The Digital Transformation of Hotel Services: Employees' Perceptions on the Reconfiguration of Operational

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores employees' perceptions of the digitalization of hotel services, focusing on the reorganization of internal processes. The research, conducted using a qualitative approach, was based on five semi-structured interviews carried out in a large-capacity Black Sea coast Romanian resort. Participants, all working in managerial or operational leadership positions, contributed insights on the implementation of digital platforms (Oracle OPERA, CRM, CRO) and their effects on processes, communication, and guest interaction. Thematic analysis identified three main findings: firstly, the digital transformation is viewed not just as a technological advance but rather as a cultural and strategic transformation; secondly, processes were significantly streamlined by automation and integration; thirdly, the digital systems constitute key instruments enabling data-driven decision-making processes and customized guest services. Digitalization enhances the level of coordination and efficiency, yet the respondents stressed the necessity of ongoing staff training and the sustenance of human interaction as an underlying value of the hospitality industry. This research contributes to the body of research on digital hospitality by adopting an employee-centric viewpoint on technological change. It draws attention to the significant role played by internal perception in the achievement of the success of digitization initiatives and provides practical guidelines on hotels undergoing transformation.

1. Introduction

The last few years have witnessed the hotel sector undergoing a swift digitization process due to rapid technological advancement and shifting customer needs. Web-based booking engines, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and Property Management Systems (PMS) have formed the bedrock technology used in hotels, enabling customization, automation, and data-driven decisions (Sigala, 2020; Buhalis & Leung, 2018). Among these, converged technology solutions like Oracle Opera have gained popularity due to their capability to automate the front office processes, bookings, and customer interactions.

But while the research body extensively documents the strategic and operational benefits from digitalization—e.g., increased efficiency, tailored provision of service, higher guest satisfaction (Mariani & Borghi, 2021)—more emphasis was not made on clarifying the perceptions among the hotel staff members, particularly those holding influential management roles. Digital transformation entails something more than technology; it is a complex organizational change that influences the workflow, the decision architecture, and the responsibility of the staff members (Ivanov et al., 2020).

This research aims to explore the perceptions of employees in managerial and operational positions regarding the reconfiguration of hotel processes due to digital transformation. Using qualitative interviews conducted in a large Romanian hotel chain, the study focuses on their experiences with platforms such as Oracle Opera, CRM, and CRO systems, as well as the redesigned online booking website. These tools are seen not only as enablers of operational performance but also as catalysts for new professional competencies and challenges (Gretzel et al., 2021).

By taking on a human approach, the research adds to the body of scholarship on digital hospitality, providing information on the readiness level, adaptability, and strategic vision among hotel employees in the context of technological transformation. Measuring the perceptions among employees is important for implementing effectively, managing change, and making technological advancement congruent with organizational culture and values (Zehrer & Raich, 2021).

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2. Literature review

Digital transformation in the hospitality industry refers not only to the implementation of new technologies, but also to the fundamental rethinking of internal processes, guest interaction strategies and organizational structure. It differs from mere digitization through its scope, affecting strategic orientation, business models and the employee-customer interface (Verhoef et al., 2021). In the context of hotel services, this transformation involves the integration of systems such as PMS (Property Management Systems), CRM (Customer Relationship Management), CRO (Central Reservation Office), and ERP solutions that optimize real-time operations, data analysis, and personalized services (Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019).

Another important result of the digitization transformation is the redefinition of conventional processes of operation. Processes that were formally manual or repetitive—e.g., assignment of rooms, check-in, guest communication or inner-reporting—are substituted or enriched by interrelated platforms such as Oracle Opera. Centralized control is enabled by these systems, the operation becomes faster, and responsiveness toward the needs of the clients is enhanced (Ivanov et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the transformation implies additional requirements on the personnel, who should be accustomed to the digitized interfaces, the logic of automated systems, and the processes of permanent training.

Current research underscores the significance of employee opinion in the efficacy of digitalization processes. The implementation of emerging technologies tends to evoke ambivalent feelings, excitement or interest alongside stress, opposition, or fear (Mariani & Borghi, 2021). Organizational culture acts as a intervening factor since it may reinforce or prevent receptivity towards innovation. Clarity of communication, participation in decision-making processes and access to IT training are key determinants that shape staff openness to technological change (Zehrer & Raich, 2021). In addition, staff members experiencing inclusion in the transformation process and the usefulness of technology tend to exhibit greater levels of contentment and productivity (Gretzel et al., 2022).

Moreover, the digital transformation influences both the inner processes and the guest experience. Online booking systems built into the website or mobile app, interactive concierge services, online check-in and room preference selection belong to the new service philosophy that relies on expediency, individualization and self-reliance. Customer requirements become shaped by these technological solutions, and the service levels in the hotel industry are re-defined. The achievement of the digital transformation project relies on the synthesis among the technological possibilities and the capability of the staff to employ them intentionally within the guest interaction process.

