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Innovation Adoption in Boutique Hotels: A Study of Guests Perceptions Across the Customer Experience Journey

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Supervisor: Mark Banchansky

Applied Project

Independent College

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To my partner, the kindest person I know, my hero. Thank you for being there, for all your patience and love.

To my mother, my favourite person in the world, thank you for always believing in me. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

Abstract

The increasing adoption of technology within the hospitality industry presents both opportunities and challenges for boutique hotels, where personalised service and human interaction remain central to the guest experience. Despite growing research in hospitality innovation, limited attention has been given to understanding innovation adoption from the perspective of boutique hotel guests. This study investigates how Rogers' (1983) five innovation adoption factors influence guests' willingness to adopt new technologies across the boutique hotel customer experience journey. These adoption factors are: relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, trialability, and observability.

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative data gathered through five semi-structured interviews involving hospitality professionals and experienced hotel guests. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and cross-tabulation, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis.

The findings indicate that guests generally value technologies that improve convenience and efficiency, particularly those that reduce friction during booking, check-in, and in-stay experiences. However, adoption is influenced not only by perceived usefulness but also by trust, reliability, transparency, and opportunities for human interaction. While guests recognise the benefits of innovation, many remain reluctant to adopt new features that reduce meaningful human interaction.

The study contributes to the existing literature by providing guest-centred insights into innovation adoption within boutique hotels and extending understanding of Rogers' framework within this context. The findings suggest that boutique hotels should implement technologies that enhance service delivery while preserving the human-centred values that define the sector.

Keywords: Innovation Adoption, Boutique Hotels, Hospitality Technology, Customer Experience, Guest Perceptions, Diffusion of Innovations, Rogers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The hospitality industry has overseen a rapid increase of new technology adoption across all sectors, with special emphasis on AI-driven tools for the past three years. These new technologies, such as AI-chatbots, butler-bots, smart room-controls, automated services, etc., have particularly been notoriously implemented in big chain hotels. Meanwhile, the boutique hotel sector is presented with a much more complex challenge, as they try to navigate the incorporation of new technologies while maintaining their offered experience which is personalised, aesthetic/authentic, and human-centered. As a result, it becomes unclear how guests perceive the adoption of technological innovations within the boutique experience, and which factors influence their willingness to use new hotel features at different stages of their stay.

Although innovation adoption has been discussed extensively throughout the hospitality industry, especially present in managerial perspectives of mainstream or chain hotels, a structured exploration of what influences innovation adoption of guest-centered perceptions has barely been attempted. Moreover, it was found a gap in research where the five influencing factors of innovation adoption -relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, trialability and observability- of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation (Rogers,1983) have been scarcely applied to the customer experience journey across the all the stages of the hotel stay.

This study aims to empirically evaluate the effects of Rogers' five factors shaping guests' perspectives of adopting new technological features within the context of the complete customer experience journey of the boutique hotel stay, through a rigorous analytical framework. It will also attempt to identify the relative importance of these factors in relation to guest satisfaction level, the extent of effect to each level of the stay, and its significance on business performance.

1.2 Research Questions

- Q1: How do Rogers' five innovation adoption factors influence boutique hotel guests' willingness to adopt new technologies across the customer experience journey?

- H0: There is no significant relationship between Rogers' innovation adoption factors and guests' intentions to use new hotel technologies across the customer experience journey.
- H1: There is a significant relationship between Rogers' innovation adoption factors and guests' intentions to use new hotel technologies on at least one of the stages of the customer experience journey.

- Q2: How do guests emotionally respond to technology-enhanced services in Boutique Hotels?

1.3 Research Objectives

- To examine Rogers' influencing factors of innovation adoption (Relative Advantage, Complexity, Compatibility, Trialability and Observability) within the hotel guest experience.
- To identify which stages of the boutique-hotel customer experience journey the incorporation of new technologies become most valuable, relevant, or disruptive.
- To provide boutique hotels with recommendations that are evidence-based, on how and when to implement technological innovations to enhance customer experience and support business growth, in relation to guests' emotional perspectives.

1.4 Research Themes

This study is structured around five research themes identified through the preliminary review of literature on innovation adoption within boutique hotels. These themes represent distinct areas of investigation that collectively contribute to understanding how guests perceive and respond to technological innovations throughout the customer experience journey.

These themes are:

1. Benefits of innovative features in boutique hotels: it explores the perceived advantages and value generated by new technologies.
2. Guests' comprehension degree of new hotel features: it examines how complexity and ease of understanding influence adoption.
3. Innovation fit to boutique hotel guest lifestyle: it investigates the compatibility of innovations with guests expectations, values, and experiences.

4. New features: challenges and risk-taking in boutique settings: it explores uncertainty, trialability, and willingness to engage with unfamiliar technologies.
5. Social influences: behavioural trends versus emotional connections: it navigates the role of social influence, observability, and behavioural patterns in shaping adoption decisions.

Together, these themes provide a structured framework for examining innovation adoption through the lens of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory. While each theme addresses a distinct aspect of the adoption process, they are interconnected and collectively contribute to understanding how guests evaluate, accept, or resist technological innovations within boutique hotel environments. The themes also support the development of the research questions and objectives by providing a foundation for investigating both the functional and emotional factors that influence technology adoption across the customer experience journey.

1.5 Relevance and Importance of the Research

This study will be extending Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations into boutique hospitality from a guest-centric perspective, where most studies are focused on operational or managerial perspectives, and models such as Technology acceptance model (TAM) or Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Dziak, 2024; Im, Hong and Kang, 2011). Although these models explored behavioural intention and influencing factors that could be related to Rogers' theory, they approach it in a systematic manner. They do not, however, encompass the full spectrum of the multiple touchpoints across the customer experience journey as it is the intent of this study.

It will be tested whether Rogers' classic framework explains consumer technology behaviour across the entire guest experience journey (pre-stay, in-stay and post-stay), with the intent to find if innovation adoption differs by touchpoint based on empirical evidence. This will be relevant in identifying which innovations guests actually value, which ones they find disruptive and which touchpoints matter the most for businesses investing prioritisation, while preserving the boutique identity.

This study is expected to demonstrate which of Rogers' five influencing factors to innovation adoption provides the strongest effect on guest behaviour, and whether their impact varies meaningfully across all stages of the boutique hotel customer experience journey. It is also forecasted that the findings will show differentiated adoption patterns across the pre-stay, in-stay and post-stay

touchpoints, of either both highly valuable or disruptive perceptions. It is also anticipated to clarify whether new technologies enhance guest satisfaction, or risks undermining the aspects that define the industry.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews the literature relevant to innovation adoption within boutique hotel guest experiences. The review is guided by Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory, focusing on the five factors influencing adoption: relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, trialability, and observability. Alongside the theoretical foundations, the chapter examines the characteristics of boutique hotels and the role of innovative technologies and service processes within this sector. The literature is then analysed thematically to explore how these factors influence guests' perceptions and willingness to engage with new technology.

Finally, the chapter synthesises the key findings, identifies gaps within the existing body of knowledge and establishes the rationale for the present study.

2.2 Conceptual foundations and Key Definitions

2.2.1 Exploring Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory

In Diffusion of Innovations, Rogers identifies five factors affecting innovation adoption across multiple industries: Relative advantage, complexity, Compatibility, Trialability, and observability (Rogers, 1983). These aim to structure the understanding of the relationship between customers' willingness to embrace innovative technological changes, and it is central for the empirical study of the guest innovation acceptance through the customer experience journey.

2.2.2 Understanding Boutique Hotels

The term "Boutique Hotel" originates as a form of opposition to standardization models of big scale hotel chains circa 1980 (Pereira, 2017). It represents a growing sector within the hospitality industry and is defined by specific characteristics: unique design, heritage link or historical setting, and personalised service (Ahmad et al., 2017; Pereira, 2017). However, in more current papers "experience design" and "novelty" elements are considered as further characteristics (Buhagiar, Pace and Dingli, 2023). Regardless of differences in characterisations, these studies agree that boutique hotels target a niche market that looks for luxury, authenticity and personalised experiences.

2.2.3 Hotels' innovative features and processes

Such is the case for boutique guests, that it is relevant to define what constitutes novelty in the hotel experience. Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation theory defines an innovation as any idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new (Rogers, 1983). Innovation features in the hospitality industry can range widely from gadgets and robotics, to new approaches to services (Eg.: digital, online, automated, AI, etc.) throughout the hotel experience (Ahmad et al., 2017). In the Boutique Hotel context, innovative features could be: robotic concierges, smart room environments, high-tech facilities, AI applications such as concierge chatbots, experiential and architectural design, molecular gastronomy, among others (Ananeva, 2019; Kurgun et al., 2011; Rohan et al., 2019).

2.3 Thematic Review of the Literature

2.3.1 Benefits of innovative features in Boutique Hotels

Relative advantage is defined as "the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it supersedes." (Rogers, 1983), where the benefits of incorporating services such as AI concierge has proved to outweigh the reduction of human interaction, reducing dissonance in communications between hotel staff and guest, becoming less-time consuming and more personalised (Ananeva, 2019; Li and Khan, 2025). However, Mndzebele (2013) found that relative advantage was not a predictor of E-commerce acceptance in hotel management, particularly because they were not aware of any advantage it could provide (Mndzebele, 2013).

The researcher implies that there are many benefits in incorporating the use of augmented reality, AI, chatbots, etc. as the guest is thought to be on the lookout for something extraordinary, however, only mentions cost as a perceived impact of technological advancements in hospitality (Rohan et al., 2019). Overall, it is not clear whether relative advantage in efficiency and personalisation influences guests' innovation adoption, as both guests and managers do not perceive meaningful benefits of new technologies, and current research lacks significant relation between factor and innovation adoption.

This lack of clarity is combined with the fact that relative advantage is subjective, depending on specific values and need of potential adopters as Dibra agrees with Rogers' theory (Dibra, 2015; Rogers, 1983). Ananeva's and Tan et al. 's studies adhere to this concept in the case of boutique hotels. They

sustain that in this sector, any perceived benefit from AI or digital innovation must be weighed against the personalized human care that defines the sector's core identity (Ananeva, 2019; Tan et al., 2025).

2.3.2 Guests' comprehension degree of new hotel features

Oturakci and Yuregir (2017), refers to Rogers' complexity as the level of difficulty of understanding a new technology, or ease of comprehension and suggests that this factor is dependent on the level of education of the user and years of experience, as this appears to be an indicator for interrelation with other factors and which cluster of them should be studied (Oturakci and Yuregir, 2017). When contrasted to Rogers' theory, it was found that for users with less than five years of experience, suggesting that the difficulty of a new feature relates to whether the guest is afforded a low-stakes environment to experiment (Oturakci and Yuregir, 2017; Rogers, 1983).

