

From Service Encounters to Service Ecosystems: A New Perspective on Value Creation in Hotels

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Submitted: November 25, 2025 Revised: December 10, 2025 Accepted: December 27, 2025 Published: January 15, 2026

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18376161](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18376161)



Abstract:

The hospitality industry is undergoing a fundamental transformation as hotels move beyond isolated service encounters toward interconnected service ecosystems that emphasize co-created value. Traditional hotel service models primarily focused on transactional interactions between guests and service staff, evaluating quality through discrete touch points such as check-in, room service, and checkout. However, evolving guest expectations, digital technologies, platform-based partnerships, and sustainability imperatives have expanded the boundaries of service delivery. This paper conceptualizes hotels as dynamic service ecosystems in which value is co-created through the integration of multiple actors, including guests, employees, technology providers, local communities, and destination stakeholders. Drawing on service-dominant logic, the study explores how resources such as digital platforms, data-driven personalization, experiential design, and collaborative networks reshape value creation processes in contemporary hotels. The analysis highlights the shift from firm-centric value propositions to interactive, experience-driven, and context-specific value outcomes. By synthesizing recent developments in hospitality management and service research, the paper proposes a conceptual perspective that links service encounters, technological enablers, and ecosystem partnerships into a unified framework of hotel value creation. The study contributes to hospitality literature by offering a holistic understanding of how hotels can enhance competitiveness, resilience, and guest satisfaction through ecosystem-based strategies. Managerial implications emphasize the need for hotels to orchestrate relationships, leverage technology responsibly, and foster collaborative innovation to deliver sustainable and meaningful guest experiences in an increasingly complex service environment.

Keywords: *Service ecosystems; Value co-creation; Hospitality management; Guest experience; Service-dominant logic; Digital transformation; Hotel service innovation*

1. Introduction

Hotels have long been examined through the perspective of service encounters, which emphasizes direct interactions between guests, employees, and service environments as the primary source of value creation. According to Vargo and Lusch (2016), such firm-centric views limit value to momentary exchanges rather than recognizing it as an ongoing, socially constructed process. In traditional

hospitality models, operational excellence at discrete touch points such as check-in, room service, or complaint handling was considered sufficient to drive satisfaction. However, contemporary hotel experiences are increasingly shaped before arrival and long after departure through digital platforms, peer reviews, and experiential narratives. These extended interactions dilute the analytical adequacy of encounter-based frameworks. As guest expectations evolve toward seamless, personalized, and emotionally resonant journeys, hotels must rethink how value is conceptualized and delivered. The growing interdependence between hotels, technology providers, and destination ecosystems further complicates this shift. Consequently, hospitality research must move beyond linear service logic toward more systemic explanations of value creation. Lopes et al. (2024) demonstrate that guest engagement, interaction, and emotional involvement significantly influence satisfaction and loyalty outcomes in hotel contexts. Guests today actively shape their experiences through self-service technologies, personalized preferences, and real-time feedback mechanisms. This participatory role transforms guests into operant resources who integrate their own skills, expectations, and social capital into the service process. For hotels, the managerial challenge is no longer limited to delivering quality service but extends to designing engagement-friendly environments that facilitate meaningful co-creation. Such environments must accommodate variability in guest behaviour while maintaining experiential consistency. The complexity intensifies when value outcomes depend on interactions across platforms, employees, and external partners.

The digital transformation further accelerates the transition from service encounters to service ecosystems by reshaping how hotel experiences are designed, coordinated, and evaluated. Yousofi et al. (2024) explain that digital guest experiences are not merely technological add-ons but integral components of holistic service design. Mobile applications, CRM systems, AI-driven recommendations, and Omni channel communication tools collectively mediate guest perceptions of convenience, trust, and personal relevance. These technologies enable hotels to personalize services dynamically across the entire guest journey, from pre-stay discovery to post-stay engagement. However, digitalization also increases interdependencies among actors, requiring seamless coordination between human and technological resources. While service ecosystems expand opportunities for value co-creation, they also introduce risks of value co-destruction when interactions fail or expectations misalign. Sthapit et al. (2023) highlight that in hospitality settings; co-destruction often arises from breakdowns across interconnected actors rather than isolated service failures. Issues such as inconsistent information across booking platforms, malfunctioning self-service technologies, or poorly coordinated partner services can erode guest trust and satisfaction. These negative outcomes are amplified in ecosystems because failures cascade across the network. Traditional encounter-based evaluations struggle to diagnose such systemic issues. In contrast, an ecosystem lens enables hotels to identify structural misalignments, governance gaps, and institutional constraints that contribute to co-destruction. Therefore, value co-destruction is treated in this study as an inherent and analytically significant dimension of ecosystem-based hospitality management.

