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Research article

Co-creating the touristic experience in the digital era: Towards increasing immersion or detachment

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ABSTRACT

Industries are striving to become digital in response to ongoing technological advancements. The tourism sector is among the most heavily impacted by these developments, requiring entities to adapt and become more resilient by co-creating valuable, personalized, and immersive experiences that go beyond standard offerings. Thus, this research examines how new technologies, including mobile applications, virtual reality, online concierge services, and smart devices, impact value co-creation and clients' immersion during their stay. To achieve this aim, we employed a phenomenological approach by analyzing customers' life stories from their stays at five-star hotels in Morocco. The study highlights contrasting approaches to technological appropriation. It reveals that while some digital devices enrich the experience by promoting autonomy, personalization, and anticipation, others can lead to overload, emotional disconnection, or feelings of dehumanization. Far from being unambiguous, the effect of technologies depends heavily on customer profiles, expectations, and the relational context. Moreover, we used Carù & Cova's appropriation model to better understand immersion as a gradual process marked by tensions between innovation and authenticity. In addition, we formulated suggestions to help the high-end hotel industry better articulate its digital services and sensory experiences.

KEYWORDS

Digital tools; value co-creation; immersive experiences; tourism; high-end hotel industry

Introduction

Digitalization is one of the most disruptive forces that form the modern economy and society. The spread of digital technologies has been hastened by rapid technological progress since the second half of the twentieth century, changing the systems of production, the patterns of consumption, and organizational models of any industry (Doğan 2024; Kurt & Genç 2025). It is more than a technological shift but a systemic one, whereby there is a mixing of information and communication technologies, decisions made based on information, and interconnected digital infrastructures. The inability to keep abreast of these rapid technological shifts further puts organizations at risk of competitive erosion and obsolescence, hence making digitalization a strategic necessity and not a discretionary option (Kurt & Genç 2025). It is in this larger change that digitalization has transformed economic activities through the potential to take on new business models, increase operational efficiency, and change the nature of value creation. Tourism takes a unique place among the industries that became most seriously influenced by digitalization. The use of digital tools in tourism was among the first industries to embrace the use of digital technology, with the development of computerized reservation systems and the implementation of fully integrated online booking, information search, and experience-sharing platforms (Begu 2025; Henok Bekele & Raj 2024; Kurt & Genç 2025). Digital technologies have

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completely changed the way tourists search, plan, make bookings, and exchange experiences, as well as changing the way tourism businesses design, deliver, and market their products and services (Doğan 2024; Dias et al., 2024). The embrace of internet-based applications, mobile, and social media has enhanced transparency, minimized asymmetries of information, and enabled tourists to take a more active role in determining their journey of traveling (Begu, 2025). This has rendered tourism to be a highly data driven and technology oriented sector and one that is becoming more reliant on digital infrastructures as a way of remaining competitive and in touch with the changing consumer demands.

As part of the ongoing digitalization process, the digital transformation (DT) of tourism is now going through a more radical stage, which involves the smart use of sophisticated technologies like artificial intelligence, Internet of Things, big data analytics, virtual and augmented reality, and automation (Henok Bekele & Raj, 2024; Kurt & Genc, 2025). The change can be related to the overall Industry 4.0 paradigm that suggests the focus on real-time data analysis, decentralization, service orientation, and integration of systems (Brati & Zlatanov, 2025; Kurt & Genç, 2025). These trends have established a new fashion in the tourism industry, such as the adoption of digital technologies to increase the quality of services and personalize experiences more and be more resourceful (Kurt & Genc, 2025). On one hand, DT has profoundly impacted the sector, particularly the COVID-19 disruption (Ezra et al., 2021; Lekgau, 2021); on the other hand, it has introduced new issues in governance, access to data, technological preparedness, and regional and firm-level unequal adoption (Gavurova et al., 2025; Rifqi, 2025). It is important to note that the digitalization of tourism has not reached the level of operational efficiency or even marketing innovativeness, but it is gradually becoming more intertwined with broader social objectives, including sustainability, inclusivity, or regional development (Alhaddar, 2025; Brati & Zlatanov, 2025). The new digital solutions will enable efficient resource management, control over the impact of tourism on the environment, and adjustment of tourist demand to the destination capacity, which will help to shift to more sustainable forms of tourism (Brati & Zlatanov, 2025). At the same time, the Internet, big data marketing, and immersive technologies have changed how tourism should be approached by moving the focus of standard products to personal and interactive experiences (Rifqi, 2025). These patterns indicate the necessary re-organisation of value creation within the tourism industry because experience is no longer produced by the provider but in the form of in-process interaction between several actors.