Two years later, Ananeva (2019) studied the relationship of the incorporation of AI in Boutique Hotels as a disruptive innovation intervening in the staff-guest interaction (Ananeva, 2019). It was found that even at a management level, the AI concept was barely understood, compromising the development of the interviews carried out (Ananeva, 2019). Ananeva's finding that management barely understood AI concepts highlights a failure in technology gatekeeping (Ananeva, 2019). If managers cannot articulate the software information or properly explain the new feature, they cannot effectively reduce the guest's uncertainty (Ananeva, 2019; Rogers, 1983).

A more recent study of the use of AI in hotels found that it still requires further research as it proposes a lack of holistic understanding of mentioned complexity, limiting to very specific uses of AI in hotels, and requiring a more holistic approach to the integration (Tan et al., 2025). These findings showcase that complexity is subjective to the user segment (Rogers, 1983; Tan et al., 2025). Moreover, while leisure guests may find AI-driven front-of-house features complex, younger generations may perceive the same features as convenient (Ananeva, 2019; Tan et al., 2025). Therefore, the complexity Tan et al. (2025) refer to is not just lack of research, but a failure to apply audience segmentation strategies (Rogers, 1983; Tan et al., 2025).

2.3.3 Innovation fit to Boutique Hotel guest lifestyle

The theme of culture appears as a highly impacting characteristic of what is understood by high compatibility, where boutique hotels in particular would see a rather successful adoption of innovation when closely linked to the dimension of Aesthetics (Kokkhangplu and Auemsuvarn, 2024). However,

not only visual aspects of cultural closeness to the innovation are relevant, but also how well those cultural elements are preserved as heritage, such as: traditions, linguistic expressions, etc. (Zhang et al., 2025).

Although culture is a clear study subject in understanding compatibility, Ojha (2025) proposed that it is rather the emotional connection and atmosphere that provides a sense of compatibility when adopting new technologies, easing the adoption of new technologies through the consumer experience (Ojha, 2025).

The findings show that the compatibility of innovation with boutique guest's lifestyle is not just a matter of technological integration, but a strategic alignment with the human-centric model that defines the sector (Ananeva, 2019; Tan et al., 2025). While technologies such as AI and self-service kiosks can improve efficiency, they may also reduce the warm and personal atmosphere expected in boutique hotels as both Ananeva (2019) and Tan et al. (2025) suggest. Further research supports this by suggesting that innovation is more likely to be accepted when it enhances authenticity and guest experience without replacing human interaction (Richards, 2024).

2.3.4 New features: challenges and risk-taking in boutique settings

Rogers' trialability involves a degree of risk-taking of the innovation testing, where most potential adopters are more likely to use a new technology if the innovation can be verifyable, reducing uncertainty (Dibra, 2015). However, this influencing factor represents challenges to research capabilities. Most studies examine adopting innovations when it has been implemented already, and where the exploration of the ability to test first can be overlooked, as unfamiliar innovations carry uncertainty that affects willingness to test (Rogers, 1983).

Islam, M.S. (2025) found that properly testing new experimental features can be challenging to understand when using traditional research tools, as it does not always capture the full depth of a guest's experience, as it encompasses sensory, environmental and emotional levels to the experience (Islam, 2025).

In the exploration of entrepreneurial marketing within Boutique hotels, one of the seven core dimensions is related to calculated risk-taking, it finds this risk taking approach in entrepreneurs is perceived as a condition for succeeding in innovation (Kurgun et al., 2011). However, this is considered once more, through the lens of managerial effect. Moreover, it recognizes the need for further

empirical research within the industry as technological advancements are continuously growing at a fast pace, and it seems relevant to keep studying the relationships between technological adoptions and guest experience through trials and testing.

2.3.5 Social influences: Behavioural trends versus emotional connections

Research shows social curation, peer validation and social media influencers as primary sources of online opinion leaders, through which emotional connection and perceived relatedness can persuade consumers in fastly adopting new trends and technologies (Pandit et al., 2024; Richards, 2024; Schmitt, 2024). Florido-Benítez's (2025) research on the UK tourism sector and AI, demonstrates that visible displays of technology adoption within tourism can create mimetic pressures to conform. This suggests that observability may operate not only through awareness of innovation, but also through the social validation attached to its adoption (Florido-Benítez, 2025).

Furthermore, Padilla et al. (2024) argue that customer behaviour can be predicted through patterns identified across similar consumer groups. This challenges Roger's concept of observability as a predominantly visible characteristic (Padilla et al., 2024; Rogers, 1983). This contemplates observability operating not only through visible behaviour, but through predictive patterns, evidencing that observability is not just visual, but behavioural and patterned (Florido-Benítez, 2025; Padilla et al., 2024; Rogers, 1983).

2.4 Synthesis of the Literature

The literature collectively suggests that innovation adoption within boutique hotels is influenced by complex interaction between technological benefits, guest perceptions, and distinctive characteristics of the boutique hospitality sector. Across Rogers' five innovation adoption factors, a recurring pattern emerges in which guests are willing to adopt innovation when it enhances convenience, personalisation, authenticity and service quality.

Relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, trialability, and observability are therefore not isolated influences but interconnected factors. They jointly shape guests' willingness to engage with new technologies. While innovation may improve efficiency and create novel experiences, its adoption is often dependent on how well it aligns with guests expectations.

However, the literature also reveals several contradictions and unresolved debates. While some studies position technological innovation as a source of enhanced personalisation, efficiency, and competitive advantage, others suggest that excessive reliance on innovation may undermine authenticity, emotional connection, and personalised service. Similarly, although observability and social influence appear to encourage innovation adoption, emerging research suggests that digital environments are transforming observability. It implies that it shifts this factor from a visible phenomenon into a behavioural perception.

These tensions in literature indicate that innovation adoption within boutique hotels cannot be explained solely through technological characteristics, but must also be understood through the broader context of guest experiences, social influences and service expectations. As a result, a more holistic exploration of guest perceptions is required to better understand how innovation adoption operates across the boutique hotel customer journey.

2.5 Identification of Research Gap

This literature review found limited empirical evidence of guests perceptions on innovation adoption with special focus on boutique hotels. The boutique hotel environment shows insufficient understanding on complexity of new-technologies experiences, where most studies focus on managerial, rather than guest comprehension and perspectives. Furthermore, there is limited exploration whether personalised experiences and cultural and emotional backgrounds affect compatibility of innovation adoption within the industry. In terms of triability, few studies actually examine adoption before innovation is fully implemented; perhaps research tools should be improved to account for the qualitative data traditional research tools are unable to capture in terms of trialability. Moreover, visual or influencer-based observability is greatly studied across studies, however, there is limited relation evaluation between behavioural patterns and observability. Finally, existing research tends to examine innovation adoption at specific service encounters or technology touchpoints, with limited investigation of how these factors influence guests' perspectives across the complete customer journey.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature surrounding innovation adoption within the boutique hotel sector through Roger’s Diffusion of Innovations Theory. The review examined the five influencing

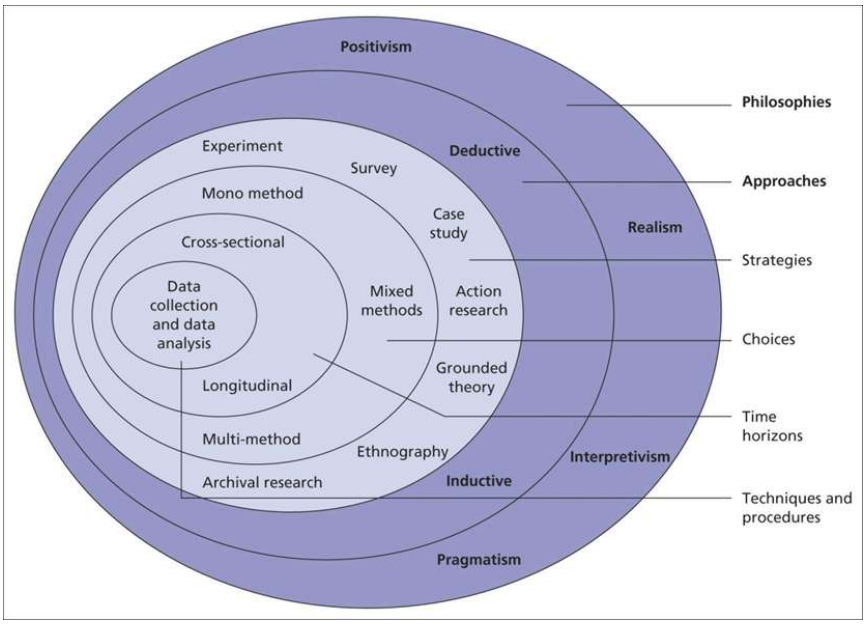
factors of adoption, and explored their relevance within the hotel guest experiences. The literature identified recurring themes relating to technological benefits, guest understanding of new features, alignment with boutique hotel values, risk and uncertainty during adoption. It also identified the influence of social and behavioural factors. As a whole, the studies suggest that innovation adoption is shaped by a combination of technological characteristics, guest perceptions, emotional responses, and hospitality expectations.

The review also identified several gaps within the existing body of knowledge, particularly the limited empirical focus on guest perspectives and the lack of holistic examination of innovation adoption across the customer experience journey. Furthermore, it identified the insufficient understanding of how emotional, cultural, and behavioural factors influence adoption within boutique hotels. These gaps provide the justification for the present study and support the research questions and objectives established in chapter 1. Having established the theoretical foundations and research rationale, the following chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to investigate guests' perceptions of innovation adoption within the boutique hotel context.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted to investigate the factors influencing innovation adoption within the boutique hotel guest experience. Guided by Saunders et al.'s (2009) Research Onion framework, the chapter presents and justifies the methodological choices made throughout the study, from the research philosophy to the data collection and analysis procedures.



The figure adopted from Melnikovas' (2018) article on research methodology, shows the Research Onion with its layers adapted from Saunders et al.'s (2009) Research Onion framework. The framework provides a structured process for developing coherent methodology by progressing from philosophical assumptions to specific data collection and analysis techniques. The methodological choices made at each layer are discussed in the following sections.

To address the research questions and objectives, a mixed-methods design was adopted, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data. The following sections discuss the research philosophy, research approach, research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, data analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations.

3.2 Research Philosophy

This research adopts a pragmatic research philosophy. Pragmatism, primarily introduced by Sanders Peirce circa 1880 (Peirce, 1878/1986). Pragmatism assesses the meaning and value of knowledge by its practical consequences and usefulness in addressing real-world problems. This is suitable for this empirical mixed-methods study, as observed in the outer layer of the Research Onion that reflects the assumptions that guided this research process (Saunders et al., 2009). This philosophy is assumed for the research design of this study to address its research questions effectively and with practical impact.

