rather than explain social activity. This qualitative research requires an interpretivist epistemological standpoint. The study is concerned with understanding interaction of individuals with self-service technologies, with a focus on meaning. The research is therefore complex, as the researcher will need to explore meaning within situations from accounts of individuals.

Botterill (2001) discusses humanism in researching the social, and the importance of the researcher’s subjectivity and interpretation in research. The researcher is central and active within the research, and therefore interpretation is dependent on the skill and subjectivity of the researcher. The subjectivity of the study of people, their behaviours, motivations, and perspectives, is important to consider. Therefore, in the context of this study the data collection will involve both hotel guests and hosts to reflect different aspects and perspectives of high-tech, high touch hospitality and the role of technology in the guest-host relationship. The positioning of such research is described as “interpretive, ‘soft’ ways of understanding the Other”, allowing researchers to explore and understand (Wilson & Hollinshead, 2015, p. 44).

## 5.2.2 Phenomenology

*“Phenomenology suggests that, if we lay aside, the best we can, the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 78).*

There are three considerations to address within this view of phenomenology. The first to understand is experience and how researchers can learn from those experiences.

Described as “the study of direct experience without allowing the interference of existing pre-conceptions” (Scotland, 2012, p. 12), the central focus of phenomenology is the lived human experience of a particular phenomenon.

The second consideration is that learnings from experiences can help researchers understand a particular phenomenon, such as previous work experience in the field. This requires a researcher to be subjective in their research. Although a phenomenological approach is the subjective study lived experience, and open to the researcher’s interpretation of those experiences, the researcher should still be mindful not to influence the participants or project their own experiences on to the participants. This is covered later in the chapter in the discussion of bias.

The third consideration is that there can be varying experiences of a phenomena, creating a relationship between the experiencer and the experienced (Crotty, 1998). A researcher must set aside any preconceptions or presuppositions of a phenomena to explore and understand the experiences of others. Taking a phenomenological approach to this thought, a researcher would add meaning from interpretation of the shared, lived

experiences. This perspective on experiences and how people experience, is adopted by the researcher for this study to make meaning of a particular phenomenon.

The two most common approaches to phenomenology are the descriptive and interpretive. Descriptive phenomenology from the perspective of Husserl (1982), assumes that experiences can be set aside from the researcher's interpretation or biases, which is a somewhat positivistic view to phenomenology (Crowell, 2013). Therefore, this logical view of phenomenology does not view subjectivity or interpretation as philosophical assumptions.

Interpretive phenomenology as viewed by Heidegger uses a researcher's background and experiences to inform the research, embedding the researcher in the study further. The phenomenological philosophy of Heidegger has been described as challenging, particularly when applied to interpretive phenomenological research. Within Heidegger's philosophy of phenomenology, there are key assumptions that are present, noted below (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2016, p. 2).

- The concept of being
- Being in the world
- Encounters with entities in the world
- Temporality and spatiality

These assumptions reject Husserl's logical view of phenomenology as they assume inseparability between human beings and the experiences around them (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016), by an understanding of being, interaction and an inseparability with the world. This difference in perspective is key, as Heidegger's interpretive position allows

researchers to frame a particular phenomenon as experiences that are open to subjectivity. The researcher aligns the methodological assumptions of this study with the interpretive, phenomenological approach, viewing lived experiences as being open to subjectivity and interpretation. This approach is most appropriate for understanding the views and perspectives of different groups about perceptions and experiences of hospitality, and therefore is key in the methodological approach of this study.

Taking a phenomenological approach is not without limitations. By understanding the potential limitations of adopting a phenomenological epistemology, a researcher can be more informed on the practices and considerations before making methodological decisions. To attempt to understand a particular phenomenon, the lived experiences of people need to be explored. A phenomenological approach requires a researcher to be interpretive using various forms of data. Therefore, interpretation may be open to influence and bias from the researcher depending on how their experiences relate to those of the participants of a study. This subjectivity can be viewed as both a limitation and a benefit of studies that adopt a phenomenological epistemology. Consequently, researchers are required to recognise their role and potential influence prior to designing a research project. An element of subjectivity and interpretation is required in this study however as the ontological position of the researcher is relativist, therefore through interpretive enquiry the knowledge is gained. If taking a more positivist, realist ontological position on phenomenology, bias and interpretation would be avoided by adopting more scientific methods of enquiry.

A final note on phenomenology, is that it should not be adopted purely as a lens for a research study, but as also as a methodological approach, described as “both a starting

point and touchstone” (Crotty, 1998, p. 85). For this study, the assumptions of phenomenology will be carried through the iterative process of reflexivity. It is through this iterative process that meaning can be found from the sharing of lived experiences.

### 5.2.3 Actor network theory and role theory

Within this study the theoretical and methodological lens for the study is the combination of actor network theory and role theory. The researcher will draw on literature to explain the theoretical assumptions that will underpin the methodology and guide the study overall.

The researcher’s intention is to embed actor network theory throughout the study, which is becoming a prevalent underpinning across varied disciplines (Bister, 2021). Therefore, the methodological assumptions of actor network theory need to be followed. Latour (2007) claims that actor network theory is not a theory in itself, however as such, it is a way of viewing how the world works around us. It is viewed that actor network theory can be adopted as a methodological approach as well as an analytical framework (Johannesson, 2005). Furthermore, Bengtsson and Eriksson Lundström (2013) suggest that actor network theory can be adopted as a concept to understand the “interplay between entities with agency, human- and non-human actors, as well as relations formed by negotiations and interactions” (Bengtsson & Eriksson Lundström, 2013, p. 2).

This study is concerned with both human and non-human actors and their relational ties, and therefore an understanding of how the actors interact and engage with each other is a key focus. There is also the idea that technology is as important in the guest-host relationship as the guest or the host. The researcher is therefore claiming, under the

assumptions of actor network theory, that there are relationships between technology and people, just as there are relationships between people, and that technology plays an active role in the relationship. As the key focus of the study is relationships, the adoption of actor network theory assumptions as a methodological approach is appropriate. In terms of methodological approach, Latour (2012) advises that studies are guided by the actors in terms of their experiences and engagement. Therefore, there is no single methodological ideal that should be followed; however, the methodological assumptions of actor network theory are at the forefront of the study.

It is the role of the researcher as an interpretivist to explore and understand the experiences and interactions of others and make sense of it. Johannesson (2005) discusses tourism studies that focus on social networks within tourism, the relations between tourists and tourism workers, and how actor network theory can be best placed as a methodological and analytical framework. Although actor network theory as a methodological framework does not ascribe any specific methods as such, there are however more suited methods of enquiry that align with the methodological assumptions.

Johannesson (2005) suggests that qualitative enquiry is best suited as the focus is the study of relationships, however there is also the messiness of interactions and relational ties that requires interaction with the actors that are being studied. Therefore, observations and qualitative interviews are suggested as best suited to discover relationships through making meaning of the 'messiness'. This messiness is also discussed by Beard, Scarles, and Tribe (2016) as something to be embraced by the researcher in terms of method. By its very nature, actor network theory provides a messy

view of what is being studied, and therefore it is the role of the researcher to provide detailed accounts of how the mess is made orderly through meaningful analysis.

By using actor network theory as a methodological lens for this study, it will aid understanding of how technology and humans can work together in a network, and to what extent technology can replace, substitute or facilitate human interaction and hospitality service. Johnson (1988) discusses this by using a mechanical door closer as an example of an important part of social being, and that if a part of the mechanical object was absent, there would be a need for a person to take over the role for the door to close correctly, therefore requiring intervention. This displays an obvious difference between technical and social, however there is still an association between humans and non-humans within this example. However, in a digitally developed world, it is important to understand how there is no longer a definitive difference. The lines are therefore blurred between the human and the technological around dependency and interaction.

Jackson (2015) discusses Latour's view of human and non-humans, stating that the human interaction evolves due to the increasing association with non-human actors. The more we understand how material objects (non-human actors) serve within those interactions, the more we can understand the relationship between human and non-human actors. As discussed in the literature review, there is a significant reliance upon technology to perform tasks and assist humans, with importance placed on technology-related interactions. Johannesson (2005) suggests that actor network theory is a way to "deal with relational materiality of the social world" (Johannesson, 2005, p. 133), therefore allowing a perspective of how we view social interactions and movement. This movement and interaction applies to both humans and non-humans, therefore for this study it is a

way to view, understand and make meaning of the relationships that exist between customers, employees and technology.

One of the key focuses of actor network theory is the movement between the network, therefore the importance is on the translation of the interactions. A researcher needs to then analyse and understand the interactions that exist within a network, to then be able to make meaning of the relationships. The concept of translation in actor network theory is viewed as a way of identifying connections between actors within a network (Brown, 2002). Translation is explained by Law (1992) as the effects of points in a network; the movement and connections made by actors, and the effects of this. By exploring the effect through translation, the social network can be understood. Law uses the terms “perform” and “embody” when discussing the translation of effects (Law, 1992, p. 387), which contextualises how the relational ties can be studied and explored.

It is important to note that within this study, both guests and employees become translated in their actions, but also the translators in terms of how they interact with each other. Their interactions and subsequent relational ties can be studied and analysed, however it is the translations of the actors that is of interest to the researcher for this study. This is described by Johannesson (2005) as the network effect; focusing on the guests and hosts. The study of the network, and relations within the network, is an additional contextual layer of analysis.

How different actors build and perceive their relationships in hospitality settings is the basis of this study, therefore by using actor network theory as an analytical framework to explore the translations of the translators, it offers a deeper understanding of the relationships that exist and those that are developing. Therefore, for the case of this

research, the perspective is that within a network, humans and non-humans are of equal importance, and are studied as such. For example, the customer has a choice of choosing between human or technological mediated service. The result of the transactional service request may be the same (for example, a customer can check-out of a hotel), however the overall service experience can then be different. There is then a question of how the customer feels about that exchange, and how the transaction affected the overall experience.

#### 5.2.4 Role theory

An additional dimension to this research is that role theory will allow the researcher to view the social structures placed on both customers and hotel employees. When applying role theory as a study, it is described as studying “a cluster of social cues that guide and direct an individual’s behaviour in a given setting...the study of the degree to which a particular part is acted appropriately (role enactment) as determined by the reactions of fellow actors and observers (the audience)” (Solomon et al., 1985, p. 102). It is therefore important that the roles of hotel customers, technology, and employees are explored during the data collection. The discussions around the roles, and perception of roles, are particularly important to the overall aim of the study. By exploring the perceptions of the guest and host roles will allow the researcher to understand the expectations of the roles, and how technology is affecting the established roles. The addition of role theory as a theoretical lens to study a service encounter or relationship allows the role of the service provider and the customer to be considered as the central focus of a study (Solomon et al., 1985).

When considering a service environment through the lens of actor network theory, it is therefore assumed that there is no distinction between human and non-human actors. However, there are socially accepted expectations of what roles both humans and non-humans should have. Therefore, by firstly understanding this viewpoint, the experiences and subsequent relationships between these actors can be explored. Latour discussed that within research there is subjectivity between both human and non-human things, and importance exists between the two things (Barron, 2003). “A role theoretic approach emphasizes the nature of people as social actors who learn behaviours appropriate to the positions they occupy in society” (Solomon et al., 1985, p. 102). It is this position that the researcher believes is a basis for understanding how the participants view their roles within the service encounters, and the role of technology within the guest-host relationship. By using this as a starting point, the way in which self-service technologies affect those roles can be explored.

The researcher sought these roles as participant groups; customers, front office staff, managers, each with defined roles. During the interviews the participants were asked to either explain their roles, or explain the activities they carried out using technologies, and how they viewed the role of technology within the service encounter.

#### 5.2.5 Qualitative research

*“Qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making, and viewing these as always context-bound, positioned and situated, and qualitative data analysis is about telling ‘stories’, about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the ‘truth’ that is either ‘out there’ and findable from, or buried deep within, the data.” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 591).*

Following on from the discussion around the epistemological assumptions of this research, here the focus comes to exploring a qualitative, methodological approach to research, the benefits of qualitative enquiry and the rationale for adopting a qualitative methodology. Braun and Clarke (2013) offer ten fundamentals of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 19), which are detailed in table 5 below. These fundamentals support the researcher's methodological position, as well as offer a way to frame the research project. It is important that the focus is on meaning, and the idea of thinking qualitatively when approaching the study. This set of fundamentals is a useful tool to provide an understanding of qualitative research.

*Table 5: 10 Fundamentals of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 19)*

1.	Qualitative research is about meaning, not numbers
2.	Qualitative research doesn't provide a single answer
3.	Qualitative research treats context as important
4.	Qualitative research can be experiential or critical
5.	Qualitative research is underpinned by ontological assumptions
6.	Qualitative research is underpinned by epistemological assumptions
7.	Qualitative research involves a qualitative methodology
8.	Qualitative research uses all sorts of data
9.	Qualitative research involves 'thinking qualitatively'
10.	Qualitative research values subjectivity and reflexivity

It would be remiss of any researcher to assume that the only differentiating factor between quantitative and qualitative research is the way in which data is collected. Quantitative research is typically embedded within positivism, whereby there is a search for truth and objective reality. Investigations and statistical analysis can provide generalisations and representation, which is devoid of human perception or interpretation (Slevitch, 2011). Therefore, a quantitative methodology would provide an objective approach to the subject being studied, offering a matter-of-fact perspective. Qualitative researchers reject that

phenomenon can be investigated by measurement, or that there is a divine truth.

Qualitative enquiry is a search for meaning, which is open to perception and interpretation. There is also a belief that there are multiple realities to be discovered, rather than finding one definitive reality. Rather than finding generalisations (from quantitative enquiry), qualitative research provides transferability to different situations based on the researcher's narrative of experiences (Slevitch, 2011).

The researcher will take a reflexive approach to this qualitative study, which is linked to the subjectivity of qualitative research. For research to be subjective, the researcher is therefore the research tool. The interpretations and understandings of the researcher are central to qualitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Considering this study, the key subject is people and their relationships within hospitality. Lashley positions hospitality studies as the study of the guest and host, further referring to the 'hosting phenomenon' (Lashley, 2015, p. 367). Therefore, by understanding this relationship, as a researcher it is important to consider the practice of being subjective and reflecting on the process. Reflexivity will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter.

Carrying out a qualitative study is not just following qualitative methods alone, it is also about 'thinking qualitatively' (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative research demands a different culture, one that requires a particular language to convey what is being done. Unlike quantitative research that examines and identifies, qualitative research explores and understands. This difference in approach links back to the epistemological assumptions of the researcher, who they are as a researcher and what they believe. This should be consistent throughout the full study, which will add credibility to the overall research as well as reaffirm the position of the researcher.

The process of *doing* qualitative research will be discussed further in the methods chapter however it is necessary at this point to summarise the methodological assumptions of the study before moving on to explore the adopted method for enquiry. The researcher will therefore carry out the research under the following methodological assumptions

- Interpretive enquiry: subjective nature of research in search of experiential accounts to explore and understand relationships, viewing situations in detail.
- Reflexive approach allowing the researcher to embed the methodological assumptions within the study.
- There is a phenomenological approach to the research, focusing on the lived experiences of people to understand formed relationships and perceptions.
- Adopting both actor network theory and role theory as a methodological lens, allowing the researcher to explore the interactions, relationships, and roles within hospitality relationships between guests, hosts and technology.

### **5.3 Method selection: Interviewing**

*“The heart of our social and personal being lies in the immediate contact with other humans” (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011, p. 533).*

Given the subjective and phenomenological underpinning of this study, a qualitative method was required to be able to explore and understand the thoughts and experiences of people. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were selected as the most appropriate method of inquiry. This section will explore interviewing as a method, and the researcher’s approach to collecting data. The principles of interviewing and how they can add value to

this study will be discussed, as well as some adaptations to data collection. At the stage of recruiting participants and hosting the interviews, it was during the height of the Covid-19 global pandemic. This required the researcher to adapt data collection procedures slightly, which will be discussed in terms of both the practicalities and also what it meant for the overall study.

In the simplest form, interviewing is described as a “conversation between people in which one person has the role of researcher” (Arksey, 1999, p. 2) and that they can “explore areas of broad cultural consensus and people’s more personal, private and special understandings” (Arksey, 1999, p. 4). For this study, the researcher was in search of personal accounts of experience. Therefore, an interview method was selected to allow a deeper insight in to how both customers/guests and employees/hosts feel about the use of self-service technologies. In particular, semi-structured interviews were selected for this study. In qualitative research there is a search for authentic accounts of experiences, which links the method employed to the interpretive nature of the overall study. Therefore, it is important that the researcher co-produces conversation as an active participant, to allow flowing conversation.

Interviews are social interactions, whereby the interviewer and the interviewee co-construct the accounts. By using semi-structured interviews, there is opportunity to explore the complexities of personal experiences with both people and technology. In a study of guest-host relationships, Kour, Jasrotia, and Gupta (2020) selected semi-structured interviews as the appropriate tool to explore the relationship and the participants experiences. Flick, von Kardoff, and Steinke (2004) discuss focused interviews as being ‘freer and more open to associative reactions to the subjects of

conversation'. By creating focused and specific topics, this will allow the researcher to lead a conversation with the participants, which will result in being more narrative in nature.

The researcher has designed the interview as such that the questioning will allow for free conversation, whereby the questions act as a guide rather than a script, to allow for a meaningful narrative around the topic to explore the participants feelings. The participants will be invited to speak openly regarding the experiences they have encountered, then probed further through laddering to encourage them to detail their feelings so that relationships can be explored. This is underpinned by Bryman and Bell (2015) whereby qualitative interviewing can allow for flexibility; "rambling, or going off at tangents is often encouraged – it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important" (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 480). When undertaking in-depth interviews, richer data is gained by being responsive to cues and employing a "spontaneous interviewer-interviewee interaction" (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006, p. 486), which the researcher followed during the interviews.

### 5.3.1 Research design

Beard et al. (2016) describe research design as "a 'road map' for achieving coherence throughout the project, and relates to decisions about methodology, research strategy and timescale for data collection as well as method choice" (Beard et al., 2016, p. 101). As the focus of the study is around the guest-host relationship and the use of technology within hospitality, the researcher deemed it necessary to interview both customers and hotel employees, to represent the 'guest-host' element of the research aim. It was also important that the hotel participants were employed in mid-scale to luxury hotels (three to

five star). This was so that the participants could discuss experience of both personal service from the higher star rated hotels, as well as self-service experience of the lower star rated hotels. To balance this, the hotel customers were required to have experience of staying in the same hotel categories. Interviews with hotel managers and front-office staff were designed as such to understand the motivations and objectives behind the decision to implement self-service technologies into the service environment. Irvine (2011) discuss various factors that need to be considered in terms of interview length, as well as considering how the interview is hosted, which are:

- Time of day
- Interviewer and interviewee personality or mood at the time of the interview
- Interviewee's schedule and free time available to volunteer
- Experiences that interviewees wish to share, depending on topic
- Dominance of interviewer
- Rapport between interviewer and interviewee

When designing the interview questions, the researcher was conscious of these factors so that value was derived from each interview regardless of the participants personalities or distractions. As the study involves two groups of people, customers and organisation, it was essential that the questions were linked in context so that the analysis and subsequent discussion could offer a perspective from both groups.

The customer interview questions were centred around their experience of hotels, hospitality, interaction with employees and use of self-service technologies. It was imperative that the beginning of the interview started with customers talking generally about their likes, dislikes and their most memorable hotel stay. This was to make the

customers feel comfortable and would allow them to settle into the interview, whilst also allowing the researcher to understand the customer in terms of their preferences. Once the customers were comfortable discussing their experiences, the questions then lead to more focussed discussion about feelings around personal interaction with employees, and use of self-service technologies.

The participants from the organisational side of the study were in two different sub-groups: employees and managers. Therefore, the interviews needed to be different in direction of conversation. For both sets of interviews, the researcher started with asking about their general role within hotels, and their experience of working in hotels. Similar to the opening questions of the customer interviews, the purpose of this was to allow the employees and managers to open up and discuss their roles. The discussion about their roles was useful for questions later in the interview discussing any role change.

For the employees, the questions were more operational in nature, as the employees work daily with customers and manage self-service technologies within the hotels. It was also important to understand further the personal connections between employees and customers, which relates to the research question related to the guest-host relationship.

The manager interviews were based around the more strategic decisions about personal service and self-service technology provision within their hotels. By interviewing hotel managers, this offered a contextual layer to the overall organisational perspective of the study. The researcher was keen to understand the motivations for implementing self-service technologies in the managers hotels, as well as how the integration with personal service was planned. This could then be compared with the more operational questions with the hotel employees, as well as customer experience.

The questions were layered with both probes and answers to note, and if not covered by the participants, further probes could be used. This allowed the conversation to flow, remain on topic, but not too rigid in terms of question and answer. Flow to the conversation was important as the experiences needed to be fully explored to allow the researcher to answer the research questions. It was also essential that the participants were relaxed and comfortable enough to share their experiences with the researcher. Therefore, a number of probes were accounted for to allow the conversation to both flow and keep focus. The interview questions linked to the research questions, literature and subsequent contribution is detailed in appendix A, and the contribution will be explored further in the conclusion chapter.

### 5.3.2 Face to face vs online interviewing

At the time of planning for data collection, the original plan was to host the interviews in person on hotel premises. However, the Covid-19 global pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (WHO, 2020), meaning the data collection strategy needed to be reconsidered. The University position during the pandemic was for all interviews to be hosted virtually. The researcher therefore needed to consider the suitability of holding interviews online when designing the interviews. The value of the data will be discussed later in this section, however the discussion regarding online interview is important at this point.

Lo Iacono, Symonds, and Brown (2016) suggest benefits of online interviews such as being able to reach out to participants regardless of location, resources required and a saving of time and money. Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, and Lawless (2019) add that there is the benefit of convenience with using online video platforms to host interviews,

claiming that time and cost savings are key contributors to the appeal of hosting interviews online. The researcher found that once the participants were recruited, arranging a time to meet was easier due to the fact there was no travel or location involved, as the interviews were hosted online. This meant that for both the participants and the researcher, it was a convenient process.

Although virtual methods are not a new phenomenon, there is scant literature around the practicalities of designing virtual qualitative research (Roberts, Pavlakis, & Richards, 2021). A different contextual layer to this is researching online during a pandemic, of which there is emergent research. The logistical planning for interviewing participants also needed to be organised differently. The priorities of planning changed when interviews needed to be conducted online. Considerations such as stable internet connection, sufficient data storage and contingency plans should either the internet connection or recording fail. These considerations vary from face to face interviews and need to be planned in advance of the interview with participants. The researcher's reflections on online data collection are explored further in a reflective account later in the chapter.

### 5.3.3 Rapport

As the researcher is seeking authentic accounts from the interviewees, it is important that rapport is built with the interviewee from the start of the interview, to allow for comfortable, flowing conversation. The concept of rapport is described as “an orientation towards ‘euphoria’ or ‘ease’ in interaction, a harmonious connection or a ‘working consensus’, is both an aim and an established element of quality in one-off and repeat qualitative interviews” (Weller, 2017, p. 614). Lo Iacono et al. (2016) place rapport as a key consideration in designing online interviews. The authors posit that by hosting the

interviews online means that participants are in their own domain, therefore can be more at ease when starting the interview as it can make them more comfortable with their surroundings. It is the role of the researcher to set the tone at the start of the interview, which can be difficult when starting a virtual interview as there can be potential connection and set-up issues if participants are not familiar with the software or protocols of virtual recordings. Roberts et al. (2021) discuss the unintended benefits of internet connection issues as both the researcher and the participant actively work together to resolve the issues, which can unintentionally 'break the ice' as a conversation starter.

When hosting interviews online and trying to build rapport with participants, both verbal and non-verbal cues are important to read. Using interviews for a qualitative study, non-verbal cues are important to record as they add context to the discussion. Hesse-Biber and Griffin (2013) posit non-verbal cues can add richness to qualitative data, therefore the benefit of using an online recording platform is that these non-verbal cues were captured by the researcher and noted for analysis. This is also supported by Archibald et al. (2019), whereby those cues are important for building engagement and trust between the interviewer and interviewee, further encouraging a flowing conversation.

From experience of hosting interviews virtually, the researcher has summarised below the key techniques that were helpful in building rapport during virtual interviews

- Researching the hotel participants on LinkedIn
  - This was particularly helpful in gaining some conversation starters by knowing the professional background of the participants
- Hosting a pre-interview phone call

- This put the participants at ease knowing that the first conversation would not be recorded on camera
- It also gave the participants chance to ask any questions before the interview
- Arrange time at the beginning of the interview to chat informally
  - This allows the researcher to break the ice and settles any nerves that the participants may have. Not all participants included in the sample have been recorded online previously to this interview, so this was a key consideration in building rapport.
  - Explain the interview procedures and any contingency should there be any interruptions or connectivity issues during the interview.
  - By the researcher taking control and talking at the start of the interview to communicate the expectations allows the participants to relax into the interview
- Send a follow up email to participants to thank them for their time and input
  - A courtesy email following the interview is good practice, and also keeps conversation going should the researcher need to contact the participants to clarify or explain any points from the interview further.

The points above were a key part of the interviewing strategy. By building rapport with the participants and taking time to get to know them, it allowed for a free-flowing conversation during the interviews, rather than a question-and-answer session.

## **5.4 Sampling**

A purposive sampling strategy is employed for this study, based on the need for two defined groups and their lived experiences. "The goal of purposive sampling is to sample

cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those samples are relevant to the research questions that are being posed” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 429). The reason for selecting this approach was so that the researcher could determine the appropriateness of the participants for the study. As the requirements for interview involved participants having experience of both personal interaction and self-service use experience in hotels, there needed to be a sample which could provide rich experiences. By using purposive sampling, the researcher could also ensure that there was a mix of hotel brands from the organisational perspective. The researcher followed the four-point approach to qualitative sampling (Robinson, 2014, p. 26) highlighted in table 6 below, which is explored in further detail throughout this section. The use of this approach allowed the researcher to clearly define the sampling strategy prior to recruitment.

*Table 6: Four-point approach to qualitative sampling (Robinson, 2014, p. 26)*

	Stage	Decision	Justification – explored further in the chapter
1	Define a sample universe	Hotel customers Hotel employees – either hotel managers or front office staff	Study is concerned with the guest-host relationship and the perceptions of technology from both groups. Therefore, experiences from both hotel guests and hotel employees are of key importance.
2	Decide on a sample size	Final sample size of 9 customers, 3 employees and 3 managers	Quality of data sample Impacts of Covid-19
3	Devise a sample strategy	Purposive sampling; Criterion sampling. Customers - experience of self-service technologies, have stayed in a 3-5-star hotel Employees - work in a 3-5 star hotel, in managerial or front office/customer facing roles.	Ensures the sample have matched a pre-determined criteria. Ensures experiences are qualified and can add value to the study.
4	Source the sample	Recruitment through professional network (employees) and social network (customers).	Allows for focused recruitment, using networks readily available to the researcher

			Targeted sample known to have a vested interest in the topic as based on either personal or professional experiences
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#### 5.4.1 Sampling considerations

A set criterion was established by the researcher to qualify the participants. This criterion ensured that each of the participatory groups would be able to discuss the key focuses of the study through their lived experiences. The criteria also allowed the participants to gauge their suitability to the study and determine whether they could take part. The criterion afforded the researcher a data set that was focused and appropriate for the study, allowing for in-depth interviews. This criterion is detailed further in the sections below. The aim of this study is not to generalise, but to understand common various feelings around using self-service technologies. Generally, in qualitative research a representative sample is not concerned with a definitive number of participants, however it is concerned about the overall contribution of the sample and what meaningful information can be gained. Therefore, age or gender was not captured in the main study as a means to segment the data.

#### 5.4.2 Hotel employees

The qualifying criteria for hotel employees was that they had to be from a mid-scale to luxury rated hotel. As discussed earlier, this was to ensure that the participants in this group would have experiences to share of both personal service and self-service technology. The researcher's justification for excluding economy or budget hotels from

this group is that those hotels are more likely to offer very limited services and interaction due to budget constraints (Rahimi & Kozak, 2017). Budget hotel staff would therefore would not be able to offer rich experiences of service delivery due to the limited services offered in hotels.

Both hotel managers and front office staff were targeted for the study. Therefore, the participants would have an operational understanding of customer facing roles and responsibilities, as well as being able to share experiences of dealing with hotel guests. This allowed for two data sets of employees, offering two different perspectives from an organisational standpoint. The hotel participants were targeted through the researcher's industry network. An advantage to using the network is that there was an element of trust between the researcher and participant, as well as mutual operational understanding.

#### 5.4.3 Customers

The qualifying criteria for hotel customers was that they needed to be UK based customers, have experience of staying in three-to-five-star hotels and have used self-service technologies or digital services in some form. The customers were required to have stayed in hotels in the previous 12 months prior to the interview to allow sufficient recall of experience. As the Covid-19 pandemic limited this, the researcher made sure to chat with the participants ahead of interviewing to ensure they had adequate experiences that they could discuss. This criterion was in place to ensure the hotel customers could reflect on multiple experiences, allowing the researcher to probe further which meant the participants could compare and discuss their experiences in more depth. Customers were recruited through the researcher's network on social platforms such as LinkedIn and

Twitter, owing to the social nature of hospitality. The participants were then contacted pre-interview to build rapport, which was discussed earlier in the chapter.

#### 5.4.4 Sample size and saturation

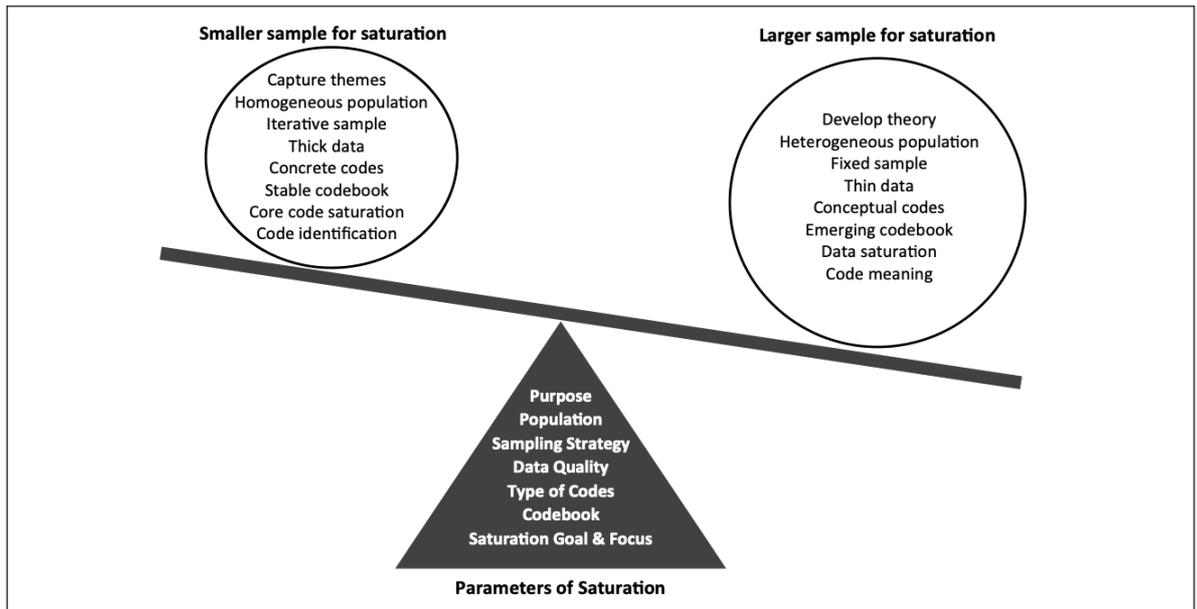
*“Sample size becomes irrelevant in qualitative methodology. An attempt is usually made to understand a small number of participants’ own frames of reference and worldviews, rather than to test hypothesis in a large sample” (Slevitch, 2011, p. 78).*

Bryman and Bell (2015) posit that there is no one definitive sample size for any study, claiming that there are too many varying accounts of how many interviews are sufficient for a qualitative study, ranging from 1 to 95 in doctoral theses. The actual size of course, is subjective to many different factors, such as purpose of the research, time, cost, and sampling strategy adopted. Similar to Beatson et al. (2007) the focus of the study is not to gather a large amount of data for generalisation, but to host sufficient, meaningful interviews that would allow the researcher to understand the guest-host relationship and the impact of self-service technologies. Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi (2017) discuss a difference between code saturation and meaning saturation. In this case, code saturation would give a general overview of themes and concepts, however meaning saturation would offer a deeper understanding of the data, beyond themes. The authors posit that a total of 9 in-depth interviews are sufficient to achieve code saturation, further suggesting a range between 16 and 24 in-depth interviews are ideal for meaning saturation. An overview of the considerations the authors suggest is shown in figure 5.

A factor that the researcher had to consider when determining (and finalising) a sample size, was the impact of Covid-19 on access to the hospitality sector. This not only delayed

data collection, but also required some thought around how many interviews would be sufficient to complete a meaningful data set, without compromising the quality of research.

*Figure 5: Parameters of saturation and sample sizes (Hennink et al., 2017, p. 606)*



Similarly, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggest that the purpose of study should be one of the main determinants of sample size. A review of the five sources that were highlighted by the authors that detail sufficient sample sizes (which are applicable to this study) and the rationale is detailed in table 7. If experiences or phenomenology are sought from the sample, then at least twelve interviews should be a sufficient sample size. The authors also suggest that any more than twelve interviews would generally gain variations of existing themes, rather than new information. The quantitative tool for deciding on sample size in relation to theme finding from Fugard and Potts (2015) was rejected by the researcher as being too prescriptive and controlling. Suggesting that there is a quantitative approach to deciding a sample size ahead of any analysis taking place is

against the interpretive nature of this research. This quantitative tool was also criticised by Braun and Clarke (2016) as not being aligned with the fundamental assumptions of both qualitative research and thematic analysis. It is therefore not appropriate for this study to pre-determine what themes are required prior to interviews taking place, due to the exploratory nature of the research.

*Table 7: Review of qualitative sample size suggestions, adapted from Guest et al. (2006)*

Source	Sample size recommendation	Rationale
Bertaux (1981)	15	For qualitative data in general, this should be sufficient
Morse (1994)	6	Suggested for phenomenological studies
Creswell and Poth (2016)	5-25	Suggested for phenomenological studies
Kuzel (1999)	6-8 12-20	Homogenous sample When testing a theory/evidence, or looking for maximum variation
Romney, Weller, and Batchelder (1986)	4	Participants must be qualified and experienced to be able to add value and context to a study

Crouch and McKenzie (2006) argue that for a meaningful qualitative study using in-depth interviews, sample 'size' is not conducive to the purpose of study, merely a representation of a sample. Therefore, a data sample concerned with lived experiences, regardless of size, is a meaningful sample. It is depended upon the researcher to make sense of the meaning from those experiences, no matter how many are attained. Based on the information presented in table 7, the researcher determined that a target sample of 10 employees and 10 hotel staff would give a balanced sample.

In terms of representation from a hotel employee point of view, the sample consisted of four different hotel brands, all of either four or five star quality (as per the qualifying criteria), rather than from just one hotel group. This meant that there was a variety of self-

service technologies and digital services that were discussed, offering further insight to the hotel industry.

The final sample used for the main study was:

- 3 Hotel Managers (2 general managers and 1 area general manager)
- 3 Hotel Employees (all front desk employees)
- 9 Hotel Guests

Further information about the participants is detailed in table 11 on page 148.

## **5.5 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was given for the study in January 2018 by the departmental Research Ethics Committee of the Business School at Northumbria University, with final clearance of data collection instruments in November 2020. The following documents relating to ethics were issued to potential participants, and data was collected once all documents were signed off, which are documented in appendix B:

- Individual informed consent
- Organisational consent for hotel employees
- Study information sheet

All participants were also briefed at the beginning of the interview to remind them that the interview was being recorded for transcription purposes only, that they did not need to answer every question should they wish not to, and that they could end the interview at

any time or withdraw from the study altogether. This short briefing at the start of each interview ensured that the ethical procedures were reiterated and that the participants were put at ease.

### 5.5.1 Consent

Informed consent was sought from participants ahead of the interviews. It was discussed with each participant prior to the interview that it would be held online and recorded for transcription purposes. As managers and front office staff were being interviewed from the perspective of their experiences within their organisations, organisational consent was sought. As an online platform was used for the interviews, the participants were informed prior to the recording starting, and were also offered the opportunity at that stage to decline participation. This was also explained as the interviews started, and that the recording was for transcription purposes so that their answers and discussion could be used in the study.

### 5.5.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

All participants data were anonymised as it was processed. Each participant was labelled and saved with a code. The notes taken during the recordings by the researcher were also void of any names linking the notes to the participant. Where the participants mentioned a particular hotel brand or staff member that was required to be anonymised, this was recorded on the transcriptions as (hotel) or (staff member). Where a brand name was used as an indicator of quality, the name was replaced with the star rating, e.g. (3-star hotel) or (5-star hotel) so that the meaning was not lost for analysis purposes. Similarly, where a participant mentioned a particular staff member in terms of their role, if

required to be anonymised the role was used in the transcription rather than their name e.g. (front office staff member) or (restaurant staff member) to add context to the transcription.

## 5.6 Pilot study

A small pilot study was adopted to enable the researcher to understand how the questions would be received by the participants. Four participants in total were selected for the pilot study (2 customers, 1 employee and 1 manager). The purpose of the pilot study was to assess the suitability of the interview questions, and to check that the structure of the interview was appropriate enough to allow for a flowing conversation, rather than a rigid question-and-answer session. This was an important consideration of the interview design, as to allow for meaningful discussion during the interview the questions needed to allow for flexibility in the flow of the conversation. This not only put the participants at ease, but it also allowed for a more exploratory interview.

These interviews were transcribed, and the following factors from earlier in the chapter were considered by the researcher:

- Flow of questions

  - Did the line of questioning and probing allow for flowing conversation?

  - Was there chance for participants to talk off topic, or add additional examples?

- Quality of answers

  - Did the participants understand the questions?

  - Did the answers provide sufficient detail?

- Validity of answers in relation to the study

Did the answers directly relate to the research questions?

Was there enough information to be able to analyse?

Following this review of the pilot interviews, the researcher noted that further probing may help uncover further comments from the participants. It was also noted that the researcher needed to allow for longer pauses in the conversation to allow the participants to consider their answers or add additional comments which may be valuable.

Thabane et al. (2010) posit that the pilot data may be included in the main study data “provided the sample frame and methodologies are the same” (Thabane et al., 2010, p. 6). There was no need to change the format of the interview, or the questions, therefore as there were no major changes, the decision was made by the researcher that the pilot interviews would be counted in the main data collection for analysis. The following self-assessment from pilot interviews was noted before the remainder of the data collection resumed:

- Follow themes through open conversation following examples from participants
- Avoid leading the conversation by offering examples to the participants
- Technology based questions need to be grouped together to allow for flow of conversation
- Allow time with pauses in between questions for participants to reflect before answering

## 5.7 Analysis

In this section the researcher will detail the approach to data analysis for this study. The researcher has adopted a reflexive approach to the analysis, which records the experiences and processes of the researcher and the research. This reflexive approach is also applied to the data analysis method of thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis is first discussed in terms of *understanding* reflexive thematic analysis as a method of analysis. Secondly, it is discussed in terms of *doing* reflexive thematic analysis, which details the processes that are followed for successful data analysis. The section then explores how the analysis will be presented, concluding with a discussion on visualisation techniques and actor network theory mapping.

### 5.7.1 Reflexivity

The researcher has adopted a reflexive approach to this research. Reflexivity is described as “the critical appraisal of one’s own research practice” (Cassell & Symon, 2004, p. 22), “researcher’s critical self-awareness” (Finlay, 2021, p. 107), and positioned as a “major strategy for quality control in qualitative research” (Berger, 2015, p. 219). The recording of reactions and reflections while collecting and analysing data is key in being reflexive and remaining subjective as a qualitative researcher. “Researchers are encouraged to reflect on and record their interpretations, and they are reminded that the validity of their interpretations is dependent on being able to demonstrate how they were reached” (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003, p. 418). The authors further suggest that researchers can use reflexivity to balance the interpretation of the data between what is being said by the participant, and how it is interpreted by the researcher.

Reflexivity can also assist the researcher in embedding the methodological assumptions in the research, can critically appraise methodological practices as well as inform future research methods (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Viewing reflexivity as both a concept and a process, Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, and Caricativo (2017) discuss reflexivity as a way of “challenging perspectives and assumptions both about the social world and of the researcher him/herself” (Palaganas et al., 2017, p. 427), establishing the researcher’s positionality. Houghton and Houghton (2018) suggest that qualitative researchers keep a reflective journal detailing the progress of data collection and analysis. The authors further posit that “the researcher is the primary research instrument in qualitative research, a fuller understanding of one’s own thoughts, feelings, expectations, assumptions and emotions is essential” (Houghton & Houghton, 2018, p. 3523).

While it is commonplace in doctoral research that there are reflexive accounts from a researcher’s perspective, embedding reflexivity in the methodology of a study requires further commitment; “it is about the role of the researcher as an active agent in the production of knowledge” (Trainor & Bundon, 2020, p. 3). This is supported by Beard et al. (2016) adding that researchers that adopt an actor network theory methodology, particularly in tourism studies, ‘situate’ themselves in the research, playing an active role in the networks of study. The authors further discuss that although the researcher is integral to the overall study, there needs to be continuous narrative around what is being studied, why and how, both in relation to the study objectives, but also the objectives of the researcher.

Later in the chapter there is a section dedicated to reflexive accounts of the research journey, challenges faced during the research as well as informing future research

practice based on the researcher's experiences. Reflexivity is also later discussed in terms of how it contributes to the value and rigour of the overall study.

### 5.7.2 Reflexive thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, and in particular reflexive thematic analysis, has been selected as the most appropriate analysis method for this study, as detailed by Braun and Clarke's contributions (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2020, 2021). Reflexive thematic analysis is described as "an easily accessible and theoretically flexible interpretative approach to qualitative data analysis" (Byrne, 2021, p. 2). The selection of this analysis approach allowed the researcher to reflect on their own experiences while interpreting the accounts of others. Therefore, an organic approach to thematic analysis is adopted to make meaning of the data and allow an exploration of a phenomena through lived experience. The organic approach is described as being "exploratory and inherently subjective, involving active, creative and reflexive researcher engagement" (Braun & Clarke, 2016, p. 741).

*"The researcher strives to be fully cognisant of the philosophical sensibility and theoretical assumptions informing their use of thematic analysis; and these are consistently, coherently, and transparently enacted throughout the analytical process and reporting of the research. They are aware the need to make decisions around analysis, and they knowingly engage and make them" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594).*

The process of analysis will be divided in to two sections: *understanding* thematic analysis and *doing* thematic analysis. First the researcher will detail the different approaches to,

and justification of selection, of thematic analysis. Literature will around the understanding and application of thematic analysis will be reviewed. The second part of this section will then further detail the process of doing thematic analysis. This will be the researcher's approach to the thematic analysis of the data collected, and how the method of analysis was applied.

### 5.7.3 Understanding reflexive thematic analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis is defined as a “method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79) and a “form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis” (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 82). It is understood that thematic analysis, is not bound by any leading epistemological or methodological assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), however researchers must appreciate the “qualitative paradigmatic and epistemological assumptions about meaningful knowledge and knowledge production” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 4). Furthermore, reflexive thematic analysis should not be seen as being atheoretical but adopted as a flexible method that matches the researcher's position in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2020). It is therefore the role of the researcher to outline the assumptions, justify the position and align the selected methods.

In terms of theoretical assumptions and alignment with this study, the ideal of actor network theory discussed earlier in the chapter assumes that there is no methodological ideal that should be followed (Latour, 2007). The researcher has adopted a theoretical approach to thematic analysis for this research, which according to Braun and Clarke (2006) allows the analysis to be guided by theory or theoretical concepts related to the

study, whilst also being guided by the researcher’s experience and standpoint. This theoretical approach to thematic analysis also allows the researcher to view the emerging themes from the data with the theoretical and methodological lens of the study. This emergence of themes from the data will then direct the coding process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Therefore, what does need to be considered through the analysis stage is that the methodological assumptions of actor network theory are focused on experiences and engagement. This is therefore a key importance when analysing emerging themes from the data. The advantages and disadvantages of adopting thematic analysis is detailed in table 8 below, summarised from Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules (2017).

*Table 8: Advantages and disadvantages of thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 2)*

<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
Provides a highly flexible approach	Lack of substantial literature on thematic analysis
Modifiable to various studies	Early career researchers may be unsure on how to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis
Provides a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data	Does not allow the researcher to make claims about language use
Accessible form of analysis	Flexibility can lead to inconsistency and lack of coherence
Easily grasped and relatively easy to learn	
Useful for summarising key features of a large data set	

It is therefore imperative that there is a rigorous approach to thematic analysis to allow for a thorough and trustworthy analysis. Braun and Clarke (2019) discuss that the reliability of thematic analysis is dependent upon the researcher’s ability to provide a reasoned rationale and take a critical and systematic approach to the analysis. This is supported by Terry and Hayfield (2020) who suggest that the researcher is front and centre to the body of research, and that reflexive thematic analysis requires the researcher to be actively

engaged in finding themes that are “constructed, tested and refined over a series of iterative phases’ (Terry & Hayfield, 2020, p. 430). A further understanding of how this will be done is explained in table 9, whereby the recommendations of Nowell et al. (2017) are matched with the stages of thematic analysis as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006).

#### 5.7.4 Doing reflexive thematic analysis

Although reflexive thematic analysis is not a relatively ‘new’ analysis method, there is scant literature about the process of *doing* reflexive thematic analysis (Trainor & Bundon, 2020). This has sparked recent literature around reflexive accounts of doing reflexive thematic analysis, offering varied approaches to using the method in practice (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2021; Finlay, 2021; Trainor & Bundon, 2020). The contemporary views of Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019, 2021) around thematic analysis, and the later reflexive thematic analysis, are a good basis for early career researchers to build on their methods, offering a framework to ‘do’ the analysis while maintaining the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the study.