The increasing adoption of artificial intelligence further intensifies ecosystem complexity by redefining roles, responsibilities, and value creation pathways within hotels. Kumawat et al. (2025) argue that AI technologies reshape hospitality work by augmenting employee decision-making while simultaneously altering guest expectations of responsiveness and efficiency. AI-driven chatbots, predictive analytics, and dynamic pricing systems increasingly influence both front-stage and back-stage operations. While these tools enhance scalability and personalization, they also raise concerns about authenticity, employee displacement, and trust. Consequently, hotel value creation becomes a socio-technical process where human empathy and technological intelligence must be carefully balanced. This paper argues that

AI should be understood as an ecosystem actor rather than a standalone innovation. By integrating AI within a service ecosystem framework, hotels can better manage its implications for employee roles, guest experiences, and institutional norms. This reinforces the paper's central premise that sustainable hotel value creation depends on ecosystem orchestration rather than isolated service encounters.

2. Background of Study

The hospitality industry has historically grounded its service philosophy in encounter-based models, where value was primarily assessed through observable interactions between guests and frontline employees. Early service quality frameworks in hospitality focused on dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy to evaluate guest satisfaction within bounded service moments. However, as highlighted by Grönroos (2021), such models increasingly fail to capture how value is formed over time and across multiple contexts. Guests today begin forming perceptions long before arrival through digital searches, online reviews, and social media narratives, while post-stay engagement continues through loyalty platforms and peer-to-peer sharing. This temporal expansion of the service experience challenges traditional assumptions about when and where value is created. Hotels are therefore operating in environments where value emerges cumulatively rather than instantaneously. Recognizing this evolution is essential for rethinking how hospitality performance is conceptualized and measured. Parallel to this conceptual shift, the structure of the hospitality industry has become increasingly networked and interdependent. According to Buhalis and Sinarta (2019), smart hospitality ecosystems rely on interconnected digital and physical infrastructures to co-create seamless tourist experiences. This interconnectedness alters competitive dynamics, as guest evaluations of a hotel are influenced by the performance of multiple actors beyond the hotel's direct control. For example, booking transparency, digital navigation, and destination accessibility significantly affect perceived value. Such complexity renders firm-centric models insufficient for explaining hotel competitiveness. Instead, value creation must be contextualized within collaborative ecosystems where coordination and alignment become strategic priorities. The background of this study is thus rooted in recognizing hospitality as an ecosystem-based industry rather than a standalone service sector.

Technological advancement has further intensified the need to reassess traditional hospitality value frameworks. The adoption of artificial intelligence, data analytics, and platform-based service delivery has transformed how hotels design, deliver, and personalize experiences. As noted by Ivanov and Webster (2020), technology in hospitality not only automates operations but also reshapes guest expectations regarding speed, customization, and control. These technologies enable hotels to anticipate needs and offer proactive services, yet they also introduce new dependencies on data accuracy, system integration, and ethical governance. Importantly, technology mediates interactions between guests and employees, altering the social fabric of hospitality service. This transformation necessitates a background understanding of value creation as a socio-technical process where human and digital resources are jointly mobilized. According to Dolnicar et al. (2022), environmentally and socially responsible practices now form an integral part of perceived value in hospitality contexts. These expectations extend value creation beyond the hotel's walls to include community engagement, ethical sourcing, and destination stewardship. As a result, hotels must coordinate with local stakeholders and align institutional practices to meet evolving normative standards. The background of this study therefore incorporates sustainability and societal impact as embedded dimensions of hospitality value creation. Understanding hotels as ecosystem participants allows these broader value considerations to be analytically integrated.

Recent developments in service theory provide a strong conceptual foundation for reframing hotel value creation through a service ecosystem lens. Service-dominant logic emphasizes that value is always co-created by multiple actors through resource integration and governed by shared institutions. Akaka, Vargo, and Lusch (2013) argue that service ecosystems offer a meta-theoretical framework capable of explaining complex, multi-actor value phenomena across industries. The background of the present study is therefore anchored in this theoretical evolution, responding to calls for ecosystem-based research in hospitality management. By situating hotels within service ecosystems, the study seeks to bridge gaps between theory and practice in understanding contemporary value creation. This contextual foundation justifies the need for a new perspective that moves decisively beyond service encounters toward ecosystem orchestration.

3. Scope and Significance of Study

The scope of the present study extends beyond traditional analyses of hotel service quality by examining value creation through the broader lens of service ecosystems. Rather than restricting inquiry to frontline encounters or operational efficiency, the study encompasses the full constellation of actors, resources, and interactions that shape hotel experiences over time. As argued by Frow et al. (2019), value in contemporary services is generated across networks where multiple stakeholders integrate resources under shared institutional arrangements. Accordingly, this study considers guests, employees, digital platforms, partner organisations, and destination stakeholders as integral contributors to value creation in hotels. The scope also includes pre-stay, on-stay, and post-stay phases, recognizing that value perceptions evolve dynamically across the guest journey. This holistic coverage enables a more accurate understanding of how experiences are formed and evaluated. Gaikwad (2024) emphasized that service ecosystems provide a unifying framework for understanding how value emerges from ongoing interactions governed by institutional logics. By applying this framework to hotels, the study bridges gaps between service-dominant logic and hospitality management literature. It extends theoretical discussions by illustrating how ecosystem principles operate in experience-intensive service settings. The study offers a structured foundation for future empirical research grounded in ecosystem thinking. In this way, the study enhances the explanatory power and relevance of hospitality theory.