The pragmatic philosophy allows this study to combine different data analysis techniques. For the study of innovation adoption factors, quantitative data collected through surveys is used for statistical examination of guest behaviour. Qualitative data gathered from interviews is then used to provide in-depth contextual nuance. This philosophy recognizes the need for both measurable and interpretative evaluation of the boutique hotel guest experience.

Pragmatism prioritizes using the methods that best address the study of the influencing factors of innovation adoption in the boutique hotel context and application. This allows the focus on a specific problem, unlike adherence to a single philosophical position such as positivism or interpretivism (Saunders et al., 2009). This flexibility ensures this research is driven by the practical requirements of the research questions. In this manner, the study can benefit from a broader spectrum of insights that a single-method approach might overlook.

3.3 Research Approach

This study adopts an abductive research approach, which combines elements of both inductive and deductive reasoning (Peirce, 1878/1986). It does so combining the deductive reasoning within the quantitative phase and inductive reasoning within the qualitative phase of the Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2009). The approach is appropriate for this mix-methods study as it allows existing theoretical concepts, specifically Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 1983), to guide the investigation while remaining open to new insights emerging from collected data.

The quantitative findings provide an opportunity to examine patterns relating to the five innovation adoption factors, while the qualitative interviews enable a deeper exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives. Therefore, the abductive approach supports the

development of explanations that are grounded in both existing theory and empirical evidence, contributing to a richer understanding of innovation adoption within the boutique hotel context.

3.4 Research Design and Methodological Strategy

This research methodology performed a pragmatic philosophy, which enabled the integration of quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods, recognising the need for both measurable and interpretive evaluation of boutique-hotel guest experiences. Quantitative data was collected through surveys allowing statistical examination of the relationships between Rogers' factors and guest behaviour. Qualitative data was collected through interviews, from which insights aided in giving in-depth contextual nuance of this relationship across the different touchpoints of the guest's customer experience journey.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Moving towards the inner layers of the Research Onion, this section outlines the data collection procedures employed within the study (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.5.1 Data Type

This study relied on primary data collected through an online survey and semi-structured interview. The use of primary data ensured that the findings reflected current guest perceptions and experiences regarding technological innovation within boutique hotels. The survey provided quantitative data from a larger sample of hotel guests, while the interviews generated qualitative insights from both hospitality professionals and experienced guests, supporting data triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

3.5.2 Data Scale

The survey incorporated nominal data in demographic categories, and yes/no question for profiling and segmentation; ordinal data measured using Likert scales; and ratio data for segmentation.

For the purpose of triangulation, the interviews used nominal data to support segmentation, and ordinal data for comparison and quantification of interview themes, intensity and/or strength of factors.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

A non-probability convenience sampling strategy was adopted to recruit participants with relevant experience of hotel services and technological innovations. For the quantitative section, the target sample size ranged from 80 to 150 respondents, focusing on individuals who had previously stayed in a hotel and could provide informed perspectives on innovation adoption within hospitality settings. The final survey obtained 98 valid responses, providing a sufficient dataset for descriptive, reliability and cross-tabulation analyses.

For the qualitative section, five semi-structured interviews were targeted to obtain deeper insights and enhance numerical data. A purposive approach was used to select both hospitality professionals and experienced hotel guests, allowing the study to capture managerial and consumer perspectives. The final sample consisted of five participants, including three hotel managers and two frequent hotel guests with extensive exposure to boutique and luxury hospitality environments. This combination enabled the collection of diverse viewpoints and supported the triangulation of findings within the mixed methods design.

3.7 Data Analysis Methods

3.7.1 Mixed Methods

Consistent with the study's pragmatic philosophy and mix-methods approach, quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately before being integrated during the interpretation stage. This approach allowed the research to combine numerical trends from survey responses with deeper insights obtained through interviews, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing innovation adoption with boutique hotels. The integration of both datasets supports triangulation, enabling comparisons between statistical patterns and participant experiences to strengthen the overall findings.

3.7.2 Quantitative

This study used descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequencies, percentages), reliability analysis, such as Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) for consistency of Likert-scale questions, cross-tabulation analysis, and basic thematic grouping for open-ended questions. These analyses were conducted by using Microsoft Excel software. These allowed for the summary of participant responses,

test whether the five factors can be reliably measured by the Likert-scale items, and analyse the significance and intensity of the factors influencing guests' decisions to adopt new hotel features.

3.7.3 Qualitative

The qualitative interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases approach. This method facilitated the identification, coding, and interpretation of recurring themes and patterns within participants' responses (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Through this process, the analysis explored how guests and hospitality professionals perceive technological innovation, providing contextual understanding of quantitative findings and generating deeper insights into the factors influencing innovation adoption within boutique hotel environments.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in compliance with GDPR following the ethical guidelines for studies that involve human participants (General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2019). These were provided with information in full transparency and clarity in regards to the purpose, scope and academic nature of this study prior participation. Engagement in the survey and interviews were entirely voluntary and anonymous, informed consent was required prior completion on each ethical topic. No personally identifiable information was collected unless respondents choose to provide their email address for the purpose of receiving further information, and such data will be optional, sorted separately and keeping confidentiality at all times.

Data was processed exclusively for academic analysis within the context of the researcher's final year project, and will be stored securely under password. Participants have the right to withdraw completion of the survey at any time, and no incomplete/withdrawn responses will be included in the dataset.

3.9 Reliability and Validity

To enhance reliability and validity, this study employed a mixed-methods design that enabled the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings. The survey instrument was developed directly from Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 1983), ensuring alignment between the research objectives and the measurement of the five innovation adoption factors. Reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha (Cronbach, 1951) to evaluate the internal consistency of the Likert-scale

constructs. For the qualitative phase, trustworthiness was enhanced through the use of semi-structured interviews, consistent interview procedures, and systematic thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The combination of multiple data sources and analytical methods strengthened the credibility of the findings and provided a more comprehensive understanding of innovation adoption in the boutique sector.

3.10 Limitations of the Methodology

Several limitations should be acknowledged within this methodology. The use of non-probability sampling limits the applicability of the findings beyond the study sample, as participants were selected based on accessibility and relevance rather than random selection. The survey relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by respondent bias or individual interpretations of technological innovation. Additionally, the qualitative phase involved a relatively small number of interview participants, which may not capture the full diversity of perspectives within the hospitality industry. Finally, while the mixed-methods approach provides richer insights, the time and resource constraints associated with undergraduate research limited the scale of data collection and analysis that could be undertaken.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined and justified the methodological framework adopted to investigate the factors influencing innovation adoption within boutique hotels. Guided by Saunders et al.'s (2009) Research Onion framework, the study adopted a pragmatic philosophy, an abductive research approach, and a mix-methods design. Primary data were collected through an online survey and semi-structured interviews, allowing both quantitative and qualitative perspectives to be examined. Appropriate sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures were selected to ensure alignment with the research questions and objectives. Ethical considerations were also addressed to support the credibility of the research findings.

Having established the methodological foundations of the study, the next chapter presents the analysis and findings of the primary research. The results from the survey and interviews are reported and organised according to the research objectives and themes identified throughout the study, providing the basis for the subsequent discussion chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the result of primary research conducted to study guest perceptions of innovation adoption in boutique hotels context. This study seeks to understand how different factors of innovation adoption impact the boutique guest experience. By following the pragmatic methodology established in the previous chapter, mix-methods approach was used to provide both measurable and interpretative evaluation of guests' experiences.

The chapter is structured to showcase a comprehensive view of the gathered data, beginning with profile strategy for survey respondents and interview participants. The findings sections are organised as follows:

- Quantitative Findings: This section presents analysis of data collected via structured surveys. The findings are categorized according to the five factors of Rogers' theory: relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, trialability, and observability. Descriptive statistics analysis, reliability analysis, and cross-tabulation analysis are employed to summarize key trends, identify significant predictors of guest behaviour, and test reliability of likert-scale questions.
- Qualitative Findings: This section details the insights gained from semi-structured interviews with industry managerial personnel and experienced guests. This section will use thematic analysis to provide nuanced contextual depth to quantitative results. It will explore the reasoning and perceptions behind guests' decisions to adopt new hotel features.
- Summary of Key Findings: This section concludes the chapter with a synthesis of the most critical outcomes from both quantitative and qualitative findings. It also summarises the patterns recognised and prepares the foundation for deeper theoretical interpretation that follows in Chapter 5.

4.2 Quantitative Findings

4.2.1 Respondent Profile

As it is shown in the below table, the survey respondents were primarily concentrated in the 25-34 age demographic, which represents the largest segment at 34.7% of the total 98 respondents. The remaining age groups are distributed relatively evenly, with the 45-54 bracket making up 17.3% and the 18-24 group representing the smallest portion at 9.2%.

Age Group	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
18 – 24	9	9.2%
25 – 34	34	34.7%
35 – 44	11	11.2%
45 – 54	17	17.3%
55 – 64	14	14.3%
65+	13	13.3%
Total	**98**	**100%**

In terms of travel frequency, the profile is dominated by moderate travellers showing 51% of participants stay in hotels between 2 and 4 times per year, as detailed in the table below. High-frequency travellers staying 5 to 7 times constitute 19.4%, and 8 or more times are 14.3%. Those with minimal hotel usage (0 to 1 stay per year) account for 15.3% of the sample. Overall, this creates a respondent profile largely defined by younger to middle-aged adults who maintain a regular annual habit of hotel visitation.

Amount of Stays per Year	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
0 – 1	15	15.30%
2 – 4	50	51.00%
5 – 7	19	19.40%
8+	14	14.30%
Total	**98**	**100%**

The analysis of traveller types reveals that the largest segment of participants consists of couple travellers, who make up 41.8% of the total respondents. This is followed by family travellers at 21.4% and those travelling for business at 15.3% Smaller groups include participants who travel with friends

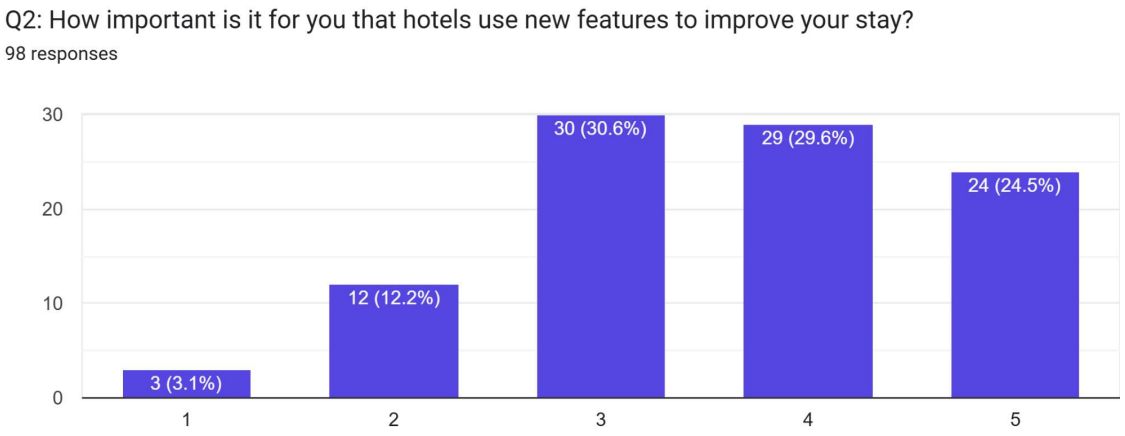
(11.2%) or solo (8.2%). Overall, these findings indicate a respondent base that is heavily leisure-oriented, with nearly two thirds of the participants travelling either as a couple or with family.