The process of thematic analysis is detailed by Braun and Clarke (2006) in table 9 below, and the researcher will document the process in further detail in relation to this study.

While reflexivity in thematic analysis is not a prescriptive approach it is more subjective in nature, therefore reflexive accounts will be provided alongside the analysis. An additional dimension has been added to the table below from Nowell et al. (2017), to consider the trustworthiness and rigour of thematic analysis. As discussed earlier in the thematic analysis discussion, this needs to be embedded in the process of analysis to ensure that the outcome is meaningful and valid. Braun and Clarke (2019) stress that researcher

flexibility in thematic analysis is important, and in particular how the researcher communicates the processes and the analytical approach. This includes documenting the process in detail and being reflexive in approach, while being informed by the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the study. This deep engagement in the research is fundamental in the analysis process, by being active and interpretative as a researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2016). Finlay (2021) also warns that it should not be a case of following the steps of thematic analysis, and that the epistemological underpinning of the study and research aims should be considered throughout the process. The researcher's decision to take a reflexive approach to thematic analysis is therefore to ensure methodological integrity and provide rigour to the overall study.

Nowell et al. (2017) suggest that triangulation and immersion can assist researchers in increasing credibility to the research findings. Borkan (1999, 2022) suggests an analytical method of immersion-crystallization as an iterative process of understanding and making sense of qualitative data. Given the iterative process of reflexive thematic analysis, the researcher followed immersion through repeated reviewing, engaging and interacting with the data on a deeper level to increase the familiarity with the data and find meaning. This approach is also validated by Nowell et al. (2017), encouraging researchers to “engage with analysis as a faithful witness to the accounts of the data” (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 5).

*Table 9: Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) and (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 4)*

Phase	Description of the process	Establishing trustworthiness
Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.	Prolonged engagement with data

		<p>Document theoretical, reflective thoughts and thoughts about potential codes/themes</p> <p>Store raw data in well organised archives</p> <p>Keep records of all data field notes</p>
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	<p>Reflexive journaling</p> <p>Use of a coding framework</p> <p>Audit trail of code generation</p>
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.	<p>Diagramming to make sense of the theme connections</p> <p>Keep detailed notes about development and hierarchies of concepts and themes</p>
Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.	Test for referential adequacy by returning to raw data
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	Documentation of theme naming
Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	<p>Describing process of coding and analysis in sufficient detail</p> <p>Thick descriptions of context</p> <p>Description of the audit trail</p> <p>Report on reasons for theoretical, methodological, and analytical choices throughout the entire study</p>

#### 5.7.4.1 Stage 1: Familiarising with the data

The interviews required transcription from the recordings. “Transcription involves close observation of data through repeated careful listening (and/or watching), and this is an important first step in data analysis” (Bailey, 2008, p. 129). The author further suggests that the researcher is best placed to perform the transcriptions, regardless of time and effort required, to familiarise themselves with the data. For this study, the researcher did their own transcription to be fully familiar with the narrative and the context of the information shared by the participants. The transcriptions were done manually by the researcher, and once the transcription document was complete, the interviews were re-watched, and the document was annotated.

Bailey (2008) suggests that visual data is just as important as the words that are said, as well as capturing the way in which the words are said. The benefit of the online interviews being recorded is that when annotating the transcripts, the demeanour and sentiment was able to be captured when the participants were discussing their experiences. This was key in understanding the context and richness of the data, which may otherwise not have been recorded if the interview had happened face to face, as these intricate details may have been lost or forgotten during the interview. This level of annotation was the beginning of the analysis and further immersed the researcher in the data, which was vital in understanding and interpreting the data. Added to the transcriptions were the notes that the researcher took down whilst hosting the interview. This allowed thoughts and ideas of the researcher to be documented and used during analysis, providing an additional contextual layer to the data. The importance of this is underpinned by Maguire and

Delahunt (2017) and Nowell et al. (2017), stating that initial notes made about the interviews are an important to understand the data.

Houghton and Houghton (2018) suggest a full review of the transcripts at least three times to ensure the researchers is fully understanding of the data. The benefit of the researcher's transcription process was that the researcher was fully connected with the data sample due to hosting, transcribing, and watching the interviews multiple times. This thorough familiarisation was crucial in the analysis process and ensured that every detail from the interviews was recorded for consideration. Examples of the annotated transcripts are shown in appendix D (customer) and appendix E (employee).

#### 5.7.4.2 Stage 2: Generating initial codes

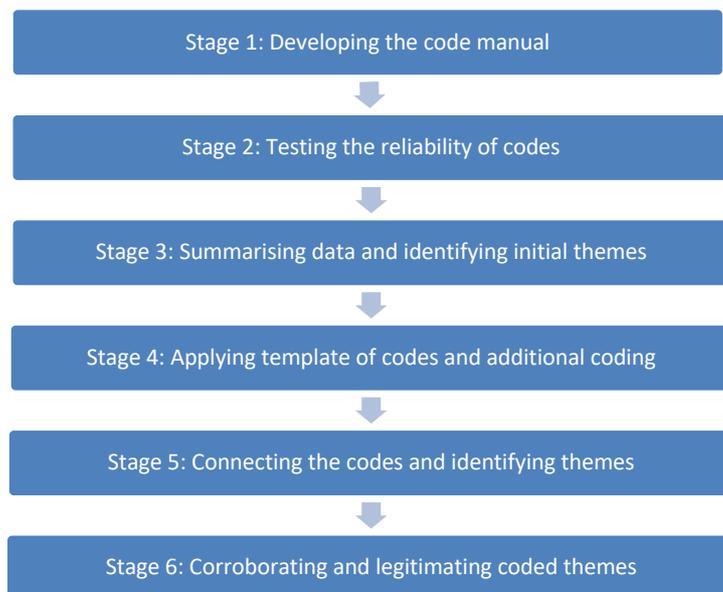
Initial codes are created from reviewing the transcripts and related notes, which “identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). The organisation of the data is the pre-stage to identifying themes, therefore it is essential that time is taken to understand the data. The annotations from the transcription stage of analysis were very helpful here, as this provided a basis to create codes. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest there are certain points to look out for when reviewing the transcripts for codes or themes, which are:

- Repetitions – repeated occurrences of similar topics
- Indigenous typologies or categories – informal or unfamiliar terms used from a collective group of similar individuals
- Metaphors and analogies – comparable situations that reflect underlying feelings about the discussed topic

- Transitions – analysing the conversation from both the interviewer and participant, and how the conversation is steered between topics
- Similarities and differences – analysing and similarities or differences between transcripts on the same topic
- Linguistic connectors – causal and conditional relations, finding meaning from examples shared by participants
- Missing data – what is missing from the discussion, which could be intentional if participants assume the interviewer knows what they are talking about

Relevancy here is important too, as context (as discussed earlier in the chapter) is found within the wider detail. Therefore, the data items that are identified will include notes around context and circumstance of each experience that is shared. NVivo was also used to begin the organisation of the data. The process of identifying themes is arranged in six stages, shown in figure 6 below.

*Figure 6: Identifying themes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p. 84)*



Although a process is offered here, the reflexive approach to thematic analysis requires the coding process to be more iterative, reviewing the data multiple times with the process being recorded to inform the next stage of searching for themes. The first stage of coding was from a review of the transcripts and the initial annotations from the interviews. The transcripts were then added to NVivo, and the manual notes were then added. The transcripts were then reviewed a second time, searching for further notable codes. Once all transcripts were reviewed and the codebook added to, another review of the transcripts was completed to ensure that the established codes were fully explored. The approach of both latent and semantic coding was adopted during this process, requiring the researcher to be interpretive to make sense of the data (Byrne, 2021). This meant that a thorough understanding of the data was achieved, which provided the basis for analysis. As the participants were discussing their experiences, it is the role of the researcher to search for underlying meaning from the participant's experiences that were shared in relation to the overall research questions.

#### 5.7.4.3 Stage 3: Searching for themes

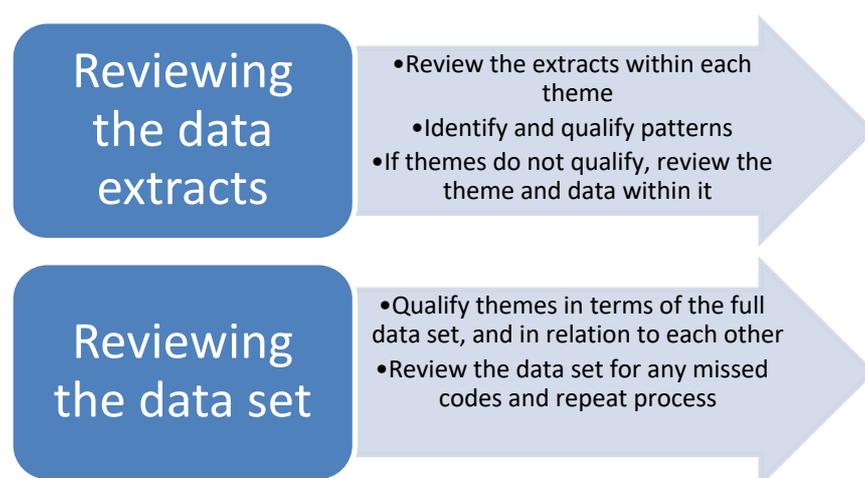
A theme should “connotate the fundamental concepts we are trying to describe” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, p. 87), with the authors further positing that the themes could be broad and span different concepts, or more focused and precise. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that themes should directly relate to the overall research objectives and question and should add significance in terms of meaning. The authors further stress importance of researcher flexibility, and that the themes should emerge from the data in terms of its criticality of the research, rather than being quantifiably measured.

The reflexive approach to thematic analysis requires researchers to be critical and analytical at this stage to develop the themes from the codes, which add meaning to the overall study and is reliant on the subjectivity of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2021). From analysing the coding determined in the previous stage, the themes emerge from the researcher interpreting the meaning of the codes. This stage progresses the analysis to find over-arching themes and sub-themes from the codes identified in the previous stage. It is dependent on the interpretive, critical and analytical skill of the researcher to importance of the identified codes, and what constitutes a theme (Byrne, 2021). Here, the reflexive approach to searching for themes is particularly important as this underpins and justifies the theme generation process.

#### 5.7.4.4 Stage 4: Reviewing themes

This stage qualifies the themes by analysing the validity and justification of the identified themes. There is a suggested process from Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 91) for the review of the themes, which is detailed in figure 7 below.

*Figure 7: Process of reviewing themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91)*



The purpose of this editing stage is to refine the themes so that they represent the data set in a meaningful way. Finlay (2021) suggests that considerable time and effort is given to this stage of the analysis process to ensure that the themes are thoroughly analysed. Too few, and not enough consideration is given, however too many and there is a risk that the meaning is lost due to theme overload. Reflexivity is particularly important here as that will aid a detailed account of theme emergence and reviewing, providing further rigour to the analysis process. This refinement will then lead into the next stage of the analysis process. At this stage the first draft of themes, sub-themes and codes was produced.

The qualification of themes was a time-consuming process as there was crossover of codes, and there was also collapsing of themes and expanding of sub-themes. This review process can be seen in appendix G where a draft of themes, sub-themes and codes was reviewed and further qualified. This shows the iterative process of thematic analysis, as it is not a linear process. The iterative process of thematic analysis was helpful at this stage, as the coding process allowed the researcher to review the data multiple times, each time finding new codes. By both watching the recorded interviews as well as reading the transcripts separately, the researcher was able to add context and further understanding to the codes before finalising the sub-themes.

#### 5.7.4.5 Stage 5: Defining and naming themes

A more analytical process is required in this stage, whereby the thematic map is analysed in terms of the true meaning or 'essence' of the identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and can add context and meaning of the data in relation to the overall study. Sub-themes are uncovered in this process, which can build a broader definition of each of the main themes. The write-up of this process "should go beyond describing the data, providing

theoretically informed arguments as to how the data addresses the research questions” (Byrne, 2021, p. 17).

Before producing the final report, there was a final review of the themes and sub-themes before naming them. This process involved returning to the data once more, to see if further context could be added, or if there was anything further to explore with the knowledge of the codes and sub-themes that had been identified. Once this final appraisal of the data was complete, the final stage was grouping the codes for a final time and naming the themes and sub-themes. The finalised themes, sub-themes and codes are shown in appendix H.

#### 5.7.4.6 Stage 6: Producing the report

The final stage of thematic analysis is to present the findings. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the presentation of these findings should support the validity and rigour of the analysis. The themes, sub-themes and associated codes will be presented in the findings chapter. This will provide the basis for the discussion chapter, where the uncovered themes will be applied to the research questions, with further contextualisation linking back to literature. Finally, the way in which the analysis will be presented and discussed will be through visualisation, in particular actor network theory mapping. By presenting the data in this way, this further embeds actor network theory through each stage of the research, as well as understanding further the interactions between guests, hosts and self-service technology.

## 5.8 Visualisation; ANT mapping

Visualisation throughout the data analysis process can be important to consider so that that relationships and links between codes can be identified by mapping. Payne (2017) presented a method for analysing qualitative through ANT (actor network theory) Analysis Diagrams, whereby they are “used to explore and develop an understanding of the interactions between, and influences of, elements in a social situation, supporting the careful consideration of relationships between them” (Payne, 2017, p. 118). This is particularly good practice for researchers to be able to visualise the research project, and the important considerations. With an appreciation that actor network theory is a dynamic system of interacting objects, the diagram approach allows for a visual to represent the network in which actors interact and their subsequent relationships. This approach will aid the discussion around the data analysis and serve as a basis for future developments and research in the area. Themes from thematic analysis and key words from coded interviews will be drafted into an ANT analysis diagram to show the key relationships and associations related between guests, hosts and self-service technology. This will then serve as a visual to base the analytical discussion.

Actor network theory mapping is a way to visualise assemblages of actors (human and non-human), showing their connectivity, relational ties and interactions (Bengtsson & Eriksson Lundström, 2013). Visual representations through mapping is important not only to visualise the relationships, but also the interactions and connections that exist, which in turn informs the interpretation of the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This interpretation is where the researcher as a ‘research tool’ adds value. As the researcher has experience of working in hospitality, this offered further insight as to how the guests and hosts (actors) interact and move around the hospitality space. To understand the context of the study

and to embed actor network theory in the methodology and methods, ANT mapping was adopted as a visual method. Although there is actor network theory there is very little literature around the guidance of producing ANT maps, and to the researcher's knowledge, no literature that covers ANT maps representing hospitality settings, representing a gap in knowledge. Research by Sarker, Sarker, and Sidorova (2006) and Bengtsson and Eriksson Lundström (2013) suggest concepts to be depicted in visualisations, which are a vocabulary that describes network interaction and movement.

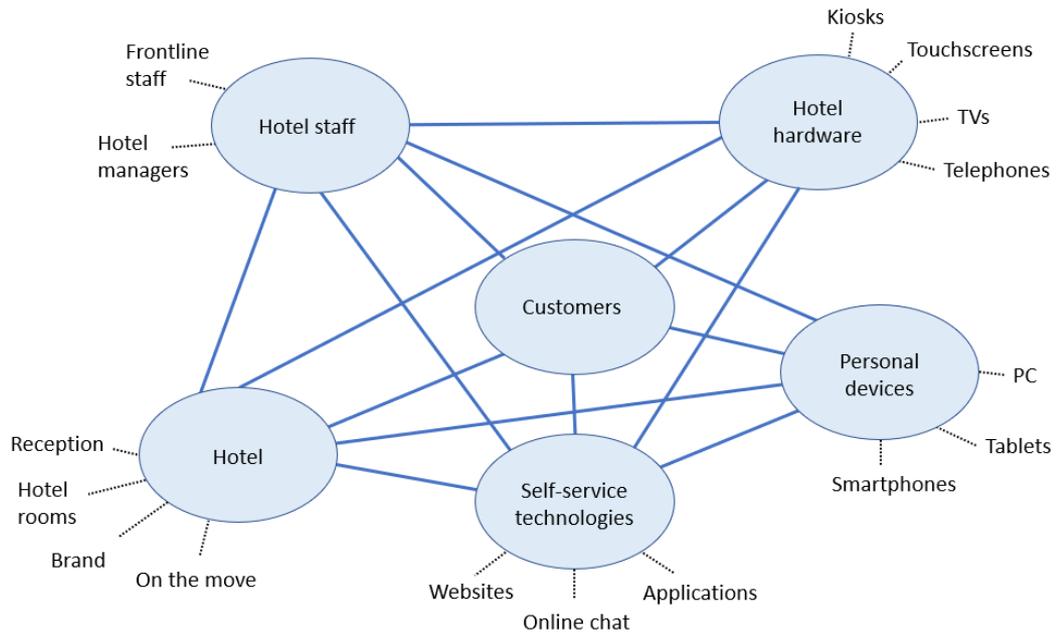
An actor-network map was produced by the researcher post data collection to determine the network in reference to this study to provide scope. A criticism of actor network theory is that the actor-network has the potential to be infinite, and therefore poses an issue of what should be studied (Jackson, 2015). With that in mind, this process of mapping the actor network allowed the researcher to frame the hospitality network from the data. By recognising both human and non-human actors in this network, the researcher also highlighted key observations to be mindful of for the discussion. The actor-network map is detailed in figure 8 and in appendix F.

This process was important for the researcher to understand the network concerned with the interactions between people, organisation, and technology (with technology sub-groups of hardware and software). This mapping process also allowed the researcher to detail initial thoughts of how each group has multiple roles within the interaction. The groupings here are important considerations to understand how each actor within the network could interact with other actors. Once these actors were identified, it added context to the thematic analysis of the data. From the understanding this ANT map of the hospitality network has provided, the researcher made the following observations:

- An importance of people, place and technology exists within the network
- People are empowered by technology
- All points of the network can co-exist and support each other
- All points of the network are reliant of each other

Following the presentation of the findings, these observations will be revisited and discussed further in the context of the research questions in chapter seven.

Figure 8: ANT map of studied hospitality network



## 5.9 Reflexive Accounts

Both reflective and reflexive journaling were required for the researcher to understand the researcher's position on data collection, and to understand the implications on the methodological position and analysis. The notion of deep reflexivity is "critical reflections on the researcher's emotions, embodiment and unconscious processes that may impact on research" (Crossley, 2019, p. 207). It was imperative that reflective accounts throughout the research process were recorded, to see how the researcher's experiences, subjectivity and emotions shaped the overall study and support the epistemological position of the researcher and methodological assumptions of the research. It also allowed the researcher to make sense of the study and find meaning in what is being done.

The reflexive accounts relating to the method is a personal reflection, and therefore written in first person, regarding the online data collection. The reflection provides an account of how the study was designed to not only critically reflect on the experience, but to also inform future research practice. Later in this chapter there is a further reflexive account regarding validity, reliability and rigour which will be an evaluative account.

### 5.9.1 Online data collection; a personal reflection

For qualitative studies, I believe it is important to make personal connections through face-to-face interaction with participants. This direct interaction allows for the interviewer to pick up on cues from the participants, such as feelings of unease, conversational pauses or needing further explanation. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic affected the time of data collection, the plans to host interviews face to face had to be adapted to be hosted virtually. In this reflection, I will discuss the main factors that contributed to successful online data collection during the pandemic. There are also some key learnings, and some recommendations for future research discussed.

#### 5.9.1.1 Planning

Although initial agreement was sought at the beginning of the study, at the time of data collection the hotel industry was forced to close following lockdown measures due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, it was difficult to contact the participants outside of the organisation due to staff being furloughed. Similarly, when hospitality began to reopen, most hotels were operational with only skeleton and flexi-furloughed staff, meaning participation was difficult to arrange. To add to that, there was also a hospitality staffing crisis in the UK, whereby hotels were hit with staff loss as well as the 'pingdemic'

(McAllister, 2021) which depleted staffing due to self-isolation rules being enforced from the Covid-19 smartphone app. This made it very difficult to gain commitment from hotel staff for interviews, as it took a great deal of time to reach out to potential participants, then to arrange suitable times. Although I could gain access to management, it was difficult to access the operational teams.

When considering sample size, it was important to find the balance between having enough data to be able to be able to make sense and understand experiences and perceptions, but not too much data that it is unmanageable and then the meaning is lost. It was imperative that I remained subjective in the process of analysing the data, as well as recording my experience to understand the journey of analysis. There were instances where I had no-shows and cancellations, which was not only disheartening, but also delayed the data collection process. This is something that should not be underestimated, as when working with industry, plans can change at very last minute, particularly when faced with additional external challenges such as a pandemic.

During the pandemic many participants within the sample were working from home, therefore some additional considerations were made when planning the interviews. By hosting interviews online, there was the possibility for the researcher to be more flexible in terms of time of day that interviews could be offered. Interview length was an important consideration to avoid screen fatigue, and work around any other commitments that the participants may have had. I was conscious to keep the interviews to an hour, however I was keen to communicate with the participants that they could take longer should they wish to share more or take more time explaining their experiences. As the research is

concerned with personal experiences, I did not want to 'clock-watch' or rush them, therefore I needed to remain flexible in terms of time available.

#### 5.9.1.2 Face to face interviewing vs virtual interviewing

The shift to virtual interviewing was difficult for me as a researcher. I was worried that the meaning and context would be lost, and rapport with participants would be jeopardised due to not being physically present. Through making notes throughout each interview, and also taking time to reflect both on how I asked questions and how the participants answered, this allowed me to review my interview style and approach.

Although the questioning themes do not focus on or mention Covid-19, it certainly added an additional contextual layer to the research overall as the topic was unavoidable in conversation with the participants. Technology was suddenly relied upon to replace human interaction, with screen time replacing face to face interactions (Sebire, 2020). This offered an opportunity during the interviews to probe the participants on their experiences of forced use of technology during the pandemic, and how they compared to using technology by choice.

For a true qualitative study, the interviews needed to be hosted with video connection to be able to see the participants. This allowed for a more relaxed, conversational approach during the interview, whereby the participants felt comfortable sharing personal experiences.

When communicating with participants about the interview, it was made clear that the interviews would be recorded, both video and audio, so that the interviews could be

analysed. This was made clear during the initial conversations about the interviews, shared on the information sheets, and re-iterated at the start of each interview to ensure that the participants were happy to proceed. This ensured that the intentions were made clear to the participants, offered them a chance to change their mind or ask further questions, and also put them at ease knowing how their data would be used.

#### 5.9.1.3 Engagement and rapport

Building rapport with participants was essential to be able to get participants to open up to sharing experiences. By hosting the interviews online, it limited the ability to read those cues, which are important to contextualise the experiences that participants share. This also made it particularly difficult to build a rapport with new people prior to starting the interview. One way to overcome this was to spend time at the beginning of each interview to build rapport with the interviewee. This time was spent talking about common ground topics, particularly the pandemic, which was a good ice breaker.

A benefit of interviewing hotel employees was that as I had existing knowledge of working in the hotel industry, I became relatable to the participants. They were therefore more willing to share 'back of house' information with me, as well as elaborate on certain examples as they appreciated that I would have an understanding of the logistics and practices of hotel procedures. This practice is discussed by Berger (2015) whereby participants feel they can open up to a researcher that they can relate to. This rapport was beneficial for gaining insight, as an element of trust was built. The hotel participants were then speaking to me using industry specific terms, which then meant that I needed to take time to explain any industry terms in the transcriptions for the benefit of analysis so that meaning and context was not lost.

## 5.10 Research quality and rigour

The idea that research is credible or reliable are not concepts that are aligned with a true qualitative methodology. Reliability assumes that there is a measurement of truth, whereas this study is based on a subjective and interpretive assumption (Arksey, 1999). This means to try and 'prove' that something is reliable would go against the research principles of the researcher. It is therefore accepted in true qualitative research that value, consistency and rigour are discussed in terms of what the research can add to the current body of knowledge. Beard et al. (2016) suggest that the criteria for interpretive research should be trust and authenticity, in terms of how credible the research is as well as how reflexive the researcher has been throughout the study. Particularly in actor network theory studies, the authors discuss how 'good' ANT research is dependent on the narrative, or the voice of the researcher, within the analysis (Beard et al., 2016, p. 106). The researcher has taken this forward in terms of the reflexive account of doing the analysis, visualising the analysis by using ANT mapping, and later in the discussion chapter providing a narrative linking back to the overall research questions.

Consistency can evidence that the researcher has carried out the necessary requirements of the study in a way that is consistent with the theoretical underpinnings and methodological assumptions of the study. Consistency from the method of interviewing is dependent upon the researcher's ability to take appropriate action. Arksey (1999) discusses that consistency can be reinforced by building rapport with participants, which encourages open discussion and detailed responses. The interview questions were designed with this information in mind. Time was allocated at the start of the interview to ensure that participants were comfortable with the conversation and allowing a rapport to

be built prior to the questions being asked. This allowed a more open, free-flowing conversation, resulting in the participants sharing experiences and providing rich data.

COVID-19 has presented challenges to the hospitality industry in terms of how customers and staff engage in the industry, as well as how scholars are researching the field (Gursoy & Chi, 2020), meaning that studies that focus on the challenges and operation amidst a pandemic can be valuable. Although this study began pre-pandemic, the researcher could not ignore the impact that COVID-19 has on the overall topic of this research. The way in which hospitality is delivered, and how customers engage with technology in hospitality environments has changed during the pandemic, therefore it was essential that this topic was covered in the interviews. Although there were no direct questions about the pandemic, there was general conversation about the pandemic in all interviews that were held. The researcher was conscious to ask about experiences of hotel stays both pre-pandemic during the pandemic, which allowed for a more meaningful conversation about how the relationships with people and technology have perhaps changed. Revising interview strategy and questions can be difficult when a research project has overlapped a pandemic, however Roberts et al. (2021) discuss this as appropriate and essential in qualitative research to allow recent and current events to add a contextual layer to the data. Roberts et al. (2021) also suggest the following framework for ensuring methodological rigour when using virtual methods, detailed in table 10 below.

*Table 10: Framework for ensuring methodological rigour (Roberts et al., 2021, pp. 10-11)*

	Considerations
Appropriateness of virtual format	Safety of participants Timeliness How losses can be mitigated in terms of context, rapport, access Virtual gains; costs, access, time
Technological considerations	Appropriateness of technology

	Access, elimination of barriers Assistance, training Recording functionality & contingency
Recruitment of participants	Technological proficiency of participants; elimination of barriers so participants can contribute Relationship building; how rapport can be built online
Researcher positionality	How to add context virtually Adding value; develop rich understanding Being academically informed

### 5.10.1 Quality criteria for qualitative research

There are three considerations that Flick et al. (2004) advise researchers to reflect on when reviewing quality of a study:

- To ensure quality in qualitative research, evaluation criteria must be applied to ensure that the methodological assumptions have been fully followed
- Quality criteria for quantitative studies do not fully apply to qualitative studies as there are fundamental differences in their methodological assumptions
- The quality criteria must be applicable to the individual study being reviewed

To take advice from the considerations above, quality criteria specific to reflexive thematic analysis was adopted. Using reflexive thematic analysis was a decision that was made not only to align to the overall research aim, but to ensure research quality and provide further rigour. Braun and Clarke (2020) devised a tool for evaluating quality when using reflexive thematic analysis when using the method (Braun & Clarke, 2020, pp. 18-19). The twenty questions detailed in appendix I are useful to contemplate and reflect upon prior to presenting work, in a way providing a reassuring framework to check that the methods adopted have been carried out in a way that is effective and adds value to the study. It is

also appropriate to note that the authors view the task of reviewing quality is open to interpretation of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, the researcher needs to understand both the quality and the limitations of the research and discuss accordingly. Interpretive rigour is discussed by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), postulating that analysis needs to be well supported through the use of thorough analysis and reflective notes that can justify the researchers interpretation of the data.

## **5.11 Chapter summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the methodological approach and the methods adopted to carry out the research. In this chapter, the researcher has posited the methodological assumptions for the study, the research techniques employed and the challenges the researcher faced during data collection. The understanding of the purpose of the study, the justifications for the data collection method and the methodological considerations in terms of analysis have been explored. The adoption of a reflexive approach to thematic analysis allowed the researcher to understand the processes and meaning of qualitative research by exploring experiences and informing future practice. The reflexive account has also offered an insight into the challenges of researching through a pandemic as an early career researcher. This chapter has provided the knowledge and guidance for the next chapter, which explores the findings.

## Chapter Six: Findings

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter will comprise the final stage of the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis; producing the final report. Therefore, the main themes and sub-themes will form the structure of the chapter, with an analysis of the findings and discussion relating to the overall study. What was clear following the thematic analysis of the data was the common ground between both the guests and the hosts as individual groups, but also with each other. There were six main themes that were uncovered from the data, which interestingly linked both guest and host experiences. The main themes were service judgements, blurring of roles, people need people, true hospitality, and tech-touch blend. The final theme was not as much uncovered, but heavily present in each of the interviews, which is hospitality in a pandemic. Undoubtedly the pandemic had great influence on not just how both guests and hosts viewed hospitality in a pandemic, but also how they recounted hospitality pre-pandemic.

The themes and sub-themes that were uncovered, along with the related codes, are documented in appendix H. At the beginning of each section, the relevant sub-themes and codes are detailed to introduce each theme throughout the chapter. To add context to the findings, a summary of the participant profiles is offered in table 11. The details in the participant notes are from the preliminary conversations with participants prior to the interview questions. This gave the researcher some background as to how the customers travel and how often, some likes and dislikes, and from the organisation side what roles

the participants have<sup>1</sup>. This information is useful in cases where context can add further understanding.

*Table 11: Participant profiles*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Participant notes</b>
C001	Customer	F	Travels individually, as a couple and as a family. Loyal customer to one hotel brand. Ex-hospitality staff.
C002	Customer	M	Travels individually and as a couple. Enjoys 5* star hotels for leisure, stays in budget hotels for business.
C003	Customer	M	Travels individually, as a couple and as a family. Loyal customer to specific hotel brands.
C004	Customer	M	Travels individually and as a couple. Works in travel industry (not hotels). Enjoys personalised experiences.
C005	Customer	M	Travels individually and as a couple. Not loyal to any brand. Favour location over any other attribute.
C006	Customer	F	Travels individually and as a group of friends. Prefers personal service.
C007	Customer	M	Travels individually and as a couple. Works in travel industry (not hotels). Likes the experience of hospitality on leisure stays.
C008	Customer	M	Travels individually and as a couple. Works in travel industry (not hotels). Privacy is important on checking in/out.
C009	Customer	F	Travels individually and as a couple. Prefers personal interaction over technology.
M001	Manager	M	Cluster General Manager for a global hotel chain, has experience of operational roles.
M002	Manager	F	General Manager for a global hotel chain, previously a Director of Operations.
M003	Manager	M	General Manager for a global hotel chain, worked across multiple brands.
E001	Employee	F	Front Office Manager for a global hotel chain.
E002	Employee	F	Front Office Manager for global hotel chain.
E003	Employee	M	Front Office Employee for a UK based hotel, has experience of working in chain hotels in management and operational roles.

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<sup>1</sup> The managers work for different hotel chains. Employees 001 and 002 work for the same hotel chain.

The chapter concludes with a discussion relating the themes found to the overall study, making sense of the current landscape of hospitality through a high-tech, high-touch lens. It also leads to the discussion chapter where the findings are related to the research questions, which takes a more focused discussion based on the researcher's position of the overall study.

## **6.2 Service judgements**

When discussing experiences of checking in to a hotel and the interactions with both staff and self-service technology, it was clear that there were pre-determined judgements that were made, deciding the level of interaction required. The judgements took many forms, including purpose of trip, cost paid for the hotel, and availability of self-service technologies. In addition to the situational judgements, there was the added complexity of technical capability, and the evaluation of the customers' time. Therefore, the three main sub-themes were an important part of the customer journey and both the level of guest-host interaction, and guest-tech interaction.

The related codes and sub-themes from the thematic analysis are detailed in table 12. These considerations were common throughout the customer interviews; however, an interesting finding was the employee's perspective on time when discussing interactions with both guests and self-service technologies. This added an additional contextual layer to understanding how the use self-service technologies are perceived from both perspectives. The service judgements and the subsequent consideration factors are discussed in more detail as the sub-themes to this main theme.

Table 12: Service judgement theme, sub-themes and codes

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Service judgements	Value of time	Queuing Time Waiting Wasting time Time saving Time wasting
	Situational judgement	Service evaluation Complex queries Business guest interaction Leisure guest interaction Expectations Cost related Service failure Customer avoidance of interaction Access to information Guest expectations Length of stay related Location led Convenience Data sharing and security Forced use of technology Security issues Privacy Employee difficulty managing tech
	Technical capability	Tech savviness Ease of use Tech failure Educating the customer Self-sufficiency Tech preferences Guests downloading apps Personal tech use avoidance Barriers to using personal devices Generational differences Tech anxiety Employee tech anxiety Ease

### 6.2.1 Value of time

From a customer perspective, time was discussed in many of the interviews and is very important to people as they were quite passionate on discussing their experiences on this topic. Wasting time, saving time, spending time – this was all in relation to waiting or queueing in reception areas, waiting to either check in or check out. There were two different scenarios in relation to time – time on a leisure stay and time on a business stay – both very different perspectives on how this time was spent, saved, or wasted.

When discussing time, both employees and customers shared similar feelings about saving time on transactional tasks. Particularly when customers are discussing transactional tasks, they refer to these tasks as not being worthy of their time. This was apparent when the guests were on a business stay, described by one of the customers (004) as being ‘time poor’ when staying in a hotel for business purposes. Customers 006 and 009 both shared that they would much prefer to have administration tasks taken away from the hotel check-in process, with customer 006 describing the tasks as time-consuming. Manager 001 shared the same sentiment from experience as a guest, and that the transactional tasks are a target for them to cut out of the check-in process as they can be automated through self-service technologies.

What is apparent here is that the customers will evaluate time spent queueing for check-in and time spent on transactional tasks and make a judgement of perceived time saving, which in turn will decide on either human interaction or self-service technology for their service needs. To customers, self-service technology offers them convenience, knowing they can rely on a quick and efficient touch point to gain access to the hotel. Customers 002, 003 and 004 all discussed convenience as a preference when they are short on time

during hotel stays. Customer 004 made a more specific distinction that they would want the convenience if they were on a business trip however, as that is when they are likely to be time-poor. Whereas customer 002 explained that their partner preferred the convenience of self-service, however customer 002 would actually prefer interaction.

If time can be saved however, self-service technology is required as an option to save on leisure time and queue avoidance takes priority. This links back to the to the previous sub-theme of trip purpose, whereby customers expressed a preference for time saving over experience. This also links back to the expectations of customers that the duty of care is more important than the transactional tasks. Customers 004 and 007 both explained that they would actively want to avoid queues and would therefore skip the personal interaction for self-service if it meant they could avoid queuing. However, customer 004 explicitly shared that they would not expect a queue if staying in either a four or five star hotel. This therefore suggests that there is an expectation that hotels allow for sufficient staffing levels and self-service provision to ensure that there are limited to no queues.

*Customer 008: I suppose I just don't want anything that's going to take up more of my time, because it's kind of like my time, and I'm coming to your place to be in your care while I'm in your place*

The associations linked with queuing include wasting time, irritation and feeling uncomfortable. There is also quality of interaction that is considered by guests here too, as if they do spend time on personal interaction at the hotel reception, it needs to be worthwhile. Customer 002 expressed irritation when arriving to a hotel where there is a queue, and then the personal interaction adds no value if the staff are there to read from a

screen and process transactional tasks. Interestingly, this customer would make an active decision to use self-service if there was no perceived value to the personal interaction. Although there is frustration and irritation caused by queuing or delays in the reception, there is also empathy for the hotel staff from the hotel guests, where they recognise the pressure points in service.

*Customer 007: I can't stand it when you walk into a hotel, and you see just one person clearly with a look of distress and panic all over their face because they have a queue of six or seven people starting to form and they're feeling like they're having to rush through the whole process. There's nothing worse than that. Especially when you know the kind of pressures that hospitality staff are under in order to perform and do things efficiently and get through everything that they need to talk about.*

Though self-service technologies are perceived as time saving by guests, they are perceived as time consuming for employees who manage the system behind the scenes. As discussed earlier, employees juggle tasks meaning there could still be delays in guests using certain elements self-service technologies, particularly the chat function. Both employees and managers expressed that the face-to-face guests always take priority, therefore the self-service technologies that require human interaction wait in a virtual queue. This therefore offers guests a false sense of time saving. This is mainly an operational issue with employees' time being stretched over multiple tasks, leading to confused customers and frustrated employees.

Employee 002: *So they still have to queue, so it doesn't actually eliminate a lot of time. So I think that's kind of what they do find frustrating*

Employees also expressed an acceptance of this frustration however, as two of the employees (001 and 002) that were interviewed stated 'it's just the way things are'. This acknowledgement therefore suggests that the implantation of self-service technologies has been added as an additional responsibility to the established front office roles. This will be picked up later in the chapter for further discussion under the blurring of roles theme.

Complex queries were the anomaly in the time saving judgement made by customers. When face with a complex query, customers seek out employees rather than using self-service technologies. These complex queries shared by the customers mainly covered complicated billing, room requirements, or local information if visiting a hotel or destination for the first time. Self-service technologies offer a very standardised experience, therefore not offering customers any chance for personalisation or deviation from the 'norm'. Where hospitality offers an 'experience', or a home from home, the standardised offering from self-service technologies offer a more efficient and functional experience, lacking any personalisation.

Customer 009 stated that they would queue if it was a non-conventional check-in. The examples of a non-conventional check-in process was described by Customer 009 were arranging a surprise stay, requested a room upgrade, travelling with a group or requested or connecting rooms. This is when the customer would actively seek out a hotel employee so that the requests are guaranteed to be taken care of. This displays a lack of trust in self-service technologies to perform tasks that are out of the norm.

## 6.2.2 Situational judgement

The situational nature of the hotel stay is an important factor in the expectations of guests not just before they arrive at the hotel, but also while they are in the hotel. The hotel guest participants shared prerequisite expectations and situational conditions of their upcoming hotel stays. First, there was a distinction between whether staying for business or leisure purposes. Although there were distinctions for between the two trip purposes, there were also similarities in terms of expectations of luxury hotels and level of personal service available in the higher star rated hotels. Secondly, there was also the situational nature of self-service technology use, and an evaluation of the usefulness and overall advantage of use to the customer. Thirdly, the element of cost was a significant factor in the expectation of the mode of service delivery. This process of customer evaluation almost decides the customer expectation, and also how the customer interacts and engages with the hotel, whether it be face to face with an employee or using self-service technologies. These three conditions will be discussed in further detail for further context.

### 6.2.2.1 Trip purpose

In a business context, the priorities that emerged from the data were speed of service, preference of little to no interaction, efficiency, being in work mode, time poor. This demonstrates a personal avoidance of interaction; however, it is mainly driven by the purpose of their stay, and not the valuation of the hotel or hotel staff, or the general behaviour of that customer overall.

Customer 006: *It's just time saving, and I often find that I become quite insular when I'm travelling on business. If I've been travelling all day or on a train or whatever, you just want to switch off and I can't actually talk to anybody.*

Customer 007: *I think there is just so many other things that you need to think about when you go away for business. I want to have everything in my room and be left alone and the door shut, and I get mentally kind of prepared for things.*

During leisure trips, guests demonstrate a more forgiving attitude towards waiting for personal interaction. An interesting comment from one of the customers showed that they are aware of this switch in behaviour depending on their trip purpose, as well as recognising it in others, and being mindful of others' experience.

Customer 007: *I tend to be more cautious about going around people who are clearly travelling for leisure, so I try and like stick out of the way and kind of let the check in desk do whatever it is that they want to do with the leisure person*

There is a level of empathy here, however considering the guests that travelled on business were actively avoiding any interaction. Particularly in this situation shared by Customer 007, it could have been avoidance of further hold up, or avoidance of people that are there on leisure stays.

When travelling for leisure, guests have certain expectations depending on the quality. The decision making leads to a question of the quality of the hotel, particularly in terms of budget, mid-scale or luxury hotel classification. For example, the following accounts of check in decisions show that they feel differently when travelling for leisure purposes.

Customer 006: *If I am staying in a nice hotel, chances are I've got a bit of leisure time. I might want a little more human interaction because I'm a bit more relaxed*

Both of these accounts were sharing experiences of leisure stays, and discussed their more relaxed approach to hotel stays, particularly the check-in process. Patience and time were apparent factors in how much these customers engaged with hotel employees.

#### 6.2.2.2 Self-service technology use

Customers shared a reliance on technology to protect their privacy, particularly around payment and discussions of billing.

Customer 008: *Privacy is important, so when you're checking in and there's loads of people around. I don't particularly like it when you've got like all the wide open reception desks and loads of people just standing around and the person checking you in is like shouting really loudly at you and telling the world your personal business, so I'm conscious about that. And I think that's one of the reasons why I quite like something like the online check in when you arrive at the hotel for that sort of reason.*

This customer further discusses how using self-service technology removes the possibility of any embarrassing encounters whereby their card may be declined or discussing a complex bill in front of other staff and guests. This links with the active customer avoidance of interaction discussed earlier, similar to business guest behaviour. Customers are actively discounting the need for interaction and relying upon self-service technologies to replace face to face service delivery.

From an organisation perspective, both employees and managers expressed frustration at the management of self-service technologies that are available for guest use. Employee 001 expressed frustration at the juggling of the multiple communication channels they have to manage, particularly between serving guests physically at the front desk, as well as manage the virtual concierge and requests that come to them via self-service technology channels.

*Employee 001: It was really tricky at some points to handle it because you had a time on the software to respond at a time like within a set time and if the phones were going off, if we had a big group check-in and somebody is waiting for stuff like there's only so many mediums of communication.*

This experience shared by Employee 001 gave a very honest account of how difficult it is to manage the expectations of customers that have the impression that self-service is instant and would save time.

*Employee 002: The guest on the phone saying 'well I'm supposed to be getting a response straight away', but you don't have someone sat in the back office responding all the time, which I think is what people think happens.*

The employees are aware of the difference of understanding of self-service technologies, therefore there seems to be a disconnect between both the employee and customer perception of the benefits of self-service technologies. What is apparent is that an element of knowledge exchange needs to happen between the employees and the customers. Both the purpose and the practicalities of self-service technologies does not match the perceived benefit of use.

### 6.2.2.3 Cost

A common topic throughout the majority of the customer interviews was a statement of expectation is that if they are paying for a hotel, customer service and personal interaction is a basic requirement and even more so with the higher star rated hotels. It was also apparent that a lack of human interaction and customer service would also make the customers question their choice of hotel. The main points made during the interviews are detailed below. All customers that were interviewed expressed that the more they pay for a hotel, the more they expect personal service and plenty of staff available to them. However, they also still require the provision of self-service should they decide they want to use it.

*Customer 008: As far as the actual experience is concerned, I would say probably the more I pay for the hotel and the higher standard of hotel, the more I would expect a more personal service when you come to check in, and actually the whole experience as well...it's partly to do with the type of hotel and then partly to do with what I've paid for it. I think if it's a three star it's just quick straight in and out. If it's five star then yeah, I would expect more interaction and a bit more personal service.*

The link here between cost and service is an important consideration. Customers have a preconceived idea of what to expect when they have booked a certain star rated hotel. Therefore, if they have 'paid' for a four or five star hotel they would expect to see staff throughout each service touch point. However as discussed earlier, in practice, customers will make a judgement of whether they will engage with personal service or use self-service technology. For example, a leisure customer would prioritise their time spent on

transactional activities during the check-in process, meaning they would select self-service over personal service if there was an element of perceived time saving. This is regardless of their expectations of staff being present. Consequently, their expectations are disconnected from their behaviour. From a service provider perspective, this can be difficult to manage both the pre-stay expectations and the actual behaviours of the guests in practice. However, the managers that were interviewed shared a common perspective regarding the payment to service ratio. Manager 001 explained that the better the service is, the more people are willing to pay for it.

### 6.2.3 Technical capability

The level of technical capability is a deciding factor on whether customers decide to rely on using self-service technologies. There are two main elements to this sub-theme, which are self-sufficiency and savviness, and technology anxiety. These two elements assist customers in deciding their technical capability, and therefore desire to use self-service technologies offered by hotels.

#### 6.2.3.1 Self-sufficiency and savviness

There is a level of self-sufficiency if customers are confident with using self-service technologies, which was mentioned by customers. This means that if customers are proficient in using touch screens or mobile apps, they are more likely to use the self-service technologies available in hotels due to their familiarity with them. There is also the ease of use that customers enjoy about self-service technology. Customer 001 explained that using a mobile application is so much easier than having to visit a website for further information, or make a telephone call to speak to someone. The customer further

explained that it can avoid miscommunication, which another important factor for using self-service.

*Customer 004: It just made you realise that it's very self-sufficient but I would say that as an experience it still felt quite cool in the fact that you were like this is a cool hotel because I can just do everything myself.*

*Customer 007: I'm kind of a little bit more self-sufficient, I like to think so, I'd much rather just turn up at the desk or try and use one of the self-check in kiosks to avoid taking up their time.*

However, self-sufficiency experienced by customers is negated by the failure of self-service technologies. Customer 004 explained their frustration of trying to embrace self-service technology by using the voice activated self-service, however the system failed to recognise their voice and did not work. Similarly, customer 003 shared that the digital key on the mobile application has failed for them during a hotel stay, which was a frustrating experience. The trust and faith in using self-service technology has therefore then broken and can also lead to further issues with the organisation.

This is a demonstration of a customer actively seeking out people to solve issues with self-service technology. This is therefore technology service failure, and personal service recovery. There is therefore a reliance on people as the contingency for when technology fails. From the organisation perspective, one hotel manager shared their thoughts on self-service technology failure, and how people are still at the centre of what they do, particularly in resolution and service recovery.

*Manager 003: In the end, it still comes down to the team, it still comes down to individuals being able to assess what the guest's issue is, and then be able to try and put in place the right resolution. And then obviously, the main this is to learn from the issue.*

The final point to consider within self sufficiency and savviness is the generational differences between customers. One customer mentioned their ability compared to a younger generation of 'digital natives', and that whilst they were able to use the technology available, they were not as confident as the younger customers and therefore would prefer to seek out an employee to assist them. They also expressed that they were sceptical of how secure and trustworthy the technology is, reinforcing their decision to interact with an employee. Employee 001 explained that it is through lived experience that they learn how to deal with different types of customer, learning their needs through practice.