Value co-creation is also becoming an emerging phenomenon in this dynamic digital tourism environment. It emphasizes the participation of tourists in shaping their own experiences through continuous interaction with service providers, digital platforms, and the ecosystems of a destination (Zhang, 2020). Instead of a passive consumer of pre-made services, tourists are co-designing their experiences, customizing their experiences, and experiencing their travel experiences in a more enriched way at various points of the travel process. Digital technologies are the main facilitators of this process as they enable interaction, real-time feedback, personalization, and shared meaning-making (Zhang, 2020). Although the idea of co-creation has become increasingly popular in tourism studies, the intersection of digital transformation and co-creation of touristic experiences has not been properly integrated and conceptualized. It is on this backdrop that the paper will attempt to explore how digitalization is marking the co-creation of touristic experiences during the digital age. The study places co-creation at the heart of digitally enabled tourism ecosystems and thus adds to a better comprehension of the technologies transforming the roles, interactions, and value creation processes of contemporary tourism. Thus, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The first section provides a literature review on digitization and co-creation in tourism. The second section describes the methodology used to achieve the study's aim. Then, the results will be presented and discussed in the following sections. Finally, we will conclude our work by discussing limits and future research directions.

Literature review

Digitalization as a game changer in the tourism industry

Digitalization has proven to be a core source of change in industries. It radically altered the way value is created, companies are structured, and consumers behave. This transformation is particularly relevant to the

tourism industry as the latter is very dependent on information sharing, service experiences, and experience consumption (Doğan, 2024). The adoption of digital technologies- internet, cloud computing, mobile apps, artificial intelligence, and immersive technologies has led to what scholars have reported as the digital tourism age (Doğan, 2024). Digital transformation in the tourism industry is not just the simple use of technologies. It's a re-shuffling of the design, delivery, and experience of tourism services. Information technologies make the processes of service virtualization possible. This enables tourists to search, compare, buy, and use tourism products based on digital infrastructures worldwide (Doğan, 2024). This change has increased the efficiency of the sector, increased market reach and competition, and changed the socio-economic relationship of tourism destinations (Cubukcu & Topcuoglu, 2023; Erkmen & Guler, 2020). Strategically, digitalization enables tourism entities to transform into data-driven and customer-oriented entities. Firms can minimize information asymmetry, offer personalization, and make smarter strategic choices through the application of digital marketing tools, online platforms, and analytics systems (Bulunmaz, 2016; Gedik, 2020). Therefore, sustainable competitiveness in the tourism industry has become conditioned by the digital transformation (Nebati, 2022; Okan & Yildirim, 2021).

Digital technologies and the reconfiguration of the tourist journey

The digital transformation has completely changed the tourist experience by creating a new way of interaction concerning the pre-travel, during-travel, and post-travel parts. The online reservation systems, mobile applications, GPS-based services, and digital platforms are all types of technology that keep tourists and service providers in contact throughout the entire travel experience (Doğan, 2024). The example of online reservation systems is seen to transform the current nature of tourism planning by giving tourists the autonomy to plan, compare, and buy tourism products in real-time (Doğan, 2024). These systems help to increase accessibility, offer 24/7 support, and personalization because they can analyze the information about previous customers (R et al., 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic additionally contributed to the increased utilization of online booking and contactless technology and entrenched it as a new standard in the industry (Ezra et al., 2021; Lekgau, 2021; R et al., 2024). Location-based services and mobile technologies are also essential to help tourists obtain dynamic information, navigate places, and make impulsive decisions during the trip (Zhang, 2020). This range of developments makes tourism more flexible, informed, and interactive. This strengthens the significance of real-time information flows in the current tourism ecosystems.