Traveller Type	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
Couple	41	41.80%
Family	21	21.40%
Business	15	15.30%
Friends	11	11.20%
Solo	8	8.20%
Business & Couple (50/50)	1	1.00%
All of the above	1	1.00%
Total	98	100%

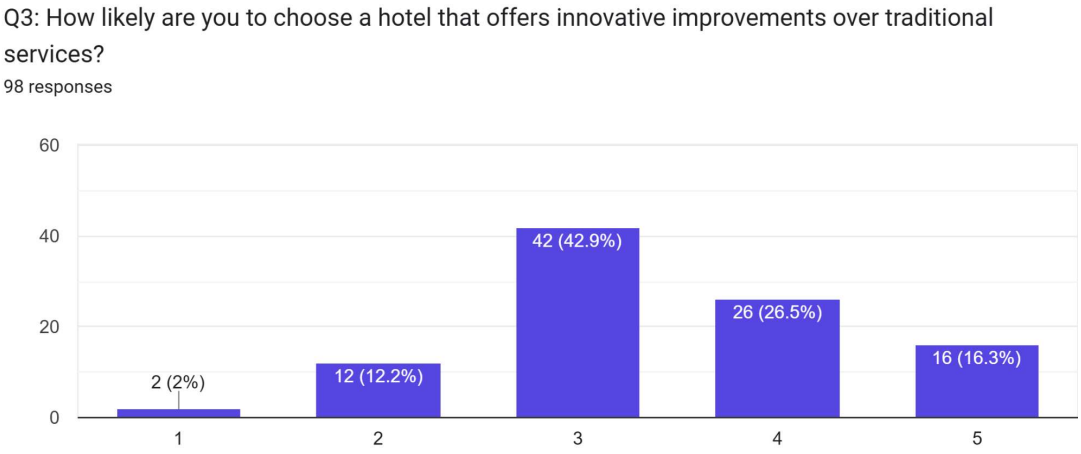
Moreover, the respondents showed a 51% preference for traditional hotels over other accommodations, a lack of engagement with hotel loyalty programmes (69.4%), and heavy reliance on booking platforms such as booking.com (36%). Finally, the data portrays a market that values leisure and convenience but remains largely unattached to specific brands, suggesting that technology adoption should focus on social proof for casual travellers and efficiency for frequent ones. These findings will be further explored in the following sections of this chapter.

4.2.2 Relative Advantage Section

The relative advantage section of the survey demonstrates strong internal consistency, with the construct achieving Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81, indicating that the items effectively and reliably measure the perceived benefits of innovation adoption. The findings reveal that respondents primarily define advantage through operational efficiency and convenience rather than technological novelty. This is evidenced by Q1, where 71.4% of participants identified faster and automated check-in/out processes as the most beneficial innovation, followed closely by faster communication with staff (64.3%), while high-tech features like concierge robots (9.2%) and voice assistants (12.2%) obtained significantly less interest.



Although there is a generally positive sentiment regarding the importance of new features (mean: 3.6 in Q2), there is a visible hesitation in behavioural intent when it comes to hotel selection. While 54.1% of respondents believed new features are relevant to improve their stay (Q2), 42.8% expressed a high likelihood of choosing an innovative hotel over a traditional one (Q3). This suggests that while innovation is respected, it may not yet be a primary competitive differentiator.

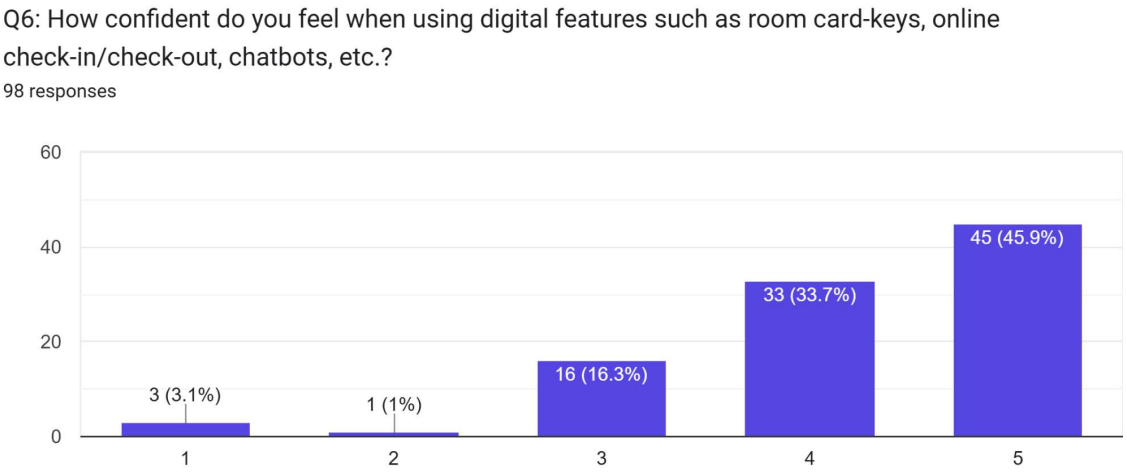


Furthermore, open-ended responses in Q4 reinforce that the main advantage sought during the booking stage is easiness and speed, with recurring mentions of easiness of booking, price/quality ratio, and comfort values. This suggests that technology is only valued as a relative advantage when it simplifies the core travel experience.

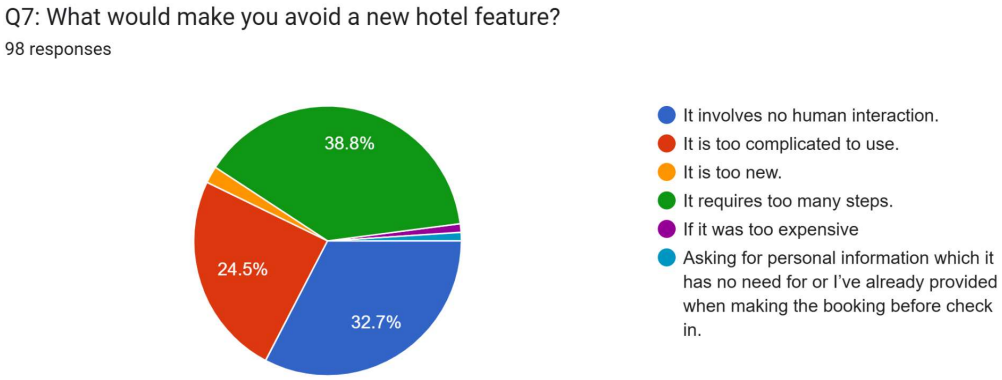
4.2.3 Complexity Section

The analysis of the complexity section reveals a notable discrepancy between respondents' self-perceived technical proficiency and their actual historical experiences with hotel innovation. Data

from Q6 indicates a high level of self-confidence, with the construct yielding a mean score of 4.2 and a mode of 5, showing that 79.6% of respondents feel confident using digital features such as room card-keys and chatbots. This sentiment is mirrored in Q5, where a majority of 63.3% claimed they have never struggled with new digital features at a hotel.



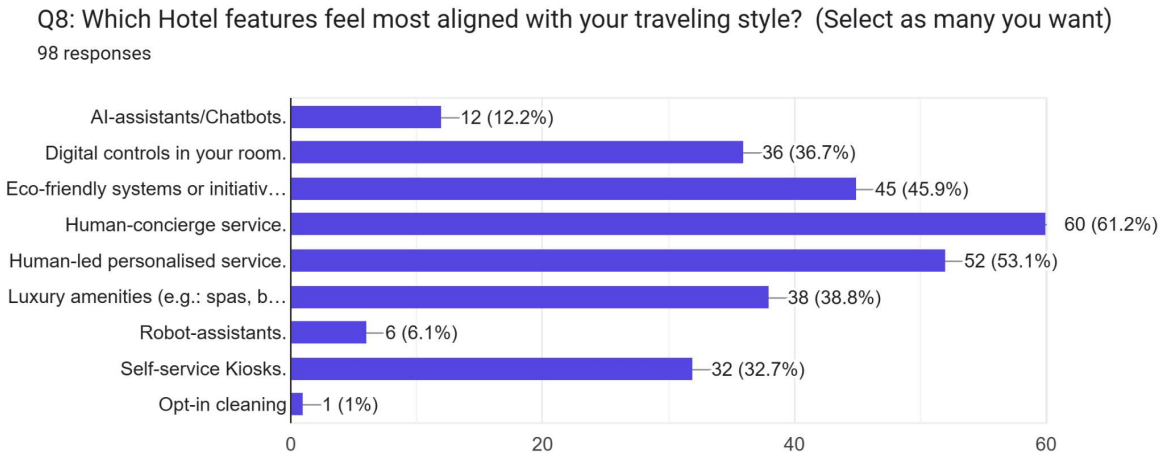
However, findings also show that 36.7% of participants admitted to having struggled, suggesting that a significant portion of the market still finds a steep learning curve to current technological implementations. Moreover, findings from Q7 clarify that complexity for these travellers is defined by operational friction and loss of social elements.