From an employee perspective, generational differences in customers are also noticed, discussing experience with different generations, and how they react to using self-service technologies. The managers that were interviewed are also knowledgeable of needing to provide personal service to the older generation who will not have access, or the inclination, to use mobile applications to access self-service. Two of the three managers that were interviewed provided similar accounts of needing to provide a balance between tech and touch, to allow all customers to have a service experience on their terms. This will be explored further in the tech-touch blend theme later in the chapter.

### 6.2.3.2 Technology anxiety

Technology anxiety was demonstrated in experiences shared by both customers and employees with the focus being on the customer to download the mobile applications required to use self-service technology.

Both the employees and the customers discussed barriers to using personal devices. A challenge for hotels was to persuade customers to download the mobile applications to allow for a more seamless service and maximise their technological investment. This is achieved through both technological touch points in the hotels themselves, and also through the employees educating the customers.

*Manager 003: I think it's the same with educating the guests as well as those who aren't used to the technology is trying to show them how it can be beneficial for example, you know, instead of having to wait for an operator to pick up the phone We try and give a customer multiple points of location within the hotel where they can have the opportunity to download the application or applications that are required.*

To the hotels, mobile applications are a good way of supplying self-service technology without providing the hardware. Although the employees are actively encouraging customers to use mobile applications, and there is a preference for using self-service technologies, customers demonstrated hesitancy to download applications to their personal devices. In the examples shared by the customers, there is a preference of using hardware provided by the hotels. Some customers felt it was an infliction on their personal

property if they had to use their own devices. Customers 005 and 007 stated that they would actively avoid downloading mobile applications for specific hotels. Customer 007 stated they would want the technology provided by the hotel, such as a kiosk in the reception area, so that they didn't have to worry about anything other than just turning up at the hotel and checking in. They further expressed that it is not just hotel mobile applications they don't like, it is more of a general preference.

*Customer 007: It's kind of subliminal marketing that's direct on my phone, once that apps on my phone it's not even an email that I can sweep away or whatever, once that apps on my phone it's on my phone and then I get that little red dot and its just all a bit much. I just don't like it.*

This demonstrates that customers share the same day to day technology anxieties even in hospitality environments, which they do not want to influence their hotel stays. Another customer explains that in their case it goes beyond the preference of not using mobile applications, they just don't like to use their mobile phones at all for those tasks.

*Customer 009: If I'm on holiday, or away in a hotel for leisure I don't really want to be on my phone because I'm on my phone all the time for work*

This customer goes on to further explain that it's the fact it disjoints the conversation with who they are with when they have to look at their mobile phones, apps or websites not being updated, as well as not having the most up to date phone. Adding further this technology anxiety, customers shared concerns over data security and privacy issues. Customer 006 described themselves as being nervous of using mobile applications for

self-service on a personal device, whilst also highlighting that it could be a generational difference.

*Customer 006: It's sitting on my phone and my phone has everything on it. I'm a bit nervous about putting that kind of open source almost tech onto my phone. I think there is a generational thing here I think people like myself who are not digital natives we are much more cynical and worried about it.*

The same customer shared a concern over hacking, if a mobile application is downloaded to their mobile phone with personal details stored, they worried the applications could then access all other content on their phone. This displays a level of nervousness and lack of confidence of the technology available, which then means a lack of engagement with self-service technologies that require the use of a personal mobile phone. Customer 009 shares similar thoughts, and discusses data being shared with too many systems and data breaches; 'it's too personal like you know too much about me'. Taking this further, Customer 008 expressed that they would rather use self-service technology if it avoided discussing personal details or billing matters at a front desk that was busy with other customers, preferring privacy over personal interaction.

From an organisational perspective, the duty of supporting self-service technologies is given to the front office staff, which was clear from all of the employee interviews. In all cases, there was no other department that could manage this task, as it is very closely linked to the role of front office employees. This forced management of self-service technologies projects anxiety on to the role of front office staff as they find both managing face to face interactions and managing the back end of the self-service technologies

difficult. Mentions of frustration, and lack of staff/time to give dedicated attention to either one. This creates additional 'role anxiety' whereby the employees are measured for their guest satisfaction from both sides, tech, and touch. Therefore, they are assuming the role of both. The role change will be discussed in further detail in the blurring of roles theme. Employee 001 expressed that some days were tricky to manage if they had a particularly busy day, but would have the added stress of requests through self-service technology platforms to sort out at the same time. This particular employee shared an interesting insight in to how they felt about the interaction when struggling to manage both face to face interaction and oversee the self-service technology platforms.

*Employee 001: It was really strange that it wouldn't have an effect on me at all because I just thought it's just an app. It wasn't like a personal thing. It wasn't like somebody coming back and going this is the fourth time I've asked to your face. Because that's when the pressure is on when the persons coming here. Whereas on the app it's just it's totally not personal at all. So like, the guest isn't getting their personal connection and neither am I, and it makes you care less.*

The views expressed here offer an insight as to how the additional management of online service has shifted the service judgement of this employee. What this example shows, is that the fact there is no tangible, personal connection being made and therefore the service offering differs from that if there was a face-to-face interaction.

### 6.3 Blurring of roles

The blurring of roles theme relates to the intervention of self-service technologies on the roles of both customers and employees. The self-service technologies allow a customer to perform the same tasks as an employee, therefore replacing the need for interaction. From an employee perspective, part of their role is impacted by customers using self-service technologies, which reduces the amount of personal interaction overall. However, this replacement is not without complexity. Blurring the line between customer and employee role, particularly in hospitality, can be a difficult proposition given the subjective nature of hotel service.

There are three sub-themes to this main theme; understanding roles, role change and transactional versus personal service, detailed in table 13. These sub-themes provide an understanding of the extent of change within hospitality environments. An interesting finding from this theme overall was the empowerment shift, allowing roles to be interchangeable. For example, the customer can assume the role of a front office employee by using the self-service technologies available to them, effectively co-producing their own experience without the need for an employee. This will be discussed further throughout the sub-theme discussion.

*Table 13: Blurring of roles theme, sub-themes, and codes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Blurring of roles	Understanding roles	Employee experience as a customer Employee experience informing practice Employee role Empowerment Customer responsibility Employee relationship with tech Empowered customers Lack of staff empowerment

		Empathy Behind the scenes
	Role change	Role change Control Employee role change Skill development Educating customers Guest forward change Tech replacing staff Tech as supporting actor Reducing staff
	Transactional vs personal service	Transactional tasks Tech requiring human intervention/action Tech supporting service Transactional tasks

### 6.3.1 Understanding roles

The data suggests there is a clear customer perception of an employees' role. That said, it is a more traditional view of the customer and employee. To the customer, the employee at the front desk is there to serve, when the customer wants serving. However, with the implementation of different service points such as kiosks and mobile applications, it transforms the hospitality servicescape into a less than traditional setting.

The integration of self-service technologies has allowed a customer to assume the role of an employee when the time suits. This was covered in the previous theme, whereby the decision to use self-service technologies are situational, therefore are only required when a customer deems it necessary, or where there is no alternative leading to forced use. Therefore, the customer can assume different roles in different situations. Where the customer wishes to save time, they actively seek out self-service technologies, adopting the role of the service employee to save time and avoiding interaction. Consequently, in

this scenario, the employee is no longer required in terms of customer interaction.

However, the employee is still very much involved in the transaction, albeit behind the scenes, but the customer is unaware.

Returning to the customer's traditional view of the role of an employee, given the supply and reliance of self-service technologies, the customer now expects the service employee to provide a service that is above and beyond what a customer can do by using the self-service technologies. However, Customer 009 shared an experience of not being able to fulfil their needs by interacting with a member of staff, they were told to use the self-service application. This therefore provided some confusion to the customer as their understanding of a service employee role is that the employee should be able to provide the services they require. However, in this case, the service delivery had been altered so that the transactional requests would be taken care of by the self-service technology available. This poses a number of issues. To the customer, their understanding of roles is questioned. This empowerment is not welcomed by all customers, however. One customer shared their experience of a hotel where they had to use the app for service.

*Customer 002: Even though it was an amazing hotel and it was really nice or whatever, I felt like it was down to me to make sure I'd have to go and do what I wanted to do.*

There is also the issue of empowerment. The employee is no longer the provider of service, and is therefore unempowered, shifting the responsibility to the customer to use self-service technology to meet their needs. Therefore, in this case, there is an imbalance of understanding of roles.

Taking the understanding of roles further, it was clear from the experiences that were shared from both customers and employees that there is difference in how the customer understands the role of the employee. This was evident in the examples that both customers and employees shared with the researcher. An employee has experience of the role of both employee and customer; however, a customer only has their experience as a customer to understand roles and expectations of a customer and employee. This therefore provides further imbalance to the guest-host relationship, as there is not a mutual understanding of roles. What was interesting from one of the customer interviews, was that they were an ex-hospitality employee, who shared this insight in to how they viewed their role as a customer.

*Customer 009: I'm conscious of treating people how I would want to be treated because I've done that job. Maybe I've got like an extra awareness of that, that I'm using in my behaviours and also in my perceptions and judgements of things. Because when I look around and someone's being rude to a waiter or rude to a receptionist or something, I always think gosh, you've never worked in a job like that or you wouldn't act like that.*

In some of the situations that the customers shared, there was a level of empathy that influences their behaviours when interacting with employees. Customer 007 showed empathy by understanding how demanding a service role can be; "I just think people have tough enough jobs as it is, there's no point in somebody else being angsty about it". There was also customer recognition of employees being genuine, making an effort, and recognition of hard work. One customer appreciated more the fact that they could see the

staff working hard to deal with guests at the front desk. Customer 006 expressed “I believe if you’re nice to them, they’ll be nice back and they’ll give you that little bit of extra mile”, which demonstrates that there is a motive behind displaying empathy for the staff, knowing the staff have the ability to improve their overall experience.

Staff experience as a customer offers a different perspective on the role of the employee, as they are directly feeding back in to how they deliver service to customers. The employees shared experiences of them staying in their own brand hotels and using self-service technologies.

*Employee 002: I actually do love the app, and I don’t just say that because I work for them, I tell any guest I’m not just saying this you need to download the app. It’s so simple, it’s so self explanatory and it’s just far easier.*

These experiences assist the employees in persuading customers to use the technologies, and have also helped them resolve issues with customers when they have tried to use the same technologies. This first-hand experience feeds in to their daily role to allow an additional understanding of how the customers will experience the service.

Employee 002 expressed that it was only through using the self-service mobile application for a personal trip, that they were able to solve an issue by explaining the processes with a customer. They go on to explain that this was in addition to their usual training, which did not offer the practical benefit of using the technologies as a customer.

The employee experience as a customer also offers a unique perspective on the customer journey, as well as how the customer would navigate both personal and technology-aided

service. Manager 002 explained that the balance between the technology touch points, and the personal touch is important to customers, following a stay in the hotel and experiencing it.

*Manager 002: I'm interested to see how well someone else is doing in it and to see what messages they get and to see it from a customer point of view because quite often I'm seeing it from my point of view on a platform.*

It was important to this manager see how the service is delivered end to end, to further improve the touchpoints and customer service. This is particularly important for the self-service technology service delivery, as it is a fairly new offering to the manager's hotel, meaning the staff do not have as much experience with the technology as they do with delivering personal service. The tech-touch balance will be discussed in further detail in the tech-touch blend theme later in the chapter.

### 6.3.2 Role change / development

The implementation of self-service technology within hotels has changed the way in which customers interact with hotel staff in terms of service delivery. Now that the customer has the option of using different technological touchpoints to access hospitality service, it has meant that the role of both the customer and the employee has changed too. This was a common sub-theme across all the customer, employee and manager interviews and consequently has a direct effect on their respective roles.

There was staffing level debate evident in the interviews with the hotel managers. This debate is due to the implantation of self-service technologies, which effectively is reducing the amount of contact time that customers have with front office employees. Particularly during the pandemic, more customers were preferring to use the self-service technologies available to them to avoid interaction. Therefore, hotel managers are wondering if staffing could be reduced in areas that are being impacted by self-service technologies, such as the front desk.

*Manager 003: We're all trying to be more effective, our organisation structures are more flat to reduce costs. We're trying to reduce the number of people and that's finding the balance using technology but still delivering the service that's for the guests and expectations depending on the brand.*

This manager further discussed that educating the customer was important to lead this change, which in turn displaces the role of the front desk staff, whereby they can focus more on the guest experience, rather than the transactional tasks. This role change in both employees and customers is a change not only in role, but in the service delivery. Educating the customer is key, however there is also the issue of educating the employees through this role change, which was not discussed.

The employees that were interviewed stated that the implementation of self-service technologies adds work for the front desk team, not saves work or time, which was evident in the service judgement theme. Revisiting one of the codes from another theme; employee difficulty managing technology, employees shared their experiences of managing self-services technologies as an additional task to their 'normal' role. Employee

002 stated 'it doesn't eliminate work, it adds work'. Therefore, the additional responsibilities are noted by employees as a change to their usual role. The increase in use of self-service technologies due to the pandemic has shifted the way in which employees organise their daily tasks. There is less contact time with guests, however it is replaced with more administration to manage self-service technologies 'behind the scenes'. Therefore, the managerial perspective of reducing staff to resolve the reduction in personal interaction is not viable. The consequence of the uptake of customers using self-service technologies is that there is more administration that the front office staff are required to take care of. Therefore, this shift in responsibilities is a role change for the front office team.

Employee 001 described the addition of managing self-service technologies as being at first beyond their understanding, joking that they needed to be an Apple Genius to be able to fulfil their role. In time however, the skill development to the employee was manageable, with the employee stating that it was 'just another thing to learn', suggesting a culture of additional tasks being added to their daily role and being 'thrown in at the deep end'. A positive takeaway from the employee, was that it was key in being able to explain how the self-service mobile application works. However, an element of the traditional front office role still exists.

*Employee 001: I don't remember thinking like, oh this is not for me, it's changing my role, because at the end of the day you're still there as the receptionist as the person as the face of the business. You are the first and last thing they see, regardless of if they've used an app or not.*

Employees are having to deal with two different ways of delivering guest service – both face to face and back-office tasks to allow the self-service technologies to function effectively. The employees confirmed that the implementation of self-service technologies was a guest-focused change, rather than a change to the role of the front office team. Although to a customer the chat functions and request functions on various technology platforms seem automated, there are people that are actioning the requests, which are the front desk team that the customers have bypassed. One of the managers explained that they couldn't survive without the front office team as they would still be required to support the technology, be there if guests don't wish to use it, or if the technology failed.

From an employee perspective, time was also very important in relation to their roles. The role change discussed earlier has meant that employees are now tasked with managing both face to face and the back end of self-service technologies. Employees discussed time in relation to prioritising tasks and having to create a hierarchy of importance in who, or what, is dealt with first. For example, both Employee 001 and Employee 002 discuss busy and stressful times when they have various forms of communication requiring attention at the same time. Between both employees, they detail face to face guests, app requests and chat function, telephone calls and emails, all requiring attention. This further establishes a need for front office staff to be able to manage the multiple channels, rather than reducing staff and replacing with technology.

There is not just employee role change to consider here, there is also customer role change. In a way the role of the customer has changed as they are now empowered with the administration tasks that were usually carried out by front office staff. This empowerment is a shift in responsibility; however, it is sold as a benefit to both employees

and customers. The control that customers have was discussed by three of the customers as a preference. Customer 004 stated it was an important part of a hotel stay, enjoying the control being able to do everything with their mobile phone. By taking control, or being in control, the customers are therefore assuming the role of the front desk, taking care of the transactional tasks that would otherwise be carried out by a hotel employee.

### 6.3.3 Transactional versus personal service

There was a distinction between personal service and transactional service from both customers and employees, which influenced the role that customers performed when entering a hotel. The comparisons made were largely where customers attributed personal service with an experience, where they wanted to enjoy the hotel and their surroundings, and transactional service with more basic service hotels, which were deemed to be not hotels of value, but a 'bed for the night'. This sub-theme will therefore be divided between transactional hotels, and transactional service, where comparisons are made with personal, experiential service.

Customers also described a 'transactional hotel', where they associated the hotels to just a 'bed for the night' or in a busy city centre location such as London. Customer 009 described a transactional hotel as being soulless, which would be fine for a business stay or an airport hotel, as there is no service experience as such. Customer 003 stated that there is a difference between staying in a hotel for the experience and just for the location, therefore a location led hotel being more transactional. This evaluation of the hotel is therefore key in the customer determining how they will navigate the hotel and participate in service interaction. In the case of the example this customer shared, self-service

technology was selected, taking over the role of the hotel employee to save time. This was also due to the customer assuming that the transactional tasks would not add any value to their experience, and therefore bypassed the personal touchpoint, which leads to the topic of transactional service.

Customer 003 described transactional service as being robotic, where a list of questions and statements are processed. Customer 006 and 005 also stated that the administration tasks are easily automated, and therefore are easier if they performed the tasks themselves using self-service technologies. They both claimed that the transactional tasks should all be automated to make it quicker for them to get access to their hotel room, or to check out of the hotel. This all relates back to the time saving sub-theme from earlier in the chapter.

From an employee perspective, they had the similar views to the customers that some of the check-in and out process are transactional tasks. They described transactional tasks as being administrative, uninteresting, and not worth spending time on. Employee 001 stated that their least favourite parts of the job are the transactional tasks, favouring the more meaningful conversations with guests over administrative duties. However, those tasks are still an essential part of the check-in and check-out process. Therefore, by altering the front office role so that this information is gained in a different way, the interaction therefore becomes more focused. Manager 001 recognises that the transactional tasks are not valued by either employees or guests, and therefore is working towards minimising the number of transactional questions by encouraging guests to use the self-service mobile application. This then frees up the employee to make a more personal connection with the guests as they arrive, focusing on the overall guest

experience. In practice however, the guest is in control by using self-service, and therefore ultimately decides if they would like to interact with the employees. If the customers feel they have taken care of everything they need to, as they have assumed the role of the front desk by completing the tasks themselves. This therefore means that they then bypass the reception area to then access their hotel room, where the hotel loses the opportunity to connect with the guests.

There is a false narrative of employees having more time to spend with guests if the guests use self-service technology to take care of the transactional tasks, as the employees are still processing and managing the information but just in a different way. This was discussed earlier in the theme, as the intention of using self-service technology as a way to shift the role to have more contact time with the guests is not realistic in practice. The employees explained that they are required to manage both face to face and digital requests from guests at the same time, where they are torn between the different roles.

It was clear from the discussions with customers and employees that hospitality needs to be less transactional and more personal if the customers wish to have a more valuable experience. There is therefore a balance of transactional versus experiential tasks, which is a role change away from transactional, administrative tasks and more conversational, relationship building. It was also clear that the customers are very much in control of this situation however, and therefore will decide on their terms if they would like to interact with the hotel staff, or if they are self-sufficient enough to navigate the hotel themselves using self-service technology.

## 6.4 People need people

Given the personal nature of hospitality, it was no surprise that one of the most important factors when discussing the hospitality experience it was interaction with people that was discussed the most. Customer service was a common theme throughout the discussions, and how service was elevated by having positive interactions with hotel staff. Whether customers required personal interaction to feel valued, solve problems or provide a personalised level of service, it was evident that this could not be provided by self-service technologies alone. Employees and managers also discussed how important personal interaction was in terms of feeling valued as a member of staff and job satisfaction. There were several reasons for people needing people, including

- Sales / commercial reasons from an organisation perspective
- Extended personal relationships
- Problem resolution / fixing issues
- Fear of missing out
- Safety

What was a surprising topic that was common throughout both the customer and employee interviews, was the friendships that were formed between the two groups. This further emphasises that to feel special, valued or looked after, people need people to make this happen. The codes that are attributed to this overall theme are presented in table 14 below. Consequently, this theme will be structured with three sub-themes; guest-host interaction, need for interaction and personal gain.

Table 14: People need people theme, sub-theme, and codes

Theme	Sub themes	Codes
People need people	Need for interaction	Need for interaction Help/assistance/technology failure Safety Recognition Reliance Dependency on team Feeling valued Reliance on people Safe Personalisation Teamwork Employee relationship with employees Fun
	Personal gain	Complex queries Fear of missing out/FOMO Finding out information Access to information
	Guest-host interaction	Extended personal relationship Rapport Employee relationships with customers Engagement Leisure guest interaction Personal connections Personal interaction Relationship building Customer interaction preferences Friends Trust Employees as friends Guest-host interaction

#### 6.4.1 Need for interaction

Although customers expressed that they like to use self-service technologies to avoid interaction in certain circumstances, it was clear from the discussions that there was still a need for interaction in different situations. This tended to be when customers were

discussing more leisure stays, which corresponds with the time sub-theme from earlier in the chapter. The need for interaction was also more of an expectation of interaction when customers were talking about five star or luxury hotels, therefore placing both quality and personal value on the need for interaction. Customer 002 described the standards, cleanliness and environment as meeting their expectations of a five star hotel, however it is the personal interaction and service from staff that they remember most, and associate with the luxury hotels they have stayed in. A description of what that interaction means to the customer is below.

*Customer 002: It's your first welcome, it's a smile it's a hello, it's another person so to speak rather than a computer screen so especially when we spend a lot of time on phones, laptops everything, I prefer to be able to have that connection, even if it's as little as what's the weather like or anything like that.*

When customers were discussing customer service, they often mentioned personalisation, which set it apart from receiving standard service. Ways in which customers described personalisation included using their name throughout the hotel stay, personal touches in the hotel room such as handwritten notes or token gifts and knowing information about them to make the stay memorable. However, in one case, Customer 009 described personalisation as being too personal, as in the hotel knew too much about them which made them feel anxious. However, personalisation was discussed in a more positive way by most of the customers, whereby they placed a higher value on the overall service. Customer 008 described the personalised touch as being part of a great experience, adding that it seems more genuine compared to more standardised, repetitive service.

Customer 009 made comparisons of self-service hotels feeling like a supermarket, whereas when they are being 'looked after' by staff, the whole stay feels more special.

This personalisation was key in customers feeling valued, with particular mentions of being made to feel special. In the experiences that the customers discussed where this occurred during their hotel stays, they described this feeling as being made to feel like the only person staying in the hotel, like royalty, positive and enjoyable. When the customers were sharing their positive hotel experiences, they were more descriptive and would go into much more detail about their overall stay and experience as opposed to when they discussed hotels where they didn't make that personal connection with the hotel staff. This difference in behaviour when being interviewed was very noticeable, and the researcher noted their cheerful disposition when talking about previous enjoyable stays. A particular example of this was Customer 007 describing a 'fun' hotel employee they encountered during a hotel stay.

*Customer 007: He was just really attentive and he was fun to be around. He was fun, he made the experience more exciting as a result of him being there. It was more of a personal level interaction that made it special.*

It was also noted that these experiences involved people; the hotel staff that made the stay more of a personalised experience. This need for interaction is perceived reciprocal by the customer in the example below when discussing travelling responsibly. They use their interest in the host community as a way of confirming their decision making as being ethical and just.

Customer 004: *As a traveller I want to know that I've kind of made fairly sensible choices in that it's giving back positively to the community and so that's what I enjoy about the people element of interacting with those people that work in the hotel, and seeing how that has a positive impact on their wellbeing and their livelihood and the place in which they live.*

An unexpected reason for people needing people was safety. When discussing how customers feel when they interact with staff, rather than use self-service technologies, not only did the customers say that they felt happy and welcomed, they also discussed the feeling of safety.

Customer 002: *I felt sort of comfortable and safe, it was sort of by having that feeling I knew that people knew I was there, they knew I'd be up for breakfast and bits like that, rather than just putting my details in to a screen so to speak.*

This suggests that the option of self-service technology would mean that the customer would not be a known presence in the hotel, therefore compromising the customer's safety. This was also discussed by a female customer, whereby they preferred having staff at the front desk at all times, particularly when travelling alone.

Customer 006: *Having people at the front desk gives you an added layer of security and it doesn't necessarily mean that they have to be there to check you in. It's just that little bit of security and sense of okay you know someone else is there to look after me if something happens.*

This security aspect of having people physically present in the hotel public areas seems to be very important to the customers that discussed it. This therefore suggests that there is not just a social aspect of the need for interaction, but also to feel safe and secure when staying away from home. This reliance and dependency on people extends further than safety, but also to customer expectations of particular level of hotels. This dependency is also exhibited by employees, whereby there is a dependency on their team

*Employee 001: I think the relationship you have with your co-workers and how you handled any sort of situation I think if you were able to lean on your co-workers whether it's from your own department or others to get you through any situation then I think you were alright. That was the best thing about front office.*

Some customers expressed an expectation that if they are travelling to higher star rated hotels, they expect staff there to greet them and make them feel welcome. Consistency was also mentioned in this respect, as demonstrated below.

*Customer 007: They always had the same staff, so it was like consistency, and that made it incredible because you just felt really at home and it almost felt like they were looking for the cues of whether you felt uncomfortable or unsure about something.*

Even when guests want to interact with hosts, there is still a judgement of whether it is worth waiting for. Customer 001 recalled one experience whereby they did not have any interaction with staff during the entire stay as they had used the self-service app to carry out the transactional tasks and wanted to chat with the staff. The result being the

customer checked out on the app and left. Consequently, although there was a need for interaction, the need was not as important as saving time waiting in this instance.

The value of interaction was discussed in relation to Covid-19, and how personal interaction is valued more because of the lack of interaction during the pandemic. This will be discussed further in the hospitality in a pandemic theme later in the chapter.

#### 6.4.2 Personal gain

The experiences that customers shared was clear that there was intention to gain something from the need for interaction. There were three main clear factors in this sub-theme, which were customer recognition, customers becoming friends with employees and fear of missing out. These factors suggest that customers want to gain something from the interactions with employees. They are investing time in the interaction, and they want something from it. Therefore, personal gain holds an importance in personal interaction, as opposed to the interaction with self-service technology, whereby the interaction is purely transactional. By investing time in interactions, customers want to feel they are gaining value from it.

Customers stated that they like to be recognised when they are staying in hotels, whether it be during their stay, or if they are returning guests. 'They know who you are' was a common phrase used when customers were questioned about positive interactions with staff. This recognition was described as a 'nice little touch' and that recognition always goes a long way in terms of satisfaction. Customer 006 discussed recognition when referring to the human touch element of hospitality and wouldn't want that to disappear given the rise in self-service. Customer 007 linked recognition with the consistency of the

staff as well as having the feeling of home when they were recognised. It was interesting that one customer mentioned that they could tell when employees were being genuine with their recognition, and therefore would value the continuity of the conversations throughout the stay. The example they give here was that they would stay at a hotel where an employee would ask the same questions throughout the stay, not genuinely remembering the guest. This repetitive, perhaps scripted, nature of hospitality did not please this guest, and therefore led to an overall negative stay. This demonstrates the importance of genuine recognition from an employee to offer personal value to the guest.

However, it is also worth highlighting that certain levels of personalisation may not be possible at scale, particularly in larger hotels. Manager 001 described that he had a dedicated member of staff for guest relations, making sure that returning guests, VIP's and loyalty members received personalised service. The manager also mentioned that it is not possible to offer this level of service to all guests due to cost and labour restraints.

Friends was a common code throughout the customer interviews as the experiences the participants shared about interacting with hotel staff were more complex than just receiving standard service. There were two layers to the friendship examples of customers. The first was feeling like they were friends with the hotel staff, and second feeling like they were staying at a friends house.

*Customer 002: Me and him shared a glass of red wine on the last night together and I felt like I was just drinking with one of my friends, I think it was just so personal it felt like I was stopping in somebody's house, and they were looking after me all week and couldn't do enough for me and made sure I was alright.*

Although this familiar exchange between guest and host may not be commonplace in the larger hotel chains, this example was a small, boutique hotel where the staff were more informal. This same customer shared an additional example of an interaction whereby they felt the connection was more than just one way, they felt a personal connection with the staff, like they were genuinely interested in them. This perceived two-way friendship offered the customer a deeper connection with the hotel they were staying in, and was a particularly memorable encounter.

*Customer 002: I think because I've got an interest in them, they've sort of got an interest in me, rather than them feeling like they're there just to serve me. I think just by having that connection that way it changes, not necessarily changes how they are with you but I think they've got a more vested interest in you because you've shown them that you're interested in them as well.*

This customer feels like their friendship is reciprocated, and therefore has more of an affiliation with the hotel and the staff because of that. This feeling was also echoed by other customers that were interviewed, whereby they felt they had made an established connection through interacting with staff on a more personal level.

*Customer 004: It was almost like you were at a friend's house, so that's what I found very impressive that they got that balance right between super professional but yet kind of felt like you're amongst friends.*

This friendship, or customer's feeling like they are with friends, could not be possible without the hospitality staff. Their opening, welcome personalities allow customers to feel

at ease (like they're staying with friends) through the interactions and connections they make.

Fear of missing out was a noticeable theme throughout the conversations with customers. From a customer point of view, this included missing out on key information, upgrades, and special offers. Customer 001 stated that they would actively seek out members of staff to ensure they didn't miss out on anything. They also stated that they would prefer this over the convenience and ease of using self-service technologies as they wouldn't want to miss out on anything. One customer also referred to fear of missing out when they would see how other customers are attended to in the reception areas of hotels.

*Customer 008: Definitely annoying when you haven't paid the upgrades and you're stood in that massive queue and you see these people being shepherded off to a lovely luxurious room and you say oh why didn't I just pay the money, but no. It definitely sets the tone.*

Linked to the fear of missing out was the access to insider information through personal interaction between customers and staff. Customer 004 talked in depth about how the interactions with staff have led to finding out more in-depth information about the location and the hotel amenities. The customer discussed how the recommendations of the hotel staff are more authentic of the destination than the travel guides. This level of interaction is important not only to customers, but also to the employees that are aiming to make those personal connections to ensure that customers have a good stay overall.

Customer 007 placed the value this interaction to gain information over having to queue, where they shared an experience where there was a queue at the front desk. As

previously discussed in the service judgement theme, customers would otherwise prefer to use self-service technologies to avoid a queueing situation. However in this case, the customer made the decision to wait in line to be able to access information, and not miss out on anything. They also stated that they felt that information could not be conveyed by using a kiosk or an app.

#### 6.4.3 Guest-host interaction

The importance of interactions between guests and hosts was evident in the interviews. There were instances where interaction was needed and avoided, and rapport was evaluated prior and post interaction. The preferences for personal interaction seemed to be linked to when customers required more of an experience from their hotel stay or have specific expectations from a particular hotel. In terms of the experience, customers intimated those personal connections added to the overall positive hotel experience, and therefore could not be simulated by self-service technologies. Customers were able to evaluate professionalism, empathy, value and care by the interactions they have with the staff alone, regardless of hotel décor or amenities. When the customers were asked about their best hotel stays, they defaulted to talking about interactions with staff, or how they were looked after by staff, rather than the hotel itself. This was particularly interesting in terms of the increase in self-service technology use, as it suggests that there is still a need for people to connect with people for reasons above checking in and out of a hotel. The interactions that were discussed involved conversations such as talking about their reason for stay, recommending things to do in the area, helping with problems or celebrating occasions with guests. These are the interactions that the managers believe

add value to the overall hotel stay, and why they want their staff to make personal connections with customers.

Customers described personal interactions with staff as being friendly and professional, genuine and valuable, and could see when the staff were 'putting the effort in'. They customers described that these personal interactions and overall treatment made them feel special, and like royalty. The outcome of these interactions has contributed to overall positive and memorable stays, which are made possible by the efforts of the staff. An employee mentioned this in their interview, suggesting that the customers perceive interaction with hotel staff.

*Employee 001: It's like the whole almost romance of going in to a hotel and having that interaction with the front desk. That's part of the big thing.*

Customers intimated that they prefer interaction on their own terms, linking back to the service judgement theme whereby they decide on the level of interaction they want depending on their reason for the hotel stay, or their personal preferences at the time.

*Customer 008: I do enjoy the personal interaction, finding a little bit more out about people and so on. But I think, from a really personal perspective, I've always liked that from the point of view when I'm kind of in control of the interaction. I do want to have a bit more just switch off and not have to interact with people 24/7.*

Customer 005 also stated that they prefer staff interaction only when they need it, and not interrupting their stay. They also stated that they prefer the interactions to be more of a 'friendly relationship', not a 'customer-staff relationship', which is interesting considering

the first point. This does pose some difficulty for organisations that try to anticipate guests needs so they are able to make personal connections. Employee 001 did infer that they learn how to deal with certain guests and try to accommodate their need for interaction, however from the customer preferences shared in the interviews it seems that generalisations cannot be made between purpose of stay, generation or otherwise, as it seems to be when customers feel like it. This means it is hard for the employees to determine when to offer personal interaction, or how much.

When discussing rapport with employees and managers, there were clear dependencies on leaning on experience of dealing with different types of guests, as well as reading cues. Employee 001 and 003 discussed how they have working in hospitality for years, and have learned through experience with different customers on how much interaction they should offer. Employee 003 explained that they learned through mistakes of getting the balance wrong between being too friendly or not enough. Employee 002 stated that rapport with customer begins 'as soon as they lay eyes on you', and that learning more and more about a guest by speaking to them face to face is key in determining how much interaction the guests want. They went on to say that even repeat guests that had been staying at the hotel for years where they were well known to the front desk team would still not want to make any connections with the staff, and that they were 'keeping themselves to themselves'. The managers are also aware that the staff need to 'find their way' with guests through exposure on the front desk.

*Manager 002: I think they're kind of intuitive to understand what the customer does and doesn't want, and you can usually gauge it from the interaction that you're trying to have with the customer, and you pretty much find out.*

There is also customer appreciation for the different personalities required for hospitality roles, particularly in terms of guest-host interaction.

*Customer 007: You want room service to be very you know, you don't want to anybody to speak because you don't want to have an interaction, and then when you're in the bar you need those lively people, so you need a whole mixture of people in order to make the experience come together*

It was evident that customers appreciated the interaction, however it has to be on their terms, where and when they want it, and there also has to be a personal connection established through rapport building.

## 6.5 True hospitality

When discussing hospitality with both employees and customers, although an overarching theme was the use of self-service technologies, there was an undertone of true hospitality in a more traditional sense. Both customers and employees would refer to either ‘old fashioned’ hospitality, or ‘in the old days’ to give context to the experiences they shared. Whereas the customers, they would definitively compare face to face examples with examples of self-service technology use. These references to old fashioned, or traditional hospitality suggest that both customers and employees still recount the time before self-service technologies changed the way in which hospitality service is delivered and received. This theme explores the customer and employee perceptions of hospitality, consisting of three sub-themes: old fashioned hospitality, value of interaction and experience expectations. The codes relating to each of the themes is shown in table 15 below.

*Table 15: True hospitality theme, sub-themes, and codes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
True hospitality	Old fashioned hospitality	Old times Guest perception of hospitality Guest experience True hospitality Luxury Experience Old fashioned Passive hospitality True hospitality Nowadays
	Value of interaction	Personal connections Guest satisfaction measurements Anticipating needs Cost Payment Commercial relationships Customer service

	Experience expectations	Disconnect from hospitality Personalisation Star rating related Employee experience as a customer Expectation Leisure guest experience
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### 6.5.1 Old fashioned hospitality

Guest perception of hospitality was described in many different ways, but mostly involved describing service delivered by hotel staff. Some of the descriptions included the amount of staff that a hotel had, providing ‘exceptional level of service’, having a human touch as part of the service, staff hosting rather than serving and a relaxed environment. Customer 002 referred to exceptional service as expecting ‘to be treated like I’m the only person there and they can’t do enough for me’. When customers experienced true hospitality, their experiences most often included hotel staff in how the customers were made to feel. Customers described their feelings as being valued, relaxed, welcomed and special. When describing their best hospitality experience, they often referred to how they felt, and how the staff made excellent service possible.

*Customer 004: It made me feel incredibly valuable but not in a sort of pretentious way. It kind of was as though they treated me like royalty. It was just as though they really valued you as a guest and they really were invested in my experience.*

*Customer 006: They were probably the best hotel staff I’ve ever dealt with in terms of their service, their passion, the willingness they would always go the extra mile. I felt a bit like the Queen, it was really lovely, no automation at all.*

From a managerial perspective, there is a preference for staff to be an integral part of the hospitality experience

*Manager 001: It is so important that we continue to have that human interaction, that will never go away because that is hospitality. It's how hospitality should be...it's building relationships with people, it's almost like you're extending that kind of welcomeness in, and you can really see that in hotels.*

*Manager 002: if you're in hospitality for the right reason, which is to delight your customer and make them feel special, I think they enjoy doing it.*

When discussing how self-service technology has changed the way in which hotel service is delivered, Manager 002 explained how their guests perceive this change.

*Manager 002: A third of your customers are going to embrace it and be excited and love it. And the rest, it's going to be down to normal, good old fashioned hospitality service.*

In discussions about recent hotel stays with Customer 009, a common theme throughout the interview was passive hospitality. This customer mentioned three different experiences of when they witnessed service being delivered to other customers, or hospitality workers doing their daily roles, where the customer was impressed by watching that play out.

*Customer 009: you can kind of see other people experiencing elements of service as well...I like seeing those sorts of things*

*This receptionist just dealt with it so well, and so professionally and just as an*

*observer like I watched her just completely diffuse the situation really well. And that already made me feel like oh this is a nice place.*

*I could see people around like cleaning public areas, like everyone felt like a team.*

*I know that sounds a bit silly, they've got the uniform on and it was like there was a team operating in that hotel and everything was just slick. I liked it.*

This demonstrates that it is not just personal interactions that can impress a guest and create a positive experience. Guests are aware of interactions going on around them, and are then therefore influenced by passive hospitality, adding to the customer's overall hospitality experience.

There were both customers and employees referring to 'old times' when reminiscing about their hospitality experiences. This referral to 'old fashioned' hospitality would be prompted by 'we used to', 'I remember when' or 'back in the day', indicating that there is recognition of progression in hospitality service. Customers and employees would provide parallels to their recent experiences, indicating that 'nowadays' there is an expectation of self-service technology use, as opposed to the 'old times' talk of hospitality.

Employee 003 reminisced about the times when they used to produce weather cards for the front desk for guests to take with them, so they knew the weather for the day, comparing to today when their guests are encouraged to use Alexa machines installed in the rooms. Customer 004 suggested they wanted to use the technology available instead of speaking with hotel staff, however there was an issue with the usability, and therefore the customer reverted to 'old fashioned ways'.

Customer 004: *I kind of went back to those sort of old fashioned ways, but year I mean I was ready to embrace the Alexa challenge. It didn't work out in my experience unfortunately.*

Customer 005 has similar experiences, however their preference is not to use mobile applications that hotels offer, describing themselves as being 'in the dark ages'. This demonstrated that customers are recognising that hospitality is progressing through the use of technology, but they also recognise that if they don't progress with it, they risk being left behind in a way.

The employee and manager discussions regarding connecting with guests and ensuring guests were taken care of, is changed by the use of technology compared to the 'old days'. Manager 001 explains that in the 'old days' guests were less informed about the hotels and its amenities, whereas now they have the ability to connect with guests directly and supply them with information via a mobile application that travels with them on their personal devices. The employees and managers described how they would set up self-service technologies via mobile applications to deliver messages and updates faster than the 'old fashioned' courtesy calls and messages on the in-room television. For example, Manager 002 described how they use their messaging platform on the mobile application to communicate with customers during their stay, going on to describe it as a flexible way to gain information. Manager 003 described their approach as 'very digital millennial', linking to their overall vision for the hotel brand. They therefore encourage the staff to use their mobile phones for work, to encourage guests to do the same. The manager describes this as a change in the last 10 years, shifting hospitality to be more mobile.

## 6.5.2 Value of interaction

Customer's descriptions of feelings following personal interaction included feeling valued, special, relaxed, treated like royalty, welcome, comfortable, safe, and happy. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the hotel staff are often referred to as being the reason for customers valuing their hospitality experience.

*Customer 005: I think if you look back at how you value certain hotel stays, generally, it's the staff that seem to make the hotel what it is.*

A way in which this is achieved is through employees anticipating guest needs.

Customers explained that they valued the fact that their needs were anticipated without having to ask anyone for anything. There was also an expectation in the higher star hotels that there would be staff available for this. From a customer perspective, participants shared that they recognised when staff had anticipated their needs. Customer 002 shared that the whole experience of one particular stay felt like they had been waiting for them and had fully prepared for their arrival, by personalising the service and welcoming the guests by name. Customer 004 shared that the staff at one hotel were always one step ahead of everything, meaning they didn't have to ask for anything, and Customer 007 noticed that the staff in a five star hotel would know when to appear and when to disappear, anticipating when they were required without intruding on the guest.

Being made to feel welcome, and a feeling of home was a common theme throughout the experiences shared from all customers, and interestingly, from the employees that were interviewed. Customers mentioning home when describing a hotel, a feeling like they're at home and being welcomed home were the main discussion points when talking about how

they felt about true hospitality. Guests also suggested that they require additional service and want to be looked after because they're away from home. Although guests wanted to feel at home and have the same level of amenities they're used to at home, they also expected a heightened level of amenities because they were paying to be available from home. This also links to an account of safety that links to the feeling of home when discussing staying at a hotel and feeling looked after.

*Customer 002: I felt sort of comfortable and safe, it was sort of by having that feeling I knew that people knew I was there, they know I'd be up for breakfast and bits like that*

Customers suggested that the feeling of home was a result of consistency from hotel staff looking after them throughout the stay. Seeing familiar faces and staff remembering their name was important to them, as well as being welcomed into the hotel, offering a sense of belonging.

There was also employee recognition of guests needing to feel like they're being welcomed home from knowing that they're missing home, particularly business guests, demonstrated below.

*Employee 001: You build quite a good relationship with them, like when I was leaving or when others were leaving, they all gave us gifts to say thank you for their appreciation and that sort of really says more than words how much they appreciated you because you know, they're away from their families as well so that interaction was really important for them.*

From an organisational perspective, the value of interaction contributes to a more commercial relationship between customers and employees. For example, some of the examples that the managers and employees shared were focused on the outcomes of making personal connections, rather than the connection itself. Employees that are working in front office roles are face to face with customers and are able to gain information which could potentially lead to repeat visits or sales opportunities. Employee 002 explained that they sparked a conversation with a group of guests staying, which led to a special corporate rate being set up and confirmed future business for the hotel. The employee went on to say 'you would never find that out through an app', suggesting the commercial value of face to face interaction. Employee 003 reiterated this sentiment too.

*Employee 003: I think there's going to still be a need for people. Because I think from a sales perspective, people still buy from people, and I don't think that will ever change.*

Managers explained how the staff are incentivised to talk to guests to find out key information about the reason for guests stay, their organisations and potential for future business. Manager 002 incentivises the staff by offering rewards for sales leads, therefore motivating the staff to make personal connections with guests. However, there is then a question of authenticity to this relationship, as if the staff are incentivised, then the genuine guest-host relationship is therefore compromised. Manager 002 describes it as an 'indirect way building a relationship' and building the relationship 'with a purpose'. This does seem rather disingenuous, as the reason for building that relationship shifts from the objective of wanting to delight the guest, to a more commercial objective.

However, the experiences shared by the employees offered a more genuine perspective on relationship building with guests. Employee 001 shared that they felt a connection with the guests, particularly with returning business guests that would chat about their family and their work. Employee 002 shared that they knew when certain guests didn't want to chat or engage outside of the usual transactions but had more meaningful interactions with some returning guests to the point where they told the researcher about a particular couple and their background. This suggested that the relationship was beyond commercial reasons, and that the employees genuinely enjoyed the personal connections with guests.

There is however a customer appreciation of this commercial relationship, which from a service understanding, plays in their favour.

*Customer 003: It's an awful lot easier to keep people coming back than it is to find new customers who've never been before. So if I've been 30 times they want me to keep going another 30 times because they don't have to sell the experience anymore.*

This commercial relationship also, however, works both ways in favour of the guests as well as the employees as demonstrated by the customer comment below.

*Customer 006: I think it's nice to be nice I believe if you're nice to them, they'll be nice back and they'll give you that little bit of extra mile. So you don't want to be too demanding.*

This suggests that a customer thinks that their understanding of how their behaviour can influence the behaviours and decisions of employees will then therefore determine what level of service they are offered. Therefore, customers can be just as persuasive in terms of how they act during guest-host interactions.

### 6.5.3 Experience expectations

Customer experience is at the heart of hospitality, and therefore a customer's opinion on what their experience expectations are is important to include here. Customer 009 explained that understanding a hotel's proposition helps the customer manage their expectations before arriving to a hotel, pointing out that if they know the star rating or quality of a hotel, they will know what level of service to expect. A point from Customer 003 was that they discussed the 'better hotels', whereby they said that they 'make everything possible, because that's the mindset of the place'. This was an interesting point to make, as a customer's appreciation for the different quality standards of hotels. Customer 007 explained their experience of a five-star hotel, which was representative of other customer explanations too, in the sense of how they were treated, and that it matched their expectations. This was also echoed by Customer 004.

*Customer 007: It was truly above and beyond what you would ever expect, you didn't have to ask for anything, they already anticipated it, which is extremely nice because not only did you pay five star money and want to be treated in that way, it was something that you couldn't quite put your finger on, you know money couldn't buy it is how it felt.*

*Customer 004: So those kind of surprise and delight things are where I sort of remember those hotels where they did exceptionally well. Just giving you those*

*extra things that you know it just made you feel nice so it's when they sort of like second guess those things.*

However, customer perception of service when using self-service technology is different. There are low expectations of service standards when using self-service technology, in that the service is functional, and is not going to be a focus on the experience or being looked after. Customer 007 and 009 explained that the hotels they identify as being basic or staying for business, they would use self-service technologies as they don't have an expectation of personal service. Customer 008 explained that the less they pay for a hotel the less interaction they want, for example a three-star hotel they wouldn't want any interaction and would rather use self-service technology. Whereas a five-star hotel they would expect personalised service with personal interaction from hotel staff. This relates back to the service judgement theme from earlier in the chapter, as the customers are making a decision based on their immediate needs, and the provision of the hotel, whether they will use self-service technologies, or interact with hotel staff.