Social media as the facilitator of interactive and co-created experiences

This can be made possible, in turn, by adopting social media tools within the tourism sector that have radically altered how tourists shape their decisions and perform experiential evaluations (Zhang 2020). The interactive nature of social media platforms makes tourists capable of creating content, sharing information, and evaluating experiences before, during, and after traveling (Dogan 2024). The quality of services is evaluated, and destination images are produced using content in social media and online reviews and user-generated content, where tourists create the image of the destination during the pre-travel phase (Dogan 2024). Social media assists in sharing experiences in real-time during the travel and at the same time augmenting interaction of the travelers and educating prospective travelers. In the post-travel phase, online evaluation and observations play a significant role in the decision of customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and future behavioral intentions (Dogan et al., 2018). In terms of organizational standpoint, social media enables tourism companies to communicate directly with their customers on a one-on-one basis, creating relationships of interaction and a feedback loop (Imre, 2020). The jointly produced conversations are going to present useful information that can be evaluated to improve service crafting, reputation administration, and strategic decision-making. The applicability of social media strategies to the big data and real-time co-creation perspectives is obvious, and it is therefore appropriate at every stage of the tourism experience (Zhang, 2020).

Big data, real-time services, and the rise of co-creation logics

The growing access to big data and real-time information has brought up new prospects of value co-creation in tourism. Zhang (2020) explains that the presence of mobile technologies, location-based services, and broad connectivity enables tourists to receive incessant interaction with destinations and service providers, which creates real-time information that can be used to deliver services in a personalized way. This move in the provision of service in an immediate, context-sensitive, and adaptive way can be summarized as the notion of nowness service, which is a concept advanced by Buhalis & Sinarta (2019). With big data analytics, tourism companies will be able to act dynamically in relation to the needs, preferences, and changing circumstances of tourists, especially at pre-visit and on-site phases. This real-time responsiveness helps to change the role of tourists as passive consumers of the services to active participants in the process of creating experiences. The co-creation of big data implies that organizations need to create the right digital infrastructure, analysis, and strategy to define effective ways to capture, analyze, and use the data generated by customers (Zhang 2020). In this way, co-creation is integrated into digital mediated service systems and not individual interactions.

Immersive technologies (VR and AR) and value addition

Another essential aspect of the digital transformation of the tourism sector is Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies, which provide immersive and interactive experiences that minimise uncertainty and increase the experiential value (Avzal et al., 2022; Kabadayi, 2020). These technologies help tourists explore destinations, accommodation, and attraction sites virtually before traveling, and facilitate better decision-making processes (Lee, 2022; Aylan & Aylan, 2020). AR supplements the physical space by superimposing digital data in real time, thus making it easy to experience the surrounding environment in an interactive and contextualized manner during field trips (Seibert-Johnston, 2014). In contrast, VR allows fully immersive experiences that could be utilized in the promotion of the destination, assessing services, and training staff (Guttentag, 2009). VR and AR technologies will facilitate the co-creation of tourism experience because they provide an opportunity to engage and interact more deeply with the destination since the tourists are able to explore, assess, and construct their views of the destination using digital interfaces (Bournemouth, 2008).

The interaction between human and robot and the expansion of co-creation actors

The introduction of robotics and artificial intelligence in the tourism and hospitality industry increases the area of co-creation even more by bringing non-human participants into service encounters. Robots have become more common in information provision and self-service check-in/out and even the fundamentals of service delivery (Zhang, 2020). With the continued development of these technologies as they become more intelligent, it is necessary to redefine the concept of co-creation to include interactions between tourists and the robotic system. On-site visits are especially applicable, as human-robot is used to assist with personalized service delivery and operational efficiency. Such exchanges aid in the collective generation of value through fusing human expectations and technological capabilities and, thus, transforming the dynamics of traditional services (Zhang 2020).

The shifting relationship of co-creation and generational diversity

Lastly, co-created tourism experiences are largely affected by the diversity of their tourist, especially the advent of the younger generations. The cohort generations vary in terms of their level of technological literacy, information processing nature, and requirements for digital service (Zhang 2020). One of them is Generation Z, which has been raised in an all-digital world, but the generation has been underresearched in tourism studies (Zhang, 2020). Since tourists are the key participants in the processes of value co-creation, generational differences are the elements that can be comprehended to create inclusive and effective digital tourism experiences. This growing diversity of travelers therefore supports the necessity of responsive, individual, and active co-creation measures at all the tourism path phases.