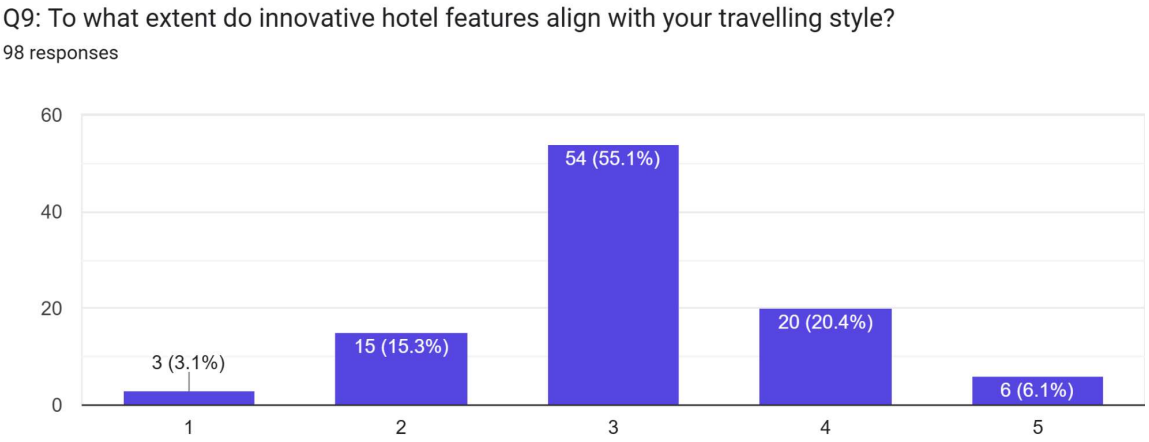


The primary reasons for avoiding a new feature are that it requires too many steps (38.8%) or involves no human interaction (32.7%). This suggests that while respondents consider themselves tech-savvy, their adoption is conditional upon technology remaining invisible and efficient. This concludes that any feature that complicates the user journey or removes the human touch is viewed as a barrier rather than an improvement.

4.2.4 Compatibility Section

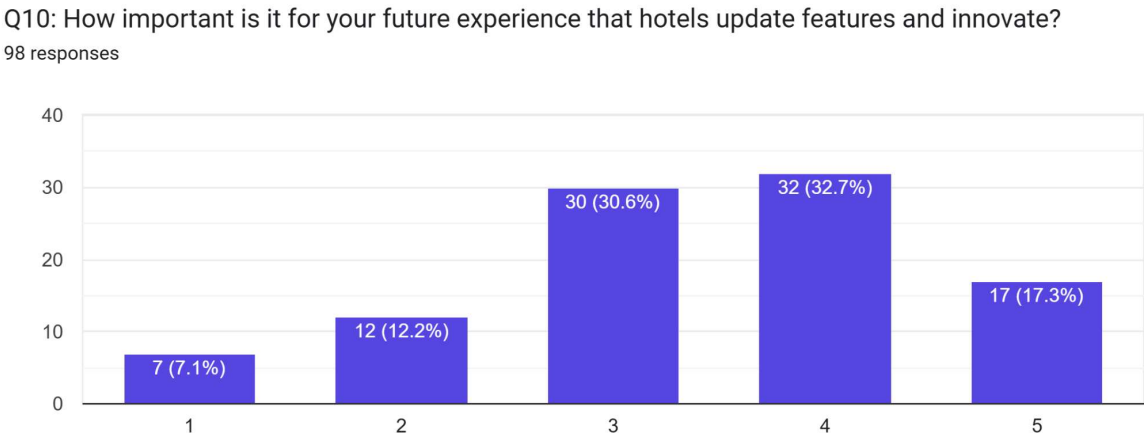
The compatibility section of the survey achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.76, indicating that items provided an acceptable level of internal consistency for measuring how well innovation aligns with participants' travel styles. Q8 reveals a strong preference for traditional service values over technological ones, with 61.2% of respondents aligning their travelling style with human-concierge services and 53.1% with human-led personalised service, while tech-heavy features like AI-assistants (12.2%) and robot-assistants (6.1%) oversaw minimal alignment. This preference for the human aspect is further reflected in Q9, where the largest segment of participants (55.1%) gave a neutral score of 3 regarding current alignment, leading to a modest mean of 3.1.





Despite this current hesitation, data from Q10 shows a clear recognition of the need for change, as 50% of respondents believe it is important for hotels to innovate for their future experiences, as observed in the mode of 4. Ultimately, these findings suggest a compatibility gap where guests

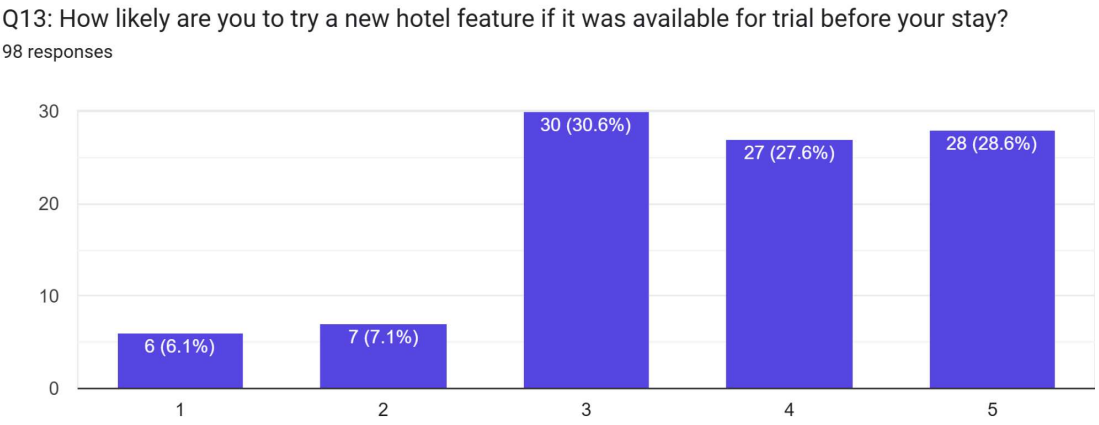
acknowledge the future importance of hotel evolution but feel that current innovative offerings do not yet match the personal, human-centric nature of their preferred travel styles.



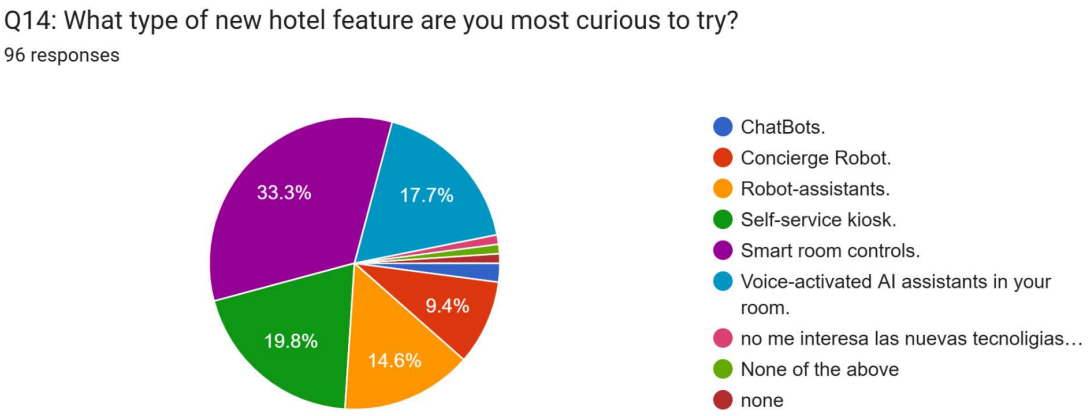
4.2.5 Trialability Section

The trialability construct demonstrated a weak internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha =0.30), indicating that the items may not have consistently measured the same underlying concept. This may be attributed to the limited number of items included within the construct and the varying ways in which respondents interpreted opportunities to trial hotel innovations before use.

Despite this limitation, the descriptive findings indicate a gap between previous experiences and potential willingness to engage with hotel innovations. While past engagement was relatively low, with Q11 producing a mean frequency of only 2.4. However, results from Q13 suggest that a trial before stay strategy could greatly impact adoption, as 56.2% of participants expressed a high likelihood of trying new features if able to test prior stay.



This willingness to experiment is highly conditional. Q12 clarifies that the primary requirements for trying something new are that it does not impact price (38.8%) or that the guest still interacts with staff (34.7%). When looking at specific interests in Q14, smart room controls emerged as the feature respondents are most curious to try (33.3%), followed by self-service kiosks (19.8%). Ultimately, the findings suggest that while curiosity exists, adoption is hindered by a perceived risk to the value and human elements of the stay.

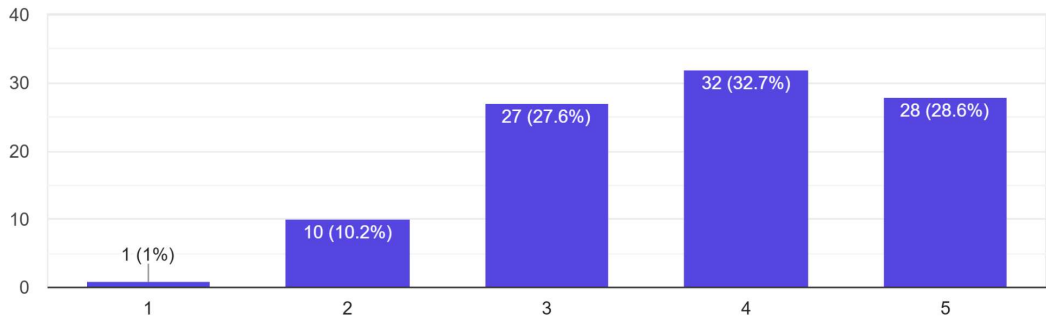


4.2.6 Observability Section

The observability section of the survey achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.74, which represents an acceptable level of internal consistency for measuring how the visibility of innovation affects guest adoption of new features. These findings suggest that observability is more strongly influenced by social reassurance and interpersonal support than by the visibility of the technology itself.

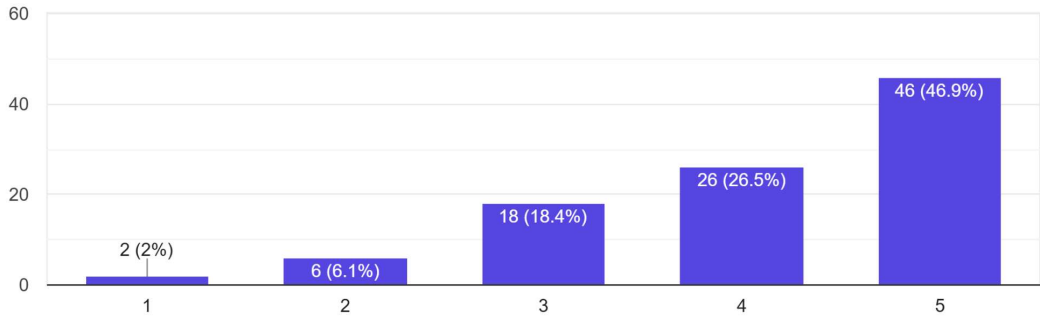
The analysis of Q15 showed a strong inclination toward trial based on observation, with 61.3% of respondents stating they are likely to try a new feature if they see others using it confidently, resulting in a mean of 3.8. However, Q16 reveals a significant hierarchy of influence, far exceeding the impact of guest reviews (39.8%) or guest experience shared by the hotel itself (17.3%).