In the higher standard hotels, customers discussed what they would expect to see. It was particularly interesting that customers pointed out circumstances where they would not expect to be offered self-service technologies. Customer 009 explained that if checking in to a four or five star hotel they would not want to be forced in to checking in via a kiosk, they would expect to see employees available for them to interact with. However, there is also a need for the option of self-service should they choose it. This further suggests that the customer wants all options available to them, and therefore they can decide on how they would like to interact with the hotel.

This therefore opens a discussion about expectation and perception; what are people expected to do, and what service do they perceive they will receive? The researcher therefore asked the customers about their most exceptional experiences, if self-service technology was offered, how they would have felt, and the answers that were shared were interesting in terms of customer engagement

*Customer 007: I just that that it would have felt as if the hotel could have been anywhere in the world, I wouldn't have felt very engaged to be honest. I think it would have been a very cold front because you turn up there expecting a personal level of service because of the standard of the property, so I think I would have found it quite jarring to be fair.*

Expanding on that jarring comment, disconnection from hospitality was a common theme across the customer interviews. In some of the examples that customers shared this was down to either the use of self-service technologies interrupting the service experience, or disengaged staff that were not as attentive or proactive as the customer expected them to be. This leads into the customer evaluation of the overall service in terms of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The customers that were interviewed demonstrated savviness in understanding what are basic hospitality standards and picked up on behaviours that fall short of those expectations.

*Customer 008: I think that it is not a good first impression of a hotel, I doesn't take anything to lift your head and say someone will be with your shortly, or whatever it might be as a bit of a holding statement. I always think it's a shame.*

From the discussions with customers about their experiences, there was a suggestion that hotels should not develop self-service technologies too much as it detracts from the interaction and true hospitality feeling of higher star rated hotels. The customers that were interviewed valued personalised service in hotels where they were higher star rated, resort hotels or were visiting the hotels for leisure purposes. This links to the situational judgement theme from earlier in the chapter, whereby customers make a judgement of their expectations depending on their purpose of trip.

Manager 001 predicts that there will be a divide in hospitality and how service is offered to customers, and again it links to the overall quality of the hotel.

*Manager 001: I think you have two parts to this. I think you have luxury and you have economy. I think economy is going to be very much driven by less human interaction, and then there's luxury. It's going to be your human interaction based on personalisation making, anticipating guest needs, I think that will never change, I think that will always be there.*

This suggests that a managerial perspective on hospitality is that the higher class or standard of hotel will be deeply rooted in 'true hospitality', meaning that the human touch element will still be very much a leading role in service. However, Manager 003 discussed how technology can be used in a more sophisticated way to support hospitality service, rather than replace that human touch element. This will be discussed further in the tech-touch blend theme later in the chapter.

## 6.6 Tech-touch blend

It was evident from the interviews that a blend of both technology and touch exists within hotel service. What the interviews provided was an understanding of the extent of this existence. From a customer perspective, their perception of the tech-touch blend provides an understanding of how the mix of service delivery is received. From an organisation perspective, the objectives of the implementation of self-service technologies were discussed, as well as how the implementation affects the personal touch. This insight from both customers and organisations is important to provide an understanding of the current tech-touch blend in three ways. First how the blend could be improved operationally in terms of service delivery. Second, understanding the tech-touch balance and the customer and employee preferences of the mix of technology aided and personal service delivery. Finally, how the tech-touch blend can be part of shaping the future of hospitality service. This theme is therefore structured by the sub-themes, facilitating versus replacing, tech-touch balance, and future proofing hospitality. The codes relating to the sub-themes are displayed in table 16 below.

*Table 16: Tech-touch blend theme, sub-themes, and codes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Tech-touch blend	Facilitating versus replacing	Tech issues Tech experience requiring human involvement Disjointed experience Transactional tasks Guest perception of tech SST failure Tech supported service
	Future proofing hospitality	Future perception Back up options Keeping up with the times Competition Future of hospitality Hotel owners ROI

		Brand associated SST Guest focused design
	Tech-touch balance	Updating tech Employee SST training Tech-touch point Balance Tech-touch mix Preferences Tech-touch employee preferences Tech-touch customer preferences Descriptions of SST Descriptions of personal service SST usage Tech management Guest-tech experiences SST

### 6.6.1 Facilitating versus replacing

Customers shared some negative examples of where self-service technology was involved in their hospitality experience. There were examples of technology failure, service disruption and disjointed hospitality experiences. In most cases, it is where personal service is being replaced by technology aided service, or self-service technologies. In cases where personal service was being facilitated by technology aided service or self-service technologies, there was a much smoother customer experience. Customers shared a common phrase; 'technology is great when it works', where they would share a positive experience of using self-service technology, followed by an experience where technology failed them.

From an organisation perspective, this technology failure does not go unnoticed by managers, and action is taken. They not only understand the frustrations of technology failure, however they also have an organisational duty to fix the problem.

*Manager 002: The thing is when technology works, it's absolutely amazing, and when technology doesn't work it's the most frustrating thing on earth, I mean you could almost be in tears.*

*Manager 001: I'm very hot on making sure that we then follow through with the team to ensure that we really report anything when it doesn't work, and that we get better and better hopefully*

Manager 003 also indicated that sometimes the customers 'don't have the time to get used to the technology' during shorter stays, and therefore will come across issues or misunderstandings. Whether the technology failure is due to user error, or circumstances out of the control of the organisation, the consequence is still a negative customer experience, which may influence their future decision making.

It was evident that customers are now aware of self-service and that it exists in hospitality environments, whether it be via hardware in the reception areas such as kiosks, or via mobile applications on their smartphones. However, the customers do still expect to have the traditional mode of service delivery available from hotel staff, when needed. There were experiences of confusion between employees and customers whereby the customer wanted a personal level of service, but was directed to use the self-service check-in.

*Customer 009: There was also a receptionist in the reception behind the reception desk. And I kind of said oh hello how's it going and she was like oh you have to check in there (the kiosks). So already that's a bit disjointed for me*

This provides a disconnection between the customer expectations and the hospitality provision. Customer 007 described this as a jarring experience, whereby they checked in to a five-star hotel and expected that staff would be looking after them from the welcome at the door to checking out. However, there was a self-service technology offering to check-in, and then once in the hotel staff then took over. Again, this provides quite a disconnect between the service expectations of the customer and the service delivery from the organisation.

Another disconnection is the check in process when using the self-service mobile application. As the customers are using their own devices, employees explained that due to UK legislation the customers need to verify their payment details via the front desk. Employees further explained that if they were to use a kiosk, the customer would physically present and authorise a credit card, however the mobile application does not have this capability. Therefore, the customer believes they have checked in online, however they are then asked to visit the front desk to verify payment and sign a registration card. This offers another disconnection in service, as it is not the seamless service that is sold to the customer.

*Customer 003: You have to go to reception to pick up your key which was also bizarre, of course the people behind the desk haven't had the training.*

The issue here is that the customer believes the staff have not been trained properly, however the case is that it is hotel policy when using a mobile application to check in. The employees and managers across different hotel brands that were interviewed expressed their frustration with this operation as they mentioned that the customers are often frustrated if they don't understand the policy. Employee 002 expressed the frustration of being the staff member that would often receive complaints regarding this but didn't have the power to change the process. Although expressing frustration, there is also an employee understanding of the disconnected service, where they know how the mobile application is sold to the customer but know the limits of the actual operation.

*Employee 002: For them they think well the whole idea is to have the key sent to the phone to skip the whole check in process. So I think that's where guests kind of either get confused or think well, what's the point?*

This demonstrates the lack of operational awareness of the decision making from higher in the organisation. What the customer understands the self-service technology to offer, is not what is actually offered. This then becomes a problem for the staff on the front line in the hotels. Manager 003 did explain that the policy for guests to complete their check in process via the front desk is location led, and not an issue with the technology, with the legislation being different for UK hotels within the brand as opposed to the hotels in the USA.

In case of technology failure or need for interaction, staff are actively sought by customers to fix the issue, therefore providing a need for staff. Returning to one of the findings from the people need people theme earlier in the chapter, customers have a reliance on

service staff to look after them (need for interaction) and resolve any problems they may have (service recovery).

Employee 001 described numerous scenarios where customers had trouble navigating the self-service mobile application and would receive customer requests to fix the issue. However, there was often an issue of the staff member not knowing what the issue was as they were not always fully knowledgeable of the technological intricacies of the mobile applications. The staff member explained there would often be software updates that the staff would need to be kept informed about. This also links to the finding from the blurring of roles theme, whereby hotel employees are experiencing role change due to technological developments.

#### 6.6.2 Tech-touch balance

Customer's first experiences of using self-service technologies in hospitality settings was surprising considering self-service technologies were not a new concept to these customers, as they had experience of them in supermarkets. An example of a customer reaction is below.

*Customer 005: First time I'd used it, it felt a little bit strange because its just different but yeah, I felt good and it was easy. I didn't have any issues with it. I just felt it was very easy and then quite clever.*

The descriptions of both personal service and self-service are detailed below in table 17. This gives an overview of what customers think about both methods of service delivery.

*Table 17: Descriptions of tech and touch related service*

<b>Descriptions of personal service</b>	<b>Descriptions of self-service</b>
Friendly	Seamless
Top quality	Easy
Felt like royalty	Clever
Remarkable	Functional
Special	Quick
Exciting	Useful
Traditional	Ugly
Proper	Straight forward
Impressive	Convenient
Memorable	Simple
Got an edge	Self explanatory
Experience	

It is clear from how customers describe their encounters with both personal and self-service that there is a clear distinction on their perception of each mode of service delivery. Given the mostly positive nature of the descriptions of both touch and tech related service, it suggests that both are appreciated. This further establishes the need for a mix of both personal and self-service to allow customers to tailor their hospitality experience depending on their needs. Relating back to the service judgement theme, customers require different modes of service delivery depending on their trip purpose. This allows the customer to be in control of their experience, which customers alluded to in their responses in the role change sub-theme earlier in the chapter. They like the control of being in charge, personalising their experience and interaction requirements.

The straight-forward, easy to use nature of self-service technologies allow customers to bypass the need for interaction in certain circumstances. This is considered time saving as there is no risk of queuing or opportunity for conversations. However, there are other circumstances whereby customers would like to engage with staff, therefore the balance

of tech and touch needs to be an important consideration from an organisation and brand perspective. Some brands have a mix of tech and touch already which some customers have learned, and which also links back to the findings of the service judgement theme whereby customers have different expectations depending on their trip purpose.

*Customer 007: I think something that Hilton kind of generally do quite well overall in all of their properties is that I think because they've got such a blend of leisure and business travel they kind of allow the person to decide which traveller are you today*

This demonstrates a customer appreciation for the balance of personal service for leisure travel and technology aided service for business travel. From a brand perspective, the organisation has a reputation for providing the customer with what they need, and at the right time.

Customer preferences of self-service technology use and personal service were clearly in favour of a mix of both tech and touch. However, the tech-touch mix should be on customer terms, when they want it, suggesting that there are certain circumstances where the balance should be at the demand of the customer. Therefore, a blend is being offered, not restricting to one or the other and giving the customer the choice.

*Customer 008: The best of both worlds. I like the technology from the point of view the convenience and so you feel like you're in control. And then for me the sort of human part of it comes in is really exceeding the expectations and making it memorable and making sure that you have a great experience.*

Customer 007 suggested that hotels should 'make the important parts count', where technology should be used for the more transactional tasks and personal touch reserved for the experiences.

There perhaps needs to be a deeper understanding of what constitutes 'personal touch' from a customer perspective. What may appear to be automated to a customer is the virtual concierge and messaging via the mobile applications and chat platforms. However, there is a team managing the implementation and personalisation of the messaging service, which the customer does not always understand. Manager 002 discussed how their virtual concierge system allows employees to personalise messages that are sent through to guests phones via mobile applications, therefore adding a personal touch, albeit virtually. This tech-touch mix allows employees to connect with guests without them being physically present at the front desk.

From an organisation perspective, self-service technologies are reliant on staff managing them to allow the guests to use them effectively. What the organisations do need to consider when offering a mix of tech and touch to the guests is sufficient and effective training, so that the staff are empowered to control their operation. Employees and even managers shared experiences of situations where they were not given sufficient training on the new technology updates, or there was a lack of information shared with the hotel teams in a timely manner.

*Manager 003: It very much put us as a hotel company in the line of doing things first, which was great but also challenging because things were quite often getting thrown at you*

*Employee 002: I've actually learned on the system by me just clicking things in the*

*hope that I'll figure out what I'm doing. But really I should have the answer, I should know what I'm doing. If I'm expecting them to do it, I should know how to do it myself.*

Discussions around the balance of technology and touch were interesting, particularly with employees and managers. They have front line experience with customers, observing how the customers are navigating the hospitality space and understanding their preferences. An example is detailed below of a manager's thoughts on finding the right balance for his hotel.

*Manager 003: I think it's a juggle but I think it becomes easier, more of a norm I suppose. Depending on the brand then it's expected that you're maybe juggling different types of technology to deliver your service or to maintain guest contact or to follow guest interaction. We're trying to reduce the number of people and that's finding the balance using technology but still delivering the service that the guest expects.*

There is managerial recognition of the need for a balance of touch and tech, however it does seem that they are still trying to find the right balance. The hotel managers and employees that were interviewed were of the same position, whereby they have self-service technologies of various sophistication, however they are not yet fully embedded in the balance of touch and tech.

### 6.6.3 Future proofing hospitality

There was evidence of a need to 'keep up with the times' during interviews with managers in particular.

*Manager 002: We're just using technology to make us a bit more savvy, and to quicken and speed things up, and to keep up with the worlds ever changing and revolving and what the customer requires. We have to keep moving with the times and we have to really embrace it.*

The repetition of 'we have to' was noticeable here, and the fact that there was a feeling of 'we have to keep moving with the times' suggests it is almost forced development, that as a brand they don't want to be left behind in their industry. Being an industry leader was also mentioned by Manager 003 from a different hotel chain. They are expected to be the 'first mover' in terms of their innovation and technology. As an industry however, it was clear from the interviews that the technology used is perhaps not used to its full potential or is not yet implemented throughout the industry as a whole.

In a bid to 'move with the times', Manager 003 discussed encouraging staff to use their mobile phone; 'what our team is doing is reflecting what the guests are doing'. Manager 002 also mentioned that customers are very close to their phones and always connected, and therefore as a hotel they need to embrace that mobile first mentality.

*Manager 003: Certain hotels like luxury brands they may still have that 'we don't want to see any mobiles'. But for a lot of hotels the mobile is not only your work device, it's your personal device. But is a combination of both and we're happy for*

*people to combine their personal and work experiences at the same time because it fits with the brand.*

However, it could be questioned whether the guests want to see this, as the traditional view of professional hospitality is that the employees are completely focused on the customer and not their devices. The move to mobile first service could add to technology interruption which was discussed earlier in the chapter. Making personal connections could be disconnected if using personal devices, whereas the device actually becomes a barrier.

One of the main considerations of keeping up with the times however, is hotel owners' return on investment. This is an important consideration in the context of future proofing hospitality, as there must be a commercial need for the technologies before the hotel owners will invest. The views of the three hotel managers are below, of which they all work for different hotel companies.

*Manager 001: In order to implement mobile key we need to have the infrastructure there, you need to discuss with an owner if they have the money to implement it. I've tried to be on the forefront to drive and convince the owners of the importance of it.*

*Manager 002: You need to be either a step ahead or at least a benchmark with what's going on in the digital world and what your competitors are doing. And I guess it's just understanding the ratio of the cost and the revenue with profit and understanding how that all comes out at the end what the sums look like in terms of profitability.*

*Manager 003: Of course technology I'm sure will get cheaper depending on the*

*technology but it's just that use of having to renew the technology on a regular basis, that's the cost. There's only so much technology costs you give to a franchise owner because at some point they're just going to say well we just can't afford the franchise anymore because the technology is too much cost.*

It was clear from all managers that were interviewed that cost was an important consideration when debating what self-service technologies to invest in. The balance between keeping up with the times, keeping up with the industry, keeping up with the customers, as well as being cost sensitive, is a real issue to hotel managers.

When discussing preferences and expectations of the tech-touch balance within hotels, each interviewee stated they wanted a mix of both options; personal touch and self-service technology available should they want to use it. Customer 004 describes it as a fine balance, offering self-service for the convenience and time saving, but having the right level of staff available so that they are there when they want them. Customer 005 describes it as a payoff, whereby the personal touch makes up for the lack of touch from the self-service technology. Overall, most customers preferred the convenience of self-service, but still wanted the personalisation and being made to feel special during their hotel stays, particularly for the higher star rated hotels. However, there is still customer recognition of need the technology to be seamless between personal and self-service delivery.

*Customer 004: So the technology or your integration to it has to be seamless for it to work, I think you can't just implement technology and think oh once it's done then it's done. It's there. There is still a service behind it.*

From the perspective of hotel employees and managers, they share a common preference of a mix of both touch and technology. Although they do understand the tech-touch mix differently to the customers, as they see it through a more operational lens, rather than the overall experience.

*Employee 001: Even if they're using self-service, it's still the staff actually carrying out the end request. It's not like we're at the stage of the robot you know. It hasn't quite taken out that person. The need for the person.*

*Manager 001: I must say these technologies though, they enhance and its nice to have, but the human contact will always be there and the most important part about hospitality, I sincerely believe that.*

*Manager 003: I'm sure there'll be a lot of new innovation, but I'm sure we'll still need people because you know our businesses run on people. Our guests will have an expectation of service, especially at the luxury level.*

## 6.7 Hospitality in a pandemic

When interviewing participants in a global pandemic, there was no doubt that it would be a common theme throughout the interviews. Not only were the discussions around the pandemic a way to 'break the ice' with participants, but it also offered a different perspective on how both customers and employees experienced hospitality throughout a pandemic. This theme is a standalone theme, with the codes detailed in table 18.

Therefore, the discussion will follow the perspectives of customers, then employees. This will offer some insight as to how hospitality has temporarily changed throughout the pandemic and how customers have adapted to those short-term changes. First, the employee experiences will be discussed to contextualise the adapted hospitality due to the pandemic, leading into the customer experiences to see how it was received in practice.

*Table 18: Hospitality in a pandemic theme and codes*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Hospitality in a pandemic		Masks/screens Limited interaction Interaction avoidance Skeleton staff Covid role change Anxiety Uncomfortable Covid practices Furlough Service change Acceptable change Culture shift Change in priorities Adaptation of expectations Signposting Covid formalities Unheard of

### 6.7.1 Employee experiences

During the pandemic, hotels were allowed to open whilst in lockdown for key workers only as social restrictions were still in place for the general public. This meant that most hotels were closed, however few remained open to allow for key workers that required accommodation to stay close to their place of work.

From a managerial perspective, the managers that were interviewed highlighted operational change in terms of using technology to replace social interaction. Manager 001 explained that the pandemic made customers initially very nervous about staying in hotels and interacting with other people. Therefore, their self-service offering was used a lot more by customers during the pandemic as a way to limit personal interaction. Manager 001 has seen a positive shift in customers now using self-service for the more transactional tasks since the pandemic.

Managers 001 and 002 found the opportunity to expand their self-service technology offering because of the pandemic, particularly encouraging hotel owners to invest in expanding the technology offering. One of the main reasons for self-service technologies, particularly mobile applications, was the investment that hotel owners had to justify without being able to sell the service at an additional cost to the customer. This was also evident from the previous sub-theme 'future proofing hospitality'. What Covid did, was accelerate the implementation and also customer usage. Manager 002 described how self-service technologies are better received by guests since the pandemic, which means there is more customer engagement with the technologies that are available.

One of the main challenges that employees shared was the fact that the hotels opened with only skeleton staff to limit the amount of people in the building, as well as being able to furlough staff. Employee 002 discussed how a 150 bedroom hotel opened up for key workers, with around 40% occupancy during lockdown. With that level of occupancy, there were only 3 staff running the operation, including a front office manager, a chef and a maintenance manager. All three staff took care of front desk, room service, housekeeping and maintenance of the building. The employee described it as 'horribly busy' and as this interview took place during lockdown, said 'you just get used to it, it's just become normal'. The 'unheard of' practices of pre-pandemic were discussed by the same employee, who explained in great detail the change in operation owing to social distancing and lockdown guidelines. The exchange is detailed in full in appendix J to show the depth of change to the front office operational role during the pandemic. However, it is noted that the practices discussed by Employee 002 was the practice at the time that they were interviewed. Since the interview took place, the social distancing and lockdown laws have since been relaxed, and therefore this experience was temporary.

This very honest account of changes due to the pandemic displays how hospitality staff are relied upon to provide service regardless of situation, keeping the show on the road. It is clear from this shared experience that the additional pressures of working through a pandemic added to an already pressurised role. The adaptability of this particular employee demonstrates the acceptance of change of role, referring back to 'it's just the way things are' from the value of time sub-theme. Adapting to change is a key part of a hospitality role, and this employee demonstrated the 'hospitality spirit' that exists within the industry. In light of additional responsibilities, this employee also discusses customers who were going against the lockdown rules, which demonstrates that hospitality staff had

additional responsibility to ensure that the rules were being followed. However, with no authority to enforce these rules, the additional responsibility was difficult to manage. Regardless of these additional tasks, this employee appeared to be surprisingly positive about the change, seeming appreciative that these changes are short term.

Another employee view of how customers are reacting to these changes has a more negative tone, however.

*Employee 003: I think people's expectations are well what do you mean you can't do this and you can't do that. Just generally we can't.*

*We were very policing, I felt I lost a lot of shine. There was nothing polished anymore*

*The QR code thing was a complete farce and a pain in the arse.*

This demonstrates a very personal view on the changes in hospitality at the time. Not only did front office staff have to change their operation, but they were also busier with less staff, as well as having to personally deal with living in a pandemic. This experience of working during the pandemic has a very adverse effect on how this employee felt about working in hospitality pre-pandemic.

There is an evident disconnect between how managers and employees viewed working throughout the pandemic. Perhaps it was what the managers and chose to share with the researcher during the interviews, sharing more positive strategies and operation plans. However, the researcher feels they were honest accounts from the employees, as they worked throughout the pandemic on the front line of hospitality. Whereas the managers

worked from home most of the time, and therefore did not see operational issues in action or see guest reactions first-hand.

### 6.7.2 Customer experience

The employee experience of working during the pandemic offered insight in to how hospitality was adapted to allow operations to continue throughout social distancing guidelines. This provides a good basis of understanding before understanding how it was received by customers. There were two customers that openly shared their experiences of staying in a hotel during the pandemic.

*Customer 004: It's a very different experience because there is kind of that distance of like of like you're checking in and there's the screen there and things., and its great that hotels have been able to adapt to it.*

*But it is a shame that it kind of like removed that social element of it. I felt like I couldn't even engage as much with the waiting staff because they were wearing a mask. And it's sometimes you can't tell it's harder to tell people's feelings, it's definitely a different experience. And it for me, it feels like I clearly value that because it didn't feel as special staying in a hotel, it felt a bit like it's not quite the same experience anymore.*

What was apparent from the customers that discussed their experiences of hospitality during the pandemic, was their appreciation of pre-pandemic hospitality and value of interaction. The example above shows that the customer need for interaction, which was affected by the social distancing measures that were in place, such as mask wearing. The fact that the customer pointed out 'it's hard to tell people's feelings' is an indication that

there is an element of care within the guest-host relationship, as well as also needing to read cues to react to the social interaction. This was also noted by one of the managers that was interviewed. Manager 001 explained that due to the pandemic the hotel was quieter and guests would stay a little longer, therefore they had the time to spend with guests who would actively seek them out for interaction. The manager described the connection as 'really nice to see'.

Customer appreciation for adaptations in hospitality to continue to operation throughout the pandemic. Surprisingly, there have been some practices that customers would like to see continue post-pandemic, such as time saving by using technology.

*Customer 009: I think it's good how people have moved with technology fast to enable them to operate within COVID restrictions and I suppose it's that whole you know I'm saying I don't I don't like technology and I like service but I was only saying last week gosh, I hope some of these restrictions stay as in I quite like getting served at the table now. I don't want to go back to like I don't have a bar three deep, or you know, those sorts of things like I think it's definitely created some improvements that I hope are here to stay as well*

It was also interesting how the customer evaluates their wants and needs in terms of pre and post Covid situations, particularly in this example of the customer discussing cleanliness.

*Customer 009: And I think by quality, a big part of quality for me is like clean, like cleanliness. And this is this is like I'm not even talking about Covid or since Covid.*

*Yeah, but that's always been a thing for me just like yeah, just a real consistent, like cleanliness is really important.*

What was clear from the accounts that were shared around both experiencing and working within a pandemic, was the need for interaction and need for people within hospitality settings. Although self-service technologies were accountable for the limiting of personal interaction, it was the social exchange that both employees and customers missed from pre-pandemic times.

## 6.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented the findings following thematic analysis of the interview data by presenting the main themes from the data. It is clear from the service judgements made by hotel guests, the hospitality servicescape needs to evolve to allow customers to make these service judgements based on their needs. From the six themes that were uncovered demonstrated some challenges in the operation of self-service technologies, which is manipulating the guest-host relationship from the traditional hospitality perspective.

The service judgement theme covers the main judgements that both customers and employees consider when assessing the hospitality servicescape. Therefore, an understanding of this service judgement process is required so that a balance of expectations and behaviours can be achieved in terms of service provision. Role change and development was covered under the blurring of roles theme, which allowed for an understanding of how roles have been affected by the implementation of self-service technologies. This insight from the perspective of both guests and hosts allowed the researcher to understand the role change, and how the shift between transactional and personal service alters their roles in a hospitality context. This led to the people need people theme, whereby the guest-host interaction was explored.

A notable code covered here was the fear of missing out, and how gaining insider knowledge was one of the main reasons for connecting with people. Following this, the tech-touch blend was explored, with both guest and host perspectives on the future of hospitality and how they view the development of self-service technologies. The final

theme provided an understanding of hospitality in a pandemic, from both the perspective of guests and hosts.

The themes that were uncovered showed the challenges that are currently being faced from both customers and employees in hospitality, mainly from the lack of understanding of the role of technology in the context of the guest-host relationship. What was apparent however, was the underlying need for traditional hospitality, albeit altered by the use of self-service technologies. The need for self-service technologies in hospitality, however, can be viewed in from two different perspectives. There is the commercial need, which the hotel managers spoke positively about. However, the hotel employees shared more negative experiences of managing self-service technologies operationally, which seemed to affect their job role and performance. This incongruity undoubtedly influences the possibility of a high-tech, high-touch approach to hospitality, the role of both customers and employees, as well as in the context of the guest-host relationship.

The next step is to make sense of the findings and discuss what it means in the context of the current study, which will be detailed in the next chapter. The discussion chapter will provide synthesis between the literature and the findings. This synthesis will provide more detailed discussion relating directly to the research questions of the study.

# Chapter Seven: Discussion

## 7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the data from the customer and employee interviews. The purpose of this chapter is to provide synthesis between the findings and literature and address the research questions in relation to both the literature review and the findings. Therefore, the chapter will be predominantly structured by the research questions.

At a very basic level, the provision of service is described as “to offer, transact, and deliver” (Hunt, 2015). The author posits further that the uniqueness of human-to-human service is emotion, and technology to human service is speed. However, the findings from the data suggested far more considerations under hospitality settings which were discussed in the findings chapter. Therefore, this chapter will explore the meaning and the researcher’s understanding of these considerations in relation to the research questions.

The findings suggested that self-service technologies are prominent in the service encounter, however there was a strong distinction between the quality of interaction when comparing experiences of self-service technologies and guest-host interaction. The experiences shared by customers suggested that their needs differ depending on the reason for staying at a hotel, and therefore will determine the level of interaction required. This distinction, broadly, links business stays with self-service technology use and leisure stays with personal service. Interestingly however, the data suggests that there are particular service judgements or evaluations that customers make before deciding on the

outcome, which in some cases overrides those linkages. The researcher has mapped these judgement points to understand further how customers are making these decisions. The chapter therefore concludes with two main outcomes of the data, which are the service judgment process and the guest-tech-host relationship (ANT) map.

## **7.2 RQ1: From the perspectives of both guests and employees, how desirable is a high-tech, high-touch approach to service in hotels?**

It is important to consider both guest and host perspectives around the potential of high-tech, high-touch hospitality. The literature review highlighted that the current body of literature mainly focuses on one or the other, where the hospitality service cannot be explored fully. The findings of the interviews with both employees and customers were beneficial in terms of understanding their preferences. The experiences they shared was a valuable source to understand the current landscape of hospitality, and the potential of high-tech, high-touch service delivery. Drawing on self-service technologies, tech-touch blend, and hospitality literature, and linking with the findings of this study, the researcher posits that a high-tech, high-touch approach to hospitality is attainable. However, there are particular considerations such as customer preferences, technical barriers and the blend of tech and touch, before high-tech, high-touch hospitality service is achieved.

### **7.2.1 High-tech, high touch hospitality**

Drawing parallels from other industries, for example retail and banking, self-service technology can offer the transactional tasks that employees would be able to do (Curran et al., 2003; Kim & Yang, 2018). However, hospitality provides more than just transactional services. By its very nature, hospitality provides interaction with people, care, and empathetic service. Therefore, self-service technology cannot necessarily perform the same experience as a host from a hospitality perspective. For example, the self-service checkouts in supermarkets are a replacement for a transactional service, scanning an item and making payment. Usually in this self-service transaction, there will

be a member of staff overseeing multiple self-service checkouts in case of any issues. However, general supermarket self-service transactions are completed mostly without any employee action at all, making the transaction completely self-service (the emphasis on *self* here) (Wang, Harris, & Patterson, 2012). When applying this same principle to hotel service environments, the availability of various different self-service technology points requires employee intervention for the variety of complex tasks. For example, the employees described the 'behind the scenes' work they do when a customer uses the self-service technologies such as mobile applications. Some of the tasks are detailed below that require human intervention.

- Complex billing queries
- Requests that require discussion
- Allocating of rooms / guest requirements
- Inventory management

The tech-touch balance as suggested by Salomann et al. (2005) focused on transactional industries such as banking and telecoms, positing that self-service is seen as a separate entity to personal service, and therefore only providing limited services. In terms of the findings from this study, the mix of tech and touch is of critical importance to meet and exceed customer expectations and maintain the principles of hospitality. Customers that were interviewed for this study explained that they expect an 'experience' from their leisure stays or stays in luxury hotels, in line with literature (Sipe & Testa, 2018).

Therefore, for hospitality organisations to be able to fulfil the experience element, there needs to be an a more coordinated approach to blending self-service technologies with personal service delivery. The transactional nature of the tasks that are performed via

self-service technologies offer customers the element of control, meaning customers can manage their own reservations and check-in and out processes. This element of control was welcomed by customers that were interviewed.

The findings established that the employee's perspective on why technology is implemented in hotels is very sceptical and does not necessarily support how the customers view the self-service technology offering. Customers choose employees over tech if there are complex queries or the technology failure, therefore both technology and hosts are used as back up options in various scenarios (Dabholkar & Spaid, 2012). This means that there is a need for both technology and hosts to fulfil customer's needs.

The concept of high-tech, high-touch hospitality relies upon customers wanting to engage with both elements of the service delivery. Although mobile applications are seen as a revolutionary way to engage customers (Wang et al., 2016), it cannot be assumed that guests are open to the idea of using applications within hospitality. Lu et al. (2015) discussed customer intention to use mobile applications, whereby customers evaluate the ease and usefulness of the applications prior to use. In all the employee interviews, they explained that their hotels offered mobile applications as a self-service mode of service delivery. However, the customers had mixed experiences of using their personal devices and downloading additional applications for the sole purpose of a hotel stay. This aligns with findings from (Brochado et al., 2016) in terms of low preference for using personal smartphones.

In the case of some of the customers that were interviewed, there were some barriers to using personal devices for hotel applications in particular. The customers shared that they do not like to have additional applications on their personal devices which is problematic

for hotel management. Literature based on mobile application use suggests that customers consider perceived performance and trust when choosing to adopt mobile applications (Lee, 2018b). The reasons for customers not wanting to download mobile applications for personal use were varied, ranging from data security issues, unwanted notifications, to too many applications on phones. One customer that was interviewed suggested they didn't want to use their smartphone leisure purposes as they want to 'switch off' from work, which relates to the technological pauses discussed by Rosenbaum and Wong (2015). However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is reported customer preferences for using mobile applications was much higher than that of public kiosks, at 62% and 8% respectively (Criton, 2020). Therefore, although there are issues with using personal devices, the risk of touching public surfaces within a pandemic has potentially changed the preferences here.

From an organisation perspective, the managers and employees that were interviewed shared that they struggle to 'sell' the features and benefits of the mobile application. The mobile application is consequently acting as a technical barrier to between the customer and the organisation. Therefore, the organisation needs to offer more a more accessible option, rather than having guests needing to download a specific application. By offering more self-service touch points in the hotel reception or providing a web-based version of the application, this would give customers options.

The standardised nature of self-service technology offers a jarring experience where guests have high expectations of a hotel, and therefore want an 'experience'. More personalised service is generally offered by hotel employees, and staff are therefore more understanding of the guests needs. However, the self-service experience is viewed by

customers as very transactional. Although some hotel employees and managers explained that they are working hard to personalise their self-service platforms, there is still a customer perception that the self-service offering is a separate entity from the personalised service offered by hotel employees. This again links with the findings from Salomann et al. (2005) whereby there should be more synergy between the two modes of service delivery. If hospitality organisations are able to develop their self-service technology offering to be a more personalised and unique experience, it would allow for a high-tech, high-touch approach (Bharwani & Mathews, 2021). More could be done from an organisational perspective to offer a blend of both tech and touch to offer a more multi-dimensional service, therefore bridging the gap between tech and touch.

### 7.2.2 Future of hospitality

In line with Ritter and Walter (2006), there were management concerns over the profitability of implementing and maintaining self-service technologies and mobile applications, particularly from hotel owners. From a return-on-investment perspective, the managers needed to ensure that the technologies provided would be welcomed and used by customers, therefore providing a business need. To build a case for the investment of guest-facing technologies, the managers cited 'keeping up with the times', fighting the competition and even used the pandemic to offer further justification for the investment. The element of customer choice and control was very much evident in the interviews with hotel customers. Their preferences included having self-service technology available should they decide when to use it, as well as being in control of the experience. Therefore, from an investment perspective, organisations should be confident that the provision of customer facing technologies will offer an additional layer of service. In addition, Scherer

et al. (2015) support the provision of multi-channel service delivery in relation to customer retention.

As hotels are implementing self-service technologies, they need to consider how they can be embedded in the overall service experience, aligning with the same quality of service delivery as face to face service delivery. For example, the Marriott 'Spirit to Serve' (Marriott & Brown, 2000) was noticeable in the employee experiences where they shared anecdotes of positive service interactions with guests. The researcher therefore recommends that there is a more seamless blend of self-service and personal service. This also needs to extend to how the self-service technologies are being sold to the guest. It was evident from the customer interviews that they were under the impression that self-service was an alternative to personal service, therefore they were making the decision whether to sacrifice/forfeit a more personalised experience. Messaging around the use of self-service technologies should therefore be explained in a way that engages the customer further in the hospitality experience (Bharwani & Mathews, 2021).

Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) argue that real-time marketing is driving the concept of 'nowness' in hospitality and tourism services, whereby co-creation of services is key in customers both producing and consuming their service experience. Nowness is explained as "present moment service and experience" (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019, p. 565). This was evident in the experiences that were shared by customers regarding their self-service technology use. They displayed the instant gratification through the real-time co-creation of their hospitality experience, particularly those that used mobile applications, where time was an important factor in their decision making. There is also a proven trust when customers are co-creating their experiences in terms of technology use and service

innovation (Sarmah et al., 2017). The values of nowness service, “real-time, co-creation, data-driven, consumer-centric and experience enhancement” (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019, p. 576), reflect the accounts that were shared from both customers and employees. Moreover, there is also an alignment with the fact that these values are supported both physically and virtually, therefore offering a tech-touch blend in terms of hospitality service. The importance of both personal touch and self-service balances the experience to co-create more personalised and meaningful experiences.

Where self-service technologies are in place in hotels, they should therefore bookend the hotel stay, so that the transactional tasks can be controlled by guests. From the accounts that customers shared in the interviews, they prefer this as a time saver to avoid queues and get on with their stays as quick as possible. However, customers also wanted a more personalised experience, didn't want to miss out on any special services and wanted to find out key information about the destination. This would be possible with personal connection with a host at the arrival. Therefore, the researcher suggests role development of front desk employees to remove the transactional tasks that employees implied are the least interesting parts of their daily tasks. By delegating these transactional tasks to the self-service kiosks or mobile applications, it allows the customer to have an element of control as well as the employees to spend more time creating personal connections and experiences for customers. In turn, this would provide a more meaningful experience for both the customer and guest, with technology used to assist in the hospitality experience, not replace.

The implementation of self-service technologies, particularly on mobile devices, creates a virtual world in the physical world of hospitality. The service platform is removed from the

physical hospitality space and is performed on personal devices. This therefore removes the personalisation that derives from personal connections and the heterogeneity of the service interaction. However, customers are then experiencing hospitality through a mobile application, not through immersion of the physical hospitality space. Removing human touch can remove the connection with true hospitality, therefore hospitality organisations need to be mindful of the service they are providing virtually as well as physically.

In summary, the researcher found that there is desire from both customers and employees to adopt a high-tech, high-touch approach to hospitality. The employees shared that they mostly enjoy the face-to-face service requirement of their roles, however, appreciate that some customers choose to use technology. Overall, managers shared that they want to provide appropriate service for the customer, want to keep up with new technological developments and be competitive in the hospitality industry. This is also evident in hospitality research during the pandemic, citing a need for a high-tech, high-touch approach to hotel service (Davari, Vayghan, Jang, & Erdem, 2022).

From a customer perspective, the findings suggested that customers enjoy both the freedom of self-service provisions, as well as the personalisation and experience of face-to-face service. However, there are varying factors to consider prior to hotels being able to adopt the approach. From a customer perspective, the customer enjoys the element of control, time saving and ease of being able to decide on how they want to interact with the hotel on their arrival and departure. This therefore relies on the provision of both self-service technologies and hotel staff to offer the customer that element of choice.

From an employee perspective, they value personal interaction with guests, which was cited as the main reason why the front desk employees do the role they do. The employees shared that they dislike the repetitive, robotic nature of questioning the guests on check-in. Therefore, by alleviating the employees of the transactional tasks that could be carried out directly by customers using self-service pre-arrival, this allows time available for employees to build personal, more meaningful connections with guests during their stay. However, there was one negative point that was shared by all employees that were interviewed, which was the fact that there was not enough time for the employees to effectively manage the back-end of the self-service technologies, as well as make time for guests. This would need to be considered from an organisation perspective from a tech-touch balance perspective, as it would need to be the right balance depending on the hotel product or brand, to meet customer expectations.

Finally, from an organisation perspective, there should be more emphasis on the customer profile of a particular hotel prior to any decisions being made on how technology will be used to either facilitate or substitute personal service. Customers will self-evaluate their own ability and willingness to use self-service technologies (Van Beuningen, de Ruyter, Wetzels, & Streukens, 2009). Manager 002 described their hotel as being more corporate business focused, whereas Manager 003 has a more leisure guest focused hotel, with a younger customer base. These customer classifications are important considerations, as the findings demonstrated that customers have different requirements and preferences when travelling on business or leisure. This will allow the organisation to understand what their exact customer wants, regardless of competition or needing to 'keep up with the times'. There were more positive experiences shared by customers where the tech-touch nature was synonymous with certain hotel brands. However, there

were less favourable incidents in hotels where customers did not expect to see self-service technologies as a replacement for personal service, such as in high-end luxury resorts. Organisations should therefore consider how they can facilitate and personal service using innovative guest facing technology, rather than replacing the human touch at any point in the service journey.

### **7.3 RQ2: To what extent is the use of self-service technologies and digital services changing the hospitality landscape and the way both guests and hosts experience hospitality?**

Although the use of self-service technologies has revolutionised the services industry, there are wide-ranging social considerations for the hospitality industry. Hospitality is a people intensive industry, whereby hosts welcome guests to hotels, relying on personal interaction to foster positive guest-host relationships for commercial gain. There is also the way in which both guests and hosts experience hospitality. Guests interact with hosts to communicate their wants and needs, and hosts deliver the service to the guests. Hosts benefit from job satisfaction of meeting and exceeding guest needs, by delivering this service to guests (Barnes et al., 2015). This research question queries the use of self-service technologies in the hospitality experience, and how guests and hosts are experiencing hospitality with the addition of these technologies. First, the digital transformation of the hospitality landscape will be discussed, before understanding the contemporary hospitality customer journey. This will explore further the service judgements that customers are making due to the additional option of self-service technologies within the hospitality space.

The topic of the digital transformation of the hospitality industry is long documented in literature. Information communication technologies (ICT) allowed developments in the industry such as computer reservation systems (CRS) and global distribution systems (GDS) to revolutionise the way in which hospitality establishments distributed and managed their product (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Online booking made the reservation process more accessible and easier for guests, reducing the need for reservation staff taking bookings over the telephone. The traditional hotel reception would consist of the

hotel reception desk, manned with hotel front office/reception employees, that would be there to greet guests, answer guest queries, and check guests in and out.

However, the customer journey within hospitality is now augmented through the use of technology (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019), meaning that there is less reliance on people to deliver hospitality service. Although the check in desk and the reception staff are still present, there is the added addition of physical and virtual self-service technologies available to guests. Once self-service technologies such as kiosks were introduced, this allowed an additional option for guests to check in via a machine, rather than queueing at the front desk (Vakulenko et al., 2018). This additional option at the time was a supplementary service. With the rapid development of smartphone technology, mobile applications and social media have allowed customers to be both connected and engaged with organisations. Self-service technologies have evolved to being more accessible in terms of a mobile application, whereby guests can have the technology on their personal smartphone devices. This allows customers to access to the hotel information, self-service and direct chat with hotel staff, when and where they need it. Lu et al. (2015) suggest that there is added value in mobile applications for customer use. As discussed earlier in the chapter, there is an issue of technical barriers to customer use of mobile applications and customers taking technological pauses when on a leisure break. However, there is an additional issue of technology anxiety from both customers and employees, which has proven to impact the overall service outcome, particularly in times of service failure (Lee & Cranage, 2018).

Employee training was a contested issue, as there were additional administrative tasks associated with self-service technologies that were required to be managed by front desk

employees. Additionally, employees do not only need to educate themselves, however they also need to educate the guests in how to use the new, or updated, technologies. Employee 001 and 002 both shared accounts of needing to talk guests through how to download mobile applications, how to use self-service technologies, and also resolve technical issues.

It cannot be assumed that all guests have the capability, or the willingness to use self-service technologies, particularly those that are designed for personal smartphones. The technical ability of guests is of key importance for self-service technologies, particularly mobile applications, to be used. Self-service technology failure and recovery was also a contested issue with guests, as there was a basic expectation for the technologies to be easy to use and to work consistently. Zhu et al. (2013) suggested three ways a customer can recovery from self-service technology failure: recovery by the organisation, the customer, or collaboration between employee and customer. The findings suggested a customer reliance on employees when self-service technologies failed, and therefore further establishes a need for interaction. The research from Zhu et al. (2013) also calls for more customer related recovery research, to understand how customers can recovery themselves from technology related service failure. In terms of this study however, all customers that were interviewed discussed their engagement with hotel employees to fix any issues they had, establishing there is still a reliance on people in hospitality.

Overall, there is a behavioural shift in how customers and employees engage in service delivery. Self-service technologies allow service and assistance to be omnipresent. This means the locational nature of service staff, reception desks for example, is not required as much as it was prior to self-service technologies being present. The customer has the

ability to 'carry' the technology with them via their personal smartphones, and therefore creates a virtual service space. The ability to support the physical servicescape with a digital offering is one of the most recent revolutionary technological changes in hospitality (Navío-Marco et al., 2018).

There is also an expectation shift, whereby power is shared between all three actors: guests, hosts, and technology. Although literature suggests service innovation is directly related to guest-host collaboration (Xie, Guan, Lin, & Huan, 2020), there is no consideration for the role of technology within that collaboration. From an actor network theory perspective, the network of guests, hosts and technology works in harmony with each other, all able to co-exist and contribute to service delivery. Self-service technology provides an option for transactional tasks to be performed by customers and employees provide the personal touch and experience. Therefore, there is a collaboration within the service delivery, whereby each actor has their own tasks to perform. The findings suggest that this has become an expectation of customers, whereby they seek out self-service technologies to form the more transactional tasks either pre-stay or on arrival to a hotel, and then rely on employees to provide a more welcoming, personalised stay.

The findings suggest that there is a lot of employee experience that feeds into the overall performance of their roles. For example, Manager 001's experience of ordering room service via the mobile application and talks of it 'enhancing' the overall experience. This seems to be which seems like they are experiencing the tech how it has been sold, as they are almost 'conditioned' to believe that it enhances the experience. Both the managers and employees have been trained in the features and benefits of the self-service technologies, therefore when they use them in practice, they see it from a

customer perspective. However, the findings suggest that a customer sees this differently. The customers see self-service technologies as a 'backup option' or an option if they choose not to have any personal interaction.

There was a notable difference in the way that managers and employees talked about self-service technology offerings in their hotels. Managers mentioned that self-service was an 'enhancement' and that it was a 'fun' way for customers to engage with the hotel. However, when employees discuss mobile application usage with customers, they speak of it more from a functionality perspective in terms of how it saves them time, they can manage their own information, or as a way to avoid personal interaction if they so wish. Self-service technologies are a way for a customer to remain connected to a brand, or to the overall hospitality experience without having any human interaction. Lee (2017) discussed the dehumanisation of self-service technologies in retail settings. However, in hospitality there needs to be an emphasis on using self-service technologies as a link to the overall experience, rather than a replacement of personal touch. Hotel managers discussed how they are using self-service technologies in a much more personal way, so that the customer feels the personal connection regardless of how they are engaging with the hotel.