Methodology

Research design

This paper uses narrative inquiry as its research design, which is a qualitative method of research that is aimed at gathering and analyzing first-person narratives of lived experiences, usually in the form of stories (Armada 2025). Narrative inquiry presupposes that people construct a sense of their experiences through creating narrations that represent personal meanings as well as the larger social settings. Narratives offer first-hand experience on the way experiences are lived, recalled, and arranged into significance, as highlighted by Richardson (1995) and Creswell (2013) (Armada 2025). The focus on lived experience and embeddedness within a context is a core feature of this method, which recognizes how the story is created by social, cultural, and spatial context (Armada 2025; Hurombo et al., 2024). The idea of narrative inquiry can be highly applicable in tourism studies where tourism is experiential and meaning-oriented by nature. Stories can be seen as a means with the help of which people arrange experience, build values, and convey cultural meanings (Mura & Sharif 2016). As much as the scholarly community in tourism has explored the narratives of the tourists, narrative inquiry is a methodological framework that is still under-exploited in the discipline (Mura & Sharif 2016). The recent methodological arguments within tourism research also reflect the necessity of reflexive, qualitative, and creative approaches that can elicit the voices of different voices and lived realities, particularly in the context of social and global upheavals (Ivanova et al., 2021). It is against this background that narrative inquiry offers a solid framework through which tourism experiences are subsequently constructed by individuals.

Research setting

The study focused on tourists staying in hotels located in Morocco. Since our main objective was to explore the customer's immersion in the hotel experience, we chose our hotels based on the following selection criteria: (1) The experiential space must have a boundary. (2) The space must be "secure." (3) The hotel must have a theme. And (4) the space must promote attention and facilitate consumer immersion by engaging all his five senses (Carù & Cova 2006). Thus, we selected five hotels located in Marrakech, Casablanca, and El Jadida based on their desire to provide consumers with unique, even immersive experiences, a desire that is fully reflected in their discourse, communications, and positioning.

Participants and sampling

The participating tourists were purposively selected. Fifteen tourist participants were selected based on the following selection criteria: aged 23-65 years, staying or having recently stayed at one of these hotels for a minimum of two days, and having used technologies provided by the hotel to assess their influence on the guest's demands, preferences, and habits (see Table 1). This diversity of customers, ranging from different countries, age groups, travel motivations, and length of stay, shapes our understanding of the dimensions of the customer experience in Morocco's high-end hotels and identifies the potential variations and trends among different customer subgroups.

Table 1. Sample of the tourist interviewees at the five hotels

Narratives N°	Hotel	Gender	Profession	Origins	Motivations to travel
1	Hotel 1	Male	Business owner	French	Travel with friends
2	Hotel 1	Male	Business man	American	Business trip
3	Hotel 1	Female	Medical service professional	Belgian	Travel with family
4	Hotel 2	Female	Jewelry brand owner	Italian	Travel with friends
5	Hotel 2	Male	Financial sector professional	French	Travel in a couple
6	Hotel 2	Female	Consultant	Spanish	Travel with family
7	Hotel 3	Male	Senior executive in a multinational company	Moroccan	Travel with friends
8	Hotel 3	Male	Director	American	Travel for vacation and discovery
9	Hotel 3	Female	Influencer	French	Travel Solo
10	Hotel 4	Male	Doctor	Moroccan	Travel with family
11	Hotel 4	Male	Engineer	Tunisian	Travel with a couple
12	Hotel 4	Female	Entrepreneur	Spanish	Travel with family
13	Hotel 5	Male	Business man	American	Business trip

14	Hotel 5	Female	Entrepreneur	Tunisian	Business trip
15	Hotel 5	Female	Model	Italian	Travel with friends

Data collection

The data were gathered by face-to-face semi-structured narrative interviewing with tourists who are staying at five hotels, which led to the creation of 15 personal narratives. The participants were chosen to have a diversified group in terms of gender, nationality, profession, hotel of stay, and motivation of travel (leisure, business, family, solo, and social travel) to get a rich source of experiential narrations. Interviews prompted the participants to narrate the touristic experience they had lived and especially how digital tools and interactions influenced their stay. Following the life story approach, the participants were requested to recount meaningful experiences in their life freely, but not to answer strict questions (Bertaux & de Singly 2005). This methodology places moderate importance on the subjective meaning-making rather than on the objective accuracy, and it is about the way people make sense of and interpret their experiences (Bergadaà & Nyeck 1992). All face-to-face interviews were recorded on tape with the consent of the participants in order to be accurate. The interviews were carried out until depth and clarity were attained. The stories were based on the anamnestic memory of participants, mobilizing reminiscence and reflexivity to reform meaningful events of their stay (Watt, L. M., & Wong, 1991; Haight & Webster, 2002). Transcription was done word-for-word to avoid distortion of the words of the participants. Participants were asked a single question: *"You recently stayed at one of the following hotels (hotel1, hotel2, hotel3, hotel4, hotel5). Tell us about your experience with the various technologies used throughout your stay."*