Q15: How likely are you to try new hotel feature if you see other guests or staff using it confidently?
98 responses



This preference for human validation is further confirmed in Q17, where 73.4% of respondents expressed comfort in trying new features if staff provided guidance, found at a high mean of 4.1 and a mode of 5. Fundamentally, these insights suggest that technological visibility alone may be insufficient to encourage adoption. Instead, guests appear to place greater weight on interpersonal validation and trusted recommendations. It indicates that the perceived value of innovation is often socially constructed rather than derived solely from direct visualisation.

Q17: How comfortable would you feel trying a new feature if hotel staff would explain it personally to you?
98 responses



4.2.7 Cross Tabulation Analysis

The cross-tabulation analysis reveals that innovation adoption is shaped not only by technological perceptions but also by guest characteristics and social influences. The strongest measurement constructs were relative advantage (α = 0.81), compatibility (α = 0.76), and observability (α = 0.74) supporting the reliability of the findings. Within the largest demographic segment, guests aged 25-34, 61.8% travelled as couples and all reported being influenced by friends and family members' experiences when considering new hotel features. This suggests that adoption decisions

within this segment are influenced more by social validation than by the technical attributes of the innovation itself.

A contrasting pattern emerged among high-frequency travellers. Respondents staying in hotels 8+ times annually consistently identified automated and faster check-in/check-out processes as the most valuable innovations. This indicates that guests with greater exposure to hotel services may prioritise operational efficiency and convenience over novelty. The findings therefore suggest that perceived value varies across market segments, with frequent travellers evaluating innovations according to their ability to reduce friction throughout the customer journey.

The analysis also challenges the assumption that age alone determines technology adoption. Among respondents aged 45 and above, 66.7% reported high confidence in using digital features, while 58.3% indicated they had never experienced difficulties with hotel technologies. However, a compatibility gap remained, as over a quarter of the 25-34 segment still reported low alignment with innovative hotel offerings. This demonstrates that reluctance towards innovation may be driven less by technological competence and more by perceived fit with personal preferences and service expectations. While some guests seek efficiency through automation, adoption appears to depend on whether innovations align with desired levels of human interaction and perceived value.

4.3 Qualitative Findings

This section will navigate through the insights gathered from the interviews, grouped in five main themes. Each theme will show direct quotes from the interviews that illustrate most relevant codes from the analysis as well as providing examples of what was discussed.

4.3.1 Participant Profile

Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants of diverse perspectives and experiences relevant to technology adoption within hospitality environments. The sample consisted of three female hotel managers and two male luxury hotel guests as observed in the table below. The managerial participants had extensive experience across different hospitality settings, including boutique hotels, luxury international hotel chains, restaurants, cafés, and bars. Their professional experience ranged from approximately ten to twenty years, providing valuable operational insights into

the implementation and management of technological innovations within hotel environments.

Interviewee	Gender	Age Bracket	Manager / Guest	Unique or Relevant Experience
Participant 1	Female	Early 30s	Manager	Has roughly 10 years of experience across various hospitality sectors (bars, cafes, restaurants, hotels) and has direct experience managing the implementation of service robots for guest deliveries.
Participant 2	Female	35s -45s	Manager	Possesses a background in international luxury chains (Hyatt, Marriott) and lifestyle hotels in Santiago and Dublin; she currently works in a classic boutique hotel.
Participant 3	Female	40s–50s	Manager	Offers nearly two decades of boutique management experience; she provides critical insights into generational resistance to technology among guests over 60.
Participant 4	Male	30s	Guest	A frequent luxury traveler and lecturer who analyzes innovation through the lens of consumer behavior, providing a "people person" perspective on AI adoption.
Participant 5	Male	50s	Guest	A prolific traveler (spending at least two months a year in hotels) with extensive experience in high-end luxury loyalty programs like Marriott and Hilton.

The guest participants were selected due to their extensive travel experience and familiarity with hospitality services. One participant was a frequent luxury traveller with particular interest in consumer behaviour and innovation adoption, while the other also spent a significant portion of the year straying in hotels and actively engaged with international loyalty programmes offered by major hotel groups. Collectively, the participants represented a broad range of age groups, professional backgrounds, and levels of exposure to hotel technologies. This diversity provided a balanced perspective on both the managerial and guest dimensions of innovation adoption, supporting a richer understanding of how new technologies are perceived and experienced within boutique hotel settings.

4.3.2 Technology Integration Across the Hotel Guest Experience

Participant 1: "Normally, with elders, they're very adverse with the robots doing stuff. (...) in the hotel restaurant, when there were elders, they would specifically say to me, "I would prefer you to do the whole thing, dropping my dishes" and so on."

Participant 1's point about generational resistance to robots is a common theme across the interviews. Participants consistently associated older guests with greater reluctance towards robotic

and digital tools, often attributing this to unfamiliarity and fear of making mistakes. This suggests that resistance may stem less from technology itself and more from perceived lack of confidence in using it. The findings also indicate that when digital alternatives replace familiar service elements, some guests may prioritise comfort over efficiency. This is illustrated by how participant 5 noted that while younger generations want things faster, many guests in their 80s prefer traditional methods over mobile apps.

Participant 2: "It's much more comfortable, it's much more "do-it-yourself", and it improves their experience much more, it makes it simpler. (...) It may be that I don't know, that some guests who are older may not understand it at first, but once they do or someone comes and explains it to them, it facilitates their stay, I would say."

Participant 2's belief that "do-it-yourself" technology facilitates a stay once explained by staff emphasizes the importance of guidance for new hotel features. This aligns with participant 1's experience that guests may not know how to use new features initially, they request a person to guide them, especially the elderly. Participant 3 notes a similar pattern: while she sees the agility these tools provide, she finds that she must frequently help older guests scan codes or download and set up apps. Participant 5 concludes that while speed is a major driver for these "DIY" tools, human interaction remains a vital touch that technology should not fully replace.

Participant 3: "You can even do your check-in, your web check-in, upload all your data. (...) "Download an app (...) goes (to the door) with his cell phone and opens it."

Participant 3's description of web check-in and mobile apps that open room doors reflects a shift toward hardware-software integration that bypasses the front desk. Participants 2 and 1 describe a nearly identical experience with the mobile keys that grants room access directly via smartphones. Participant 5 adds that loyalty programs, such as Marriott's, now standardly use these digital codes for check-in and room entry, which he finds beneficial for speed.

Participant 4: "It wasn't a person. Actually, there was a machine there, a computer waiting for us."

Participant 4's encounter with a self-check-in machine rather than a human receptionist represents the automation of the arrival experience. Participant 1 refers to these as "check-in pods" and considers them a major improvement for corporate guests or those in a hurry. Participant 2 describes these systems as a digital keyboard where instructions are sent to the guest allowing for an Airbnb-style entrance without meeting the owner or staff. Participant 5 notes that such hardware is a response to the fact that modern humans want service faster than in the past.

Participant 5: "The room service menu is now a QR code rather than a printed document."

Participant 5's mention of QR codes replacing printed room service menus highlights a digital tool that has become a hospitality standard. Participant 4 agrees that QR codes are "brilliant" and "very practical" because they are environmentally friendly and allow guests to order and pay without delay or human interaction. Participant 1 includes QR codes in her list of essential mobile-access innovations. Lorena also notes that while some older guests struggle with them, QR codes are now central for connecting to streaming services like Netflix or viewing hotel information.

Overall, the findings suggest that technological implementation within boutique hotels is increasingly centred on digital tools that enhance convenience, speed, and operational efficiency. Participants identified a range of technologies including self-check-in apps, mobile room keys, QR code systems, web check-in platforms, and robotic assistants in both boutique and other hotel types. These innovations were generally perceived positively due to their ability to streamline processes, reduce waiting times, and provide guests with greater control over their hotel experience. Participants also highlighted that adopting new features appear to be changing consumer expectations, where faster and more autonomous service options are becoming more desirable due to the beneficial output.

However, the findings also indicate that successful implementation depends on balancing technological efficiency with human support. A recurring concern across the interviews was the difficulty some older guests experience when interacting with unfamiliar technologies, often resulting in a preference for traditional service methods. Participants consistently emphasised the relevance of stuff guidance during usage of new features. This suggests that technology is most effective when complemented by human assistance rather than its replacement. Finally, the findings indicate that while digital tools can enhance the guest experience, their acceptance is influenced by users' confidence, familiarity, and access to support when needed.

4.3.3 Psychological Barriers and Drivers of Technology Adoption

Participant 2: "That, the unknown, let's say, obviously generates curiosity and maybe a little rejection, but as I was saying, older people, maybe older couples, are not so used to this. (...) And it generates that kind of refusal to learn, but once you teach them or they are willing to learn, I think it improves things a lot."

Participant 2's observation that the unknown creates a mix of curiosity and rejection in older guests is a sentiment shared across most interviews. Participant 1 notes a similar dynamic, stating that while young adults are almost always fond of innovations like robots, elders often have the opposite

reaction and prefer traditional human service. However, this participant also agrees that explaining how to use it can shift this perspective, turning a negative reaction into one of interest. Participant 3 also observes this resistance, noting that in her case older guests often feel they are “too old for this” and require significant staff guidance.

Participant 3: "Especially older people... they say no, because they have to download an app.”

Participant 3’s point about older guests refusing to download apps reflects a broader demographic friction with mobile-centric hospitality. Participant 1 echoes this, noting that older guests often reject using check-in pods or automated systems, preferring to wait for a human receptionist even if a staff member is standing by to help them. Participant 2 adds that this rejection often stems from guests being accustomed to manual processes, such as using a physical key, rather than QR codes. Participant 5 also highlights this gap, noting that while younger generations want things faster, many guests in their 80s still prefer traditional methods over phone-based services.

Participant 3: "They have that fear, that rejection of those changes."

The fear and rejection participant 3 describes regarding technological changes often stem from a concern about the loss of the human element. Participant 1 suggests that this aversion in elders is partly fueled by the belief that robots are replacing humans rather than acting as helpful tools. This is a barrier that is not limited to the elderly as participant 4 admits that society often creates an aversion to new features such as AI. To him, this is due to the focus remaining on negative outcomes rather than potential benefits. Participant 5 reinforces this by noting that guests can become skeptical and untrusting of systems if they feel technology is being used to hide costs.

Participant 4: "We created that aversion because we see only the negative."

Participant 4’s comment on the aversion created by focusing on negatives highlights a common psychological hurdle in technology adoption. Both participants 1 and 3 highlight that guests may initially resist new technologies due to misconceptions, unrealistic expectations, or fear of making mistakes. These can discourage guests from engaging with new features altogether. Participant 5 adds that previous

Participant 5: "Am I a bit skeptical still? Probably, because I like to hear a human voice."