Manager 002 explained that the guest chat platform is personalised by front office employees, rather than automated messages. Personal touch on the self-service platforms is valued so much that the employees are incentivised to make the interactions personal and memorable, contributing to the overall service experience. Manager 003 discussed how the interactions via self-service technologies are also branded, using brand voice to establish differentiation between hotels. Making self-service interactions

memorable for guests is key in customer engagement, with further focus on “fun and sense of presence” (Halstead & Richards, 2014, p. 21).

A common discussion point across all interviews was the feeling of ‘old-fashioned’ hospitality and talk of the ‘old days’. This was particularly evident with the employees where they have experience of working in customer facing roles before the implementation of self-service technologies. Customers made connections between old fashioned service with personal interaction. Customer 006 discussed a preference for old fashioned hospitality, pointing out the fact that there was no self-service option, and that there were plenty of staff to take care of everything. Overall, this suggests an element of nostalgia is very much present in the evaluation of hospitality services, whereby customers and employees are drawing comparisons with the ‘old way’ of doing things, with their current experiences.

Nostalgia is described as an “emotional reminiscence of a familiar entity or environment” (Chen, Yeh, & Huan, 2014). The findings suggest the sense of the familiar is still important to customers and employees. Even though there is an appreciation for the way things used to be, both customers and employees still shared that there is a need for interaction both physically through personal interaction and virtually through self-service. Li, Lu, Bogicevic, and Bujisic (2019) describe two types of nostalgia as being either personal or historical, whereby emotions are evoked depending on the connection with personal feeling, or connection to the past. This further demonstrates that evaluations can be made on future service by past service, and historical experiences. For example, employee 003 shared their love of working in hospitality through an expression of past experiences. This therefore demonstrates a belief that the past (in this employee’s case), was better.

An unexpected finding was hospitality in a pandemic, and how the experience of hospitality has changed in terms of personal interaction. Guests have accepted and adapted to the 'new way' of service during the pandemic by using self-service technologies as a replacement of personal interaction (Oliveira, Maia, Fonseca, & Moraes, 2021). It was clear from the manager interviews that the investment and implementation of self-service technologies, was accelerated by the pandemic. This also meant that the customers who were not familiar with using self-service technologies within hospitality were exposed to using them if they travelled during the pandemic. Technological change studies from Montargot and Ben Lahouel (2018) suggest that the usefulness and ease of use are important factors when considering technology acceptance.

From the findings, customer acceptance of self-service during the pandemic was *because* of the pandemic. Customer 009 discussed throughout the interview that misgivings were overlooked as the pandemic changed the usual hospitality service delivery. They therefore embraced self-service technologies as they were put in place to limit personal interaction, and therefore was the only option. This was also evident throughout the industry, with the cost of self-service technologies being more affordable to businesses as well as a way to work more safely throughout the pandemic (Aratani, 2020). Therefore, the forced use due to the pandemic allowed customers that would not necessarily prefer to use self-service technologies, try them for the first time and become familiar with them.

### 7.3.1 Service judgement

The findings suggested that when entering a hotel, customers make a quick judgement based on a number of different factors, deciding whether they prefer to use self-service technology or face to face interaction. This was clear from all the customer interviews. All

participants shared experiences of various scenarios where they have made strategic decisions on how they want to navigate the hotel check-in process, which revealed service judgement points that are considered. The main customer considerations in the service judgement on whether to use self-service or engage in personal interaction are trip purpose, availability of self-service technology, value of time and complex queries and are discussed in further detail below. Additional points that were raised during the interviews also included the quality and location of the hotel, need for interaction, and value placed on interaction. These points will be discussed later in the chapter.

#### 7.3.1.1 Trip purpose – business or leisure?

The difference in trip purchase determines how much interaction (if any) with hotel employees. Typically, the findings suggested that when staying at a hotel for business purposes, guests wanted little to no interaction with hotel staff. This is a decision made prior to arrival to the hotel, and therefore the hotel staff have little to no influence on this decision. Encinas, Raptis, Kjeldskov, and Skov (2020) identified three considerations that business travellers in particular have when deciding to use self-service: technology readiness, seamless experience and connectivity capability. The customers that were interviewed shared that they found self-service technology to be easy to use, and that they were comfortable using them, therefore demonstrating capability and readiness.

Alternatively, the same participants shared experiences of leisure stays, where they engage more with hotel employees for reasons such as fear of missing out, wanting local destination knowledge or complex queries. Both Customer 006 and 007 mentioned that if they are paying for a higher standard of hotel, they expect to receive personal service as it is part of what they are paying for. Therefore, during leisure stays, they will make the time

to engage with hotel staff. However, it is not a clear-cut decision that if they are on business they use self-service, and if they are on leisure, they prefer personal service. When on leisure, there are still judgement points in the arrival process, such as if there is a queue, or if they want to skip the check-in process to enjoy the resort or destination. This seems to be a snap decision for leisure guests, as they will survey the options once in the building. The readiness and capability evaluation is also important in this decision (Encinas et al., 2020), as well as the capability and perceived utility of the self-service technology (Safaeimanesh, Kılıç, Alipour, & Safaeimanesh, 2021). This is the point where customers stated that they want to see the availability of staff, with both Customer 007 and 008 commenting that it is unfavourable to see an insufficient number of staff dealing with too many customers when they arrive at a hotel.

#### 7.3.1.2 Availability of self-service technology – are there SST options?

It was apparent in the data that the participants would seek out self-service technologies if there was a queue or busy reception area. However, in luxury or resort hotels, there was no expectation for self-service which was an interesting discussion point. Customer 007 and 009 mentioned that if there was the option of self-service within a luxury hotel or resort but there was also a queue, they would choose the self-service option, then seek out hotel employees later in their stay. Therefore, there is still a need for interaction, however, the need is at the command of the customer when they decide the timing is right for them. Customers are therefore happy to forfeit personal service if self-service is a perceived time saver for them. Pham et al. (2020) highlight a connection in luxury hotels with innovative and experiential self-service options. However, it could be argued that a guest should not have to choose between time saving or personal service. Hospitality

organisations should prepare and provide better provision of personal service to allow for customers to make the choice they would prefer.

#### 7.3.1.3 Value of time – is there a queue?

The value of time was an important influence in engagement with hotel staff, or using self-service technologies, regardless of business or leisure trips. Time was discussed in many ways with both guests and hosts, perceiving the use of self-service technology as time saving, and interaction with front desk staff as time spending.

Collier and Barnes (2015) discuss time pressures in self-service settings, and how it may have an impact on the overall customer experience of self-service. In the case of the experiences shared in this study, the customers are actively using self-service as a way to save time, therefore they are aware of their own time pressures when choosing self-service. The way that some customers discussed time in their experiences, particularly in cases where they were staying in hotels for business, it seemed to be a race to get to their hotel room. This evaluation of time in terms of queueing aligns with the findings from Kokkinou and Cranage (2015), whereby customers base their decisions on perceived saved time of using self-service technologies over waiting in a queue to speak to staff. This is where self-service technologies are preferable to business guests, as they can perform the pre-arrival transactions themselves, and in some hotels use their mobile phones as a key. Customer 003 shared that their most favourable hotel experiences for business use was where the mobile application worked without any issues, remembered personal information so no need to re-enter, and then the digital key came available with a notification of which room to go to. This experience was the most preferred as the biggest time saver.

Regardless of business or leisure stays however, customers shared that they would actively avoid queueing if they could and would therefore use self-service technologies to bypass a busy hotel reception. An exception to this would be if a guest had a complex query, particularly billing queries, which seemed to be a reason for guests to queue.

#### 7.3.1.4 Complex queries – is anything needed that is non-standard?

Technical capability of both the user and the self-service technology was an issue in terms deciding whether to use technology or human interaction. If it was a simple check-in process, the self-service technology option was preferable if on business or if there was a queue when on a leisure stay. However, if the guest had complex queries or required information, they would make a judgement on whether it was worth queuing for. This was the biggest deciding factor for the participants as time was an important discussion point during the interviews.

Interpreted from the customer data set, this hospitality service judgement process shows the considerations and judgements made by guests. It shows the navigation of the servicescape, the perception of both self-service technology and human interaction and places central importance on guests' wants and needs. The factors considered when making these service judgements were discussed in further detail in the sub-themes that emerged from the experiences shared around consuming hospitality, which are trip purpose, service evaluation, value of time and technical capability. The value of time and complexity of query is also in line with previous studies around customer perceptions of self-service technologies (Law et al., 2020). This gives a deeper understanding of how these factors influence the service judgements made by guests in hospitality service

environments and demonstrates the overall service judgements from a hotel guest and host perspective.

It is therefore suggested that there are technological bookends to the hospitality experience. For example, self-service technologies are a good customer option for pre and post trip administration (check-in and out, etc). This also allows the hotel employees to focus less on the transactional tasks and focus more on the customer experience. However, the choice needs to be with the customer, as the findings and literature suggest that the need for self-service or personal interaction is highly dependent upon the customer's intention.

## **7.4 RQ3: What perceptions of roles exist between service employees and guests due to self-service technology use within hospitality?**

The findings suggest that typical guest and host roles have been impacted by the use of self-service technologies within the hospitality servicescape. As self-service technologies allow customers to control tasks that would otherwise be performed by hospitality staff, the shift in responsibility puts into question the role change between guests and hosts.

This research question allows the roles of both guests and hosts to be explored in present day hospitality. This discussion also allows an understanding of how these contemporary roles contribute to high-tech, high-touch hospitality.

### **7.4.1 Co-creation and collaborative service**

The managerial view of the role of the employees is to put guests at the centre of everything they do. Sipe and Testa (2018) suggest that the role of the employee is a facilitator of social interaction, which is important to facilitate the experience of hospitality. However, the findings suggest that the employees are both the creator and curator of experience, with self-service technologies facilitating the process. By self-service technologies removing the transactional tasks, in theory it should therefore free the employee of such tasks to focus on more personalised experiences. In practice however, the employees shared that this was not necessarily the case, as they are too busy managing multiple channels of communication with guests. This will be discussed later in the chapter relating to role change.

In terms of collaborative service delivery, Kelly et al. (2017) posited that in a co-creation situation between a customer and a service provider, there needs to be a balance of

needs. Both the service provider and the customer need to gain something from the co-creation interaction. As the systems are now shared between the customer and the organisation, there is also a sharing of tasks and responsibilities (Montargot & Ben Lahouel, 2018). Therefore, in the case of the findings from this study, the employees are gaining the information they need from the guest, with the guest doing most of the work via self-service technologies. The employees are able to access the information and work more effectively, and the customer is in control of the situation. The customers are also in control of their data, which was also proven to be an important point, particularly with Customers 006 and 009.

The customer experience of using self-service technologies has just as much importance as personally delivered service, therefore hotel organisation should prioritise how they integrate their self-service offering with personal service. By using co-creation and collaborative service as a way to engage customers, it can contribute to the overall guest experience. Neuhofer, Buhalis, and Ladkin (2015) explored how smart technologies can be used to personalise guest experiences, however a main highlight was that employees are integral to the operation to ensure that the guest experience is positive. This was reflected in the findings, whereby customers shared their experiences where the hotel employees were key in making those experiences personalised and memorable.

The self-service technology offering to customers should be as engaging as personal service. Customers 003, 007 and 008 commented that they would use the self-service mobile applications if they were easy to use and engaging. Ryan (2012) established that engagement is the key to collaborative service, and by offering an opportunity to co-create service, there is a sharing of power between the guest and host. Returning to an actor

network theory perspective, this would be a favourable scenario whereby guests, hosts and the technology have the ability to interact with each other, offering seamless collaboration. The sharing of power in the relationship, which was more traditionally hierarchical, where the host would have the power over the guest in a gatekeeper role, the host shares the power with the self-service technology. The guest also has equal power to perform the tasks via the self-service technology, therefore the network works in collaboration with each other. Linking back to the ANT map (appendix F), it shows the network connecting with each other, yet all points in the network are reliant on each other to work.

An element of 'fun' is also proven key in customer adoption of self-service technologies (Kim et al., 2017), with Anitsal and Schumann (2007) stating that the co-creation of service has the potential to feel like labour to the customer, like they are doing the work. This was highlighted by customer 003, where they were aware of the task being shifted to them as a customer. Therefore, organisations should invest as much effort in to improving the self-service, as they do personal service. The co-created service should be more collaborative, and contribute to the overall customer experience, rather than it being a laborious task. This would further embed the co-creation element of service delivery within the hospitality offering, therefore engaging the customer in the process. Mobile applications have been proven to engage customers in transactional tasks (Schuster et al., 2015), however as discussed earlier in the chapter, hospitality managers and employees struggle selling the benefits of additional mobile applications to hotel guests. Therefore, from a managerial perspective, further engagement with customers and more accessible self-service options should be provided to allow the customer to collaborate on their service journey.

#### 7.4.2 Guest-host role change

From the findings it was evident that employees have experience of being both employee and customer, however customers don't have the employee experience and therefore assume an understanding of the role of an employee when being empowered with self-service technologies. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the role of self-service technologies in this instance is a facilitator for hospitality service, however the actual experience is very different to that of personally delivered service. The perspectives of both customers and employees can be viewed in four different ways.

- Employee understanding of their own role
- Employee understanding of customers' role
- Customer understanding of their own role
- Customer understanding of employees' role

There is also the complexity of self-service technologies within this service interaction, therefore additionally, there are the following considerations.

- Employee understanding of self-service technologies as an employee managing technology
- Employee understanding of self-service technologies to a customer
- Customer understanding of self-service technologies

The findings suggest that customers have no appreciation of the connection of employees and self-service technologies. To customers, they view self-service as a separate entity to the staff. Therefore, there is a disconnect in customer understanding of service delivery.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, there is no longer a hierarchical nature of the guest and host roles due to the implementation of self-service technologies and the sharing of power and capability. The guests are now empowered with the tools to be able to perform the tasks of a hotel receptionist. This role shift therefore breaks down the hierarchical roles within the guest-host relationship and allows for a more collaborative service environment. The addition of self-service technologies has therefore changed the traditional roles of guest and host, as they now have shared responsibilities. The additional roles that a customer carries out when using self-service technologies are that of a service worker (Kelly et al., 2017). Therefore, organisations need to be mindful that there needs to be a benefit to the customer for taking on these additional tasks and responsibilities (Andrews, 2018).

From a managerial perspective, the role of the employee is an important part of the guest experience, as they offer memorable experiences through building personal connections and personalising the hotel stay. This supports the views of Baradarani and Kilic (2018) who believe that the employee is integral to the customer experience as they have knowledge of the guest via personal interaction. Although there may be a managerial preference for memorable, personalised experiences, customer use of self-service technologies can be a source of important information to assist the employees further. The information from self-service technologies includes guest preferences, likes and dislikes, and behaviours. This would equip the employees with a wealth of information that they would otherwise need to question the guests about once they arrive at the hotel, however they will have this information at their disposal through the internal systems. This was demonstrated by Manager 002 by discussing the systems they used. Therefore, rather than using self-service technologies to replace personal service, it is used in a way

to facilitate more personalised service. This aligns with the outcomes of Oh et al. (2016), whereby self-service technologies are recommended as being merely functional, not a replacement for personal service. Manager 001 discussed how it is a core value within their organisation that they create memorable experiences by making personal connections with guests, whether they use technology or personal touch. This is supported by Sipe and Testa (2018), where emotional value is gained through employees engaging with customers.

In discussions with employees, they understand their role is to serve the guest, however they now have multiple ways in which they carry out that role. Their role is no longer predominantly face to face interactions with guests, they now have multiple communication channels to manage. Employee 001 and 002 discussed in detail how their role has changed to encompass more virtual communications with guests, even when the guests are present in the hotel. Their role as a hotel employee is therefore divided between being physically present, and virtually present, depending on how guests want to communicate with the hotel staff. Literature around employee role change in hospitality due to technology is scant, and is mainly concerned with role importance (de Souza Meira, Hancer, dos Anjos, & Eves, 2021; Kusluvan, 2003) and career related role development (Chang & Busser, 2020; Rasheed, Okumus, Weng, Hameed, & Nawaz, 2020). This therefore offers a new perspective on frontline employee roles in hospitality.

There is also the issue of additional responsibility with employees. Managers 002 and 003 explained that the employee role had changed due to the implementation of self-service technologies, however, didn't feel as though it took more time, or added any additional responsibilities. When discussing the employee role with the employees, there were

different responses. Both employees 001 and 002 stated that the implementation of self-service technologies had added tasks to their daily role, not taken anything away or made it easier. This disconnect between the manager and employee perception of the employee role raises concern, as the managers are implementing additional service platforms without the consideration of the employee role.

Manager 002 stated that the newer members of staff on the front office team have only known the role to be as it is currently, which is managing guests in person, as well as managing the self-service technologies and digital platforms. However, for those that have been in front office roles prior to the implementation of self-service technologies, they have first-hand experience of how their role has changed. All employees and managers that were interviewed were able to offer examples of their roles both before the implementation of self-service and post-implementation. Employees 001 and 002 were employed in front office roles and were involved in the implementation of the self-service mobile application within their hotels. They detailed the operational process of setting up the technology, embedding it into their daily routines, and discussing several issues with the practicalities of the new technology. They further explained their priority changed from being focused on delivering personal service, to a role where they were dealing with setting up mobile applications and helping guests with technical issues on their mobile devices. Employee 002 explained that this was a challenge for some of the older members of their team, as they were not experienced with smartphones as some of the younger team members.

It is clear that the front office role is now a dual role to manage both a physical and virtual service space. Their responsibilities have been altered over time to compensate for the

change in service delivery. Their skills have also developed to be more adept at technical tasks. It is therefore important that hotel managers recognise the additional strain on the front office roles. Adequate planning and training need to be provided to the front office teams to be able to effectively manage both face to face guests and the technology platforms.

## **7.5 RQ4: To what extent can technology be considered to have an active role within the guest-host relationship?**

The discussion so far has focused on the high-tech, high-touch hospitality concept, the use of self-service technologies within hospitality and the changing role of guests and hosts. It is therefore necessary to discuss the relationships that exist within hospitality given the breadth of change within the industry. The guest-host relationship in hospitality is long established, the host as the giver and the guest as the receiver of hospitable service. The host traditionally supplies a safe environment for rest and sustenance, while the guest is served and catered for (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). Although the relationship has developed over time to be a commercial relationship, the host providing a service at a price and guest paying for it, the contemporary guest-host relationship is under-researched.

In this section, the value of interaction will be discussed, drawing together the guest-host interaction and the interactions with technology, linking back to the balance of touch and tech from the previous research question. The guest-tech-host relationship will then be discussed, a new concept of which the researcher believes that technology has an active role within the relationship and should be referred to as such.

### **7.5.1 Value of interaction**

Whether a customer engages in personal service or self-service via technology, interaction remains important in hospitality. The literature suggests that the need for interaction can be a contributing factor to positive service experiences (Kim & Yang, 2018), and that the need for interaction can deter customers from using self-service

technologies (Gelderman et al., 2011; Kaushik & Kumar, 2018; Lee, 2017). However, the findings of this study suggest that there is more of a customer appreciation of the different features and benefits to opting for either personal or self-service. This suggests that over time, and with experience of self-service technology use, customers are able to make a judgement of which service they prefer, depending on their needs at a given time. Linking back to the discussion in research question two, the findings suggested that there was an equal balance of need of both personal interaction and self-service, and the decision to use either is highly dependent on the judgement call of the customer.

It is established that in hospitality, personal connections between service providers and guests offers competitive advantage (Solnet et al., 2019). The findings suggested that there was a reciprocal commercial relationship between guests and hosts. Customer 008 mentioned that they would go out of their way to be nice to the staff as they will get something in return. Manager 002 that stated they would incentivise staff to make personal connections with guests so that they could gain sales leads from them. The commercial aspect of the relationship now works both ways, rather than the commercial relationship being led from the organisation.

There was evidence in the findings that the more personalised experiences were through personal interaction and connection with hotel employees. Customers 002, 004, and 007 all shared positive experiences through direct interaction with hotel employees. A notable discovery in the findings was the personal connections being interpreted as friendship by customers. Customers 002 and 004 shared experiences of staying in hotels and making friends with the hotel staff during their stay. Existing literature suggests there is risk in customers developing such relationships with particular members of staff, as the need for

interaction and loyalty is linked to the staff member, and not with the organisation or brand (Guenzi & Pelloni, 2004). However, in these particular experiences, the customers expressed their wish to return to the same hotel due to those personal friendships contributing to the overall experience, and not to return to a particular staff member. Therefore, although the value of personal interaction is important, it is part of a broader experience from a customer perspective.

The findings also suggest that the need for interaction is beyond customer relationship management, particularly post-pandemic. Customers demonstrated a need for interaction with hospitality employees after being in social isolation in a national lockdown and having missed the interaction with other people. This demonstrated that the guest-host interaction is more valued, given the limited interaction during the pandemic. Therefore, the value of interaction was gained from personal connections made in post-pandemic travel. However, there were still instances in the shared experiences of the participants whereby customers avoided interaction, particularly in cases where they were travelling on business and could rely on self-service technology, aligning with (Oliveira et al., 2021). This further suggests that customers value interaction with hotel employees, however only on their terms, and in their time. Post-pandemic studies of customer experiences within the pandemic have also highlighted the need for both personal and self-service so that there are options for customers (Davari et al., 2022).

### 7.5.2 Guest-tech-host relationship

What was evident from the experiences that were shared from both the customers and the employees was the relationships that were formed. The guest-host relationship has long been established as detailed in the literature review, however the findings suggest that

technology has a significant role in the relationship, particularly when self-service technologies can be chosen by guests to replace human interaction. Self-service technologies in this case, are taking the role of a person and replacing that interaction virtually. The guest is therefore building the relationship via technology, not a hotel employee, effectively replacing the host role. However, the information shared by the hotel employees during the interviews suggested that the host is very much still present within the guest-tech interaction, if only from a 'back-office' standpoint. In the cases that the self-service technologies are allowing guests to perform transactional tasks, there is still employee involvement in the logistical operations, chat functions and such like. Therefore, although the guest may be choosing self-service technology over human interaction, the self-service technology is merely a facilitator in this interaction, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

Linking the literature and findings, the researcher suggests that the relationships involving guests, hosts and technology can be viewed in four different ways. Ultimately, the interactions and close working nature of all three actors in this relationship leads to a guest-tech-host relationship. The relationships are explored in further detail below.

**Guest-host relationship:** The guest-host relationship is long standing and can either be viewed as an experience based relationship, or a commercial relationship (Lehto, Davari, & Park, 2020). The findings suggested that guests have meaningful relationships with hotel employee (hosts) where customers shared experiences of making friends with the hotel employees and felt a genuine connection.

**Guest-tech relationship:** The findings suggested that guests have a reliance on technology to provide a service where and when they need it. This dependency was

showcased in the experiences where customers were short on time, wanted to actively avoid personal interaction, or avoid queues. However there were also instances whereby the guest-tech relationship was less favourable, where customers want to avoid technology use, in line with technological pauses (Rosenbaum & Wong, 2015).

**Host-tech relationship:** Literature suggests that the host-tech relationship relies upon employee acceptance and adoption of technology (Montargot & Ben Lahouel, 2018), however the findings suggest that hosts and guests co-exist in terms of providing service to guests. This is therefore an operational relationship, in which the hosts are reliant on technology to be able to fulfil their roles.

**Guest-tech-host relationship:** The relationship between guests, technology and hosts is a relationship whereby all actors can co-exist, support and interact with each other. By reframing the relationship to include all actors, it offers a new way to view the present day hospitality.

From a service provider perspective, the host-tech role is essentially one entity. Self-service technologies are perceived as a facilitator to providing service to guests; however, the management of the self-service technologies is the role of the service employees. Therefore, the self-service technologies from a brand or organisation point of view is that it is an extension of their hospitality service, supporting their operation and offering customers another way to experience the hotel and a seamless experience from both sides. However, the customer sees the host and technology as two entities – they perform different tasks for different needs. There therefore needs to be a more strategic understanding of how technology forms part of the guest-host relationship.

In line with Kim et al. (2017) and Majra et al. (2016), both employees and customers demonstrated that technology was very much an active participant in the guest-host relationship. Whether using self-service technologies to perform tasks, use chat applications to communicate with hotel staff, or replacing interaction between guest and host all together, it is clear that there is an element of inseparability between guests or hosts and technology. Although Wirtz et al. (2018) suggests the lack of emotional intelligence in technology platforms (such as self-service and service robots) inhibits a relationship per se, there is no doubt a reliance, confidence and support on the technologies that are currently used by customers and employees.

The researcher proposes that each of the actors, guests, technology, and hosts, should be considered as significant in the hospitality relationship. They are all dependent upon each other to interact and support each other, with a need for both personal and technological interaction. Therefore, the recognition of that support network needs to be evident in the established relationship; the guest-tech host relationship. The researcher therefore suggests that a future priority in hospitality research should be the recognition and development of the guest-tech-host relationship in a hospitality context. The traditional view of the guest-host relationship is that of “caring for a stranger in order to establish a relationship based on reciprocity and exchange” (Lashley & Morrison, 2000, p. 237).

The researcher therefore offers the definition of the guest-tech-host relationship as a symbiotic relationship, recognising the active roles of guests, hosts, and technology within hospitality. This definition offers a blend of people, systems, expertise, and operations within hospitality. It also offers more of a commercial perspective on the relationship, to

recognise the contemporary practice-based view of hospitality. The benefit of providing a definition with a commercial standpoint of the guest-tech-host relationship allows for acknowledgement of the key stakeholders in the relationship and ensures that they are considered in future innovation and development. By recognising technology as a key part of that relationship, it also establishes the actor network perspective of the study, whereby both human and non-human actors are offered equal agency within the relationship.

With a role theory perspective, the new development offers defined roles within the relationship. Both guests and hosts have pre-conceived ideas of their role within hospitality, however as this study has documented, technology has changed those roles in a way that the lines between both guests and hosts are blurred. Therefore, rather than redefining the guest and host roles, the recognition of technology having a specific role within the relationship allows the guest and host to remain as true to hospitality as it were prior to the interference of self-service technology. By applying a role theory perspective on the guest-tech-host relationship, it allows the separation of technology from both guest and host, and therefore offers a definitive role of technology within the relationship. It was clear from the discussions with customers that they perceived the role of technology as the facilitator, offering a platform to carry out tasks in place of a hotel employee. Therefore, this replacement of role is effectively recognition that the roles can be interchangeable.

The guest-tech-host relationship also appreciates how each actor in the relationship experiences hospitality. How both guests and hosts experience hospitality is an important consideration of the relationship (Xinran, Dori, & Soona, 2020). As this study has documented, technology is embedded throughout both the guest and the host experience

and practice of hospitality. Therefore, technology is a vital actor within both the experience and the relationship and should be recognised as such in future studies. As documented in the literature review, within the guest-host relationship there are considerations of trust (Laequddin & Sardana, 2010), loyalty (Oly Ndubisi et al., 2007), and can also contribute to innovation (Charterina et al., 2017). The findings suggested that trust, loyalty and innovation are also contributing factors to the use of self-service technologies, and therefore can be attributed to the guest-tech-host relationship.

## **7.6 The guest-tech-host service dynamic; a conceptual framework**

Following a review of the research questions, linking the literature to the findings, it is clear that there are varying levels of service, interactions and service relationships between employees, customers and technology in terms of self-service technology involvement. Traditional forms of guest-host interaction within hospitality are augmented by the engagement of self-service technologies, allowing guests to control certain elements of the service interaction. It is clear from the findings that there is a need for synergy between the personal and the digital.

The researcher has developed a model to illustrate the augmented service environment within hospitality, as well as the interactions between guests, technology and hosts; the guest-tech-host service dynamic presented as figure 9 below. The model offers a conceptual framework, which is a summation of the findings and discussion. The key actors are shown, and the connections between each of the actors gives the reader the service outcome of when those actors interact. Central to the model is high-tech, high-touch hospitality, where the three key actors are connected, working collaboratively, and co-creating a tech-touch hybrid service environment. The model therefore highlights both the roles of the hospitality actors, as well as the tech-touch composition within hospitality service. These key points will be further discussed in the sections below.

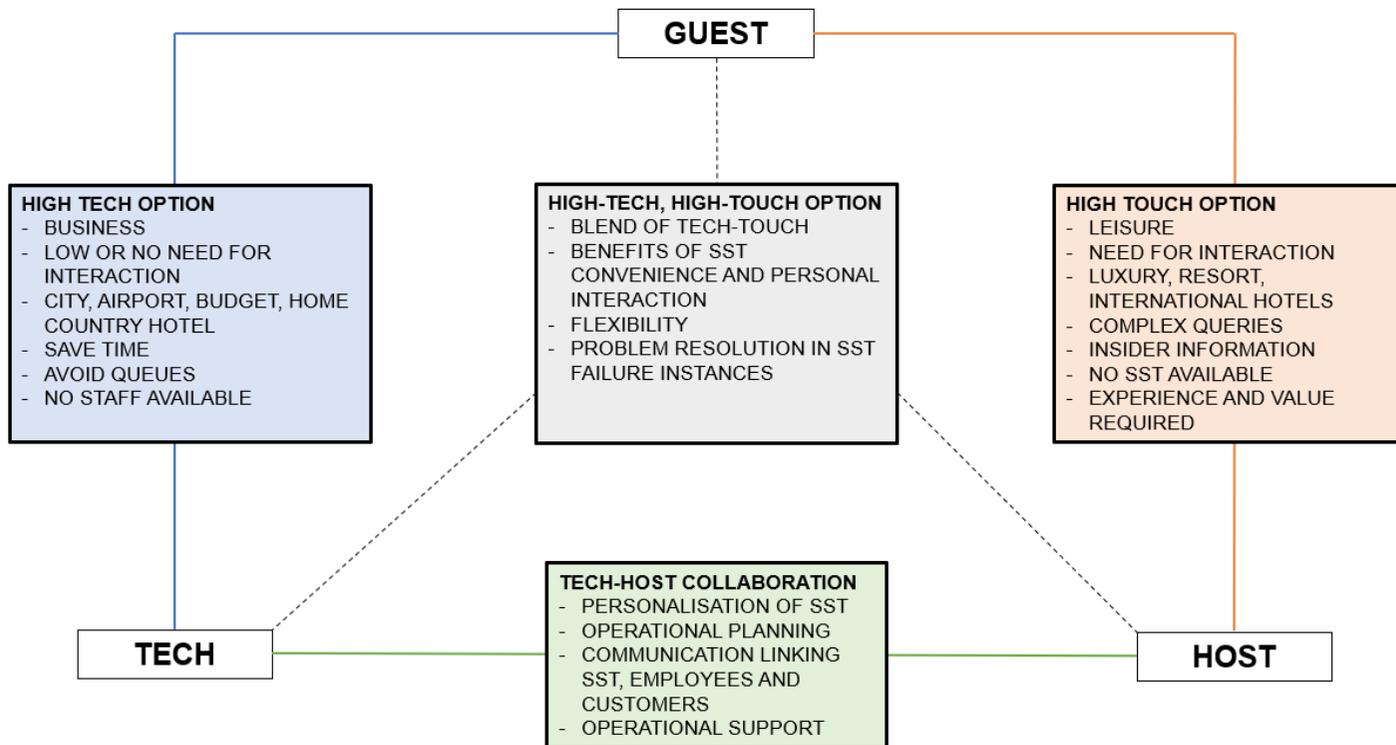


Figure 9: Guest-tech-host service dynamic

### 7.6.1 Guest-tech-host roles

The model shows the roles of guests, hosts and technology, and the service outcomes when they interact with each other. The model is designed to show the customer as the leading decision maker in the desired service interaction, as the findings presented in section 7.3.1 indicated that customers wanted to have the choice between either personal or digitally delivered service, or a mix of both, when it suited their requirements depending on their purpose of stay. This also depends on the availability of self-service technologies, however, which is highlighted on the model as a key factor.

The connection between guests, hosts and technology allows the roles to be interchangeable, essentially empowering customers to perform some of the tasks traditionally carried out by employees. This therefore results in a shift in employee responsibilities from the involvement of self-service technologies, as they have to manage customers both face to face as well as through the administration of the self-service technologies. There is also a shift in customer roles, given the customer ability to use self-service technologies, whereby the roles become blurred, as discussed in section 7.4.2. The blend of personal touch and technology therefore allows this shift and interchangeability within hospitality. There are cases where there will need to be human intervention of employees to deal with complex queries or for occasions where customers prefer personal interactions. Therefore, the customer has freedom and power to choose whether to have personal interaction or self-service technology interaction.

It was important to also include the host-tech interaction within the model, as there is an element of trust and reliance between the two actors to ensure their roles within the hospitality service environment can be fulfilled. This host-tech collaboration is key to the

hospitality operation, as it allows a seamless connectivity between the personal and the technological service offering. This connecting role between hosts and technology also contributes to the unified link to guests, allowing a more meaningful hospitality offering.

### 7.6.2 High-tech, high-touch hospitality

Viewing hospitality servicescape as a system or a systemscape, as explored in section 3.4.3.1, means that the purpose of guest-tech-host interaction is intrinsic to the possibility of high-tech, high-touch hospitality. However, this needs to be viewed with more fluidity, allowing the customer to make a personal choice of how they want to receive their service; either personal, digital or mix of both. Central to the model is the concept of high-tech, high-touch hospitality, which is the combination of personal touch between guest and host, as well as technological interaction through the use of self-service technologies.

The customers interviewed stated that they preferred a mix of both personal and self-service technologies available depending on their needs during their hotel stay. There are some circumstances where customers decide on either tech or touch, however, which are detailed on the model. Although the more traditional delivery of service is preferable in certain situations as detailed in section 7.3, there is still a need for technology enabled service. It is clear from the findings that the desirability of high-tech, high-touch hospitality is entirely dependent upon the needs of the customer.

The managers that were interviewed stated that the purpose of self-service technologies was to remove the transactional tasks from the guest interaction, so that the frontline service staff can spend time on more meaningful, personal interactions, therefore leading to a high-tech, high-touch view of hospitality. From the customers perspective however,

the customers make a choice of whether they want personal interaction and will choose between using self-service technologies or interacting with the hotel staff.

The key service judgements discussed in section 7.3.1 highlighted that customer use of self-service technologies is based on trip purpose, self-service availability, value of time and whether or not they have complex queries. These service judgement points are therefore highlighted on the model, to show which tech-touch service options would be selected. The reliance on self-service technology is important at this stage of the customer interaction within hospitality, as the element of choice is important to guests, linked to their willingness to use the self-service technology that is available to them.

## 7.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented how both the literature review and the findings from the data have addressed the research questions set out at the beginning of the study.

In terms of high-tech, high touch hospitality, the researcher suggests a shift in scope of research. Rather than view tech and touch as two separate perspectives in competition, such as the tech versus touch debate (Giebelhausen et al., 2014), they should be viewed as a holistic approach to hospitality. The findings suggest that customers are comfortable using self-service technologies, are reliant on them in certain circumstances, and view them as part of the overall hospitality service. Managers have invested in technology to keep up with the times, compete with rival hotels, and meet customer expectations. Employees have embraced the implementation of self-service technologies regardless of technical ability, lack of training or preference of service delivery, which were feelings shared by employees.

Self-service technologies have been developed in a way that can be virtually engaged with, as opposed to physical hardware in a hotel reception area such as kiosks and has become a personal addition to hospitality service. Therefore, it is not a case of being a competition between tech and touch, but more of a symbiotic relationship. The relationship between guests and hosts has evolved to include technology, which is evident on the reliance and dependability that both guests and hosts have on technology. The service judgement process showed that customers in particular, rely on self-service technologies in place of interactions with people.

The guest-tech-host role development allows technology to have both an active role within the hospitality service, as well as being recognised as an actor within the traditional guest-host relationship. By establishing a guest-tech-host relationship within hospitality, it also allows for future service developments and innovations to consider that guests, technology and hosts need to be considered.

The use of actor network theory as a perspective on the interactions and movements of actors within a hospitality network, adds both a theoretical and methodological lens to the discussion. The scope of the network was mapped (appendix F), to include people, physical spaces, hardware, and software. The interactions and feelings between all four points in the network are integral to understanding the hospitality experience, given the influence on technology in the hospitality landscape.

From an actor network theory and role theory perspective, the researcher has the following observations from the customer journey and experiences.

- Non-human actors have agency *and* power
- Relationships are formed with non-human actors
- Non-human actors can be selected or preferred over human actors
- Roles can be interchangeable or become blurred between actors
- Importance and reliance are placed on non-human actors
- Expectations are placed on non-human actors, just as they are with humans

The findings of the study provide both theoretical and practical contribution to knowledge, which will be discussed in further detail in the conclusion chapter, along with how the study met the overall research objectives.

# Chapter Eight: Conclusion

## 8.1 Introduction

The purpose of the final chapter is to draw together the thesis in the context of the overall research aim and objectives. The discussion chapter addressed the research questions, contextualising the literature and findings. Therefore, a conclusive summary of research will be presented here. The contribution to knowledge and management implications of the research will also be discussed, leading into a discussion on the future research opportunities in hospitality. The limitations of the study will also be addressed. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection of the research journey before a final closing summary.

## 8.2 Overview of research

The discussion chapter contextualised the findings in terms of both the literature and the research questions. This overview of research will address the research objectives, highlighting how the researcher has approached this study. The literature review presented in chapters two, three and four provided an understanding of the current body of knowledge concerning self-service technologies, guest-host interaction and relationships, and the potential of high-tech, high hospitality. This critical review was crucial in how the researcher understood the current body of knowledge, and how the literature could underpin the study. The chapters also provided considering factors before designing the methodology of the study.

First, chapter two presented the main theories that have been adopted to study self-service technologies were covered. By providing a synopsis and discussion around the applicability of the theories as underpinning frameworks for this study, it allowed the researcher to select a combination of actor network theory and role theory. By combining the two theories under the one study as a lens, this allowed the researcher to explore roles and relationships within the hospitality environment. The hospitality environment is dependent upon three main actors within the hospitality space, guests, hosts and technology, and therefore as there were main points within a social network, actor network theory allowed a lens to view the interactions and relationships that take place (Latour, 2012; Payne, 2017; van Der Duim et al., 2013). However, although actor network theory allows a view of the movement and interactions within a network, it does not fully allow an understanding of the expected or perceived roles. This is where role theory allowed the researcher to consider that there could potentially be a conflict of roles considering the implementation of self-service technologies within the hospitality service encounter (Ho et al., 2020; Wehner, 2016).

Chapter three first provided an understanding of self-service technologies within the service encounter. By first exploring self-service technologies and their implementation within hospitality, it allowed for further exploration of the factors that can affect the overall service experience. These factors were technology readiness (Clausing & Holmes, 2010; Pham et al., 2020), trust and anxiety (Taillon & Huhmann, 2019), adoption (Huang, Chang, Yu, & Chen, 2019), and service failure and recovery (Collier et al., 2017). The researcher found that a combination of these factors were important considerations for the motivations of customers using self-service technologies, and the affects it has on the overall hospitality experience.

The chapter then provided literature covering the role of self-service technologies within the guest-host relationship. The related literature covered the need for interaction (Lee, 2017) and collaborative service delivery. Co-creation is a key factor in the use of self-service technologies as it allows customers to perform transactional tasks and take an element of control over their service experience (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Chathoth et al., 2013). The literature suggested that the use of self-service technologies could act as both a barrier and a connection between guests and hosts. Finally, literature exploring the high-tech, high-touch approach to hospitality included multi-channel service delivery, standardisation of services and service evaluation (Brochado et al., 2016; Davari et al., 2022). This allowed the researcher to understand how the hospitality landscape has developed to include self-service technologies.

This research is concerned specifically with the roles of guests, hosts, and self-service technologies in high-tech, high-touch hospitality environments. By using actor network theory together with role theory as an underpinning theoretical lens for the study, this allowed an additional dimension of understanding in how both the guests and hosts perceive each other's roles, as well as the role of self-service technologies. The perceived roles of both guests and hosts were important to capture in the data collection. From a customer perspective, the interview questions were therefore focused on the customer experiences, how they interacted with both hotel staff and self-technology, and how they felt throughout the experience. The outcome of the conversations with customers was that they still have a reliance on the hotel staff, and they don't perceive the staff role to have changed even with the addition of self-service technologies in the service process. However, what was evident was the reliance on staff in times of self-service failure.

From an organisation perspective, the questioning around roles was more direct with hotel employees and managers, whereby the researcher asked specifically how the roles have changed with the implementation of self-service technologies. There was an evident divide in the perspectives of role change here, as the employees explained how they needed to adapt their skills, take on additional tasks as well as an increased need for additional training. They also explained that the addition of self-service technologies didn't save them any time in their daily role, it added work due to the additional administration. However, the manager perspective was slightly different. The hotel managers explained that the purpose of the self-service technologies was to alleviate the transactional tasks from the interactions between customers and employees, and therefore gave the front office employees more time to spend on building a more personalised, memorable experience. In practice however, there are evident operational issues that are preventing this happening.

In terms of roles, there is evident blurring of roles between guests and hosts due to the use of self-service technologies. The guests are able to assume the role of a host by using self-service technologies to allow them to access hotel services and complete transactions without the need for interaction with hotel employees. The self-service technology therefore has a host role, overlapping with the host role of hotel employees. However, it can also be viewed that self-service technologies are an extension of the hotel employee role, as they are ultimately in control of the operation of the technologies, taking care of the administration and completing any tasks that require human input. Ultimately however, the role of the hotel employee takes responsibility for any failure in service, regardless of whether that service is face to face or via self-service technology.

From discussions with both customers and employees, both groups claimed that they do not see the role of the hotel employee being replaced by self-service technologies in hotels. The managers and employees claimed that there will always be a need for employees within hotels to be able to provide the high-quality standards and physically serve the guests. The customers wish for hotel employees to remain in their roles as there is a need for interaction, albeit not in every circumstance. The experiences shared by both guests and hosts suggested that technology has an active role in the guest-host relationship. By connecting the guest and the host together through the use of technology, this further suggests that the technology has more of a facilitator role within the relationship, and not as a replacement of human touch.

Customer perceptions of self-service technologies were very practical compared to the more emotional descriptions of face-to-face interaction. Although their perceptions of personal and self-service were different, they valued both forms of service within the hospitality. As discussed earlier, there is a conflict between the manager and employee perceptions of self-service technology use. The managers believe customer use of self-service frees the employee of transactional tasks and should therefore have more time to focus on the customer experience. This is how the implementation of self-service technologies was planned, however in practice at a hotel operation level, this does not seem to be the case. There is therefore a disconnect between the objective of self-service technology implementation within hospitality, and the experience of it. The customers have also noticed this, as the service that is advertised to them as a seamless way to experience hospitality using mobile applications, does not happen in practice. There are still technical barriers in the way of the seamless experience that is promised.

The findings suggested that both customers and employees want a provision of both technology and human touch within hospitality, and is therefore a need for a high-tech, high-touch blend of hospitality service. The hospitality experience has consequently changed to accommodate technology within the service encounter, which means that both the customer journey and employee experience has changed over time. The service judgement process presented in the discussion chapter provided an overview of the customer decision making in hospitality environments as well as the interaction points between guests, hosts, and technology. This view of the customer journey demonstrates customer reliance on both technology and hotel employees to fulfil their hospitality service requirements. The findings suggested that customers make certain decisions on arrival at the hotel whether they want to use self-service or interact with the hotel staff.

Although the potential of high-tech, high-touch hospitality is possible, the findings suggest there are technical barriers in place in terms of legislative procedures (confirming payment details, passport requirements in some cases), communication failures (no or late responses via virtual chat on mobile applications), and general self-service technology failure. The findings suggested that the customers want a high-tech, high-touch experience as they prefer a mix of both personal service and self-service available to them in hospitality. This is due to their different needs depending on the purpose of trip, location/type of hotel, level of query, all of which were covered in the guest-tech-host service dynamic (figure 9). From an organisation perspective, they also wish to provide a balance of personal and self-service to customers. The reasons that hotel managers gave for this was to keep up with the competition and keep moving with the times. Hotel managers understand that customers want a more digital first service, therefore they are implementing technological platforms to provide this in their hotels. However, from

conversations with customers, it is not always the case that they want digital first service. They want to connect with hotel employees when they want, depending on their needs. Therefore, the customer wants a blend of personal and self-service available, and not wanting to rely on self-service, particularly in higher star-rated hotels, or when on leisure trips.

The researcher suggests that the relationship is viewed in hospitality as a guest-tech-host relationship, given that technology is now embedded within the service encounter, and there is still a need for interaction with hotel staff. By framing the relationship using the lens of actor network theory to include three actors within the relationship, it allows technology to be recognised as equal to the guest and host. Further, role theory added further understanding of the role change within the guest-tech-host relationship. It is clear from both the literature (Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Law et al., 2020; Shiwen et al., 2021) and findings of this study that self-service technology is relied upon, trusted and now a mainstay in the hospitality industry.

### **8.3 Contribution**

In the introduction to this thesis, the anticipated theoretical and managerial contributions were described. This section details the actual contribution following the completion of the study. Crane, Henriques, Husted, and Matten (2016) suggest that applying theory in the context of a wider phenomenon can provide rigour if there is a meaningful interpretation and criticality applied to the phenomena by the researcher. The authors also suggest seeking theory and concepts from other disciplines to add further contribution to theory, positing that 'good' work should have both scientific and practical utility and provide

impact. Both the theoretical and methodological contribution are discussed in more detail below, as well as the managerial implications of the study.

### 8.3.1 Contribution to knowledge

The researcher has presented a number of insights to add to the current body of knowledge in hospitality literature. The focus of this thesis was to view hospitality in a high-tech, high-touch concept so that the guest-tech-host relationship could be explored. To do this, the researcher adopted an actor network theory and role theory lens to be able to view the interactions and relationships within the guest-host relationship and the use of self-service technologies. By viewing both the interactions within the network, and the roles of actors within the network, it offered the researcher a new perspective of the high-tech, high-touch hospitality concept and relationships between guests, hosts, and technology. To the researcher's knowledge, at the time of this study it is the first to adopt both actor network theory and role theory to explore this concept.