The research literature observes that the IT transformation should be treated as an interactive dynamic process and not a top-down implementation of software. Hotel businesses shall remain competitive and responsive to an industry that is in constant flux only when there is strategic congruence among the management, the personnel and the technology.

3. Methodology

This qualitative study aims to explore how employees in key managerial roles perceive the digital transformation of hotel services and the reconfiguration of operational processes. The research was carried out in a five-star hotel complex located on the Romanian Black Sea coast, part of a well-known local hotel chain, which includes several properties oriented toward leisure and luxury tourism. Over the past decade, the hotel has implemented a series of digital systems, such as Oracle Opera, CRM platforms, and online reservation modules integrated into the corporate website, reflecting an advanced stage of digitalization in service delivery.

The selection of the qualitative method was made due to the necessity to tap into the deep, personal perceptions of those most closely involved with the reorganization of hotel processes on both an operational and strategic level. Data were gathered by semi-structured interviews conducted among five respondents representing middle- and top-level management.

The sample was selected on the basis of the applicability of the respondents' role in dealing with computerized systems and the adjustability of organizational processes. All the respondents were female and had 3–14 years of professional experience in the hotel industry. A summary of their positions and their professional profiles is presented below:

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Respondent Code	Position	Experience (Years)	Education Level
R1	Executive Manager	14 years	Master's Degree in Tourism
R2	Front Office Manager	7 years	Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality
R3	Operations Manager	8 years	Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality
R4	Sales Manager	13 years	Bachelor's Degree in Business
R5	Front Office Manager	3 years	Bachelor's Degree in Business

Source: Own elaboration

The scope of positions interviewed (executive, operational, front office, sales) ensured an enriched insight into the impact of digitalization on diverse levels of an organization.

The interviews were undertaken in June 2025 and took a semi-structured style based on eight open-ended interview questions produced by the author. The interview questions were clustered around three overarching thematic areas found within the literature:

(1) perceived effect on internal processes and productivity due to digitalization;

(2) customer experience and service delivery perceptions within the scope of online systems; and

(3) strategic and emotional reactions to the change process.

Participation was voluntary and the answers were anonymous. The respondents were informed about the scope and the intentions of the research and gave their consent to the use of the answers for research purposes.

The data analysis conducted was the thematic coding approach suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which entails the extraction of the main patterns and concepts arising from the interviews. After transcription, the answers were manually coded into the three prescribed themes. In each theme, the repeating keywords, phrases, and story patterns were noted down and cross-compared among the respondents.

This strategy facilitated a preliminary structured yet open-ended analysis that illuminated convergences and differences in interpretation. Credibility was amplified and interpretative bias was reduced by two-stage coding: an early open coding phase was selectively refined based on frequency and relevance.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study, based on thematic analysis of the five interviews conducted with hotel employees in managerial positions. The data were organized around three central themes, each of which reflects a key dimension of digital transformation in hospitality:

1. perceptions of change;
2. operational impact;
3. strategic role of digital tools.

For each theme, the perspectives of Respondent R1 (Executive Manager) are presented alongside those of another respondent whose insights provide relevant contrast or reinforcement.

4.1. Perceptions of digital transformation and organizational change

Digital transformation in the hotel industry is no longer perceived as a trend, but as a strategic necessity a view consistently expressed by respondents in this study. The participants framed digitalization as a process that reshapes not only technologies, but also organizational culture, employee roles, and guest expectations.

Perspective from R1 – Executive Manager (14 years of experience)

R1 emphasized a strategic, long-term vision of digitalization. For her, the adoption of systems such as Oracle OPERA and CRM platforms was part of a broader effort to align the hotel's internal functioning with evolving market dynamics and guest behaviours:

We didn't implement digital tools just for image. We did it because the business model required it. Guests had changed, and our workflows had to keep up.

From her standpoint, digital transformation is more than just technological upgrade—it involves rethinking processes, empowering staff, and redefining performance indicators. She acknowledged that:

There is resistance at first, but if the management explains the 'why' and provides support, people adapt. And once they see the results, they don't want to go back.

Her statements suggest that leadership plays a pivotal role in cultivating a digital mindset, by setting expectations, allocating resources, and monitoring implementation.

Perspective from R5 – Front Office Manager (3 years of experience)

R5's perception, while complementary, reflects the operational and behavioural impact of digitalization at ground level. Unlike R1, who discussed strategy and transformation narratives, R5 focused on visible outcomes in day-to-day interactions:

Everything we do now is digital. From check-in to room assignment, to answering client messages. It was overwhelming at first, but now it helps a lot.