Data analysis

The analysis of data was conducted inductively as a qualitative approach, where the narrative inquiry and descriptive phenomenology were used to find the essence of the lived experiences of the tourists (Giorgi 1975). This method proves to be suitable especially when the aim is to conceptualise consumer experience based on empirical data and not to impose predefined categories (Bergadaà & Nyeck 1992). The analysis was done in five stages that are interrelated and adapted after (Giorgi, 1975, 2005; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003):

Stage 1: Immersion in the narratives

There was repetition of each of the transcripts in order to obtain a holistic view of the experiences of the participants in the five hotels.

Stage 2: Determination of Units of Meaning (UM)

The major quotes that depicted perceptions, emotions, digital experience, and co-creation were marked. The exclusion of segments that were not relevant to the research objectives were excluded (Miles & Crisp, 2014)

Stage 3: Abstraction of Focal Meanings (FM)

The meaning units were interpreted and abstracted in terms of the concepts and ideas of the literature on tourist experience, digital transformation, and value co-creation.

Stage 4: Situated Structural Descriptions (SSD)

In the case of every participant, focal meanings were condensed into contextualized narrations on the basis of their respective situation (type of hotel, reason behind travelling, and their own background).

Stage 5: General Structural Description (GSD)

Lastly, the synthesis of the SSDs of all of the 15 stories resulted in a general structural description of how tourists co-create their experiences in digitally mediated hotel settings. This process of analysis allowed highlighting the patterns of experience that occur repeatedly and maintaining personal subjectivity. Shedding light on the nature of the digitally co-created tourist experience in the various hotel settings, the analysis shows the shift from individual-based narration to shared meaning constructions. To improve rigor and

credibility, consistency among the narratives and sensitive correspondence between empirical and theoretical interpretation were highlighted in the analysis, which is in accordance with qualitative requirements of tourism research (Creswell 2013).

Ethical considerations

In this study, the ethical consideration was to ensure that the informed consent of all the participants was taken and that emphasis was made on voluntary participation and anonymity. Data were gathered and stored safely to promote confidentiality.

Results

The discussion of the stories provided by the participants gives a detailed insight into the process of digital immersion in the luxury hotel sector. Analysis of the life stories of the participants resulted in identifying 3 key themes and sub-themes:

Theme 1: Digital immersion dynamics of the luxury hotel industry

The study of the life stories of the participants shows that digital immersion is a priority in the organization of the customer experience at luxury hotels. The findings indicate a set of three key dynamics, namely technology-aided planning of the stay, the significance of connection, and mobile applications in making the experience more personal. To begin with, the technology-assisted trip preparation seems to be a landmark in the customer journey. The participants highlight the active use of websites, pictures, online reviews, and mobile applications to predetermine their experience and filter their selection. One of the interviewees explained it in the following way: "*I went online before I got to the hotel and accessed pictures of rooms, restaurants, and other aspects and comments of other travelers as well"*. This online booking serves not only to eradicate any uncertainty, but also enables the traveller to plan their stay, thus enhancing positive anticipations and interaction. The use of advice to other customers encourages the perceived experience to be more regulated and recollected. Second, an essential role of connectivity is brought about by the testimonials. Wi-Fi and Internet services are regarded as the crucial elements of the luxury experience. Some of the participants complain about the technical malfunctions, which casts doubt on the quality service promise. As one of the participants explained: "*How are you going to call yourself a luxury hotel in 2024, and not have a working Wi-Fi? On the other hand, high-performance connectivity is perceived as a necessity, especially among business travelers*, as one of the interviewees mentioned: "*I had the opportunity to use good Wi-Fi connections to do my work, and this is what was crucial to me*". These quotations show how much guests are becoming reliant on technology and how much they employ digital gadgets in their lives. Lastly, personalization tools (mobile apps) feature prominently in the accounts of experiences. They facilitate a comprehensive and excellent preparation of the stay before arrival: "*I downloaded the app before my arrival and was able to organize my trip within a few minutes. On site, they provide a great degree of control and comfort, especially the room environment control: a system was provided to allow me to control the lighting, blinds, and the temperature of the room remotely"*. These applications indicate that mobile applications do not end with an informational task and can be real interfaces of individualization and immersion.