At the start of the thesis, the researcher claimed that the focus of research concerning self-service technologies were concerned with self-service technologies in service industries covers mainly technology adoption and acceptance (Kaushik & Kumar, 2018; Lee, 2016; Lu et al., 2015), co-creation (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019; Chathoth et al., 2013; Hilton & Hughes, 2008; Kelly et al., 2017; Sarmah et al., 2017), and service evaluations (Beatson et al., 2007; Robertson et al., 2016; Taillon & Huhmann, 2019). Given the literature lacked focus on the relationships and interactions within hospitality, this research has contributed to the current body of knowledge. Specifically, in exploring the guest-tech-host relationship, a new concept that recognises the significant role of technology within a traditional guest-host relationship. Additionally, the guest-tech-host service dynamic,

which offers an exploration of high-tech, high-touch hospitality. The findings were key in further understanding the factors that determine the levels of personal and technological interaction within hospitality, advancing the level of knowledge beyond the limitations of technology adoption and co-creation. The outcome of this research offers a focus on the relationships and interactions within hospitality servicescapes that considers both employees and customers (guests and hosts). Both the operational considerations from a host perspective, and the sentiment of the customers from a guest perspective, provides a depth of understanding of the contemporary hospitality service environment. The researcher has therefore offered a model that recognises the roles within the guest-tech-host relationship, presents high-tech, high-touch hospitality and the service judgements of customers within the hospitality environment, which can be tested in future research.

A significant contribution to knowledge is the concept of the guest-tech-host relationship, presented in section 7.5. Following this study, the researcher has redefined the traditional guest-host relationship in the context of high-tech, high-touch hospitality. Using both actor network theory and role theory as a theoretical lens to explore the roles and relationships between guests, hosts and technology, the researcher presented the new concept in chapter seven. The guest-tech-host relationship is defined by the researcher as a symbiotic relationship, recognising the active roles of guests, hosts, and technology within hospitality. The concept of the guest-tech-host relationship allows research in the field of hospitality to move forward, particularly in understanding the guest journey and the future of hospitality.

The second significant contribution to knowledge is the guest-tech-host service dynamic (presented in section 7.6), whereby the researcher offered an understanding of the

interactions and collaborations within the hospitality service environment, highlighting the key actors (guests, hosts, and technology) and their connections with each other. The conceptual model presented the guest-tech-host relationship in operation. Here the model presents customer preferences, service judgements, and potential benefits, of customers deciding to engage in either personal or self-service, or a mix of both. The judgements made here highlighted the importance in customers being able to make the decisions based on (in no particular order) trip purpose, need for interaction, availability of self-service technologies or hotel staff, location and type of hotel and value of time. This therefore presents the high-tech, high-touch hospitality concept in action, providing customers with the overall choice, and allowing them to make the decision on how they want to engage in, and receive, their hospitality service. This was a key finding from the customer, employee, and manager interviews.

From a customer perspective, the experiences, and preferences they shared were heavily reliant on a provision of both tech and touch from hospitality service providers, to allow them the freedom of choice. The model also shows the tech-host collaboration, another significant finding from the data, whereby the role of technology is a link between hosts and guests. The experiences from both employees and managers implied that the employees work collaboratively with self-service technologies, to provide guests with a high-tech, high-touch experience. Furthermore, the findings presented a blurring of roles between guests and hosts from technology use, as customers could adopt the role of both guest and host when using self-service technologies. The element of control was particularly important to guests when using self-service and was a considerable deciding factor on self-service technology adoption. However, there was an established need for interaction between guests and hosts, and so in turn, this then offered the perspective that

self-service technologies facilitate, not replace human service and interaction. This is an important contribution as the general rhetoric in self-service technology literature is focused on either the competition between tech and touch (Fan & Mattila, 2021; Giebelhausen et al., 2014), a shift from high-touch to high-tech (Solnet et al., 2019; Zeng, Chen, & Lew, 2020), and tech replacing touch (Chen, Tzeng, Tham, & Chu, 2021). This study presents findings from both customers and employees that explicitly states a blend of both high-tech, and high-touch is most desirable. This therefore established a need for high-tech, high-touch hospitality.

This research adds a dual perspective on the interpersonal relationships in the context of high-tech, high-touch hospitality. As stated in chapter 2, research exploring interpersonal relationships in hospitality, particularly considering self-service technology use, is scant (Kelly et al., 2017; Shin & Perdue, 2019), with customer-centric research being more prevalent. Therefore, this research adds to the limited literature that considers interpersonal relationships in hospitality.

An unexpected contribution to this study, is the methodological contribution following a change in the data collection strategy. The data collection stage for this study took place during a global pandemic, which added challenges to both recruitment and to the context of the interviews. Although the researcher was required to adapt the original plans for data collection owing to social distancing and lockdown rules in the UK, it was beneficial to the overall learning and outcomes of the study.

Following the experiences of hosting virtual interviews during a pandemic, there are some learnings that can be taken forward for future research projects following the researcher's experience of this study. Do not underestimate the time it takes to arrange interviews and

have a strategy in place for the event of any disruption to original plans. The unintended impacts of the pandemic and subsequent closure of hospitality delayed data collection considerably, and therefore added difficulty in gaining participants once hospitality opened back up. Secondly, consider how the sample is wide-ranging and inclusive, and consider if the criteria could be adapted to include a varied range of participants that can offer differing perspectives. This was important for this study, as a mix of roles, genders and age offered different opinions and experiences. Although the purpose was not to generalise or measure the participant characteristics, it did offer further context when interpreting the data.

With regards to collecting data online, although it is good practice to limit time being online to avoid fatigue, being flexible and offering participants the option of a longer interview gives the flexibility for exploration of experiences. The researcher therefore suggests that good practice for qualitative research online would be to set out the minimum requirements for the data collection, and then let the participant decide if they would like to spend more time sharing further experiences or anecdotes. Finally, rapport is very important in gaining trust and ensuring the participants are comfortable sharing experiences, therefore taking the time ahead of the interviews to build rapport is important.

### 8.3.2 Managerial implications

Value can be determined by detailing what the researcher can add in terms of value to the current body of knowledge through detailed interpretation. The value of this research not only contributes to the current body of knowledge, but also has managerial implications.

Through the dual perspective of both employees and customers, the findings of this thesis are significant in understanding the current hospitality landscape in terms of the guest-host relationship and the use of self-service technologies. The guest-tech-host service dynamic (figure 9) offers further insight into the decision making and situational judgements that customers make when entering hotels. The customers that were interviewed shared their pre-determining factors of whether they would select self-service technology or personal interaction through employee engagement.

From an organisational perspective, the insight provided in the guest-tech-host service dynamic model offers the hospitality industry with a range of situational factors, or service judgements, that customers make when deciding on their service preferences. This information is vital in terms of understanding the hospitality customer and can allow hospitality organisations to plan and deliver their service offering more strategically.

From a managerial perspective, self-service technologies have been implemented in the hotel operation for three main reasons; to offer guests a self-service alternative, to save on employee labour and to match competitors offerings. This strategic view of self-service technology implementation is not matched by the understandings of employees, as the findings suggested that there is a disconnect between hotel managers and front office employees on perception of self-service technologies. The employees that work with self-service technologies are of the opinion that self-service technologies do not save any time or make the frontline staff role easier. The findings from hotel employees suggested that there are additional tasks and more channels of communication to manage compared to pre-self-service technology implementation. The employees also shared that there should be more training offered when the self-service technologies are implemented or updated,

as in the case of the experiences that the employees shared, they had insufficient training and knowledge of the systems. Employees shared feelings of frustration and anxiety when faced with new technological challenges in their daily roles, adding further stress.

This study has also offered an insight into hospitality throughout a pandemic. The timing of the data collection gave the researcher the opportunity to discuss the effects of the pandemic on hospitality with customers and employees. Although the concept of hospitality in a pandemic was not a planned part of the data collection, the conversation naturally led to pre and post pandemic thoughts about hospitality. Therefore, it offered the researcher insight into hospitality in a post-pandemic world. Given that the pandemic was largely an unprecedented event, the insight to customer experiences during the pandemic are valuable to future planning should any incident of a similar nature occur. Additionally, the guest-tech-service dynamic model offers an operational understanding of when high-touch service is preferable, therefore should there be a case in the future where personal interaction needs to be limited, the hospitality organisation can understand the circumstances that are important to customers and that require significant change.

The findings of the study are valuable in terms of the reliance on technology to avoid human interaction during the pandemic. From a customer perspective, there were some practices that customers would like to see carried forward into post-pandemic hospitality. The customers suggested that the widespread availability of self-service technologies was encouraging, as during the pandemic personal interaction needed to be minimal. However, customers now prefer the benefit of choice, and knowing that the technology will remain available to them as well as interaction with hotel staff. Therefore, a high-tech, high-touch hospitality option in this case would be preferred.

## 8.4 The research journey; a personal reflection

At the start of the research journey, reflective notes were taken at each stage of the data collection process to document the progress of the research. This personal journaling process allowed me to make sense of what needed to be done, how it was being done, and how I as a researcher navigated the process. This will be discussed in this reflection, with some considerations for future research offered.

### 8.4.1 Becoming a researcher; who, what, why?

This thesis is a product of a practitioner, new to academia and research. Not only did I need to 'become' a researcher, I also needed to find out who I was as a researcher, what I wanted to achieve and why I was doing it. Doctoral research to a new researcher is quite a daunting task. The proposal process itself is an overwhelming task, as you are expected to know (broadly) everything that you want to do, and will be doing, before you have embarked on your research journey. Although overwhelming, it made me think very quickly about what type of researcher I wanted to be. I believe that we can understand the way of the world through lived experiences. By learning and exploring experiences different perspectives can be explored, with no right or wrong, but an understanding that there can be multiple views of the same phenomena. This belief that I have, embedded me in interpretivism which in turn led to me designing a qualitative study to be able to explore the multiple views and perspectives of a particular topic.

My position as a researcher is one that is deeply rooted in the hospitality industry. From working in hotels for fourteen years, I have knowledge of being both a hotel employee and manager, as well as a hotel customer. This shaped the study considerably, as it was

through this knowledge was used as a lens for the overall research, and consequent research questions were able to be identified. This is a research trait recognised by Berger (2015) that the way in which a researcher views different constructs can act as an overall lens for the research project, however the researcher must also be aware that it should not be projected on to the participants. I have a passion for hospitality, and appreciate the meaning of 'true hospitality' in the sense that it regards a welcoming, personal touch. I am also of the opinion however, that as time progresses, so too does the development of hospitality through technology advances and customer expectations. This is why I am keen on exploring the potential of a high-tech, high-touch future for hospitality, how it is perceived, and exploring the potential development of the guest-host relationship.

Considering the research is about relationships within hospitality environments, it was vital that I created a study that considered perspectives of both hotel employees and guests, to provide balance and a deeper understanding of the relationships. As a researcher I believe it is important to look at the wider picture to understand what is going on, therefore understanding the experiences of technology from both hotel employees and customers, I could then make sense of how technology is viewed in the relationship between the two groups. Therefore, it was vital that I included both hotel customers and employees in the study so that I was also able to make sense and meaning from the experiences that were shared.

#### 8.4.2 The process of doctoral research; building resilience

The freedom of independent inquiry is both a blessing and a curse. For an introvert personality type like myself, I enjoy the control and freedom of working alone. However, as a perfectionist that suffers imposter syndrome, the overwhelming feeling of self-doubt

somewhat clouded my research experience. Before my doctoral research journey, I had spent 14 years in an industry where I was a confident manager, knowing my role and my industry inside and out. It was a big change, and leap of faith, to then switch career and start something where I had to work from the beginning again, not knowing everything. For the majority of my research journey, I would dismiss positive feedback from supervisors, as I felt personally that what I was doing wasn't good enough, and that I could have done better. This was a difficult struggle with self-confidence and self-worth as a new researcher, as I would focus on the negative (yet constructive) feedback, spending more time on 'fixing' things, rather than progressing. This had a detrimental effect on not just my confidence, but also on the time it took to do the work. Now, towards the end of my doctoral research, I realise that there is no harm or shame not knowing everything, and that the research journey is exactly that – a journey, and it does not end once the doctoral research is over. When I realised and accepted this, the journey was much easier to navigate.

Doctoral research can be a very isolating process. The pandemic added additional challenges as there were forced lockdowns and home working. This meant that I could not meet colleagues for discussions about research, or work in social hubs, which is how I would normally carry out my research. This shift meant that my 'normal' routine was interrupted, and the transition was difficult to navigate at times.

Doctoral research is a long-term project, and although project management techniques are good for making initial plans, it was disheartening when things didn't quite go to plan. This can be tough to deal with, particularly when there are graduate school deadlines to meet as well as self-imposed deadlines. From this experience, I believe I have gained a

certain level of resilience so that I can deal with change and set-back in a much calmer way.

The reflective journey of this research allowed me as a researcher to 'find my way' in terms of what type of researcher I wanted to be; what questions did I want to ask, what can be known about something and how did I want to make sense of it. By journaling the experience of that journey, the reflection therefore became a timeline of events that can be reviewed for both the final stages of this thesis and will also lead the way for my future research projects. These reflexive accounts are therefore important to shape me as a researcher. This is the start of my research journey, which is guided by recording these experiences to inform how I will do research in the future.

#### 8.4.3 Recommendations for future practice

I never thought at the beginning of the doctoral research journey that I would be navigating a global pandemic, yet here we are. Although there have been many emotions during the process, resilience and confidence are the main positive factors that I can take forward from the journey. The following points are considerations for future research practice

- Don't be afraid to not 'know it all'. It is the role of a researcher to learn, and there is never an end point of knowledge, therefore no one can ever know it all.
- Take the positive feedback as much as the negative and celebrate the successes rather than focus on the failures. It is easier said than done, however this is advice I wish I had taken at the start of the journey, rather than realising it at the end.

- Be explicit in what feedback from peers and supervisors you would like, and how you would like to receive it. This avoids miscommunication and conflict, and is a proactive way to progress with research projects without feeling dejected.
- Be flexible enough in your plans so that last minute or unintended changes can be made

## **8.5 Limitations and recommendations for future research**

This study has provided an exploration of both customer and employee experiences of self-service technologies and personal interactions in hospitality. As the participant recruitment and data collection took place during the pandemic, the sample for both customers and hotel employees was sufficient to allow the researcher to understand the concept of high-tech, high-touch hospitality and the role of self-service technology. A limitation of the study, however, was that only front office managers and hotel managers from the organisational side were considered for this study. To expand the scope, and to gain a wider understanding of the holistic hospitality experience, further customer facing roles in hotels could be included in the study. Concierge, restaurant, and bar staff roles would offer an additional contextual layer to understanding personal guest-host interaction and the use of technology within the customer journey. To understand further the customer journey, and how customers navigate hospitality environments, the research could also be expanded to include observational research, adding further insight as to how customers navigate the hospitality landscape. The researcher intends to take this forward to further contextualise the connections made between guests, technology, and hosts in practice.

As the study was concerned with understanding experiences and feelings of customers and employees, the sample cannot be generalised. This was a study of subjective experiences to help understand modern day hospitality, not to generalise preferences of certain customer groups, or employee roles. Therefore, to offer generalisability, a mixed method study would be recommended to provide a quantitative approach to gaining insight in preferences according to trip purpose or gender and generational preferences.

As the pandemic limited travel and personal meetings, the interviews with participants were all held online. Although the researcher allowed additional time for rapport building and made allowances in time spend online, there would have been some benefit in interviewing participants in person. This would have been particularly useful for hotel participants as it would allow the researcher to see first-hand the environment where the employees work and interact with customers. Another limitation to hospitality research due to the pandemic, is that the researcher was asking participants to recall hotel stays after a period of national lockdown and subsequent travel bans. Although the participants were able to recall their experiences, some of the potential detail may have been limited.

It is intended that the researcher's model of the guest-tech-host service dynamic is tested further in future research. This conceptual model offers academics a framework to view the guest-tech-host relationship in a high-tech, high-touch hospitality context. Emerging literature in hospitality is concerned with the implementation of service robots in hotels (Abou-Shouk, Gad, & Abdelhakim, 2021; Mukherjee, Baral, Venkataiah, Pal, & Nagariya, 2021; Zhong, Verma, Wei, Morrision, & Yang, 2022), which would provide an additional actor within the customer journey, taking the concept of the guest-tech-host relationship further. However, the implementation of service robots in hotels particularly in the UK and

Europe, is low. Therefore, to apply the same methodological approach and to understand both customer and employee preferences and feelings towards service robots, the adoption of robots in hotels would need to be more widespread to gain a true understanding based on experiences.

There has been a focus on the pandemic in self-service technology and hospitality literature (Bharwani & Mathews, 2021; Davari et al., 2022; Gursoy & Chi, 2020; Hao & Chon, 2022; Kour et al., 2020; Mukherjee et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2021). As the researcher has proposed a guest-tech-host relationship, this reframing of the traditional guest-host relationship in hospitality could offer a more holistic perspective of hotel operations in the 'new normal' (Cuomo, Tortora, Danovi, Festa, & Metallo, 2021).

Overall, for future studies the development of technology within the hospitality industry is prosperous. The opportunity is dependent on development over time. Self-service technologies are still being implemented in hotels, and as they become more commonplace, the adoption of AI, smart environments (IoT) and service robots will follow. As smart technologies are progressing in hospitality, it is important that the research continues on how both the practice and experience of hospitality is progressing (Buhalis et al., 2019). This body of research has shown how the use of self-service technologies can influence how both customers and employees experience hospitality, and how those technologies affect interactions between customers and employees. This therefore will allow hospitality researchers to continue studies in understanding how technological change impacts relationships and experiences within hospitality.

## 8.6 Closing summary

This thesis has presented a view of modern-day hospitality from the perspectives of guests and hosts. With the rapid implementation of self-service technologies within hospitality, particularly post-pandemic, there is a need for literature within the field of hospitality to understand how the industry is adapting and changing (Law et al., 2020). By adopting an actor network theory and role theory perspective on the guest-host interactions within hospitality, it gave the researcher an opportunity to explore the high-tech, high-touch nature of the current hospitality landscape. The tech-touch blend of hospitality was explored, along with an understanding of the interactions and relationships that exist between guests and hosts.

Following this exploration, the researcher has contributed two original contributions to knowledge. First, the guest-tech-host relationship, whereby the researcher has reframed the traditional view of the guest-host relationship, which is a view of the contemporary hospitality operation and including technology as a main actor within the relationship. Secondly, the guest-tech-host service dynamic, whereby the researcher presented judgement points by customers when deciding on whether to engage in personal or self service, or a mix of both. This service judgement process also considered the interactions between guests, hosts, and technology, therefore further establishing a need for the guest-tech-host relationship to be recognised.

The future research opportunities following this thesis were presented in this chapter, which offers the researcher chance to further develop the guest-tech-host relationship, to which the researcher looks forward to being active in the field. It is important that as

hospitality moves to a more mobile future guided by technology, that the industry does not lose sight of the foundations of hospitality.

## Appendices

Appendix A: Interview question planning

Appendix B: Individual and organisational consent forms

Appendix C: Initial notes from reading transcripts

Appendix D: Annotated transcript example (customer)

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Appendix H: Final themes, sub-themes, and codes

Appendix I: A tool for evaluating thematic analysis

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Appendix K: EuroCHRIE 2021 poster submission: Technology and the Guest-Host Relationship: Towards the Future of Hospitality

Appendix A: Interview question planning

<b>Research aim:</b> Explore the role of technology within the guest-host relationship in the context of high-tech, high-touch hospitality.			
<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Related literature</b>	<b>Contribution</b>
<b>RQ1:</b> From the perspectives of both guests and employees, how desirable is a high-tech, high-touch approach to service in hotels?	<b>HG:</b> What do you expect from a 4-5 star hotel service? - Why? - What is most important to you?	Griffy-Brown et al. (2008) Kim et al. (2017)	From the current body of literature, the concept of a high-tech, high-touch approach to service has been researched, however there is scant literature that focuses on hospitality. Traditionally a low-tech, high-touch service environment, the proliferation and popularity of self-service technologies means that the hospitality industry needs to adapt. What is not yet understood however, is if a high-tech, high-touch approach is achievable or desirable. By gaining the perspectives of both hotel guests and employees, this will develop an understanding which will have both theoretical and managerial implications.
	<b>HG:</b> How much value do you place on being able to control/manage your hotel stay with self-service technologies? - Why? - How important is this to you? - Is it something you would pay for? - Would you pay more for staff interaction / SST?	Beatson et al. (2007) Brochado et al. (2016) Robertson et al. (2016) Scherer et al. (2015)	
	<b>HG:</b> If you had a choice of using either technology aided service or	Kelly et al. (2017) Brochado et al. (2016)	

	<p>relying on hotel staff in the future, which would you choose?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> <li>- In an ideal situation, what would you prefer hotels to offer?</li> <li>- Would both offers be welcomed?</li> </ul>	<p>Scherer et al. (2015) Lee (2016)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> Do you feel guests are comfortable with the technology that is available to them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you take time to chat to guests about it?</li> <li>- How do the guests react to it?</li> </ul>	<p>Giebelhausen et al. (2014) Lee et al. (2003) Lee and Cranage (2018) Meuter et al. (2000)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> Do you feel you can build rapport with guests the same way if they were to use self-service technologies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has the relationship with guests changed in any way since the increase in use of self-service technologies?</li> <li>- What level of assistance do you give to those using self-service technologies?</li> <li>- Tell me more about that interaction</li> </ul> <p>Note: positive/negative?</p>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019) Giebelhausen et al. (2014)</p>	

	- Why/How?		
	<b>HE:</b> In your opinion, what do you think the future of hotel service is? Note: mentions of personal interaction / development of technologies / role change / guests preferences	De Keyser et al. (2019) Giebelhausen et al. (2014)	
<b>RQ2:</b> To what extent is the use of self-service technologies and digital services changing the hospitality landscape and the way both guests and hosts experience hospitality?	<b>HG:</b> What do you expect from a 4-5 star hotel service? - Why? - What is most important to you?	Griffy-Brown et al. (2008) Kim et al. (2017)	As hospitality is traditionally a people intensive industry, personal interaction and relationships are typically relied upon to build guest satisfaction and loyalty. The increase in implementation and use of self-service technologies allows a different service option to carry out basic tasks without the need for interaction with hotel employees. Evaluations of self-service technologies has been explored in current literature, however what is not known is if the use of self-service technologies directly affects customer evaluations of service in hotels overall when compared to traditional service methods. By exploring this concept from the perspective of both guests and
	<b>HG:</b> Tell me about your last great hotel experience - how was it? - What were the main positive factors that contributed to your stay?	Barnes et al. (2015) Guenzi and Pelloni (2004) Oliver et al. (1997)	
	<b>HG:</b> Thinking back to the last time you stayed at a hotel and your service experience was purely based on face to face interaction with employees and no technology – talk me through your experience Note: was it a good/bad experience? - How did you feel?	Guenzi and Pelloni (2004) Lee (2017)	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What role did the hotel staff play in this?</li> </ul>		<p>employees, this will add to the current body of knowledge. The results of this, when linked with how relationships are impacted by use of self-service technologies, will aid an understanding of whether a high-tech, high-touch approach to service delivery is desirable to either guests or employees.</p>
<p><b>HG:</b> Tell me about your last experience using self-service technology during a hotel stay  Note: was it a good/bad experience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> <li>- How did you feel?</li> <li>- Why did you choose to use self-service technologies instead of speaking to hotel staff?</li> </ul> <p>Note: Are the experiences different?  Are the tasks transactional (check-in/out, pay bill, etc)  Did they need to involve staff at any point - probe further if so;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> <li>- Was the service not available via the self-service technology?</li> <li>- What was the experience like?</li> </ul> <p>Note: positive/negative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does this affect your opinion of self-service technologies?</li> </ul>	<p>Brochado et al. (2016)  De Keyser et al. (2019)  Lee et al. (2003)  Rosenbaum and Wong (2015)  Sur (2011)  Wirtz et al. (2018)</p>		

	<p><b>HE:</b> Talk me through an example of a time where you have used technology to assist you in delivering service to a guest?  Note: did they direct the guest to use the SST alone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did it have a positive or negative impact on the guest?</li> <li>- What was the guest's reaction?</li> </ul>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019)  Lee et al. (2003)  Montargot and Ben Lahouel (2018)  Rosenbaum and Wong (2015)  Wirtz et al. (2018)</p>	
<p><b>RQ3:</b>  What perceptions of roles exist between service employees and guests due to self-service technology use within hospitality?</p>	<p><b>HG:</b> Thinking back to the last time you stayed at a hotel and had a service experience from hotel employees alone  Note: was it a good/bad experience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How did you feel?</li> <li>- What role did the hotel staff play in this?</li> </ul>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019)</p>	<p>By using both Actor Network Theory and Role Theory as a lens, the researcher is able to explore how technology has impacted both the current and expected roles between the three key actors in this study; hotel employees, hotel guests and self-service technology. By viewing self-service technology as a key actor in the service environment, this can aid an understanding of how all three actors interact with each other and what relationships are formed. It will then serve as a basis for discussion around how these augmented relationships are impacting hospitality, which is an unexplored area in the current body</p>
	<p><b>HG:</b> How important is staff interaction during your hotel stay?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you build a rapport with staff?</li> </ul>	<p>Beatson et al. (2007)  Giebelhausen et al. (2014)  Lee (2017)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> Talk to me about your role within the hotel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What does your typical working day look like?</li> </ul>	<p>Wirtz et al. (2018)</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you love most about your job?</li> </ul> <p>Note (if not covered, ask):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job role</li> <li>- How long they have worked at the hotel</li> </ul>		of research.
	<p><b>HE:</b> Do you feel your role has changed in any way since the implementation of self-service technologies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How?</li> <li>- How do you feel about it?</li> </ul>	<p>Kelly et al. (2017)  Montargot and Ben Lahouel (2018)  Moon et al. (2019)  Lee (2016)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> Has technology replaced any of your daily tasks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What kind of tasks?</li> <li>- Does it have a positive/negative impact on your day to day role?</li> </ul>	<p>Montargot and Ben Lahouel (2018)  Moon et al. (2019)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> In your opinion do you think guests have a preference of using self-service technologies, or do they prefer to speak to staff?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> </ul>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019)  Lee et al. (2003)  Lee and Cranage (2018)  Robertson et al. (2016)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> In your experience do you feel guests rely on staff more or less when they use self-service technologies?</p>	<p>Lee et al. (2003)  Lee and Cranage (2018)  Montargot and Ben Lahouel (2018)</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give any examples of experiences?</li> </ul>		
<p><b>RQ4:</b> To what extent can technology be considered to have an active role within the guest-host relationship?</p>	<p><b>HG:</b> Tell me about your last experience using self-service technology during a hotel stay</p> <p>Note: was it a good/bad experience?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> <li>- How did you feel?</li> <li>- Why did you choose to use self-service technologies instead of speaking to hotel staff?</li> </ul> <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are the experiences different?</li> <li>- Are the tasks transactional (check-in/out, pay bill, etc)</li> <li>- Did they need to involve staff at any point - probe further if so;</li> <li>- Why?</li> <li>- Was the service not available via the self-service technology?</li> <li>- What was the experience like?</li> </ul> <p>Note: positive/negative</p>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019) Brochado et al. (2016) Lee et al. (2003) Rosenbaum and Wong (2015) Sur (2011) Wirtz et al. (2018)</p>	<p>It is widely covered in literature the reasons why and how customers choose to adopt self-service technologies, however what is not known is the long-term impact this will have on the hotel guest-employee relationship. As hospitality is such a people intensive service industry, the development, implementation and use of self-service technologies can act as a barrier to personal interactions and potential relationships. To explore the true impact, it is necessary to understand perspectives of both hotel guests and employees on how the use of self-service technologies is impacting the service relationships that are traditionally formed.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does this affect your opinion of self-service technologies?</li> </ul>		
	<p><b>HG:</b> Comparing those two experiences - one with staff interaction and one with self-service technology, which did you prefer?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> <li>- Which did you value the most?</li> </ul> <p>Note: reasons why</p>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019) Wirtz et al. (2018)</p>	
	<p><b>HG:</b> Do you enjoy interacting with hotel staff? Y/N - Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does it have a positive impact on your overall opinion on a hotel?</li> <li>- Y/N - Why/How?</li> </ul>	<p>Guenzi and Pelloni (2004) Lee (2017)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> Tell me about what self-service technologies are available to your guests</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you introduce them to your guests?</li> <li>- Are they widely used?</li> <li>- Are they easy to manage in your opinion?</li> </ul>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019) Brochado et al. (2016)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> Talk me through an example of a time where you have used</p>	<p>Lee et al. (2003) Montargot and Ben Lahouel (2018)</p>	

	<p>technology to assist you in delivering service to a guest?  Note: did they direct the guest to use the SST alone?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did it have a positive or negative impact on the guest?</li> <li>- What was the guest's reaction?</li> </ul>	<p>Robertson et al. (2016)  Rosenbaum and Wong (2015)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> How do you manage the guest experience through using both face to face service as well as promoting self-service technologies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you have a preference of either personal interaction, or directing guests to use self-service technologies?</li> <li>- Are there any specific tasks that are useful to you that guests can manage themselves through self-service technologies?</li> </ul>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019)  Lee et al. (2003)  Robertson et al. (2016)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> In your experience do you feel guests rely on staff more or less when they use self-service technologies?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Why?</li> </ul>	<p>De Keyser et al. (2019)</p>	
	<p><b>HE:</b> Do you feel guests are comfortable with the technology that</p>	<p>Lee and Cranage (2018)  Meuter et al. (2000)</p>	

	<p>is available to them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Do you take time to chat to guests about it?</li><li>- How do the guests react to it?</li></ul>	<p>Robertson et al. (2016) Rosenbaum and Wong (2015)</p>	
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## Appendix B: Individual and organisational consent forms



### FOR USE WITH ORGANISATIONS

**Project title: An understanding of guest-host perceptions of using self-service technologies and the impact on the guest-host relationship**

**Principal Investigator: Kate Harland**  
**Student ID No. (if applicable): 02044247**

#### **Researcher's Statement:**

This research is concerned with both customer and service provider perceptions of using self-service technologies and the impact on the guest-host relationship. The overall aim of the research is to understand the extent to which the guest-employee relationship within hotels is being impacted, and how the delivery of hospitality service is changing as a result of this. It is therefore important to find out how both employees and customers feel about the self-service technologies, and the perceptions of using these technologies within a hospitality setting.

From an organization perspective, it is important to gain both an organizational and employee understanding. Interviews will be hosted by the principal investigator (Kate Harland) with general managers and front office employees to gain insights around the interaction and relationships with guests, and how technology is involved in the service environment. This will provide rich data which will be analysed to provide insights into guest-host relationship and how technology is perceived. The outcomes will have managerial implications that will allow future decision making around hotel service developments. The study will be published as part of a doctoral thesis, and may be published in academic journal articles.

A senior organisation manager, director or representative must give consent:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Location/s where the research is permitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Anonymity must be offered to the organisation if it does not wish to be identified in the research report. Confidentiality is more complex and cannot extend to the markers of student work or the reviewers of staff work, but can apply to the published outcomes. If confidentiality is required, what form applies?

- No confidentiality required
- Masking of organisation name in research report
- No publication of the research results without specific organisational consent
- Other by agreement as specified by addendum

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This form can be signed via email if the accompanying email is attached with the signer's personal email address included. The form cannot be completed by phone, rather should be handled via post.



**CONSENT FORM**

Project Title:

An understanding of both customer and service provider perceptions of using self-service technologies and the impact on the customer-service provider relationship.

Principal Investigator:

Kate Harland

*please tick or initial  
where applicable*

I have carefully read and understood the Participant Information Sheet.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study and I have received satisfactory answers.

I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason for withdrawing, and without prejudice.

I agree to take part in this study.

I also consent to the retention of this data under the condition that any subsequent use also be restricted to research projects that have gained ethical approval from Northumbria University.

Signature of participant..... Date..... (NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS).....
Signature of Parent / Guardian in the case of a minor .....
Signature of researcher..... Date..... (NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS).....

## Appendix C: Initial notes from reading transcripts

### **Role related**

- Employee knows how to be a customer from both experiences, however a customer (unless an ex-employee) does not know how to be an employee – they cannot see the service perspective from both sides.
  - Use Megan as example of customer, ex-employee
  - Employees experience as a customer informs practice within the organisation
  - Customer 009 – ‘I’m conscious of treating people how I would want to be treated because I’ve done that job. Maybe I’ve got like an extra awareness of that, that I’m using in my behaviours and also in my perceptions and judgements of things. Because when I look around and someone’s being rude to a waiter or rude to a receptionist or something, I always think gosh, you’ve never worked in a job like that or you wouldn’t act like that’
- Empathy
- Consideration
- Role change – employees learning new skills (Employee 001 examples of setting up the app)
- Expectation and perception – what are people expected to do, and what service do they perceive they will receive?
- Transactional versus experiential tasks – role change away from transactional admin tasks and more conversational, relationship building
- Staff experience just as important as customer experience (manager 001 example)
- Customer 002 – when had to use an app ‘I felt like it was down to me to make sure I’d have to go and do what I wanted to do’ – rather than the personal service experienced at a different hotel
- Differences of interaction – Customer 007 – ‘You want room service to very you know, you don’t want anybody to speak because you don’t want to have an interaction, and then when you’re in the bar you need those lively people so you need a whole mixture of people in order to make the experience come together’

### **People related**

In case of technology failure, or need for interaction, staff are actively sought by customers.

## Reasons for needing people:

- Sales/commercial reasons (upselling/relationship marketing)
- Extended personal relationships – familiarity (eg business – example from Claire)
- Resolution / fixing issues
- Fear of missing out – upgrades/deals/local knowledge
- Safety – Customer 006 – woman staying on her own, by having staff present in the hotel it adds an extra level of safety.
- Recognition – ‘they know who you are’ (customers 007 & 008)
- Cost – if customers are paying a higher price, they expect personal service

## **Personal interaction related**

- Perceived higher value if personal service is offered
- Situational nature of technology use – good in certain environments/situations – customers make that judgement call
- Tradition versus contemporary / traditional service or product with contemporary methods
- Personal service is expected if ‘paying more’
  - Customer 009 – anything above a three star, and especially if it was a four, I feel like part of that is like I’m paying for that experience within my costs’
- If time can be saved however, technology is required as an option to save on leisure time/queue avoidance
- Tech is a facilitator of personal service, not a replacement
- Words describing personal interaction between guests and hosts: friends, top quality, friendly, ‘felt like royalty’ customer 006, special, exciting, traditional, proper
- Anticipating needs
- Customer 007 – ‘he made the experience more exciting as a result of him being there, it was more of a personal level interaction that made it special’
- Customer 009 – ‘I suppose its like that being looked after element that makes it feel like I’m doing something special. Like that makes it feel like its not just transactional like a self service till in a supermarket you know, like I feel like its giving me that edge of me feeling like I’m on a leisure trip or I’m doing something special’. Further; ‘a machine is not going to do that for me, I think to me it’s just part of a hotel experience with having people part of it’.

## **Service related**

- Service evaluation – customers make a judgement based on time, effort (what else?) before they decide on using SS or human interaction
- Queuing / queue avoidance – customer 007 describes it as impatience of waiting in line, ‘wasting my time’ (customer 008), ‘ I suppose I just don’t want anything that’s going to take up more of my time, because it’s kind of like my time, and I’m coming to your place to be in your care while I’m in your place’ AND ‘ I would queue if it was not a conventional check in’ (customer 009).
- Customers evaluate time spent before making a decision on tech/human
- Employees ‘juggle’ tasks meaning some customers need to wait – f2f takes priority
- Tech savviness
- Situational - Purpose of trip is a consideration factor in judgement of what service is required
- Self-sufficiency
- Service standards – pre-conceptions/based on price paid
- Technology is great if it works – what is the contingency...people – reliance on people.
- Acceptance - Busy/queues/high workload for staff – (‘just the way things are’/just the way it is – across all employee/manager interviews)
- Hospitality needs to be less transactional and more personal. Commercialisation of hospitality – additional admin/transactional tasks
- Complicated billing – will seek out an employee to sort out checking out rather than using self-service
- Star rating impacts how much interaction is expected;
  - customer 008 – less they pay the less interaction they want; 3 star no interaction, 5 star all personal interaction
  - Customer 009 – ‘I personally would not like to walk in to a four star hotel and have to check myself in on a kiosk. I would expect that to be done by a person., and maybe there might be innovations to make my stay more efficient. Like I can pay my bill online or, I don’t know, I could order room service on an app or something. But I would expect every technical innovation to also be available to be done by a person as well, if I didn’t want to use that as an option’.

## **Hospitality related**

- Referring to 'old times'
- Comparing today's hospitality to previous years (we used to/I remember when/etc)
- Explanations of what hospitality is
- Personalisation to heighten the hospitality experience
- Not developing technology too much – detracts from the interaction and true hospitality
- Customers mentioning home
  - Feeling like they're at home
  - Welcomed into a home
  - Requiring additional service because they're away from home
- Customers want personalised service
- Customers – service delight – surprise/personalised/delight/special
- Customers referring to staff as friends (customer 002 and 004)
- Customers describing feelings from, or describing, personal interaction; valued/special/relaxed/treated me like royalty and invested in my experience (C 004), impressive
- Customer 005: 'I think if you look back at how you value certain hotel stays, generally, it's the staff that seem to make the hotel what it is'
- Customer 007 – 'they know when to appear and when to disappear which is truly what you would expect of a five star hotel'

### **Covid related**

- Implementation of technology because of covid
- Increased usage of existing self service technologies due to covid and limiting of human interaction
- Increased investment in technology because of the pandemic – gives a reason to use it, some ROI, customers are therefore required to use it. Linked to forced use?
- Are habits beginning to be formed with using technology instead of interaction with people?

### **Technology related**

- Virtual concierge and messaging via the mobile apps – appear automated to the customer, however there is a team managing the implementation and personalising the messaging to appear less automated
- Self-service customer journey explained by Manager 002
- 'Keeping up with the times'

- Customer expectations
- Competitors
- Lead from other industries
- Fits the brand image
- Staffing level debate – managers wondering if staffing could be reduced, employees saying its more work, not saving work
- ‘We have to’ – almost forced development, Manager 002 – ‘we have to embrace it’ and ‘we have to keep up with the times’ – thinking its like an unavoidable force
- Implemented without any training/little information/support/lack of information shared with hotel teams (manager 003 – ‘things were quite often getting thrown at you’)
- Technology interruption - disconnected service if using personal devices – need to sign/present ID first time staying, not as seamless as sold to the customer.
  - Customer 009 – there was also a receptionist in the reception behind the reception desk. And I kind of said oh hello how’s it going and she was loke oh you have to check in there (the kiosks). So already that’s a bit disjointed for me’.
- Staff education for how to use tech, as well as staff educating the customer
- Words describing SS use: efficient, convenient, effective, less faff, seamless, quicker, clever. City led thing (customer 005), functional, simple, useful, ugly, good, surprise, transactional, jarring, straightforward, fast, nightmare, hindrance, backup, self-sufficient, trade-off, soulless, adequate, no personality,
- First experience of using SS – customer 005 – ‘first time I’d used it, it felt a little bit strange because its just different but yeah, I felt good and it was easy. I didn’t have any issues with it. I just felt it was very easy and then quite clever’
- Encouraging mobile phone usage – Manager 002 example – ‘what our team is doing is reflecting what the guests are doing’
  - Customer 009 – ‘I don’t really want to be on my phone because I’m on my phone all the time for work’ – goes on to say it’s the fact it disjoints the conversation with who they are with when they have to look at their phones, apps or websites not being updated, as well as not having the most up to date phone.
- Focus is on the customer to download the app – inflicting on personal property? Issue for hotels as they invest in the capability of apps, however customers may not want to have the responsibility
- Hotel owners’ investment
- Concern over data security (customer 006)
  - Concern over cross-hacking(?) – if an app is downloaded to the phone with personal details – can it access all other content on the phone (customer 006 – would rather have a physical key card than have an app on the phone that can access details – describes herself as being nervous of that technology, ‘we are much more cynical and worried about it’)

- Customer 009 – discusses data being shared with too many systems and data breaches, ‘it’s too personal like you know too much about me’
- Tech as the supporting actor, with the staff as the main actors? In terms of ANT does this work? In terms of the relationship does this work? Discuss the tech on customers terms – they make a judgement whether to lean on the supporting actor (tech) when the main actor (host) cannot fulfil their needs.
- Barriers to using personal devices – customer 007 – ‘I’ve never really used a lot of hotel apps. To be honest I don’t like it, it’s a personal preference, it’s just I don’t want anything extra on my phone, I don’t want to have to download an app. I don’t mind using technology that’s provided by them, but the second that it involves me and my personal device I don’t like it’
- Technology anxiety – customer 007 – ‘it’s kind of subliminal marketing that’s direct on my phone, once that apps on my phone it’s not even an email that I can sweep away or whatever, once that apps on my phone it’s on my phone and then I get that little red dot and its just all a bit much. I just don’t like it’
- ‘Nowadays’ – expectation of self-service and tech use, matches with the opposed ‘old times’ talk of hospitality
- No expectation of service when using a self-service product – expectation is that there is not going to be a focus on the experience, or being looked after (customer 009)
- Attributing self-services to business or airport hotels

### **Tech-touch related**

- Some brands have the mix already which some customers have learned to accept; Customer 007 – ‘I think something that Hilton kind of generally do quite well overall in all of their properties is that I think because they’ve got such a blend of leisure and business travel they kind of allow the person to decide which traveller are you today’
- Customer 007 - Jarring experience – using tech to check in to a 5 star hotel where personal service was expected, however once the admin was taken care of, that was when personal service kicked in to focus on the experience rather than the ‘transactional’ admin tasks
- Customer 007 – calls for a mix of both so guests can choose - ‘make the important parts count’
- Privacy is important for sharing personal details and payments – customer 008 prefers that to be done either digitally or in a private area of the hotel rather than an open or exposed reception area. This is where technology could facilitate that check-in/out process.

- Customer 008 on the mix of tech-touch. 'the best of both worlds. I like the technology from the point of view the convenience and so you feel like you're in control. And then for me the sort of human part of it comes in is really exceeding the expectations and making it memorable and making sure that you have a great experience. Because nowadays the technology exists, and its not like its super expensive to have some of these things in place that can make it really easy for you. And then that frees up then the staff to be able to be able to actually spend more time on making sure that it's a super experience and that the customer's really happy'.
- Interaction on their own terms – customer 008 – 'I do enjoy the personal interaction, finding a little bite more out about people and so on. But I think, from a really personal perspective, I've always liked that from the point of view when I'm kind of in control of the interaction. I do want to have a bit more just switch off and not have to interact with people 24/7'.
- A blend being offered – not restricting to one or the other and giving the customer the choice

## Appendix D: Annotated transcript example (customer)

### Customer 007 Transcription

I = Interviewer

P = Participant

I: Tell me about your general likes and dislikes of hotels whether it be for leisure stays or business stays

P: Like everybody I hate a queue, so I hate queues at desks so overall that's about the only dislike that I have about checking in to a hotel. When I'm thinking about travel for business when I'm travelling for business, I don't know whether it's because I work in travel or what but I tend to be more cautious about going around people who are clearly travelling for leisure, so I try and like stick out of the way and kind of let the check in desk do whatever it is that they want to do with the leisure person whether that be explaining I don't know like I don't know about the local area or where they can get meals that kind of stuff or transport because I'm kind of a little bit more self-sufficient I like to think so I'd much rather just turn up at the desk or try and use one of the self-check in kiosks to avoid taking up their time because it feels a little bit more precious and I don't feel as if I need that kind of attention especially when travelling for business, I just kind of want to be left alone

I guess the likes that I have is lots of check-in staff, I can't stand it when you walk in to a hotel and you see just one person clearly with a look of distress and panic all over their face because they have a queue of six/seven people starting to form and they're feeling like they're having to rush through the whole process there's nothing worse than that so I don't think understaffing the hotel check-in experiences is particularly a good thing. It doesn't make you feel comfortable as somebody waiting and the queueing itself makes you feel uncomfortable. So, I just don't like that whole experience I won't lie. That was another dislike, it turned into a dislike didn't it, but I like to see plenty of staff to avoid that dislike from actually happening Kate so that's more the point.

INTERVIEW  
IS USE FOR  
EXAMPLE  
OF  
QUEUE  
NOISINESS

So I definitely like, I do enjoy speaking to somebody when it's more for leisure. So if I'm checking in to a hotel I would prefer and opt to use the check in desk to hear about the facilities, to learn about where I can get transport from and understand, because "restaurant etiquette" in a hotel is often quite intimidating so at least you have the chance at check in to understand that, so I definitely like that when checking in for leisure.

I: I have to say very considerate of you when you're travelling on business to allow the leisure guests, because usually when people stay on business, they start getting angry. Very considerate of you. I guess that's because you work in industry though?

P: It is, it's the only reason why. It's because I work in the industry and I just think people have tough enough jobs as it is, no matter what job it is, there's no point in somebody else being angry about it. Especially when you know the kind of pressures that hospitality staff are under in order to perform and do things efficiently and get through everything that they need to talk about. So, let them deal with it and I'll just fend for myself.

important  
- customer  
understand  
- however  
I know from  
someone who  
works in  
travel  
industry

I: It's definitely a trait of working in the industry because you obviously understand the pressures both sides. I would say definitely I agree with you with the queues. If you were in a

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hotel say and you saw that queue and you saw that the check-in staff were overwhelmed, there was a massive queue, and you had the option to either use the self-service kiosk, or an app, would you see the queue and think no I'm going to dodge that and use the technology

P: I'm going to throw probably a lower level curveball in to this as well that yes if I was checking in to a Premier Inn, I would, I would go and do that I would use the self-service kiosk if it was Premier Inn, Holiday Inn you know kind of three to four star hotels where it's not necessarily a resort that you wanted to check in to that's probably the key difference if it's a city centre hotel I'd probably just avoid it and go and use the self-service check-in kiosk because it just gets you through the whole process and there's nothing worse than standing around in a lobby or a hallway for too long. If one the other hand I was checking in to I don't know a resort in the Maldives I remember getting off the boat that took us down to the island and when checking in there, there did turn out to be a little bit of a queue and I made sure that I stood and waited because I want to hear what they've got to say about the resort. The same with the hotels that I might have checked in to in Disney in Orlando or wherever because you want to hear what they have got to say and I feel like that information isn't something I'm going to be able to absorb through a kiosk, and I don't want to do it when I get to my room, I want to have that conversation with somebody there and then and know that I've truly kick-started a holiday. But if you're checking in to a city centre property, you kind of don't mind because you're there for the city, not for the property. Does that make sense.