She described digital transformation as both a challenge and a relief. While the initial adjustment was difficult—especially for less tech-savvy staff—the integration of digital systems eventually reduced stress, accelerated tasks, and allowed more attention to guests:

I don't print check-in cards anymore. I don't write things on paper. The system tells me everything. I feel more in control.

R5 also noted that digitalization has contributed to standardizing service delivery, improving consistency:

Even when we change shifts, everything is saved. I don't have to explain to the next colleague what's going on. They see it in the system.

The contrast between R1 and R5 reveals how digital transformation is experienced differently depending on hierarchical position.

- R1 perceives it as a strategic transition—purposeful, monitored, and resource-intensive.
- R5 perceives it as a practical adaptation—complex at first, but ultimately beneficial.

Both highlight that transformation is not solely technical: it requires internal communication, learning, and leadership involvement. R1 supports the top-down model, while R5 confirms its effects bottom-up.

Importantly, both agree that digitalization cannot succeed without staff engagement and internal clarity of purpose.

4.2. Impact on operational workflows and guest experience

One of the most prominent effects of digital transformation highlighted in the interviews concerns the reconfiguration of operational workflows and the evolution of guest interaction dynamics. Respondents observed that the implementation of integrated systems such as Oracle OPERA and CRM tools has brought significant changes to the way tasks are distributed, tracked, and completed, while also reshaping the expectations and behaviors of hotel guests.

Perspective from R1 – Executive Manager (14 years of experience)

R1 emphasized the systemic transformation of internal processes following the introduction of digital platforms. From her point of view, operational flows have become more transparent, traceable, and time-efficient. She noted that:

Digital platforms have eliminated the information gaps between departments. There is no need for repeated confirmations or paper-based task lists. Everyone sees the same data in real time.

She also highlighted the role of automation in ensuring consistency, especially during high season or when managing large volumes of reservations:

Operational accuracy has improved visibly. The check-in process is now synchronized with housekeeping and billing. Errors related to room readiness or client preferences have decreased dramatically.

Moreover, R1 linked the quality of internal workflows to the external perception of service:

When the back office runs smoothly, the guest feels it. They don't wait, they don't get contradictory information, and they trust the system we use.

Her observations reflect a clear belief that digitally enhanced operations create a competitive advantage, by improving both internal coordination and customer-facing efficiency.

Perspective from R3 – Operations Manager (8 years of experience)

R3 offered a complementary, execution-level perspective, focusing on how digital systems have changed the rhythm and structure of daily operations. He stressed that one of the main benefits of the current digital setup is the ability to prioritize and monitor tasks centrally:

Before, we used to communicate everything manually – by phone or face to face. Now we open the system, and we know instantly which rooms are cleaned, which ones need technical service, or where check-out is delayed.

He also referred to the impact on staff behaviour, stating that:

Everyone is more responsible now. The system keeps a history, so it's harder to forget something or claim it was done when it wasn't.

Regarding guest interaction, R3 observed that digitalization has modified expectations:

Clients want to move fast. They check availability online, they arrive with specific requests, and they don't tolerate delays. If our systems are not updated in real time, it shows.

Still, he also mentioned a tension between automation and empathy:

Technology helps, but it also makes guests expect instant solutions. Some things still require judgment or human interaction.

Both R1 and R3 confirm that digitalization has streamlined operational processes, enabling better planning, reduced miscommunication, and faster reaction times.

- R1 emphasizes the macro-level transformation, with automation as a means to ensure cross-departmental coherence and enhance service quality.
- R3 provides an on-the-ground view, highlighting how real-time data improves individual accountability, task prioritization, and clarity.

With respect to guest experience, both respondents agree that digital transformation has increased expectations regarding speed, accuracy, and professionalism. However, R3 brings an important nuance: while technology accelerates delivery, it does not replace the need for discretion, flexibility, and human touch.

This tension—between efficiency and personalization—is central to understanding how operational change is perceived and managed in a digitalized hospitality context.

4.3. Strategic role of digital platforms and future directions

A third key theme that emerged from the interviews is the recognition of digital platforms—such as Oracle OPERA, CRM systems, and CRO tools—as not merely operational aids, but strategic infrastructure that supports performance, personalization, and organizational foresight.

Respondents unanimously agreed that the integration of such technologies has contributed not only to service efficiency, but also to informed decision-making, guest segmentation, and the anticipation of market trends.

Perspective from R1 – Executive Manager (14 years of experience)

R1 emphasized the centrality of Oracle OPERA and the broader digital ecosystem to the hotel's strategic functioning:

We couldn't manage a resort of this size without OPERA. It connects all departments—from reservations and front office to housekeeping and accounting.