Participant 5’s skepticism towards automated communication reflects a broader tension identified across the interviews between technological efficiency and the preservation of human

connection. While participants recognised the operational benefits of digital tools, they consistently questioned their ability to replicate the empathy and personalised support associated with human interaction. This suggests that technology may enhance service delivery, but its acceptance is constrained when it is perceived to diminish relational aspects of hospitality. The findings therefore indicate that guests are more likely to value innovation when it complements, rather than replaces, human interaction, particularly in situations requiring problem-solving or personalised assistance.

Participant 5: "What's the margin of error in actually talking to a computer or an AI or a chatbot."

Participant 5's concern regarding the margin of error in AI interactions reflects a need for reliability that technology sometimes fails to meet. Moreover, participant 1 provides a practical example of this when describing a phone conversation with an AI where the lack of emotional variation and silences made the interaction frustrating. On this same line, participant 4 further notes that if technology like digital keys is not implemented properly, it generates significant inconvenience.

Collectively, these findings suggest that guest responses to new hotel features are shaped as much by psychological factors as by the technologies themselves. Resistance was rarely linked to a complete rejection of innovation. Instead, it appeared to come from uncertainty and perceived complexity. The interviews indicate that guests evaluate new technologies through a lens of trust, familiarity, and perceived risk, with negative expectations often creating barriers before directly using the new features. This suggests that successful technology adoption depends not only on the functionality of the innovation, but also on how effectively hotels address guests' emotional concerns and build confidence in its use.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that guest psychology plays a significant role in shaping attitudes towards technological innovation within boutique hotels. Participants consistently identified fear of change, unfamiliarity, skepticism, and concerns regarding reliability as factors influencing guests' willingness to engage with new technologies. While these responses were particularly evident among older guests, the findings suggest that resistance is not solely age-related but can emerge whenever innovations are perceived as complex, risky or capable of reducing human interaction.

At the same time, participants acknowledged that positive experiences, clear guidance, accessible support can improve acceptance and build confidence in new systems. This indicates that innovation adoption is influenced not only by functional benefits of innovation but also by guests'

emotional responses. This highlights the importance of maintaining trust and human support throughout the implementation process as better detailed in the following section.

4.3.4 The Human Factor

Participant 1: "I think a very important thing is when they start the call, they should explain that you're not speaking with the person, but an AI assistant."

Participant 1 emphasizes the need for transparency when using AI, suggesting that hotels should explicitly state when a guest is interacting with an AI assistant rather than a human to manage expectations. While technology can process standard requests quickly, the participant notes that AI often lacks the emotion of a human voice, leading to awkward silences when complex needs arise. Participants 3 and 5 also share this reflection on AI lacking the emotional intelligence required for true hospitality. However, participant 3 also adds that this lack of human presence can lead to rejection and fear.

Participant 3: "People still like interaction between people more than with technology."

Participant 3 argues that guests still value human interaction far more than technology, identifying personal contact as the core value of hospitality. On this same line, the interviews suggest that human interaction remains a fundamental component of the boutique hotel experience, despite the growing presence of technological innovations. Participants consistently distinguished between efficiency-driven services and the emotional value created through personal contact. This indicates that technology may struggle to replicate empathy, spontaneity, and relationship-building associated with human staff.

This tension was particularly evident in the distinction between guests' functional and experiential needs. While some of them may prioritise speed and convenience, boutique hotel guests were perceived as placing greater value on personalised communication and authentic interactions. These findings imply that technology may be most effective when used to support service delivery rather than replace human engagement. They imply that the relational aspects of hospitality continue to play a significant role in shaping guest experiences and satisfaction.

Participant 4: "Innovation literally gives you the power to do all hands-on... a lot of people are against that. (...) I'm a people person. (...) I think it needs to have a good mix of both."

Participant 4 observes that “hands-on” innovation can sometimes conflict with the experience of holiday, as many guests travel specifically to relax and be served rather than performing tasks themselves. All participants suggested that the value of innovation depends on its ability to complement, rather than disrupt the purpose of the hotel stay. While technological tools were recognised for improving convenience and efficiency, there was a shared concern that excessive self-service may undermine the relaxation and authenticity guests seek in boutique hotels. The findings indicate that successful innovation requires a balance where technology supports operational tasks while preserving meaningful human interaction and service quality.

Participant 5: "Had a handwritten note (...) I think it's a really great customer service point."

Finally, participants suggested that meaningful personalization is driven more by human attention than by technology alone. While innovative features may enhance the guest experience, the findings indicate that personal touches and genuine service remain key drivers of satisfaction, loyalty, and perceived service quality.

Overall, the findings suggest that the success of technological innovation in boutique hotels is not determined solely by its functionality, but by its ability to coexist with the human-centred values that define hospitality. Participants consistently viewed personal interaction, empathy, and transparency as to display genuine service elements that technology cannot fully replicate. While digital tools were recognised for improving efficiency and convenience, their value was perceived to diminish when they replaced meaningful guest-staff interactions or reduced opportunities for personalisation.

As a result, the findings indicate that guests are most receptive to innovation when it enhances service delivery while preserving the emotional and relational aspects of the boutique hotel experience. This suggests that in this hospitality sector, technology is perceived as a supporting mechanism for service quality rather than a substitute for human connection.

4.3.5 Market Dynamics and Segment Expectations

Participant 1: “For corporates: They always expect Chromecast to connect easily to the televisions.”

Participant 1 suggested that corporate guests perceive technology as a functional requirement rather than an added benefit. Hotel features such as seamless connectivity, stable internet, and automated services were associated with efficiency, convenience and productivity. These findings

indicate that this segment primarily values innovation for its ability to reduce friction and save time throughout the hotel experience.

Participant 2: "It seems to me that a boutique hotel is a smaller hotel in itself and is more classic (...) Perhaps they do not expect a robot for service. (...) I don't think there is as much of a need as it is with television, that we are already immersed in that reality."

Unlike corporate guests, who were perceived to value technology primarily for its benefits, boutique hotel guests were viewed as placing greater importance on personal attention and authentic experiences. Participants suggested that within this segment, innovation is not necessarily evaluated by its novelty but by its ability to support the intimate and personalised nature of the stay. As a result, highly visible services such as robots, may be perceived as less relevant when they do not contribute to the relational aspects of hospitality.

At the same time, the findings indicate that not all technologies are assessed in the same way. While boutique guests may be more selective regarding highly innovative features, certain technologies became expected service standards. Smart TVs, streaming platforms, chromecast, reliable WIFI appear to have moved beyond the category of innovation. This indicates that guests expectations are dynamic, with successful technologies gradually becoming part of the baseline service offering rather than remaining sources of differentiation.

Participant 4: "We go in the reviews (...) check the reviews and see, first of all, if it is clean."

Participant 4's focus on cleanliness in reviews demonstrates that for luxury and leisure guests, foundational service quality still outweighs technological novelty. Despite staying in high-end establishments like the Ritz-Carlton, participant 4 maintains that features like balcony or clean room are non-negotiable. The findings suggest that technological innovation operated within a market where core service expectations remain the primary drivers of guest satisfaction.

Despite differences in age, travel purpose, and hotel segment, participants consistently indicate that factors such as cleanliness, transparency, service quality, and personalisation hold greater influence over booking decisions and repeat visits. This implies that innovation may function more effectively as a competitive enhancer rather than a substitute for fundamental hospitality standards as repeatedly found in the previous sections. This further indicates that in the boutique hotel market, reputation and personalised service continue to shape perceived value.

4.3.6 Reliability, Trust, and Transparency Challenges

Participant 1: "Do the robots fail to deliver (...) they do when there's human error."

Participant 1 highlighted that the effectiveness of technological innovation is not determined solely by the feature itself, but by the organisational capabilities supporting its implementation. Participant 1's observation that robotic failures often stem from human error suggests that operational weakness can undermine the perceived value of effectiveness. Participants agreement on how new features should be implemented suggests that guests are likely to evaluate innovations based on their reliability in practice. These findings imply that inadequate staff training or poor implementation may become significant barriers to adoption in relation to findings in section 4.3.3. Service failures can quickly erode trust in the technology and the overall guest experience.

Participant 1: "Always be transparent in that you're using it (referring to AI) first so people know what to expect."

This transparency factor mentioned across participants remains a relevant factor when introducing any type of new feature in the service provided. To build trust, participant 1 argues that hotels must maintain this transparency, disclosing to guests if they are interacting with AI. This is also apparent in Participant 5's interview, where he expresses a degree of skepticism as mentioned previously. Across interviews, this is supported with evidence of AI lacking emotional intelligence and contextual personal nuance.

Participant 2: "Maybe the phone didn't work, maybe the code didn't arrive (...) Generates a bit of rejection, but it's more of a generational thing."

The findings suggest that technological failures may reinforce existing skepticism towards innovation, particularly among guests who already perceive digital tools as complex or risky. Rather than creating resistance independently, issues such as malfunctioning digital keys or unsuccessful app interactions appear to validate the previously mentioned concerns. These pre-existing concerns about reliability and ease of use feed guest reluctance to interact with new hotel features. Furthermore, It indicates that guest reluctance may be influenced by perceived risk and actual technological complexity. Findings suggest that negative experiences may strengthen preferences for traditional, human-assisted service options.

Participant 4: "If it's not (done properly), it generates this inconvenience that could provide bad reviews."

Participant 4 warned that if technological implementation is not properly done, it can create significant inconvenience that directly leads to bad reviews. Following the case of previously detailed findings, it was found that the perceived value of innovation is highly dependent on its reliability and execution. When systems fail to perform as intended, the promised benefits of convenience and efficiency can quickly be replaced by frustrations and service dissatisfaction. This indicates that guests may judge innovations less on their novelty and more on their ability to deliver a seamless experience.

Participant 5: "Worries in relation to GDPR (...)"

Finally, concerns for data protection when providing personal data to hotels' platforms is noted as a big concern for participant 5. The findings suggest that these concerns may act as a significant barrier to innovation adoption, regardless of the potential benefits of the new digital features. Participants associated the sharing personal information with increased vulnerability. This indicates that trust in technology is closely linked to trust in how data is collected, stored and protected. Moreover, it implies that guests may be unwilling to engage with innovative features when perceived privacy risks outweigh perceived advantages.

In summary, the findings propose that trust and reliability are fundamental conditions for successful technology adoption within boutique hotels. Participants consistently indicated that the perceived value of innovation is shaped not only by its functionality, but also by the quality or its implementation. Transparency surrounding new features usage and security of guest information also represent a challenge for adoption. Moreover, service failures and inadequate staff support were found to reduce confidence in new features and reinforce resistance to use. Overall, the findings show that adoption appears to depend on whether technologies can deliver reliable , secure and transparent experience.