I: It completely makes sense, definitely. So when you checked in at the Maldives and you had to queue and then you ended up having that interaction with the staff, how did that go?

P: Brilliant. So we had a queue, there as probably only about five or six people stood in that queue, you know five or six couples but straight away they recognised that there was a bit of a queue and people were there. So very quickly you got right the way to the front of the line because naturally you're in a five-star island resort, they're not going to allow people to queue there for half an hour while everybody gets their five minutes of talking with the check-in desk person. When you finally get to the front, it incredible because they start to show you the resort map, they really explain to you where your room is going to be located, where you can go to pick up kind of diving equipment, they'll explain everything and show you it on a map so that, having it explained as well as being shown where it is on a map, I think that was kind of key. That was by far my best check-in experience. It was having that interaction with a smiley person who you then recognised, and they remember your name when you're walking around the resort, there's a lot of benefits to it. They first off kind of explained where the rooms would be, where all the facilities were located, they then started to explain about the different restaurants that were available and where you could go in order to get midday snacks. You then had the opportunity to ask them what side of the island has the better coral reef, which all of these things are kind of key when you're going to somewhere like the Maldives as opposed to I don't know if you were going to Dubai you might ask something about the waterpark or whatever it might be. So it was nice to have that interaction because you felt as if someone was understanding you and taking the time to make you feel instantly at home. Then obviously they organise for your luggage to be picked up and taken across to your room, and then guide you over to where you can get a drink and just start to relax and it makes the whole check-in process a lot simpler because you've dealt

more interesting  
persons  
require  
more person  
interaction  
for  
explanation  
queue  
management

Recognition  
Person  
Mentioned  
AJ  
best  
P.P.

with a person. So any questions that do come up you don't have to remember I'll ask somebody later, you can just ask them there and then.

I: How would you have felt if you had to use the technologies that you've normally used to check-in, in that hotel, how would you have felt had that experience been changed slightly?

*- Personalisation*  
P: In that scenario I just think that it would have felt as if the hotel could have been anywhere in the world, I wouldn't have felt very engaged with it to be honest, I think it would have been a very cold front because you turn up there expecting a personal level of service because of the standard of the property that you're checking in to. So I think I would have found it quite jarring to be fair, very like 'oh so I've got to use this what I used to check-in to a Premier Inn because they've got a turnover of people staying for one night' and they don't really want queues at the desk – I'm being expected to do that in a resort where I'm going to spend the next week and you're expecting us to do the same thing – I think I would have been a little bit annoyed to say the least

I: I think when you're staying somewhere like the Maldives as well it's not like you're just hopping on a train to the nearest city centre and you're kind of aware of the surroundings and you can read about things where this is more of an experience holiday isn't it, and you kind of want to be immersed in it, rather than it being a passive kind of holiday. So when you were in that kind of check in process and you arrived at this hotel – how did it make you feel, that whole check-in process?

P: Well it makes you feel like a five star guest because you know that somebody is waiting for you in front of whoever it might be you know behind a desk. Somebody is waiting because it's their job and they want to speak to you to deliver the service that they've been trained to deliver. You know, people have to go through pretty intensive training courses to make you feel that special, and you pay enough money so you should feel that special. Sorry I don't think I answered your question there did I?

I: In a round about way you did, just how did it make you feel when you were being checked in

P: Oh it makes you feel special. It really does, it makes you feel like you're the only person that really matters which I think is a key difference – they never show that they've just served somebody before, it's like every single time the reset button gets hit. So they reset straight away after checking in one person, it's like the slate's wiped clean and they start all over again as if you're the only person who turned up is how it makes you feel, which is very nice.

*- Relationship  
- Personal  
Interaction*

I: Very special, because it's hard to come by – staff that are able to do that and make you feel that way

P: Well it's part of their training isn't it? A hotel at that sort of level, or you would hope that a five star level they would be training their staff to make every single stay feel individual, so it's just part of their training programme isn't it, they invest a lot in it

I: It takes the type of person they hire as well, and their demeanour and their openness to welcome people. You might want to use this hotel as an example for this question, but tell me about your last great hotel experience and why it was such a great experience.

P: I think I will go with the Maldives one – so about the overall experience of it you mean. It was the personal attentive level of service so within the first two days there wasn't anywhere that you could walk on that island that somebody didn't know who you were. If they didn't know who you were you certainly didn't know that they didn't know if that makes sense. I had no idea that they didn't know you by first name, so within the first kind of twenty four hours you'd been escorted along so you met the person at the check-in desk, you'd then been taken out to your room by one of the bell-boys on one of the jeep things, I don't know what they're called but you know what I mean, and they remembered your name. And then the next day you would get up and when you went to breakfast because it was in the same place, they always had the same staff. So it was like consistency, and that made it incredible, because you just felt really at home and it almost felt like they were looking for the cues of whether you felt uncomfortable or unsure about something, so they, I don't know how they did it actually, it's almost like a mind-reading experience because you could go anywhere, they would know who you were and if you looked a little bit lost it was like they already knew that you were lost before you even felt as though you had the confused look on your face. So it was above and beyond, it was like a five star resort with six star service is how it felt. Which just makes you feel at home and as if nothing is too much of a problem, which is always very nice when you're on holiday and you want to be pandered to a little bit don't you.

- cues anticipating need

I: Definitely, especially a luxury holiday like that you don't want to be worrying about anything but it sounds as if they just anticipated needs all the time

P: They do and I think the only other place where I think I've seen it was in Dubai and I went to the Armani Hotel in the Burj Khalifa and they were very much similar. So I only went there for the day just to go to look round and use the facilities and stuff and that was the only other place where I seen that kind of level of anticipation. It was truly above and beyond what you would ever expect, you didn't have to ask for anything, they already anticipated it, which is extremely nice because not only did you pay five star money and want to be treated in that way, it was something that you couldn't quite put your finger on, you know money couldn't buy it is how it felt. It really ties in your holiday experience. So I guess that that's more about the people, and then the resort is something else – people invest a lot of money in that don't they so that experience outside of the interaction of people – there's a lot of money gets spent on it put it that way.

anticipating needs -  
payment -

I: Definitely and it's all about your surroundings and kind of the resort that you're in isn't it, it's one thing being made to feel at home but then another thing to then look at the place and go actually you know pinch me I'm here, it's that kind of moment isn't it

P: Very much so, actually what I do remember at the hotel that I stayed in it was an Outrigger property, and Outrigger chain had put devices in each of the rooms and the devices not only opened the curtains, closed the curtains, turned on the aircon, it basically pretty much ran you a bath it felt as if it was that intense as to what the machine could do. But within there, there were FAQ guides with a resort map so lets face it when you're going

to somewhere in the middle of the ocean if you lose your paper map, at least you always had a version you could click back on to. It also had things in there like the restaurant opening times that you knew you could kind of plan without having to ask anybody so whilst I believe there was no emphasis on using technology in that particular resort because it was all about the human touch, there were still, well, there was still technology involved but only if you wanted it, it was only there if you just wanted to remind yourself of something. It wasn't the primary focus for people to use it.

I: More like a supporting role? The supporting act to the main actor?

P: That's absolutely it. I think there was something that the people had informed you of you had a backup plan somewhere, so yeah it was quite useful to know, more for the resort map I think than anything else.

I: Was that a tablet device?

P: It was yeah, I won't lie it was a bit ugly, it had this huge base of the back of it and then the tablet on the front with like these extra buttons around the outside of it, so I think it was more to do with it was a fully integrated system as opposed to it being kind of an ipad, it was linked in to the actual building into the room itself, so it must have just used certain parts of an interface that existed already where they just plugged in their resort information in to.

I: But still really useful, as ugly as it may have been

P: I mean honestly, if you threw it at somebody it could know somebody out, it wasn't the slickest of devices but I don't know how many ipads I guess actually, it is possible to have ipads and things that you can link back to your room where you can actually open the curtains from it and stuff so god knows why they did it, it wasn't even old, I think the resort only opened in 2014, yeah I think it only opened in 2014. I think it had been open about 6 months so I don't know what the excuse was for the ugly fat technology but it was good nonetheless.

I: Yeah, it did its job. I was going to ask about your experience in the Armani hotel because I know that your expectations would have been heightened going in to somewhere like that especially in the Burj Khalifa, and particularly in Dubai you know it's a place of excess and opulence isn't it, how did you feel when you walked in to that space?

P: more because of the hotel setting itself, intimidated I won't lie, you get a little bit of the imposter syndrome of oh I'm not quite worthy to be here, so I don't know whether it aims itself at people maybe who aren't me, or I'm not too sure where the property is aimed at, it's very niche and I think its aesthetically beautiful which is the reason why I wanted to go and see it for the day, but outside of that it was very cold, they do use technology there so whilst there is a concierge desk, the fact that you do check in using a tablet which a person hands you a tablet still, it was very transactional, which I thought was a little bit of a surprise. It was only once you got through that the personal service really kicked in. So initially it's very jarring and then all of a sudden you get through the door and that's kind of when the service kicks in.

Mix of tech + touch.

I: You would think it would be the other way round?

P: You would have thought, again I can't help but wonder if it's because it is the Armani hotel where it felt a little bit more like that, whether they were just extremely busy or what but yeah, it was a little bit strange, intimidating is the right word

I: Was it the staff that made you feel that way, or was it the other guests, or what was it?

P: It was the building, it's the actual building itself, it's the aesthetic of the grey slate walls and everything is stunning. I mean it is absolutely out of this world, everything from the flooring right the way through to the lighting in the ceiling, the whole, the everything is just very, what's the word if you were going to talk about art. Brutalist, is that kind of word – it's very brutal on the eye, which makes you feel a little bit 'oh', it's not a cosy place that you walk in to, it's very brutal. **But as I say, once you are through the door, the second that you start kind of walking through the reception area there are people everywhere, attending to whatever you might want. The second that you step in to the restaurants off the property itself then it all kind of heightens, and it all goes up a notch.**

Feeling  
acting -  
as the  
jerk keeper  
?

I: I suppose that technology is the admin/transactional bit at the very start, you have to get that over with somewhere, so I suppose its breaking that barrier and then you're open to that service. So can you talk through an example of when you were interacting with the staff there and how they made you feel?

P: I guess probably more so thinking about ordering drinks, so actually being at the bar at that point because you were already through, and it's all done, when you're just sat there, there were, how many bar staff must there have been, I mean the bar was absolutely huge, but in terms of bar staff there must have been at least three or four people who were just milling around constantly cleaning everything, but then that made you feel as if they were really approachable, so the second that you got down to kind of maybe half an inch or an inch left at the bottom of your drink, it was like shall we get you a new one sir, **there's like a constant flow of conversation, and the they're there if you want to speak to them, and then the second that you don't they almost vanish in to the woodwork a little bit, so it was kind of that they know when to appear and when to disappear which is truly what you would expect of a five star hotel,** in a city where I would imagine at the Armani hotel that predominantly its going to be business travellers as opposed to necessarily leisure, or potentially celebrities that you know, possible stayed there, and in which case you wouldn't want anybody to be standing over the top of you, so I think the staff very much catered to the level of person that would visit the hotel.

I: Sounds like they were very discrete, in terms of their service

P: Extremely, I think the only thing that you can liken it to is probably if you've ever seen on yacht documentaries where the yacht staff are always there, there is plenty of them, but you never see them and you never hear from them. Its only whenever you need something that they have kind of already anticipated your next move. It's like taking that and putting it in to a hotel, so you get that truly exceptional level of service.

I: It sounds nice, I don't know if I would get over the whole intimidation at the start, it's like a test

P: Well it feels like that, but then a lot more of it has got to do with the fact that you turn up to the Burj Khalifa and it's the whole atmosphere of, maybe it was me, and you know, other people like celebrities or people with a lot of money might actually expect that, and you know, are used to arriving to somewhere as impressive as the tallest building in the world to check in to a hotel, so maybe that's all you know, pretty normal for them, but it's not to me. It's not for me.

I: Can you describe to me your most memorable encounter with a hotel staff member? Someone that really sticks out to you.

P: Do you know, is it really wrong that its normally the bar staff, so I mean I went to New York it was last February and I remember that the Crowne Plaza that they used kind of a mixture of people and technology for check in but then afterwards when you're in the bar that overlooks Times Square I remember distinctly the man who was serving us because he would come over and he was asking questions more about our accent etc, so because obviously mine is little bit of a higgledy piggeldy one, I think I sound very north eastern but then other times I don't feel like I do, then obviously Americans just have a thing for British accents full stop don't they, but I don't know, it just kind of felt really nice that he kept on coming back over and he was topping up the drinks and he was just really attentive and he was fun to be around, he was fun, he made the experience more exciting as a result of him being there, we didn't have to go to the bar and he just kept coming round, topping up the drinks and chatting, it was more of a personal level interaction that made it special. That was what the key was.

Reminded  
friendly  
service

I: I suppose for somewhere like New York and particularly Times Square you're in that really memorable place, so it's nice that you actually remembered the person from the hotel as opposed to the big lights of the big city

P: I couldn't remember the gentleman's name unfortunately, but I remember him personally enough, I can remember what he was wearing like a black shirt and everything on, but I couldn't tell you what the gentleman's name was, but yeah he was just fun to be around. He made the whole experience of sitting in the hotel bar which the hotel bar is the lobby almost, so it's kind of, its very strange because in New York obviously there's not a lot of space to fit many things in, so it was kind of a strange space, but he just made the whole thing fun.

I: Yeah, and you can't replicate that with ordering your drink on a tablet and having it delivered, it's that level of personality isn't it, that they inject into the service. It's nice that you remember that.

P: Yeah he was really good he was really fun, but yeah carrying on from that point that you've just said there about you kind of want somebody that's quite calm and very relaxed behind the check in desk, you want you know, room service, etc to be very you know you don't want anybody to speak because you don't want to have an interaction, and then when you're in the bar you need those lively people so you need a whole mixture of people in order to make the experience come together, because if one of them is a little bit abrasive

then the rest of it just goes out the window. So that must be a challenge to try and get all of that to pull together quite nicely in terms of the whole experience.

I: Definitely, and I know what you mean about room service. Can you give me an experience of where you have used technology during a hotel stay, so whether it be check in at a kiosk or a hotel app, or anything like that but something that you have used to facilitate your stay

P: I actually booked a Hilton in Wolverhampton, of all of the random places, a Hilton Wolverhampton, I booked it on the IHG app on my phone. It was a business trip, so it was nice and easy to do. You can put in your IHG, actually who is it, is it IHG?

I: No so Hilton is it's own company, IHG is Crowne Plaza and others

P: So I booked it on the Hilton app, not the IHG! Hilton Honors, yes its because I keep getting emails from IHG left right and centre because I stayed in the Crowne Plaza in Times Square and it never stops. And for some reason with it being an American company GDPR doesn't seem to apply, so unsubscribe from the distribution list in America is nigh on impossible, anyway I guess that is something we can come on to about technology. So yes, I booked it on the Hilton app, and put in the Hilton Honors number, so obviously you collect points which is good for business travel. I remember checking in and using the little kiosks, so they had multiple little kiosks and I distinctly remember that there was just in general a lack of people around, but on that day in particular, I didn't want anybody around so it was perfect. I was just like nope, I just want to get in and rest after literally stepping off a train and needing to go straight in to a meeting pretty much, and it was nice just to be able to have booked it on the app literally the day before because it was very last minute and then I turned up at the hotel, put the reservation number straight in, literally the key card came popping out, done and I was in the room. So before you know it, I was out the way and I didn't have to talk to anyone, and that was absolutely fantastic. It was just what I needed on that day.

decision  
not to  
talk to  
anyone  
-  
then  
had stayed

I: I like that though, when you really don't want to speak to anyone that you've got the option of not speaking to anyone

P: Exactly, exactly, it's quite interesting they way that they do it. So they've got the self-check in kiosks kind of down the side and then the actual receptionists themselves along the front so it was different, you didn't have to see anybody before you did the self-check in basically, you didn't have to look at anyone. So then if you did want somebody then you could of literally just opted to turn slightly the other way and then you would have found someone. But it was much better though, didn't have to talk to anyone which was nice.

I: But for Hilton is still you know a four star hotel it's classed as mid-scale not luxury but did you expect to see anyone with it being a Hilton?

P: No, no I don't think so. I don't think I expected it. No I don't think there was really an expectation of it, I think something that Hilton kind of generally do quite well overall in all of their properties is that I think because they've got such a blend of leisure and business travel they kind of allow the person to decide which traveller are you today, is the way that it feels,

on customer terms

and I think that's how they kind of left it. What do you want to do, it's your choice and I think that's kind of nice because then if you've got somebody greeting you through the door I mean unless you had a tonne of suitcases or whatever, had the location have been New York I would have expected it, in Wolverhampton I didn't expect it, so maybe it is more down to location. If I checked in to Dubai I would have probably expected somebody because I'm going on holiday, I'm not going for a two night stay in Wolverhampton. So maybe its more down to location.

I: Location and purpose of trip by the sounds of it because I cant imagine many people go to Wolverhampton for a two week holiday, there may possibly be a market for it, but technically the only time I would ever go is business, so I suppose you're absolutely right, it's finding that balance that they offer leisure guests that option but then for business guests that come in and out it's ideal that they've got kiosks. Was it the first time that you'd stayed at that hotel and used those kiosks?

P: It was the first time I have stayed in that hotel and actually the first time I've ever stayed in Wolverhampton and since I've been back about three times after.

I: So first time in Wolverhampton, first time in this hotel, and then you're met with this kiosk, how did you navigate that and how did you feel?

P: Quite straight forward because I mean it was literally there asking whats your surname so it was really straight forward, what's your surname, whats your booking reference number, well I've got that, done. It loads up on the screen, this is what you've booked, is that it, yes done. So I remember it being very fast, it was extremely quick, there was no chattiness, apart from asking do you want to add breakfast on, that was the only thing that it really kind of asked. Because apart from that I don't think it really would have been any optional extras, so I remember being asked if you wanted to ask breakfast on to it, but apart from that it was literally booking reference number, surname if I remember rightly, straight through to another screen, do I want to add breakfast yes or no, no I didn't and then that's it, your card is kind of printed with obviously all of the card details and the number and everything all on there so it was straight forward and it was quite easy I didn't struggle with it at all. It was good overall, the fact that I managed to get through without talking to anyone was even better so it shows you how quick it was.

I: I think when you've got it in your mind and you go you know I'm not going to speak to anyone and I'll find the nearest check-in, have you ever got to that point where you've come across an issue with using anything like that, like a kiosk or an app.

P: yes, where was it, I can't even remember the hotel. It was definitely in a Travelodge because Travelodge are quite large I'm trying to keep things low touch aren't they because obviously it's their model; budget, self-service kind of crucial. Definitely remember it was a Travelodge, can't remember if it might have been Sunderland or Manchester, it was one or the other and the kiosk I mean it was just a bot of a nightmare from what I can remember it being. You were touching the screen and it was like touching something over the other side of the screen, and it was all just a bit of a nightmare. It was like, this must have been what maybe a good eight years ago, nine years ago so touch screens I don't think were that well known for being in hotels at that point, it would have been quite new. It was more of a

customer recognition level

hindrance more than it was a help, so I remember somebody trying to guide me how to use it, like the actual check in staff and even then you just could not get it to do what you wanted to do, so after all of that fuff on I then had to go to a check in desk in order to be issued with a card, well why didn't you just get this right the first time around and now I'm annoyed and didn't need to be if you knew that there was a problem, just take me straight over to the check in desk. It's not difficult.

I: And then you're kind of starting the stay on the wrong foot straight away aren't you

linked to payment

P: Absolutely, I mean to be honest with you there's not a lot of complaining you can do about a Travelodge, it's virtually basic isn't it, it's a bed for the night so you don't come to expect great things but I think with that you're still paying somebody a service, you know you're still paying money to stay there so you do expect the very least that you can check in with no problem. I think that's just a given in any hotel regardless of how much you've paid for it even if it was a hostel you would expect just to check in without any problem.

I: definitely, and in that kind of situation when you start on a negative it normally perpetuates and customers start looking for things don't they, and they start picking, because I know if I'm annoyed and if I arrive somewhere I'll think right, they've annoyed me so what else is wrong and I'll look for things. Its just in your nature isn't it, well it is in mine as a hotel critic.

P: I think you're right, when you get there and you know you've walked through your bedroom door and you find that there's only like a pillow on the bed and you go to look in the cupboard and you can't find a second pillow, I mean it might just be because I have to sleep with three pillows because, well I don't know why I just have to, I have to be dramatic in that way Kate, I need three pillows to be able to sleep, and there's only one on the bed and you know that you can't find anyone because it's a Travelodge I mean apart from the cleaner who probably sweeps the floor probably once, I dunno, probably once a day or whatever that may look like, you can't find somebody to go and talk to. So that frustrates you even more, and then you're right, it does just perpetuate doesn't it, it gets worse and worse as the stay goes on. But then you also look at it when you check out and you think mmm, ah well I'm not going to complain about it because it was only about, I don't know, £35 for the night or whatever you pay so yeah it's a bit of a fine line.

I: As you rightly say, it's a basic expectation what you're paying for is a bed for the night, a clean, comfortable bed for the night, being able to check in without any issue and being able to check out without any issue, if they fall down at any part of that it doesn't matter how much you pay for it, its what you've paid for, so if you're not getting that then they have fallen short. So I wouldn't ever feel bad for saying that about Travelodge.

So when you've used Hilton where you used the app and then used the kiosk while you were there. Did you use the hotel app for anything other than booking your room?

P: no, to be honest Kate that's the area that I've never really used I don't really think, I think probably apart from when I went to Florida and I think I used it then, but that was more to find out the shuttle times and that was about it. So I've never really used a lot of hotel apps. To be honest I don't like it, it's a personal preference, its just I don't want anything extra on my phone, I don't want to have to download an app, I don't want to have to find my location

and make sure my reservation matches up to it, I don't want to have to do any of that stuff. If I want something, I want to be able to pick up an iPad or an information sheet or call somebody while I'm in the room. I don't really want to be doing it all on my phone. I don't know why, but I don't. I couldn't tell you the exact reason why I don't like it but I just generally don't at all like it.

I: I mean your phone is very personal to you, so as soon as an organisation says you have to have an app, you have to control it, I suppose it then pushing that pressure on to you as the customer to then control it, but it's interesting that you very much like to use the technologies that's available but that's provided by them

P: yeah I don't mind using technology that's provided by them, but the second that it involves me and my personal device I don't like it. Maybe one of the reasons behind why could potentially be because of the job that I do anyway. I do download a lot of apps, airline apps, hotel apps, tour operators apps, and it gets to the point where the push notifications, maybe this is it, the push notifications that they're constantly sending out to you, it's kind of subliminal marketing that's direct on my phone, it's not even an email that I can sweep away or whatever, once that apps on my phone its on my phone and then I get the little red dot and it's all just a bit much, it's all a bit much. I just don't like it, I want to use something that they have provided, or that they've printed or speak to somebody on the phone. Generally I think I feel a little bit self-sufficient when it comes to that, I'm a bit more 'I'll just go and ask a question', I've got a tongue in my head, that's what its for.

*tech anxiety*

I: I suppose constant interruption via notifications, particularly if you're on a leisure stay, that's probably the last thing you'll need, is more notifications about things.

P: I tell you I remember using the, I had the Tui app, I'm sure it was the Tui app downloaded. I went on a two week all inclusive holiday to Turkey and the whole time I was there, because of the live chat functionality that's linked in to it you get notifications saying 'your resort rep has just arrived' and I'm like, I don't want that. Why do I care? I don't want to speak to her, if I wanted to speak to her I would go and find her. But then, that's obviously just a personal preference as opposed to I might be the exception to the rule rather than the norm. A lot of people might want, because they're on a package holiday, to know your reps just arrived, come and ask a question, or we'll be holding a meeting at I don't know, 10 o'clock in the morning please drop in. I didn't want to know that though, so I ended up deleting the app after a couple of days of being on the two week holiday. I just think, well because I knew where she was, it's not difficult, it's a Tui exclusive property. I know where she's going to be. That was another one where the app had really annoyed me, so maybe I've just had a couple of bad experiences in the past and I don't know, in general I don't like apps on my phone to start with. Whether that be games or even this new Clubhouse app I've literally disabled the whole thing because I'm getting notifications every couple of minutes and I can't stand it. It drives me mad.

*How can the app engage and make them care?*

I: it's just constant interruption in your day I think for now it must be about 5 years since I turned all notifications off from my phone, I think if I want to look at social media and catch up, it's on my terms and my time, so yeah the only thing that will come through to me are text messages and phone calls, it's very traditional for a gen-x, quite traditional in that sense.

P: I think we're quite similar.

I: You know work interrupts you too much in your day and you've just mentioned there about the all inclusive holiday you were on saying there was a meeting scheduled at 10, I can't think of anything worse than when I'm on holiday if someone said to me there's a meeting at 10 I'll be like, I've come away on holiday to escape meetings, don't drag me in to a meeting on holiday

P: it's so true, it's so true, sometimes I think the use of technology for some reason is forced upon everyone, and there doesn't seem to be enough preference setting, or for some reason I'm the one who has to go and now sort out that preference.

I: Like push everything on to you, and then you have to sort it out?

P: Yeah very annoying

I: I totally get that. So tell me a bit more about this Tui app. So you were on your all inclusive holiday, did you have to have the app? Why did they sell it to you?

P: The Tui app was literally because you could do an online check in online or via the app, so it didn't make any difference, there was nothing major in there, there were excursions where you could view prices and what was available, so it was additional product on top of your holiday so it was nothing ground breaking in there that I needed, it was all extras which maybe if I didn't work in travel I might want to see all of that stuff but I do feel like because of the jobs that we do working in travel and our understanding of the industry and how it works I feel a little bit well I know what I can do, I've already researched this because its kind of my job to know this, nevermind for just my own personal travels, it's kind of something that you need to know. So anyway I have downloaded it, massively regretted it, deleted it and its gone. But I didn't need it, it wasn't essential to any part of the trip, but I can see the flip side of it for people who might have been unsure or if you didn't know anybody that worked in travel or if you were older if you wanted to know more information just generally or wanted to hear from Tui, then it would have been perfect. You would have wanted that app on your phone.

I: I suppose again it's that notion of it being the support act to the main service, the main face to face service. Interesting, and interesting that you binned it off after two days

P: I don't need it

I: So comparing your experiences, you told me about the hotel in the Maldives and different experiences in New York, comparing that to your experience in Hilton where you already decided you didn't want to speak to anyone, you managed your whole stay on your own, which of those did you prefer, and how would you compare them?

P: it is for very different reasons, I think when it comes to, I'm going to break it down in to four pieces, leisure travel in a beach destination – its amazing to have the five star service, so it's really, really good to have it for that reason. So if I'm going on a beach holiday for leisure, I want that level of service because nine times out of ten the beach holiday resort is

a resort, it's not just somewhere to stay, and the reason that you're travelling there isn't to go and explore necessarily a city. Or the hotel in itself generally has a lot more to offer, more pools, more restaurants more I don't know, evening entertainment, just generally a lot more on-site facilities. So in a city, so where on a beach I would want that level of service, speaking to somebody to you know ask questions that kind of stuff, in a city destination I would probably happily use a kiosk if it meant avoiding a queue. If there was no queue I would definitely speak to somebody, and the funny thing here is that I probably wouldn't even ask them what was around because I'd probably just want to crack on and do it myself. I would then use things in the room in order to educate myself about whats available in the local area, or revert back to apps that have nothing to do with the stay whatsoever, do I don't know, Lonely Planet that kind of stuff. So it would kind of be the complete opposition to beach. If I was staying in a beach destination for a conference, I would expect a little bit of understanding of where the facilities are that are more pertinent to the conference itself. Where do I need to go for breakfast, where do I need to be for the sessions, where is everything going to be held. I would want that regardless of city or beach destination but outside of that I wouldn't necessarily be asking anything other than can I use the pool after hours, that kind of stuff. But it would be nice to you know speak to someone at check in, I would use the kiosk as the back up. But then if I was travelling to a city for business, you know Wolverhampton, Newcastle or wherever it might be, I would much rather use the kiosk and not talk to anyone, wherever possible. Generally because you've normally just a little bit more travelling, you're already feeling independent because you've travelled by yourself anyway to get to that destination. Nine times out of ten you're there for a meeting, you want to prepare for it, you don't want to have a conversation, so that's why I would break it down in to four different types; leisure and business, and city and beach destinations. If that makes sense.

*Service Judgement*

*Tech as back up, not preference  
I mix of both tech-touch*

I: It's a very comprehensive answer! What interests me there through was where you mentioned about the city for leisure you mentioned that if there was a kiosk you would dive for that if there was a queue, but if there was no queue you would select and go and speak to the person, so you would choose people over tech, if you had the option you would go for personal interaction if it was convenient for you, that's your preference?

P: I think I would, especially if I was on leisure and not for business, because I think there is something nice, it cheers you up, it's a personal you're talking to in that destination, you're on holiday, you're just arriving there's still some adrenalin and excitement running through your veins so therefore you actually don't mind it as much, it's kind of nice. I think I would, I think I would always opt for the person over the tech in a leisure world if I was travelling for holidays. If there were queues, etc, that I would skip the person and go and find whatever, I would go and sort it out. Its more impatience clearly Kate than anything else

I: it's just time isn't it, time is so precious, and I think even if you're on a leisure or a business trip, your time is precious for obviously different reasons, because if it's business you either want to get caught up on work but it its leisure that's your time off and its valuable, so I suppose if you're waiting in queues that's the last thing you want to be doing isn't it.

P: Absolutely.

I: What's interesting when you broke that down was its almost like a switch in you that changes your preference, whether you're there for business or there for leisure, there's no in between

P: Nope, there is not. I think there is just so many other things that you need to think about when you go away on business when you travel somewhere for another meeting or whatever else and I just can't be bothered. I don't care what you've got to tell me about the car parking facilities, because I don't drive so it would never even make any difference to me whatsoever, I don't care about how far away the Centre for Life is from a hotel in Newcastle. I don't care, therefore if I don't need to know it, I'm not even going to waste brain cells in trying to store that random information that I just really don't need to know. I don't need to know it, so there's no point. Let me decide, I'll check in and I'll see you later.

Change in  
business -  
days.

I: On my terms, I'll do what I want - I completely get that and it is almost like a switch in you that you completely change when you travel away on business and I can chatty with people but as soon as I travel alone on business I'm just like just leave me alone, I need to prepare for my meeting, I've got my night planned, and I think its when you live with someone as well when you get that night on business you think right, I've got a night on my own, nobody talk to me.

P: It's so true! I know, this is completely off topic but I know that whenever I have travelled for business, it might have been one of our members meetings for Advantage, etc and if we've gone up the night before because it requires an early start or something like that, that night there might be work colleagues who I've travelled there with, or that are already there and I'll still say no I'm going to get an early night. I don't even go to the restaurant, and I really don't care about eating by myself or being on holiday by myself. All of that doesn't bother me, but I won't even go downstairs, I will just order room service. I want to have everything in my room and be left alone and the door by shut. And I get mentally kind of prepared for things.

I: Absolutely the same, even when you know we said at the start of this interview, you know that interaction with room service, it's kind of like you want your food to arrive but you don't want the awkward bit. Completely get it. So when you are choosing a hotel, I'm going to give you scenario just to make it easier to draw some comparisons, so say you are booking a leisure stay in the UK, what would your preferences be in terms of when you're looking at a hotel and what would you look for in terms of technology available to you, or level of personal service. Would you look for either one of those things when booking a hotel. Which would you prefer?

P: I would look for online availability myself, I wouldn't even think about downloading an app I have work access to bedbanks and suppliers and do it all myself and that would be it. I would possibly look at trip Advisor reviews apart from that I wouldn't even look, I don't think I've ever looked in my entire life whether or even thought about does this hotel offer a personal level of service. I'm probably a little bit bad when it comes to that because I don't really use review sites to post my own reviews or anything like that either so I think I'm a bad example.

I: It's not a bad example, that's just your preference, so what motivates you to book somewhere then?

P: The imagery, the room type, the brand name, so that definitely turns me in to a little bit of a travel snob, knowing what is quite nice in terms of brand names in hotel chains across the world not even just in the UK. I think there is probably a few different parameters. Can I get a good agent price on it by booking through our suppliers, you know that you possibly can't get elsewhere. Price is obviously always important to everyone, everybody wants as much as they can get for their money. Brand name definitely, or chain of the hotel, if its synonymous with kind of affordable luxury or luxury then I'd definitely prefer to opt for that. Room upgrades if there are any free room upgrades, I'll definitely look for that. And I guess really the imagery sells it, I think I'm a very visual person as opposed to, I mean everybody is, everybody wants their hotel to look nice of course, but I'll kind of like make sure and I'll go through some of the Trip Advisor photos that travellers have posted just to make sure that it matches their website and stuff

Hotel  
pret-  
net  
venue  
related

I: Instagram vs reality?

P: Yes absolutely very much so. Yeah that's what probably attracts me, how it looks, brand name, how it carries and I would definitely just book it myself online without needing to speak to anyone.

I: And when you've stayed in 4 or 5 Star hotels what's your level of expectation when you turn up that these hotels. What do you expect when you get there?

P: I'm going to put all of the service to one side because the more I talk about it the more I may actually contradict what I've said earlier on. What I expect from every hotel is bright white sheets, for definitely when you actually get in to the room it needs to smell clean, it needs to look clean. I want things to look modern, I cannot stand a dated bedroom, large shower, so it's all of things you kind of expect. Pre-travel I always make sure that those kind of things are ticked off because when you arrive you're not going to know whether you know, you can't change it if there's a bath tub in the hotel and you wanted a walk-in shower well you can't change that when you get there so there's no point even expecting it when you walk through the door if you know what I mean. But other things like the cleanliness of the property and the style of it, I'm definitely very picky over that before I travel. It has to tick the box and then when I get there if it doesn't match it then I will not be impressed by that lets say.

As  
above

I: Definitely, I'm the one that always looks at the bathroom pictures first because that's my biggest thing. And then when you say you don't like outdated things, the mark of an outdated hotel is the hairdryer that's attached either on the wall or in a drawer

P: Yeah its better for the hotel to actually say they don't have hairdryer. If it's that crap just take it down, because all you're doing is building somebody up to thinking it's going to be alright and then it isn't. I can guarantee you now that 90% of women will still take their own hairdryer in case the one at the hotel is rubbish. What's the point in having it, what's the point? If you can't do anything good don't bother. I think people can do things exceptionally but unfortunately not every hotel chain, brand, especially if its independent that kind of stuff,

not everybody can afford it have every single room in a hotel done up to an exceptional standard. If you can't just do the basics good, don't even try to do it. Don't do it. Don't advertise that there's an iron available in the hotel its some kind of rikshaw MDF thing at the end of the corridor, don't even bother, just avoid it, just say that you don't have it. Because it will cause you more problems in complaints than what it will attract people in the first place.

I: It does, it just detracts from the style of the hotel as well doesn't it. As you say when you start looking at things you think – is this nice or is it not.

P: It absolutely does.

I: I'm going to ask you a final question. If you could imagine a hotel in the future, and it would be your ideal hotel in terms of staff interaction, customer facing technology available, style of hotel, what would that hotel look like, and how would you arrive at that hotel. The power is in your hands to create your perfect experience

P: Oh Kate I've got far too many questions to ask back – where is it in the world, what kind of weather is it, because a skyscraper in New York is very different to what I'd want in the Maldives. In all seriousness, taking out the location of where the hotel would be, I like something that fall in to the affordable luxury category. It doesn't have to be too minimalist, but it should be minimalistic, lots of clean lines very calming colours, I did used to think that the Armani hotel was my favourite hotel because it was so grey and it was moody but its definitely not, its definitely an acquired taste, so lots of clean lines, calm colours and somewhere that feels very peaceful but that's tastefully done. It doesn't have to have massive expensive gold trimmings or whatever but if it has beautiful hardwood floors that would suit me down to the ground. So I'm thinking kind of to put it in to an example of what it would may already look like might be something like a Six Senses resort, that kind of level. So almost like clean, minimalistic, plain. From a customer interaction point of view there would be an option of both, the self check in, as well as the ability to walk up to somebody. There would be at least 4 staff manning the desk at all times, so that there wasn't too much of a queue because I don't like a queue. But I would definitely, I would like the option of both. When it came to all of the services within a hotel or a resort after that I think that's where it shouldn't be replaced. I don't mind doing a dinner reservation potentially on an app or an ipad in the room, if it meant that you got the hotel that you wanted. I don't mind doing that, but the second I got to the restaurant itself I want somebody to kind of know my first name or surname or whatever it might be to make the trip feel special and have that personal touch. Somebody who knows you are when you go to walk through the door of a restaurant, by the pool or by the bar or whatever.

no replacement -  
personal  
touch  
both  
req -> real.

I: So almost eradicating those admin tasks by using technology but having the interaction and the experience with people

P: Make the important parts count. I mean nobody has to pick up the phone and spend 5 minutes trying to make a dinner reservation at a restaurant, so that shouldn't be needed, so I don't mind doing that on an app or whatever in the room but putting the emphasis back on the top-level service in the communal areas that everybody can access, and that personal touch I guess. They don't have to know whether I like steak or whatever else, that doesn't really matter. I'm not paying you know 20 odd thousand dollars a night or whatever to stay at

a suite at the Bellagio you would expect that, but it should just be decent you know people to come and show you around and people who know you by potentially your surname that kind of stuff, smiling at you having a conversation you know – how are you doing tonight, oh hasn't the weather been awful today, because you know the British love to hear it.

I: We love chat about weather, we've never really moved on from the weather chat

P: Not since about 1600 anyway. Kate it's because we've got nothing else to do, we've got work, looking out the window and bed, that's about it.

I: It's been a really tough year. Well thanks so much for all of the answers that you've given, they're so valuable. All of your experiences and the way that you have spoken about them is perfect, so thank you. It was really interesting hearing your different preferences and how difference places change how you want to experience a hotel and what your motivations are. So really interesting, thanks for taking the time.

## Appendix E: Annotated transcript example (employee)

### Employee 001 Transcription

I: Interviewer

P: Participant

P: Hiya, hen how are you? Oh my gosh, I can't hear you. On your name down in the left corner and it's got a little the microphone with a red line through it.

I: Oh, is done? Oh there. How are you?

P: Oh not bad not bad getting through the day you know?

I: Oh I know it's um it's just been a weird year, absolutely weird year, how's everything going?

P: Oh fine little ones at nursery today so like nursery days are great. I've been skipping along like let's get you to nursery, bye. See you at half past five. It's great.

I: Oh, I bet he loves it though

P: Ah he always there's like we average at least one accident for a week and he's there three days a week. Last week twice he flooded the corridor because if they leave the room, the door of the room open too long. He just bolts for it because he knows there's a sink outside for babies. Like it's only like this big, so they can wash their hands and he's just got the taps on and he's like, why do you think he's in like, a music video? Yeah. So what was going on? Tell me.

I: Absolutely nothing. Other than like, well just work. I've been consumed with work this year. like not been anywhere. So I'm just going to get my questions in front of me. So that form that I sent you is pretty much like the theme of the questions that will be asking

P: Yeah.

I: And then how I'll ask them is just worded a little differently. I should have got this up at the start. Or the other thing I need to ask you are you bound by any kind of time? Because it should take about an hour

P: No like, I've leave here at half past four but that's fine

I: it'll definitely not take that long, I'd be worried if the interview took that long.

P: I definitely don't have that much to say.

I: So what I would like to know from you, is what your typical working day looked like on the front office.

P: Typical was desk admin. So like checking in checking out, bills, room allocations, any complaints to deal with, payments, People coming in, like yourself, have requests and things And just juggling all of that, I think that's quite typical.

I: And then, when you say you're dealing with all that, obviously, you've got guests coming to and from the desk. What kinds of requests were the guests coming to you with? On a daily basis?

Access to information

P: Okay, it could range from can I have a taxi, methods of payment? Where's the restaurant? Where's the pool? And can we ask housekeeping to do things? Like, can they have their sheets changed? Or can they have more towels or something was wrong? or whatever? Or if there was something about the room for maintenance, and then and, yeah, that's the broadest sort of spectrum.

I: Yeah. Okay. And what, what most was most attracted to you when you worked in front office roles? What was the best thing about the role would you say? Be as candid as you like,

Dependency on team

P: Well you know my middle names candid, eh? I think the, the relationship you have with your co-workers, and how you handled any sort of situation, I think if you were able to lean on your co workers, whether it's from your own department or others to get to through any situation, then I think you were all right, but I think that was the best thing for front office. Nothing, not that its front office really specifically because I mean, I don't know if I wouldn't put like, I love checking guests in out as my main answer as nothing like that's gonna come up. Relationships between employees over building relationships w/ guests

I: Yeah. So you mentioned relationship with your co-workers? What about relationships with guests and dealing with guests on a daily basis? Was that important to you to have that kind of interaction with guests?

P: Yeah, important. In terms of business guests, the one that came every week, they mostly 90% of them enjoy by catching up about the weekend, the past week, what they've got going on, if they came as a group with their co workers, like sometimes they'll travel together in a car. So you get like a group chat and you build quite a good relationship with them, like when I was leaving, or when some others will leaving they all gave us like gifts to say thank you for their appreciation and stuff. And that sort of really says more than words how much they appreciated because you know, they're away from their families as well. So that interaction was really important for them. And then the leisure guests, they I think they really, I think maybe sort of people my age upwards, appreciate more the personal interactions so like being told for breakfast or ask them questions and that sort of just that it's like the whole almost romance of going in a hotel and having that interaction with the front desk. That's part of the big thing. Whereas younger folk aren't really bothered given the key and they're off.

example of anti-work action  
Not typical of customer accounts & travelling on business - perhaps younger??

- generational differences

I: So would you say it was hard to kind of build that rapport with a younger generation then?

P: yeah, because they're like, not into chatting and they're not really going to tell you don't get a lot out of them. You only get a couple of word answers, whereas the older generation like I got speaking to a couple that were from Aberdeen in Newcastle, and they visited me

every time and they would tell me everything I knew about their son. They were down to visit their other son's grave. I knew about their family everything. But then if it was somebody younger than me, it was just off shopping and I'm going out for a drink it wasn't like, yeah, you wouldn't get that rapport. And you knew it. Like, it wasn't like a big surprise. Whatever happened. It was just like, okay, you need to be polite enough to people and that was it.

- experience of generational differences in building rapport

I: Yeah. So did you think you approached those differently then? And you knew how through experience you knew kind of how to approach that both situations?

P: Yeah, you sort of learn how to speak to people and you just get that instant sort of like, don't get me wrong, like some older folks aren't really interested in telling you they don't really want to chat they just want to get up and get up to their room which again is fine and you get that from the off and on the younger generation you just need to go Yeah, no problem answer their questions rather than questioning them a lot about what they're doing. And that just comes with practice really, like within the first year of working in a hotel, you'll get it down to the ground, like you know.

- importance of interaction - developing social skills in service environments

I: Yeah. So we kind of went off on a little tangent there wasn't in my questions to start asking about kind of building relationships with either generations. It's very interesting. So in terms of the whole study is about self service technologies. And I think a good place to start would be to, for you to talk about the different types of guest facing technology that was available. So what technologies would guests interact with either pre stay or during their stay

P: so at Newcastle, Metro centre that's where we launched the mobile check in so that was the biggest one I've worked with and no one that Marriott was competing with other brands to launch it get launched first get it into full use it was a huge roll out in the way Marriott works it's so scripted and there's procedures and processes for everything so you couldn't really go wrong. And the like some of the guests absolutely loved it like the businessmen that came every week that like just like to say hello to the key and off the go they thought it was brilliant. But the problem being they still had to come and sign the registration card, they still had to come at the desk. So it wasn't like a fully flowing operation. Whereas there's other brands I can't remember what who it is but they've just got like the machines you'd go in and type in your information and it gives you the card and off you go like that would have been if Marriott had done that for the business people they would have been flying Yeah, so I think it was too rushed. Nobody thought about it fully because you run out it's not like you could put an envelope with a registration card and a key on the desk for somebody to come and pick up with their name on it like data protection you can't do that it's not so like people were getting really annoyed with that and they used it so they can just check in checkout choose your method of payment they could write down to reception like can I have this like the room service or whatever and which we would then have to get on the desk even it was really tricky at some points to handle it because you had a timer on the in the software to respond at a time like within a set time and if we you know if the phones were going off if we had a big group check-in and somebody is also writing for stuff like there's only so many mediums of communication you can handle Yeah, and something's gonna trip like whether you can't answer the phone or somebody online or somebody in front of you and it's never gonna be the person in front of you that's the thing so using the technology Yeah, cool if you've got somebody dedicated like I know say Durham had at your service department so they weren't on the desk whereas at Newcastle you were on the desk. And it was really hard sometimes.

- procedural is/was ruining the experience

- tech experience ruining human interaction

new thinking for staff

logging tasks

-negative experience from staff perspective

And it was just like you got the Daily Report through of how you did on your technology scores and it was just red red red, red, and they would be like oh why is it red? You know, if they'd come back with us last week face to face, they would have got it no problem. You know, that was a problem. So that was the biggest one that I would have said at Newcastle and that's sort of how it went really from the off.