She highlighted the analytical capacity of the platform as a key driver of business intelligence:

Every day we generate reports that show us occupancy patterns, client preferences, seasonal shifts. It's not just management by instinct anymore. We have data.

Furthermore, she stressed that the CRM system is essential for building long-term relationships:

We use CRM data to create targeted offers and track feedback. If a guest likes a particular room type or service, we know it next time. Loyalty is no longer random.

When discussing future directions, R1 identified hyper-personalization and automation as critical areas of development:

We will soon have guests who expect to pre-select their room, their pillow type, even the music in the room. The system should allow that.

She also noted that staff readiness must evolve alongside technology:

Strategic investment in training will become just as important as the tools themselves.

Perspective from R2 – Front Office Manager (7 years of experience)

R2 focused on the functional integration of systems in daily work and their impact on staff performance and guest satisfaction. She described OPERA as:

The only way we can stay organized. It tells me who is arriving, what their preferences are, and which rooms are ready—all in one place.

For R2, the CRO system is equally important, especially for coordinating offers and monitoring availability:

We don't lose clients anymore because someone didn't answer the phone. The CRO helps us send real-time quotes, and guests book directly from our website.

Although enthusiastic about the benefits, R2 also acknowledged some challenges:

- The system's complexity for new employees;
- Occasional technical errors or internet dependency;
- The risk of over-relying on automation at the expense of spontaneous service.

Regarding the future, she echoed R1's vision of personalization and app-based guest interaction:

We will probably need mobile apps where guests can check-in, open the door, and order room service. Everything should be integrated.

She emphasized that front office staff must evolve into digital hosts, combining technological literacy with emotional intelligence:

You can't just be a receptionist anymore. You must understand systems, data, but also how to read people.

R1 and R2 converge in their belief that digital platforms are core to both strategy and operations. R1, as a senior executive, views these systems as tools of control, prediction, and innovation. R2, closer to day-to-day use, values them for efficiency, transparency, and communication.

Both recognize that digital transformation is not a one-time implementation, but an ongoing process—driven by client expectations, market pressure, and internal adaptation. Importantly, they also agree that the human component (training, judgment, empathy) remains essential.

Thus, technology is framed not as a replacement for human effort, but as a strategic enabler, supporting both personalized service and institutional memory.

5. Conclusions

This study investigated how employees in managerial and operational leadership roles perceive the digital transformation of hotel services, with particular emphasis on the reconfiguration of internal operational processes. Through a qualitative approach based on five structured interviews conducted in a high-capacity resort hotel, the research has brought forward meaningful insights into the lived experiences and interpretations of digital change within the hospitality sector. The survey reveals that workers perceive the digital transformation as a profound and multilayered change that impacts the instruments and processes of doing business as well as the culture of work, role boundaries, and the expectation of guests. Executive management regards it as a strategic response to market forces that demands vision, investment commitment, and organizational alignment. Operations managers regard it as an operational transformation that shifts the manner in which tasks operate, get tracked, and refined.

Overall, employees perceive digital transformation as inevitable, yet highly dependent on how it is introduced and supported. The quality of internal communication, clarity of objectives, and provision of training were all cited as key factors in shaping staff engagement and receptivity.

Respondents unanimously recognized that digital transformation has led to a fundamental restructuring of operational workflows. Processes that were once fragmented, paper-based, or reliant on verbal transmission are now standardized, traceable, and integrated within unified platforms such as Oracle OPERA, CRM, and CRO systems. This reconfiguration has enhanced:

- the speed of execution,
- the accuracy of internal communication, and
- the responsiveness to client needs.

Employees noted that these tools also redistribute responsibilities, reduce repetitive work, and empower staff to focus more on value-added tasks, such as personalization and service quality. The use of real-time data further supports better coordination between departments and consistent service delivery, even in high-demand contexts.

Beyond the operational dimension, employees identified digital systems as strategic assets that enable performance monitoring, trend analysis, and the personalization of guest experiences. The capacity to track guest preferences, anticipate needs, and automate administrative functions positions the hotel not only as more efficient but also as more adaptive and competitive in a digital-first tourism economy.

Respondents also highlighted the importance of maintaining a balance between automation and human interaction, noting that while digitalization improves efficiency, it does not fully replace emotional intelligence, discretion, or relational service.

- Future development is expected to focus on:
- deeper system integration (mobile apps, self-service tools),
- advanced personalization based on guest data, and
- continuous digital training for staff.

Considering the findings, the digital transformation of hotel services must be understood not only as a technological project, but as a people-centered and process-oriented evolution. The perceptions of employees provide critical insight into the success, challenges, and future potential of such transformations.

When employees are informed, trained, and included in the transition process, operational reconfiguration becomes more than structural—it becomes cultural. Their engagement is not only a reflection of adaptation, but a driving force for sustainable innovation in the hospitality sector.

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