Theme 2: Technology use role in the co-creation of the tourist experience

The review of the life stories brings out that the use of technology is determinant in the co-creation of the tourist experience in the five-star hotels in Morocco. The findings, however, indicate that there is a varied range of customer attitudes, ranging between those who are keen to adopt technological devices and assumed preference for traditional human interactions. On the one hand, some of the participants indicate the direct role of technology in enhancing and co-creating their experience. The high-speed Wi-Fi connectivity seems to be a central aspect, especially among business owners, as it is described in the following quote: I liked free high-speed Wi-Fi connectivity in my room, and this enabled me to be at all times in touch with my loved

ones and business. This is the connectivity that will enable the guests to carry on with their personal and professional activities, which will strengthen their sense of comfort and continuity. Online reservation systems also play an important role in providing co-creation, where the guest has more freedom to customize their accommodation. According to the comments of the participants, with the help of the hotel site, it was quite easy to examine all the offers provided, as well as arrange a stay in the way we preferred. These tools enable the guests to be engaged in the process of shaping their experience before even their arrival. Moreover, this co-creation mechanism is strengthened with the help of interactive in-room devices that provide the customers with direct control over their space. One of them wrote: I was pleasantly surprised by the technological amenities in the room... The blackout curtains and the attached hot tub that had the right temperature were also quite pleasant. The technologies enhance independence, comfort, and customization of the onsite experience.

This dynamic also includes online concierge services, especially through WhatsApp. It is viewed as a contributor to fluidity and responsiveness, as they are always available. The 24-hour WhatsApp concierge service was incredibly convenient. Such devices allow communication between the guest and the hotel, which improves the quality of service in the eyes of the former. Last but not least, virtual reality seems to be a new resource that can be used to determine the future experience and form an emotional bond with the establishment, as one participant notes: "*I could customize my stay and take a virtual tour of the hotel even before I literally met it. This initial introduction aids in enhancing customer involvement and therefore makes the experience much more memorable. Conversely, the findings demonstrate that there is a segment of customers who willingly prefer not to exploit technology and instead opt to use direct human interaction. One of the participants explained it as follows: I did not want to use a lot of technology, and I concentrated on more traditional services the hotel provides*". The rationale for this preference is a quest for authenticity and customized connections, which are assumed to be incomparable: No technology can substitute the feeling of a personalized greeting, or "*there is no technology to find another thing like a real conversation with the concierge to explore the local gems*. " These consumers relate value co-creation to human experience, cultural experience, and recommendation that is personalized, which is reflected in this quote: I am not only paying to stay in a place; I need to experience something I will remember. The decision to not connect at that point is a deliberate tactic with the goal of creating a more realistic experience.

Theme 3: Technology application in the co-creation of the tourist experience: Enabler or inhibitor of immersion

The comparison of life stories shows differences in the outcomes of the utilization of technology on the customer immersion with their tourist experience in luxury hotels in Morocco. The testimonials show a conflict between, on the one hand, the power that technology has in making the experience more immersive, and, on the other hand, its possibility to turn into a hindrance to the experience when it is seen as intrusive or unsuitable. On one hand, some of the participants underline the fact that digital technologies are a tool of immersion and co-creation of the experience. Wi-Fi connection with high speed, Smart televisions, and mobile apps enable the customers to remain connected, inform themselves about the services available in hotels, and customize their stay without any space limitation. As respondent 14 explained: *I found that the hotel has a mobile application that enables you to customize your trip more; you can add preferences, which enables you to manage the specifics of your stay and eliminate unwanted surprises. These devices enhance the sense of control and transparency, which adds to a more comfortable experience of being in the hotel*". Virtual reality also seems to be one of the tools that facilitates anticipation and involvement. It further supports a projection of the experience by enabling guests to have a virtual tour of the facilities before traveling to the places. This aspect is demonstrated by the verbatim of participant 15: "*I visited the hotel virtually before I came there and could learn about the various services available"*. This pre-immersion is used to build a more emotional bond and add to the anticipation of the stay.