I: Yeah. So there's a couple of kind of questions are spinning off from what you've just said. So you've already mentioned how hard they are to, to manage. Because you're all you're trying to manage two kind of different sides. you're managing face to face and you're managing the kind of technological side where you've got them using the online chat to request certain things. How when you're talking to guests about the app or about the online chat or mobile check in how do you kind of communicate the features and benefits of those? Do you communicate it as a as a more convenient way to get in touch? Or do you communicate it as kind of the preferred method of getting in touch How was that talked about to guests

P: I remember that Marriott were really specific in how you put things across so they were really big on you emphasising it as part of your check in like if they hadn't used the mobile check in you were to say oh have you tried have you downloaded the app they were very big on at least getting engagement on the app and that was your way you know you can make your reservations on the app and then you know you can check in and then all you have to do is come and pick up your key but that really wasn't the case because the apps had a lot of like teething issues maybe like depending on if it was like an Android or iPhone like I remember sitting there for ages like trying to figure it out and then people started to go I've got an Android and I hear it doesn't work blah blah blah but the way you said it like you had to make it positive and make it an experience whether it was preferred or quicker or whatever. I mean, it was neither here nor there it was long as you've got them on the app and got them thinking about them making their bookings through that

Staff development  
+ know how to talk  
+ know how to talk  
+ know how to talk

I: and how responsive were they when you were talking about it?

P: I would honestly say I don't think they really cared because they just wanted to like ask the question the normal questions like people are so intent on right I need to know this this and this so for me to then give them an overload information about an app or online check in it was just too much but again, then it's like almost like you walk in to a hotel you're not there learn to be sold stuff like when you check in it's like if that's not on people's frame of mind they've just travelled or whatever like however far for them to then for you and then put on to them have you downloaded this app? Have you done this? Have you done that it's almost like you're firing this stuff at them and they're like nah

I: yeah, it must be quite be quite hard because you you're trying to build a relationship because they're in front of you so you're having that conversation but then you're forcing them to use a different channel to do the same job

P: exactly which was odd and because with Marriott you've got so much points to hit like on your audit standards you had to then mention you have to do this you have to do that like up sells you have to do everything but there's like a lot of people just don't want to hear it and that's the problem you know, they are just there to just go and chill out or whatever they're

Problem for employer, not customer → who would it be a problem?

up to the last things on their mind is to be sold and app or sold a package or whatever so it can be tricky.

- responsibility  
challenging

I: So when these kind of different forms of technology came into play Do you feel you're you kind of hinted at this already but do you feel your role changed in any way when these new kind of channels came in place?

P: It changed by giving us more work because there wasn't dedicated people to sit in the back or to sit next and answer phones, emails and on app requests so like we'd have that as an extra plate to spend on top of everything else it wasn't like this is gonna make your job easier it wasn't anything to help us it was something for the guest and so I would say that would be the biggest change with us. You ended up having to add more stuff to the checklist for like the staff to do like run this report you need to check this you need to check that. And of course for some people like change isn't good so getting them to check another system like on top of Oprah, Marsha, emails everything else Okay, you need to go and check your online request in case someone's chatting to you it's like no, I'm not checking another thing. You might as well find them six mobile phones and go right. Go and respond to everyone on these six at the same time and deal with people face to face off you go, good luck.

- guest focused, not designed with staff in mind

I: sounds quite a challenge. But how does it make you feel like when you were when you were in it and you're having to deal with all that how did you feel about it?

P: super frustrated, because you knew you couldn't something was going to have to drop for you complete the other 90% of stuff and that one thing was just going to have to go so like somebody's towels are going to have to wait 45 minutes to like request it and send that request through to housekeeping. And then housekeeper then when they get up there they go I've requested this an hour ago, how are you so late? And they're like we've just got it through now because I've been stuck dealing with a queue or a complaint or a crew or like could be anything, or I was in a meeting and then there's only one person on the desk. So like it was super frustrating when you're in the thick of it wasn't, wasn't great.

member's  
room  
tasks

I: Yeah I can imagine. So when these were in place, so obviously, post launch. Did these technologies replace any of your daily tasks?

P: No, just simply added, there was no replacement. It was just another way for somebody to tell me they wanted something - not adding anything to the relationship

I: different avenue of inquiry. So let's go my next question was going to be does it have a positive or negative impact on your day to day role? I'm guessing when you're talking about frustration,

P: oh, yeah. And especially because some people like thought it was great. And like, checking in grab your key. But that wasn't the case. Like the whole work for Marriott the whole thing we had visioned in their mind and set out to achieve didn't happen or certainly when I was there wasn't happening then people were getting annoyed with that. So like, we just got the edge of that

I: Yeah, because you are the face of the hotel

P: If they had texted or emailed me as well, but they chose to tell me to my face. At that point, they didn't upload their app.

I: So talk me through an example of when and where you need to get my words out, talk without an example of a time where you've used technology to assist you in delivering service to a guest. So this is using technology to assist you not just assist the guests.

Employee 001

P: Gonna have to just cast my mind back on my many years as a hospitality worker. Assist me and a guest. I mean, I can't. Honestly, there's nothing sticking out in my mind. Because all people would require is just check ins, check out and bring me things to my room. So like to help me. I honestly don't think I ever thought wow, this really helped me.

I: Yeah, so didn't make a difference to your kind of day to day task. It was just a additional work for you.

P: Totally. Yeah.

I: No, that makes that makes complete sense. So when you are dealing with both face to face and having to keep an eye on, you know, the online chat, or the app kind of traffic coming through? How do you manage kind of the guest experience through using both of those ways of delivering kind of service to a guest? How do you kind of keep that mode of professionalism and kind of deliver the dream almost, when you having to deal with all of this

P: just years of practice of putting a face on? Yes of course you can have it. No, it's just I'm I don't know I think sometimes when you're in that mode, like say its front office manager, they you know what comes from higher up and you get given this thing to do and you just have to do it like you have it there's no yes or no about it. Or maybe we should do this or that. This is what it is this is how you manage it you just have to do it. Like there's absolutely no way around it. There's only through it. And if you want to do well at your job, if you want to score well on your scores, then you just have to absolutely give it your all. That's the only thing can do.

work / process related

I: Yeah. So about those kind of self service technologies that guests use so when they use the app or when they use the online chat or whatever are there any service specific tasks that you remember being used all of the time via those technologies. So for example, Was mobile check in more popular? Or was it just online chat to get quick answers with, you know, quick questions what seemed to be the most popular use of those technologies?

P: Definitely check in was absolutely. Because actually, when the Marriott members got first use of it, and they were all over it, like as a Marriott member, and then when you got people more signed up, and they started, it was all about the check in. But again, the way Marriott rolled out was, you just need to click these buttons and you can go and collect your key like, but that didn't happen. But yeah, definitely check in then followed by the requests, like upgrades or extras they started that way. Yeah, that was definitely the way.

Functionality - or the app

I: Yeah. So going back to the kind of the requests when you're responding to guests, was it, in your experience, was it the guests that thought it was just a quick way of getting answers? in actual practice what was that whole process?

P: Yeah, so like that this whole app, and the request thing was rolled out before like that immediate the whole instant communication culture. But what it relied on was somebody being on that day, on the other end all the time, waiting, and to action. And we didn't have that. So like the reality was waiting for me clear whatever I had in front of me and then go right, I need to go into this and have a look. Because yeah there would be a pop up on the screen be like you have a new request, I'm like well, I can click on it but I can't do anything about it yet, because I still need to phone maintenance and then or I'll send it to maintenance. And if I send it to housekeeping, or reply, because always, it wasn't just a simple forward it to housekeeping like it came to us to reply to the guest, and then go to housekeeping. So it wasn't like, what could have the guest, if the guest was making a housekeeping request, it could have gone straight to our housekeeper. But again, that would rely on somebody being at the end of their terminal. So the whole thing relied on somebody being there 24/7, waiting in front of a screen or a phone or whatever, that never wasn't the case. So they would have to wait. It was like they were put to the back of the queue. In behind telephone email. Yeah. And somebody who's at a desk.

not fully automated - I'll a person dealing with it.

people needing people

lack of automation (what with new reqs)

Reliance on someone managing the change

I: So when you you've got kind of all of these kind of channels coming at you so you've got face to face as well as the phone and email and apps and they're all kind of stacked up, what in your experience kind of took precedent?

face to face takes priority in practice

P: Those in front of you. Yeah, every time.

I: Yeah. Because if I imagine it must be hard to say, you know what? I've had an online request waiting for half an hour, I need to go disappear in the office. Just wait there

P: Yeah like just wait there, someone's just been asking me for water for ages. Yeah.

I: And what was the guests reaction when say they had put a request in online, or they've done a quick question on the app, or used the app to get something what was their reaction when they didn't get that kind of immediate response?

P: It was like, it would just be like, maybe sat there going, hit the thing again, hit the thing again, they would just be firing in and be like every five to 10 minutes if they weren't getting a response. And rarely did people come down to the desk or phone and say, I've been asking, I've been on the app, like who's on the other end of this, but like, I always expected people to be like, I've been doing this for ages, why you're not answered. And they're like, well, I'm sorry, I'm here. Like, I can't, you know, like, which was really I honestly, that's what I thought was gonna happen, but I not once. It was just like, if it didn't happen, you would then get an email through the reception email. So what they did was go from the app to the website to find the hotel they were in receptionist email, instead of like then phone or coming down. Yeah, it would get an email and you would then have to respond to that email. Sort it out.

customer avoid use of more how admin for employees

I: So it seems like the preference is to kind of use technology to request things but then when they are doing that, and they're not getting the response that they thought, I can imagine that would change their mood slightly and did you ever feel that?

*Avoidance of interaction*

P: No because you never saw them, but for those that were using it like, you wouldn't, there were some folks that would check in check out you only ever saw them at the start to get their key or just sign the reg card or whatever, or if there's a problem of their credit card, or that was it. But then maybe there were people that did use it, but then found that out quickly that it wasn't a quick way. Like I feel like some business people caught on to that quite quickly. Because they're used to like passing us going to dinner and going, oh, can I have x y and z in my room, and it'd be put up while they were at dinner. Whereas if they'd done it on the app, it would have taken us a while maybe in some cases. And but the young people that used to, I think they realised it's not a manned system? Certainly, at this property it wasn't a manned system. Whereas I remember like at Durham, it was a manned system. So it was done quite quickly.

I: Yeah. So it makes a difference when you've got specific people looking at that, like the one main job is to look at that one part of it

P: Yeah its a full time thing in itself. Yeah.

I: And how did that when you so when you're in a situation at Metrocentre, for example. And you've got kind of these requests stacking up and they've asked multiple times, how did that make you feel, as an employee?

*Feeling  
isn't connect  
to the app -  
not personal*

P: Erm, in some cases, quite overwhelmed, because you're trying to deal with like, 30 other things. And but other times, it was really strange that it wouldn't have an effect on me at all because I just thought its an app. It wasn't like a personal thing. It wasn't like somebody coming back and going, this is the fourth time I've asked to your face. Where is this? Right, right? Because that's what when the pressures on when the person's coming here, and are phoning you from the room being like, what the hell, whereas on the app, it's just, it's totally not personal at all. So like, the guest isn't getting their personal connection, and neither am I, and it makes you care less. Well, for me anyway, I was, you know, obviously, something sorry, but you're bottom of my queue. So as an employee, I was like, most of the time not that bothered. Yeah.

*No way  
blaming it*

I: Because I support when you say, you kind of haven't got that connection with it. It's a very different way of dealing with Yes, it's, it's the same requests that you're dealing with day to day, but I suppose when you receive them in a different ways, and it's not that, you know face to face

P: Oh totally yeah.

I: So I know you've you kind of mentioned this at the very start, but in your opinion, do you think guests have a preference of using technologies? Can self service technologies where they think they're able to kind of take control of their requests? Or do you still think that they prefer to speak to you face to face?

P: I think, overall, the majority is still a face to face thing? I think that won't be for years. yet until like, the whole I'm going to have hotel and I have to check in and see this person or wherever that will go. Or like, I know there are hotels, now where you just go to the thing. And some people love it, like younger folk and maybe some older folk too, but I think it'll be a long time before old, older sort of classic hotels will drop that personal goal, because people say it's a home from home when you want to just relax and know everything's cared for. But there's still that complaining culture. Nobody's going to just wait on a phone or email, if there's something immediately wrong. They want somebody to hear about it now. And I think that will help keep that technology out.

- failures or issues - people need people to fix it, not tech.

I: Yeah. And I can imagine as well that the guests that are staying quite time constrained because they might only be with you for 24 hours. So you know, you kind of give people a day to fix something if you know the check out the following day. So in your experience, do you feel guests rely on staff, either more or less when they use self service technologies?

P: Interesting question. Because even if they're using self service, it's still the staff actually carrying out the end request. Like they want towels, room service, whatever up to their room is still a person that's going to come to their room. Yeah. It's not like we're at the stage of the robot is coming up and doing it yet. And I think, I don't think they've consciously think about in the moment, I think probably when the person knocks on their door and go, Oh, this, I've done this request through the app, and this person has just brought me my request, because it's still a person receiving the request. Do you know that way, it's not quite like Amazon warehouse that gets the machines to go and get it and bring it to the person. Yeah. You know, it hasn't quite taken out that person, The need for the person.

- people needing to interact

- personal interactions remain part of the service

I: Yeah. But they just don't know it. Interesting. So do you think that the guests are comfortable using the technology that's available to them?

P: Yeah, I think so if that's what they're looking for, yeah.

I: Was there ever a time where you had to show them how to use anything or be explained?

P: They, like if they were having trouble, like a function didn't work on their app, say like, if they want to do the online web chat with people or they were trying to make a booking for another hotel and couldn't find it quite often, they would book the wrong hotel, because in the app, it seems quite tricky, like the way they kept doing updates. And that's where I was on it not that long ago. And like, I kept having to like scroll or swipe or something. I was like, why'd they move that over there? Like even my eye wasn't quick enough in catching it. So some people were like what the hells this and you had to like, suss it out yourself kind of thing in the way it was presented between the devices as well could be different, like between Android and iPhones, say for instance. And you had to work out if you weren't, like, if I wasn't, hadn't seen the Android one before I would have to like figure it out there on the spot.

- employees using tech.

I: Yeah. So that's kind of new knowledge that you would just have to have kind of learned because you, in your normal kind of daily, i say normal, kind of pre this technology, you wouldn't have had to know exactly how apps worked. So how did you feel about that, because that's an additional kind of layer on to your daily tasks.

P: So even like setting up the whole thing, like you had to input all the room numbers, room types, what you could have in that room, what you couldn't have in that room. So even like the back door setting up to what you receive on the front end was like, yeah, it was a whole different element. I thought I was working in like some kind of JavaScript, it was weird. I was sitting on group calls. And they were like, Okay, this is how you set up this part of the app and this is how you set up this part of the app. And I was like flipping heck, like, way beyond my understanding, but somehow I managed it. And so I'm learning how to set up from the back end, but also then how to use it on the front end, so that when people came to ask, you, you knew you just have to be on it. So it was just another thing to learn, you know? Yeah.

role change -  
new skills

I: Because it's quite as I said, it's quite different to the role that you have. So it's, it's almost like quite a shift in skills, isn't it? So how did you feel about that at the time?

P: I don't remember thinking, like, Oh, this is not for me, it's changing my role. Because at the end of the day, you're still there as the receptionist as the person as the face of the business, you are like the first and last thing they see, regardless if they've used an app or not. And I think, again, people still like that person to just reassure them, maybe like sometimes, like, if they're asking the question where to go, what can I have what can I not have? Rather than just checking the information sheet on the app. I think I remember thinking you know, this is the end ago, you know like, I don't think I thought like that

I: it's just an extra layer, another string to your bow. So when you have this kind of face to face and technology mix of service, do you feel you or did you feel you could build rapport with guests the same way if they were using kind of a mix of face to face and technology? Or did you feel as though it was it had changed in any way?

P: Yeah, I don't think I don't remember thinking that there's such a change in like, customer attitudes towards you, like some people just saw you as the means to an end. And some folk were there to like, have a good chin wag and even if they didn't need to ask a question about it, they would still just come up and be like, Oh, hey, you know, what, is this and you would deal with it. The same way that they would make a request through you at all think it was any, like, super shift in attitude towards front desk

I: Yeah. So when we're talking about rapport, how important was that to you as, as a front desk manager, how important was it to kind of build that rapport with guests at the start?

rapport writing

P: It's super important because you actually found Well, actually what was about to say I think is a total lie, because what I was going to say was, you build that real face to like rapport as soon as they lay eyes on you, like use the whole 15 5 rule or whatever. And actually, we still got loads of like 10 out of 10 scores from people that used the app to check in and check out so they can't be really had any interaction with them. They were like it was great, because that's what they were expecting. So like you give them it's all about perception and expectation. And if you like knock those two on the head, like you're laughing, regardless if they use technology or not. So actually, the whole face to face thing, for some people depended on the guest, isn't the be all and end all

I: yeah. And what kind of level of assistance? Did you feel that you were giving people that were trying to use those technologies? Did you feel they were coming to you with requests of how to use it? Or did you feel you spent a lot of time with them? If they were trying to use the technology?

P: Sometimes like, I don't remember any major incidents. But I remember a comment from one of the receptionists like she said, I feel like I'm an apple genius, because people were just like, it was I think it was not long after the roll out. The business guests were all over it because they were all my members. And Marriott members were like big on all this stuff. But they were like, what's this? And what's this? As much as there's a how to when you install the app, and it was meant to be as plain as day on how to use it. It wasn't really because they still have to figure things out, I think between themselves. And but once I think you've done it once or twice that was it. You never really heard from them again. Yeah. It's something that got used to

- role change / new skills

I: It's more experience. In your opinion, knowing what you know, as a as a hotel employee, what do you think the future of hotel services?

P: Short term I think it's still very personable. I think people are still there to complain. And they're still there to ask questions, and have somebody look after them. Long term. Yeah, I think once that whole generation slips from wanting somebody to pamper them. I think, yes, we're looking more of a less personable approach to hotels, it's more of a convenience thing to just go to a machine and tap your information in and get a key. And if there's a problem, like there'll be that one person that has to fix it, so they'll still be that element of oh somebody needs to come and fix this when there's a problem. Yeah.

- Future perception

I: Great. Excellent. Well, thank you very much I've asked all of my questions. Oh, so that's it.

P: Hopefully they're alright, I hope you got something.

I: Yeah, definitely. Definitely. I mean, are there any questions you want to ask me about anything? Or are you quite happy with what was asked

P: not exactly, yeah, like I feel like because I was there when it's like the whole online checking started rolling out you can sort of see far enough where it was going it wasn't good be quick to implement it. But if you had a purpose built place for it, then it maybe it might have had a quicker take off.

- situational?

I: I think that's sometimes the issue was when you kind of changing something more than starting afresh. And this is a brand new concept. You had quite a traditional Hotel in in kind of Metro centre, for example, it was a traditional hotel, traditional methods. So that period of change, certainly would take some time.

- Blend - tradition vs contemporary

P: Oh, yeah, for sure.

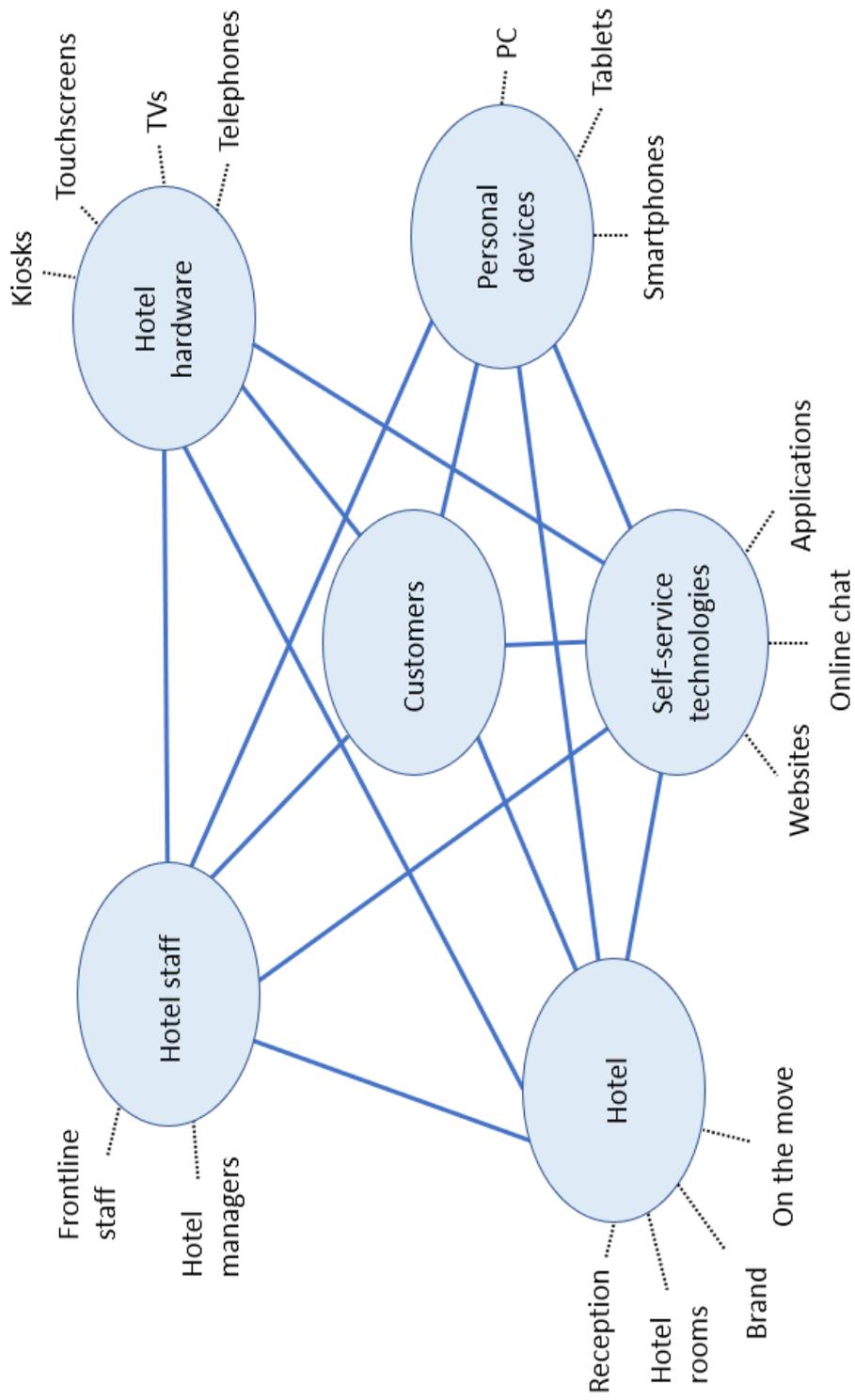
I: So yeah, thank you so much for I was really pleased with it. I know you've given me some really good information there. And there's a lot of them. It's quite hard for me not to comment on what you were saying because I'm like, Yes, that's exactly and I can't be seen the leader

and it was the conversation. But when you're talking about when you start talking about relationships and you know, you start talking about different generations stuff Exactly. Kind of what I've found is the younger generation that are more digitised, often lean towards that kind of digital interaction. Yeah, And you kind of mentioned like procedures and processes and that's the whole kind of background of these self service technologies is it is a process as a transactional? Yeah. procedure that can be easily done via technology. What without stripping away that interaction because you're still delivering face to face so you've kind of confirmed a lot of the thoughts I would have there was no kind of food and I also realised a couple of more questions need change and so it doesn't go right so yeah, you've really helped me out thanks. My pleasure if you need anything else, just let me know it's no problem. No, I think I think we're all done so I'll let you know if I know you've signed off the kind of ethical form I think that's at an hour where everything will be anonymized. So your name will not appear in kind of the data analysis or anything.

P: Good. All right. Well, good luck. Let me know if you need any further information. It's no problem.

I: well, thanks so much. It was lovely to see you. I'll see you later.

Appendix F: Actor-network map to be studied



Appendix G: Sorting of themes, sub-themes, and codes

Code/theme creation

Theme	Sub themes	Codes
<p>Service judgements</p> <p><i>Situational evaluation?</i></p>	<p>Service evaluation</p> <p>Value of time</p> <p>Situational judgement</p> <p>Technical capability</p> <p>Control?</p>	<p>Queuing</p> <p>Time</p> <p>Service evaluation</p> <p>Tech savviness</p> <p>Complex queries</p> <p>Ease of use</p> <p>Business guest</p> <p>Leisure guest</p> <p>Waiting</p> <p>Expectations</p> <p>Cost related</p> <p>Service failure</p> <p>Customer avoidance of interaction</p> <p>Access to information</p> <p>Guest expectations</p> <p>Guest focused change</p> <p>Guest satisfaction measurements</p> <p>Tech failure</p> <p>Control</p> <p>Wasting time</p> <p>Educating the customer</p> <p>Length of stay</p> <p>Location led</p> <p>Access to information</p> <p>Self-sufficiency</p> <p>Convenience</p> <p>Generational differences</p> <p>Situational</p> <p>Time saving</p> <p>Time wasting</p> <p>Snap decisions</p> <p>Time DELETE</p> <p>Preferences</p>
<p>Understanding of roles</p> <p><i>Burring of roles</i></p> <p><i>discussion point theme</i></p>	<p>Understanding roles</p> <p>Employee experience informing practice</p> <p>Role change / development</p> <p>Consideration</p> <p>Transactional vs personal service</p> <p>Burring of roles</p> <p>Control?</p>	<p>Employee experience as a customer</p> <p>Employee experience informing practice</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Consideration</p> <p>Role change</p> <p>Transactional tasks</p> <p>Business guest experience</p> <p>Differences of interaction</p> <p>Employee role change</p> <p>Generational differences</p> <p>Tech requiring human intervention/action</p> <p>Skill development</p> <p>Employee role</p> <p>Educating customers</p>

+ data mining + security

+ tech preferences

+ convenience

+ guest downloading app

+ forced use

+ personal use avoidance

+ tech failure

+ barriers to using personal devices

+ tech anxiety

+ employee tech anxiety

+ security issues

+ Privacy

+ Ease

~~not appropriate tech~~

+ employed difficulty managing tech

+ temporary

+ customer responsibility

+ guest forward change

+ tech replacing staff

+ tech as supporting acts

+ temporary

+ employee relationship with tech

+ reducing staff

		<p>Empowered customers</p> <p>Lack of staff empowerment</p> <p>Behind the scenes</p>
<p>People need people</p>	<p>Need for interaction</p> <p>Fear of missing out</p> <p>Insider knowledge</p> <p>Problem-solving</p> <p>Rapport</p> <p>Guest-host relationship</p>	<p>Need for interaction</p> <p>Complex queries</p> <p>Help/assistance/technology failure</p> <p>Fear of missing out/FOMO</p> <p>Cost</p> <p>Safety</p> <p>Recognition</p> <p>Extended personal relationships (friends)</p> <p>Commercial/sales</p> <p>Business-guest interaction</p> <p>Reliance</p> <p>Learning</p> <p>Need for interaction</p> <p>Rapport</p> <p>Dependency on team</p> <p>Employee relationships with customers</p> <p>Feeling valued</p> <p>Reliance on people</p> <p>Anticipating needs</p> <p>Commercial relationship</p> <p>Conversation</p> <p>Safe</p> <p>Engagement</p> <p>Finding out information</p> <p>Leisure guest interaction</p> <p>Personal connections</p> <p>Employee relationship with customer</p> <p>Personalisation</p> <p><i>Excess to information</i></p> <p><i>+ teamwork</i></p> <p><i>+ personal interaction</i></p> <p><i>+ recognition</i></p> <p><i>+ employee relationship with employees</i></p> <p><i>+ relationship building</i></p> <p><i>+ customer interaction preferences</i></p> <p><i>+ Rapport</i></p> <p><i>+ Friends</i></p> <p><i>+ Fun</i></p> <p><i>+ Trust</i></p> <p><i>+ employees as friends</i></p> <p><i>+ guest host interaction</i></p>
<p>Value of personal interaction</p> <p><i>Merge w/ hospitality &amp; people need people.</i></p>	<p>Anticipating needs</p> <p>Personal connections</p> <p>Relationships</p> <p>Cost related</p>	<p>Two-way relationship</p> <p>Diffusing situations</p> <p>Cost related - TI</p> <p>Communication</p> <p>Teamwork</p> <p>Personal interaction</p> <p>Perception of customers</p> <p>Recognition</p> <p>Rapport</p> <p>Empathy</p> <p>Relationship building</p> <p>Friends PP</p> <p>Rapport PP</p> <p>Fun - PP</p> <p>Guest-host interaction PP</p> <p>Employees as friends</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Friends</p> <p>Hotel owners ROI</p> <p><i>+ Commercial relationship</i></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Payment - TT</li> <li>✓ Customer interaction preferences PP</li> <li>✓ Anticipating needs - TT</li> <li>✓ Knowledge gain</li> <li>✓ Descriptions of personal service: - TT</li> <li>**INSERT WORDS**</li> </ul>
True hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Old fashioned hospitality</li> <li>Home</li> <li>Change in experience expectations</li> <li>Value of interaction - cost home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disconnect from hospitality</li> <li>Old times</li> <li>Personalisation</li> <li>Guest perception of hospitality</li> <li>Home</li> <li>Guest experience</li> <li>Star rating</li> <li>True hospitality</li> <li>Employee experience as a customer</li> <li>Luxury</li> <li>Expectation</li> <li>Experience</li> <li>Old fashioned</li> <li>Transactional tasks</li> <li>Disconnect from hospitality</li> <li>Leisure guest experience</li> <li>Customer delight</li> <li>Passive hospitality</li> <li>Detail</li> <li>Customer service</li> </ul>
Technology related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical barriers to communication</li> <li>Control - SJ</li> <li>Situational use - merge w/ situational evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Virtual concierge and messaging</li> <li>Self-service customer journey - pull out as discussion</li> <li>'Keeping up with the times' - Tech touch</li> <li>Technology interruption</li> <li>Descriptions of SST:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>efficient, convenient, effective, less fuff,</li> <li>seamless, quicker, clever, City led thing,</li> <li>functional, simple, useful, ugly, good, surprise,</li> <li>transactional, jarring, straightforward, fast,</li> <li>nightmare, hindrance, backup, self-sufficient,</li> <li>trade-off, soulless, adequate, no personality</li> </ul> </li> <li>Security issues - SJ</li> <li>Customer responsibility - UR</li> <li>Ease - SJ</li> <li>Tech replacing staff - move to understanding roles</li> <li>Hotel owners investment - TT</li> <li>Tech as the supporting actor - more w/ role</li> <li>SST failure TT</li> <li>Privacy - SJ</li> <li>Employee relationship with tech - UR</li> <li>Barriers to using personal devices - SJ</li> <li>Employee tech anxiety - SJ</li> <li>Guest-tech experiences - TT</li> <li>Technology anxiety - SJ</li> </ul>

		<p>'Nowadays' - TT</p> <p>Personal tech avoidance - SJ</p> <p>Employee SST training - TTB</p> <p>Disjointed service - TTB</p> <p>Control</p> <p>SST updated with info</p> <p>Guest focused design - TTB</p> <p>Technology touch points</p> <p>SST usage - TTB</p> <p>Forced use - SJ</p> <p>Tech issues - TTB</p> <p>Technology supported services - TTD</p> <p>Functionality</p> <p>Keeping up with the times</p> <p>SST examples</p> <p>Guests downloading apps - SJ</p> <p>Updating/maintaining tech TTB</p> <p>Technology failure - merge w/ SST failure</p> <p>Data sharing and security - SJ</p> <p>Tech preferences - SJ</p> <p>Brand associated SST - TTB</p> <p>Guest perception of tech - TTB</p> <p>Convenience SJ</p> <p>Tech/SST admin</p> <p>Employee difficulty managing tech SJ</p> <p>Automation</p> <p>Technology management - TTB</p>
<p>Tech-touch blend</p>	<p>Blurring of roles - CB</p> <p>Facilitating vs replacing</p> <p>Empowerment</p> <p>Back-up options</p> <p>Future proofing hospitality</p> <p>Tech-touch balance</p>	<p>Future perception + guest focused design</p> <p>Back up + replacing tech # description of SST</p> <p>Keeping up with the times + employee</p> <p>Competitors + description of tech touch points</p> <p>Tech-touch mix + personal service</p> <p>Future of hospitality + tech</p> <p>Balance + SST failure</p> <p>Preferences + disjointed service # tech supported service</p> <p>Tech experience requiring human involvement + tech management</p> <p>Disjointed experience</p> <p>Empowered customers + guest perception of tech</p> <p>Trip purpose dependent</p> <p>Tech-touch employee preferences + keeping up w/ times</p> <p>Tech-touch customer preferences + hotel owners ROI</p> <p>Availability</p> <p>Tech-touch blend + SST usage + guest tech experience</p> <p>+ brand assoc. SST</p>
<p>Hospitality in a pandemic</p>	<p>Acceptable change in service</p> <p>Adaptation of expectations</p> <p>No sub themes - one main theme for discussion re: COVID.</p>	<p>Masks/screens</p> <p>Limited interaction</p> <p>Interaction avoidance</p> <p>Skeleton staff</p> <p>Covid role change</p> <p>Anxiety</p> <p>Uncomfortable</p> <p>Covid practices</p>

	Limited personal interaction	Furlough Service change Acceptable change Culture shift Change in priorities Adaptation of expectations Signposting Covid formalities 'Unheard of'
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Appendix H: Final themes, sub-themes, and codes

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Sub themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Service judgements	Value of time	Queuing Time Waiting Wasting time Time saving Time wasting
	Situational judgement (or evaluation?)	Service evaluation Complex queries Business guest interaction Leisure guest interaction Expectations Cost related Service failure Customer avoidance of interaction Access to information Guest expectations Length of stay related Location led Convenience Data sharing and security Forced use of technology Security issues Privacy Employee difficulty managing tech
	Technical capability	Tech savviness Ease of use Tech failure Educating the customer Self-sufficiency Tech preferences Guests downloading apps Personal tech use avoidance Barriers to using personal devices Generational differences Tech anxiety Employee tech anxiety Ease
Blurring of roles	Understanding roles	Employee experience as a customer Employee experience informing practice Employee role Empowerment Customer responsibility Employee relationship with tech Empowered customers

		Lack of staff empowerment Behind the scenes
	Role change (or development?)	Role change Control Employee role change Skill development Educating customers Guest forward change Tech replacing staff Tech as supporting actor Reducing staff
	Transactional vs personal service	Transactional tasks Tech requiring human intervention/action Tech supporting service Transactional tasks
People need people	Need for interaction	Need for interaction Help/assistance/technology failure Safety Recognition Reliance Dependency on team Feeling valued Reliance on people Safe Personalisation Teamwork Employee relationship with employees Fun
	Insider knowledge (or Fear of missing out?)	Complex queries Fear of missing out/FOMO Finding out information Access to information
	Guest-host interaction	Extended personal relationship Rapport Employee relationships with customers Engagement Leisure guest interaction Personal connections Personal interaction Relationship building Customer interaction preferences Friends Trust Employees as friends Guest-host interaction
True hospitality	Old fashioned hospitality	Old times Guest perception of hospitality Guest experience True hospitality

		Luxury Experience Old fashioned Passive hospitality True hospitality Nowadays
	Value of interaction	Personal connections Guest satisfaction measurements Anticipating needs Cost Payment Commercial relationships Customer service
	Experience expectations	Disconnect from hospitality Personalisation Star rating related Employee experience as a customer Expectation Leisure guest experience
Tech-touch blend	Facilitating versus replacing	Tech issues Tech experience requiring human involvement Disjointed experience Transactional tasks Guest perception of tech SST failure Tech supported service
	Future proofing hospitality	Future perception Back up options Keeping up with the times Competition Future of hospitality Hotel owners ROI Brand associated SST Guest focused design
	Tech-touch balance	Updating tech Employee SST training Tech-touch point Balance Tech-touch mix Preferences Tech-touch employee preferences Tech-touch customer preferences Descriptions of SST Descriptions of personal service SST usage Tech management

		Guest-tech experiences SST
Hospitality in a pandemic		Masks/screens Limited interaction Interaction avoidance Skeleton staff Covid role change Anxiety Uncomfortable Covid practices Furlough Service change Acceptable change Culture shift Change in priorities Adaptation of expectations Signposting Covid formalities Unheard of

## Appendix I: A tool for evaluating thematic analysis manuscripts for publication: Twenty questions to guide assessment of TA research quality

These questions are designed to be used either independently, or alongside our methodological writing on TA, and especially the current paper, if further clarification is needed.
<i>Adequate choice and explanation of methods and methodology</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Do the authors explain why they are using TA, even if only briefly?</li><li>2. Do the authors clearly specify and justify which type of TA they are using?</li><li>3. Is the use and justification of the specific type of TA consistent with the research questions or aims?</li><li>4. Is there a good 'fit' between the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the research and the specific type of TA (i.e. is there conceptual coherence)?</li><li>5. Is there a good 'fit' between the methods of data collection and the specific type of TA?</li><li>6. Is the specified type of TA consistently enacted throughout the paper?</li><li>7. Is there evidence of problematic assumptions about, and practices around, TA? These commonly include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Treating TA as one, homogenous, entity, with one set of – widely agreed on – procedures.</li><li>◦ Combining philosophically and procedurally incompatible approaches to TA without any acknowledgement or explanation.</li><li>◦ Confusing summaries of data topics with thematic patterns of shared meaning, underpinned by a core concept.</li><li>◦ Assuming grounded theory concepts and procedures (e.g. saturation, constant comparative analysis, line-by-line coding) apply to TA without any explanation or justification.</li><li>◦ Assuming TA is essentialist or realist, or atheoretical.</li><li>◦ Assuming TA is only a data reduction or descriptive approach and therefore must be supplemented with other methods and procedures to achieve other ends.</li></ul></li><li>8. Are any supplementary procedures or methods justified, and necessary, or could the same results have been achieved simply by using TA more effectively?</li><li>9. Are the theoretical underpinnings of the use of TA clearly specified (e.g. ontological, epistemological assumptions, guiding theoretical framework(s)), even when using TA inductively (Inductive TA does not equate to analysis in a theoretical vacuum)?</li><li>10. Do the researchers strive to 'own their perspectives' (even if only very briefly), their personal and social standpoint and positioning? (This is especially important when the researchers are engaged in social justice-oriented research and when representing the 'voices' of marginal and vulnerable groups, and groups to which the researcher does not belong.)</li><li>11. Are the analytic procedures used clearly outlined, and described in terms of what the authors actually did, rather than generic procedures?</li><li>12. Is there evidence of conceptual and procedural confusion? For example, reflexive TA (e.g. Braun and Clarke 2006) is the claimed approach but different procedures are outlined such as the use of a codebook or coding frame, multiple independent coders and consensus coding, inter-rater reliability measures, and/or themes are conceptualised as analytic inputs rather than outputs and therefore the analysis progresses from theme identification to coding (rather than coding to theme development).</li><li>13. Do the authors demonstrate full and coherent understanding of their claimed approach to TA? <i>A well-developed and justified analysis</i></li><li>14. Is it clear what and where the themes are in the report? Would the manuscript benefit from some kind of overview of the analysis: listing of themes, narrative overview, table of themes, thematic map?</li></ol>

15. Are the reported themes topic summaries, rather than 'fully realised themes' – patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept?

- If so, are topic summaries appropriate to the purpose of the research?
  - If the authors are using reflexive TA, is this modification in the conceptualisation of themes explained and justified?
- Have the data collection questions been used as themes?
- Would the manuscript benefit from further analysis being undertaken, with the reporting of fully realised themes?
- Or, if the authors are claiming to use reflexive TA, would the manuscript benefit from claiming to use a different type of TA (e.g. coding reliability or codebook)?

16. Is non-thematic contextualising information presented as a theme? (e.g. the first 'theme' is a topic summary providing contextualising information, but the rest of the themes reported are fully realised themes). If so, would the manuscript benefit from this being presented as non-thematic contextualising information?

17. In applied research, do the reported themes have the potential to give rise to actionable outcomes?

18. Are there conceptual clashes and confusion in the paper? (e.g. claiming a social constructionist approach while also expressing concern for positivist notions of coding reliability, or claiming a constructionist approach while treating participants' language as a transparent reflection of their experiences and behaviours)

19. Is there evidence of weak or unconvincing analysis, such as:

- Too many or too few themes?

Too many theme levels?

Confusion between codes and themes?

Mismatch between data extracts and analytic claims?

Too few or too many data extracts?

Overlap between themes?

20. Do authors make problematic statements about the lack of generalisability of their results, and or implicitly conceptualise generalisability as statistical probabilistic generalisability (see Smith 2017)?

## Appendix J: Excerpt from transcript regarding hospitality in a pandemic

Employee 002: *And so as a front office manager, you obviously organise the accommodation and rates, the groups or transient bookings with matching your different systems, making sure you are balanced, obviously running the front of house operations now and you honestly I mean, obviously you come in your first priority is to serve Breakfast do room service come back down check the guests out clear the floors clean the dishes and run any functions and any teas coffees lunches because they can't touch anything. And at one point we're were up on the floors doing the rooms till housekeeping came back. And so it was a lot kind of your original checklist went out the window and all everything that you used to prioritise you didn't prioritise anymore It was a lot of like just operational get everything done get the dishes clean, which is totally different to making sure all your rates are correct make sure you had the financial backup making sure everything was routed correctly making sure you had credit cards in the system weirdly that became secondary to just serving people breakfast and clearing function rooms.*

*We've just got a mobile now when I mean that would be unheard of in Marriott to not have someone on the desk you know it was always manned 24/7 now we have a sign said if I'm not here phone this number. I mean that would have never been heard of before we're now it's totally acceptable because you know, you're in a bedroom cleaning or your through the kitchen, and you just have to go on back through weirdly guests have actually adapted quite well to that. You know, they understand so now I don't think they're gonna understand when we start to get back to normal.*

*So if I'm not at the desk as a sign, but obviously if I am at the desk, check in is a lot longer because of all the COVID formalities, we obviously have the, the glass at the desk and we have sanitised pens in a used pen box we have the government form that they have to sign in to put their name and number for us to then contact them if we've had obviously a case of COVID in the hotel and we do everything room service so they have to fill out their breakfast form at reception, what time they'd like it delivered and then they circle which items they would like they also get a dinner form which so we only serve breakfast for three hours in the morning and serve dinner for three hours in the evening. So they get a dinner form which they can either phone down press zero or obviously always come through to reception and basically explain to them that everything's closed and everything's room service drinks as well so yeah just a lot longer now*

*And because I think as business guests at the moment that actually very understanding and they are here for work anyone who's here it was more difficult than I think that's going to become more difficult when the shops open. Because we just take people's word for it. We don't actually have to ask for any evidence where if they're here now they're not shopping they're not going to the metro centre, they really are here for work so they do*

*tend to go out come back, have dinner, go to sleep. Do their day again. Where we I mean, we had a couple of people where you asked them what because there's really no reason why you can't travel. If you say I'm going to see my support bubble you know, what evidence can I ask for that? So I've only ever had one person slip up and I said Can I ask you a reason to stay and she said, Oh yes, its my daughter's birthday. So you can just watch the news and but the majority people are here for like actual business like you know, Nissan or the A1 works. So they're actually here to work. So they're actually no problems at the moment.*

# Appendix K: EuroCHRIE 2021 poster submission: Technology and the Guest-Host Relationship: Towards the Future of Hospitality

## Technology and the Guest-Host Relationship; Towards the Future of Hospitality

**Author**

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**Introduction**

Self-service and mobile technologies have long been part of the service industry, however in hospitality settings, there is scant literature focusing on the role of technology in the guest-host relationship.

This poster presents ongoing doctoral research on the digitisation of hotel services and the influence on the guest-host relationship.

First an understanding of the guest-host relationship is required before exploring the high-tech, high-touch service environment. This allows for a discussion about the guest-tech-host relationship, whereby technology is an active member in the relationship.



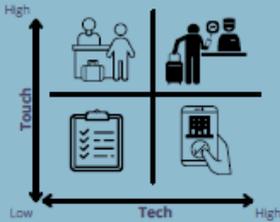
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**Importance of the guest-host relationship**

This concept is documented in literature in the following areas relating to hospitality;

- Satisfaction and loyalty
- Innovation
- Need for interaction and meaningful interaction
- Co-creation of services, creating partnerships
- Collaboration through technology

**What is not fully understood, is the role of technology within the guest-host relationship in hospitality settings.**



**High-tech, high-touch hospitality**

There is a limited understanding as to how technologies are changing the service encounter in hospitality settings.

- Replacing or facilitating personal service?
- What are the guest and host views of using technology in hospitality settings?
- What does this mean for the guest host relationship?
- Is high-tech, high-touch hospitality possible, and is it welcomed?

These are important considerations when researching the relationships that exist between guests, technology and hosts.

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**Development of the guest-tech-host relationship**

It is important that as hospitality moves to a more mobile future guided by technology, that the industry does not lose sight of the foundations of hospitality. By exploring the concept of the guest-tech-host relationship, this research adds to the current body of literature around the guest-host relationship and the emerging technologies within the hospitality industry.

**Current research**

- Unlike other studies, this research focuses on experiences, feelings and interactions, and interpreting meaning
- Using Actor Network Theory and Role Theory as a lens to understand interactions, interplay and subsequent relationships between guests, hosts and technology
- Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with hotel guests and hosts
- Reflexive thematic analysis
- ANT mapping of interactional experience to provide visual representation of the complexity of the guest-tech-host relationship

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**Contribution**

- New concept of the guest-tech-host relationship
- Provides an understanding of interactions and interplay between guests, technology and hosts through Actor Network Theory mapping
- Allows academics to further explore both the future of hospitality and the changing relationships that are present in the current landscape
- Allows hospitality organisations to further understand the human implications of implementing technologies within their service environments
- Provides an understanding of relationships affected by technology in a post-pandemic world, with the potential of further longitudinal studies

**Discussion**

This is part of ongoing doctoral research on hospitality in a high-tech, high-touch context, and the exploration of the guest-tech-host relationship.

The researcher welcomes feedback and discussion by email.

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