4.4 Summary of Key Findings

The findings indicate that guests generally value technological innovation when it improves convenience, efficiency, and ease of use throughout the hotel experience. Features such as automated check-in, mobile room keys, and digital communication tools were perceived positively when they reduced friction and enhanced service delivery. However, innovation alone was not found to be the primary driver of hotel choice, with guests continuing to prioritise core service attributes and overall experience.

The study also found that technology adoption is influenced by psychological and social factors, including trust, familiarity, staff guidance, and recommendations from others. While guests recognised the benefits of innovation, concerns regarding complexity, reliability, privacy, and loss of human interaction remained significant barriers. Across both quantitative and qualitative findings, participants consistently emphasised that technology should support rather than replace human interaction and personalised service. Overall, successful innovation adoption within boutique hotels appears to depend on this mentioned balancing operational efficiency with human-centred values that define the guest experience.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in chapter 4 in relation to the research question examining how Rogers' fie innovation adoption factors influence guests' willingness to engage with new hotel features within the context of boutique hotels. The findings are interpreted and compared with the existing literature and theoretical framework presented in chapter 2 to determine whether they support or challenge previous research. The discussion is structured around the study's research themes and objectives, allowing for the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings.

5.2 Discussion and Integration of Findings by Theme

5.2.1 Technology Integration Across the Hotel Guest Experience

The findings suggest that the perceived relative advantage of the hotel innovations is driven primarily by convenience and efficiency rather than technological novelty. Consistent with Rogers (1983), guests valued innovations that offered clear functional benefits, particularly automated check-in/check-out processes. This challenges suggestions that guests actively seek extraordinary technological experiences (Rohan et al., 2019) and instead supports the view that relative advantage is subjective and dependent on practical value (Dibra, 2015; Rogers, 1983).

5.2.2 Psychological Barriers and Drivers of Technology Adoption

The findings indicate that psychological factors play a significant role in technology adoption, supporting Rogers' (1983) theory. The literature highlights that unfamiliar technologies can create resistance and require greater user understanding (Ananeva, 2019; Oturakci and Yuregir, 2017; Tan et al., 2025), the quantitative findings showed that although most respondents felt confident using hotel technologies, many still identified excessive steps and reduced human interaction as barriers. Qualitative findings support this as they revealed that fear of change, skepticism, and reliability concerns often discouraged adoption, especially among elders. Both datasets identified staff guidance and clear explanations as key drivers of acceptance.

5.2.3 The Human Factor

The findings strongly support the literature suggesting that innovation adoption in boutique hotels depends on how well new features align with the sector's human-centric nature. The studies argued that guests are more likely to accept innovations when they are enhanced without replacing personal interaction (Ananeva, 2019; Richards, 2024; Tan et al., 2025), which is reflected as well in quantitative findings. Across findings, innovations were valued for improving convenience and efficiency, however, emphasis was made on technological support rather than replacing human service. These suggest success relies on achieving a balance between new features and meaningful human connection.

5.2.4 Market Dynamics and Segment Expectations

The findings support the literature that relative advantage is subjective and depends on the needs and values of different guest segments (Rogers, 1983; Dibra, 2015). Quantitative findings showed that 71.4% of respondents valued automated efficiency, 61.2% still preferred human-led services. This reflects tension between convenience and personalised experiences as expected in literature (Ananeva, 2019; Tan et al., 2025) This is supported by qualitative findings that showed corporate guests view technology as a functional requirement, where boutique hotel guests prioritise authenticity, service quality and personal interaction.

5.2.5 Reliability, Trust, and Transparency Challenges

Primary research findings support reduction of uncertainty for innovation adoption success (Rogers, 1983) and aligns with the literature on complexity and trialability, where unfamiliar or unreliable technologies can discourage use (Dibra, 2015; Oturakci and Yuregir, 2017). Quantitative findings showed 36.7% respondents had experienced difficulties using hotel technologies, while qualitative findings concerns for data privacy and transparency as factors that reduced trust. This is consistent with Ananeva's (2019) argument that uncertainty can be reduced through effective guidance.

5.3 Implications of the Findings

The findings contribute to the existing literature on innovation adoption by providing empirical evidence from the perspective of boutique hotel guests. The study extends Rogers' (1983) framework

by demonstrating that adoption decisions are influenced not only by characteristics of an innovation but also by emotional factors such as trust, perceived reliability, and the desire for human interaction.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that boutique hotel operators should prioritise technologies that improve convenience and efficiency while preserving the personalised service that defines the sector. The results also indicate the importance of staff training, guest guidance, and transparent communication.

From a marketing perspective, boutique hotels may benefit from positioning innovations as service-enhancing tools rather than replacements for human hospitality. Marketing communications should therefore emphasise ease of use, reliability, privacy protection, and the ways technology supports a more seamless guest experience and brand identity.

5.4 Link to Research Gap

This study's findings directly address the research gaps identified in chapter 2 by providing empirical evidence of boutique hotel guests' perspectives on innovation adoption, instead of focusing solely on managerial view. The study offers new insights into guests' perceptions, revealing that adoption is influenced by psychological factors such as trust, uncertainty, and need for human support. It also extends understanding of compatibility by demonstrating how guests contrast personalised service expectations against emotional aspects of the boutique experience. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the limited research on trialability and observability by highlighting the relevance of reliability, guidance and behavioural patterns shaping innovation adoption. Finally, the study examines the factors across multiple stages of the hotel guest journey, and therefore provides a more holistic understanding to factors influencing guest perceptions in boutique contexts.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of chapter 4 in relation to the literature review in chapter 2 across innovation adoption factors of Rogers' (1983) theory. These findings suggest that technology adoption in boutique hotels is influenced by perceived usefulness, trust, psychological factors, and service expectations. The chapter shows that while guests valued innovations that improve convenience and efficiency, they also emphasised the importance of human interaction, personalised service, and reliability. The discussion highlighted the role of transparency and guidance in reducing uncertainty and addressed the research gap by providing guest-centred insights into innovation

adoption across the boutique hotel customer journey. The next chapter presents the study's conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and directions for future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research by summarising the study and its key findings in relation to the research objectives and research questions. It outlines the contribution of the study to the existing literature on innovation adoption within boutique hotels and presents practical recommendations for industry practitioners. The chapter also acknowledges the limitations of the research, identifies opportunities for future research, and concludes with a final reflection on the significance of the study's findings.

6.2 Summary of the Research

This study investigated how Rogers' (1983) five innovation adoption factors influence boutique hotel guests' willingness to adopt new technologies across the customer experience journey. The research addressed the limited understanding of guest perspectives on innovation adoption within boutique hotel environments and sought to identify how these factors shape guest experiences and perceptions. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative survey data from 98 respondents with qualitative insights from five semi-structured interviews. Through the integration of both datasets, the study explored innovation adoption within the context of boutique hotels and provided a holistic understanding of guest attitudes towards technological innovation.

6.3 Summary of Key Findings

The findings addressed the first research objective by demonstrating that all five of Roger's (1983) innovation adoption factors influence guests' willingness to engage with new hotel technologies. Relative advantage emerged through guests' preference for innovations that improve convenience and efficiency, while complexity, compatibility, trialability and observability influenced adoption through factors such as ease of use, alignment with service expectations, opportunities for experimentation, and social validation.

In relation to the second objective, the findings showed that innovation was perceived as most valuable when it reduced friction throughout the customer journey, particularly during booking,

check-in, and in-stay service interactions. However, guests consistently indicated that technology should enhance rather than replace the human aspects of the boutique hotel experience.

Regarding the third and final objective, the findings suggest that successful technology implementation within boutique hotels depends on balancing operational efficiency with personalised service. Trust, reliability, transparency, and staff guidance were identified as important conditions for adoption. This indicates that hotels should implement innovations in ways that support guest experience while preserving the human-centred values associated with the boutique hospitality sector.

6.4 Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to the existing literature on innovation adoption by providing empirical insights into boutique hotel guests' perspectives, an area that has received limited attention in previous research. Existing studies have often focused on managerial viewpoints or individual technology touchpoints, meanwhile this research examined guest perceptions across the broader customer journey. The findings extend understanding of Rogers' (1983) innovation adoption factors by highlighting the importance of trust, human interaction, and psychological responses in shaping technology adoption within boutique hotel environments.

6.5 Practical of the Research

Recommendation 1: Enhance service through technological enhancement, not human replacement

Boutique hotel operators should introduce technologies that improve convenience and efficiency while preserving opportunities for personal interaction. The findings showed that guests valued innovations such as automated processes, but consistently preferred technologies that supported human service. Maintaining this balance can help hotels improve operational efficiency without compromising the personalised experience expected in this sector.

Recommendation 2: Increase guest guidance through staff training

Hotels should train their staff effectively to provide clear instructions, assistance, and onboarding support when introducing new features. The findings revealed that perceived complexity can discourage adoption. Proper staff guidance can increase guest confidence and willingness to

engage with new hotel features. Effective support can therefore improve both technology acceptance and overall guest satisfaction.

Recommendation 3: Prioritise transparency to build trust

Boutique hotels should ensure that new features are reliable and communicate clearly how they operate, particularly when implementing AI or collecting guest data. The findings identified reliability concerns, transparency, and data privacy as important factors influencing adoption decisions. By emphasising secure and transparent implementation, hotels can strengthen guest trust and reduce resistance towards innovation.

6.6 Limitations of the Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, although the survey generated 98 valid responses,the sample was obtained through non-probability sampling and therefore may not fully represent the wider population of boutique hotel guests. Second, the qualitative phase consisted of five interviews, which provided rich insights but may not capture the full diversity of guest experiences and perspectives.

Third, the study relied on self-reported perceptions and attitudes towards innovation, which may differ from actual behaviour when guests encounter new features. Finally, the research was conducted within a limited timeframe and captured perceptions at a single point in time. As technology and guest expectations continue to evolve, future studies may identify different adoption patterns. Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods approach provided valuable insights into guests' perspectives on innovation adoption within the boutique hotel sector.

6.7 Recommendations for the Future Research

Future research could examine innovation adoption within boutique hotels using larger and more geographically diverse samples to improve the generalisability of findings. Additional studies may also explore specific guest segments, such as corporates or luxury guests, to determine whether adoption factors differ across market groups. Furthermore, observational research could be conducted to compare guests’ stated perceptions with their actual behaviour when interacting with new features. Finally, future studies could investigate emerging technologies and their impact on guest experiences as innovation in the hospitality industry continues to evolve.

6.8 Final Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing innovation adoption within boutique hotels from a guest perspective.The findings demonstrate that while guests generally value technologies that improve convenience and efficiency, adoption is strongly influenced by trust, reliability, human interaction and alignment with service expectations. The research highlights the importance of implementing innovation in ways that enhance rather than replace the personalised and human-centred experiences that define the boutique hotel sector. Overall, the study contributes to a better understanding of how technological innovation can be successfully integrated across the boutique hotel customer journey.

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