On the other hand, some descriptions emphasize the restrictions and adverse impact of the overuse or the wrong use of technology. Too complicated or inaccessible systems create frustration as well as

distraction that alienates the customers from the intended experience. Participant 1 presents this scenario when he says: *The lighting system was in itself very complicated and not user-friendly... It was an irritating inconvenience that might have been readily obviated*. Likewise, participant 4 adds that the spread of digital technologies (e.g., QR codes) can marginalize some of the customers and interfere with the quality of the information: "*This practice will marginalize a lot of customers who are not well acquainted with this technology to the detriment of the clarity of information provided by it*. "

Discussion

The luxury hotel industry dynamics of digital immersion

The life stories presented by the participants give in-depth and contextual insights into the experiences in the hotel industry. These testimonials intersect with some of the trends identified in the literature, therefore providing ample substantiation of the findings. The necessity of connectivity is one of the common themes in the stories, especially when it comes to the guests at the luxurious hotels. One of the participants states: *The Internet connection quality has become one of the most vital requirements, like room cleanliness*. This issue identified in the stories is in line with the findings of Mercan et al. (2020), which names connectivity as the core of enhancing tourist experience. The participants therefore highlight the importance of offering a smooth connection as hotels to satisfy the existing customer needs. The fact that mobile applications have become a key component of customer experience is an indicator of a momentous change to the manner in which hotels engage with their customers. The case of mobile technology described by one of the participants, who could regulate the amount of light and temperature in their room even before entering it, is an ideal example of how this technology provides the customer with an unprecedented level of personalization and autonomy (Dimitrios et al., 2018; Xiong & Id, 2024). The mobile applications have revolutionized the experience of engaging with hotel services with the guests with a variety of features that go beyond traditional experiences. Being able to adapt the room atmosphere prior to arrival is a show of proactive attitude towards the comfort of the customers and creates a personalized experience even at the very first steps of the stay. The move is in tandem with the results of Afonso 2021), who places technology and mobile applications at the center of surpassing the conventional tourist experience. It has been hypothesized that mobile applications provide a lot more than convenience itself. They are an effective use of customer interaction and reinvention of the connection between the hotel and its audience (Caber et al., 2024). The option of remotely controlling the room environment is only one of the numerous features.

The contribution of technology in co-creation of the tourist experience

The life stories of guests in luxury hotels in Morocco have been analyzed, which has provided an insight into the role of technology in co-creating a traveling experience. Compared to the past study of this topic, these findings can be compared to gain a clearer understanding of this dynamic. First, our study revealed that there are hotel customers who value the advancement of technology that can assist in customizing their accommodation. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the use of digital technologies in the hospitality sector is becoming more significant, according to earlier research. Some research shows that clients are becoming more dependent on personalized experiences and enjoy digital technology that enables them to customize their stay based on their interests (Niziaieva et al., 2022). Therefore, the practice of experiencing a hotel before it opens its doors is the latest trend in pre-experience that allows a guest to prepare psychologically before visiting the hotel and experience its surroundings (Flavi et al., 2022). Research has also demonstrated that virtual reality is a good method of creating excitement in the minds of passengers by helping them have an interactive experience prior to the real journey (Balcerak et al., 2024; Melo et al., 2022). Conversely, we also found that there is a category of guests that likes to turn off technology when they are on a vacation. Such a finding aligns with the research on the concept of slow tourism, whereby tourists attempt to slow down and untune their experiences so that they can experience things in a more authentic and rewarding way (Balletto, 2023). These consumers value the old-fashioned services and direct interaction with hotel employees to get a more entertaining and culturally-enriching experience.

How technology can be used to enhance and destroy customer immersion.

By considering the analysis of actual stories and comparing them to the existing literature, including the research results of the Caru & Cova (2005) model, we can further clarify the role of technology in the immersion process of customers who have to stay in high-end hotels. Three phases of the appropriation model of Caru and Cova, namely nesting, integration, and provision of a valuable framework of how visitors, in their vacation situation, immerse themselves. Technology is dual to this process as it can both help in immersion of customers and trap them. The immersion, which is proposed by technology, enables customers to visit the hotels virtually prior to their arrival and enjoy warm anticipation and an emotional bond, which is in line with the assertions by Nuenen & Scarles (2021). The stories that portray the application of mobile applications and virtual reality to create personalized experiences and visualize facilities demonstrate this dynamic. According to Dominique-Ferreira and Collins (2023), these digital touchpoints enable customers to prepare and be more committed to the hospitality industry. Nevertheless, the issue of technology is not totally thrown aside. The observed experiences raise some complications and difficulties that the technology may present during the immersion, as Blumenthal & Gjerald (2022) and Pratisto et al. (2022) have stated. We can spoil the immersive experience with usability problems, such as problems with using complex interfaces or programs. Moreover, overuse of technology may break the emotional bond that exists between guests and the physical hotel environment, which agrees with the assertions of Kourouthanassis et al. (2014) and Yang & Wong (2020). The difficulties are reflected in guests who have problems with agreeing on the simplest things, which include the price of the minibar.

Conclusion

This study examines the impacts of the use of digital technology on tourist experience in high-end hotels in Morocco. Through a phenomenological methodology which involves the use of life stories, it has also identified complexities of perception and practices to deal with technology adoption in an environment where authenticity, comfort and personalization have become the order of the day. As it turned out, technologies as a lever for enhancing the experience are not uniform, as they are viewed and applied differently by various people, their needs, their motivation to stay, and their level of familiarity with digital tools. In theory, the given work also adds to the existing methods of co-creation in the sphere of tourism by demonstrating that active involvement of customers in the process of its formation may be facilitated by technological use but also prevented. It builds upon the experience economy (Gilmore, 1998) and service-dominant logic (Lusch & Vargo, 2004); it incorporates a subjectivity-centered approach to customer appropriation (Caru & Cova, 2007). The three-stage appropriation model with exploration, nesting, and marking was introduced. It gave a more insightful idea of the role of digital devices in the experience of the visitors, the degree of their interaction, their feeling of being immersed, and in some cases their sense of distance. The empirical part of the study is relevant to the knowledge of the technological experience in the luxury hotel sector. It determines such common conflicts: autonomy/cognitive overload, innovation/digital exclusion, technological comfort/the need to have human contact. Some customers view technology as a means of improving the experience, making the experience more personalized, predicting the stay, or ensuring smooth interaction with the services offered by the establishment. Others, quite to the contrary, want to be half or fully disconnected, to get closer to a more real human experience, a sense of locality, or a sense of sobriety in experience. Such variety of expectations emphasizes the non-linearity and even ambivalence of the relationship between technology and tourist immersion.

However, there are a number of limitations in this research which ought to be taken into account. The research is based on a qualitative sample with a restriction to very high-end establishments within a certain cultural context. Such a selection enables an in-depth experience with unique experiences (Dias et al., 2024); however, reducing the possibility of generalizing the findings to other parts of the hotel industry or the rest of the world. Furthermore, there is a certain amount of subjectivity and reconstruction when it comes to the use of life stories based on the memories, emotions, and expectations of the participating parties. The research is also unable to establish a clear correlation between customer characteristics (age, digital

skills, geographical origin) and their relationship to technology, which creates the possibility of further research. Such limitations of the methods and the results of empirical studies demand the introduction of new research perspectives. To begin with, it would be pertinent to expand the analysis to other categories of accommodation (budget hotels, guesthouses, collaborative platforms) to see whether the logic of technological appropriation takes place in a parallel manner. Observations in different cultural settings would also contribute to the determination of the role of social norms and cultural allusions in the perception of digital tools. In addition, a mixed methodology, involving qualitative data, particularly interviews or narratives, and quantitative data, which is provided by the satisfaction survey, the level of engagement, or the use of the technology, would be a viable approach to cross-referencing the subjective and behavioral aspects of the experience. Last but not least, there might be a longitudinal approach where customer attitude and practice can be monitored as the conformity to the ever-changing technologies. It would be a pertinent way to analyze the curve of accepting or rejecting the digital innovations depending on their intrusion level, intuitive or perceived value addition, and help the professionals in designing customer journeys that are more relevant, more inclusive, and more aligned to the differentiated expectations of users. Finally, this paper highlights the fact that technology integration in the tourist experience cannot be considered a direct and functional process. It requires subtle, sensitive, and contextualized thinking where digital tools would be created not as a goal in themselves, but as facilitators of experiences, stories, and meanings. It is within this tension between technological innovation, relationship quality, and cultural anchoring that the circumstances of a completely co-constructed immersion for tourists now have its playing field.

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