The study is also significant in addressing the managerial challenges faced by hotel operators in digitally mediated and highly competitive environments. Hotels today must coordinate technology adoption, employee roles, and partner relationships to deliver consistent and differentiated experiences. According to Lemon and Verhoef (2016), managing customer experience requires an integrated view that spans touch points, channels, and organisational boundaries. This study provides such a view by framing experience management as an ecosystem orchestration task. Its significance lies in offering managers a strategic perspective that aligns operational decisions with broader value creation goals. By highlighting interdependencies, the study helps managers identify leverage points for improving guest satisfaction and loyalty. It also underscores the importance of governance, collaboration, and alignment in sustaining competitive advantage. Hotels operate within destination ecosystems where policies related to digital infrastructure, sustainability, and workforce development shape value creation outcomes. As noted by Della Corte et al. (2022), destination competitiveness increasingly depends on coordinated value creation among tourism actors. By situating hotels within these broader systems, the study highlights the need for collaborative governance and policy alignment. Its scope includes consideration of sustainability and societal value as integral components of hotel ecosystems. This perspective supports policy initiatives aimed at inclusive growth, responsible tourism, and destination resilience. The study therefore contributes insights that are relevant beyond individual firms. It informs ecosystem-level

thinking that can guide destination strategy and public–private collaboration. This broader relevance enhances the societal significance of the research. The significance of the study lies in its timeliness and relevance to emerging technological and institutional shifts in hospitality. Rapid advances in artificial intelligence, data analytics, and platform-based service delivery are redefining how hotels create and capture value. Ng and Wakenshaw (2017) highlight that understanding value creation in complex service systems is critical as technologies blur organisational boundaries. This study responds to that need by offering an ecosystem-based framework capable of accommodating socio-technical change. The significance is therefore twofold: it advances scholarly understanding and equips practitioners with a robust conceptual lens. Overall, the study establishes a strong foundation for rethinking hotel value creation in an increasingly interconnected service landscape.

4. Objectives of Study

- To examine the evolution of hotel service delivery from encounter-based models to ecosystem-based value creation frameworks
- To analyse the role of multiple factors guests, employees, digital technologies, partner organisations, and destination stakeholders in co-creating value system
- To explore how digital transformation and emerging technologies influence value creation processes in hotels
- To investigate the mechanisms of value co-creation and value co-destruction in hotel service ecosystem.
- To examine the significance of institutional arrangements, sustainability practices, and socio-technical factors in shaping ecosystem-based value creation in hotels

5. Review of Literature

Hospitality literature has increasingly moved away from viewing hotels as isolated service delivery units toward understanding them as complex systems of value creation. Early studies concentrated on service encounters as the primary locus of guest satisfaction, but this perspective has been criticized for overlooking the broader relational and contextual dimensions of service experiences. Vargo and Lusch (2016) argue that value is not embedded in outputs but emerges through the integration of resources by multiple actors operating within service ecosystems. Applied to hotels, this implies that value is shaped not only during face-to-face interactions but also through networks involving guests, employees, technologies, and institutional arrangements. This systemic view allows scholars to capture the cumulative and experiential nature of hotel value creation. It also reframes hotels as platforms for interaction rather than sole producers of value. By adopting service-dominant logic, hospitality research gains a more robust theoretical foundation to explain multi-actor collaboration. Thus, the literature increasingly supports ecosystem-based perspectives as more suitable for analyzing modern hotel services.

A growing body of research emphasizes the role of value co-creation in shaping guest satisfaction and loyalty in hospitality contexts. Rather than being passive recipients, guests actively participate in designing and personalizing their experiences. According to Ranjan and Read (2016), co-creation involves both co-production activities and value-in-use experiences that unfold during service consumption. In hotels, this participation is evident through self-service technologies, customization choices, and interactive communication with staff. Studies suggest that such engagement enhances emotional attachment and perceived uniqueness of experiences. However, co-creation also introduces variability, as outcomes depend on how guests utilise available resources. This has prompted scholars to explore co-creation as a dynamic and relational process rather than a controllable operational input. The

literature therefore positions co-creation as a central mechanism of value creation in hospitality ecosystems. This perspective aligns with the experiential turn in tourism and hospitality research. Consequently, understanding co-creation processes is essential for explaining differentiated value outcomes in hotels.

Digital transformation literature further strengthens the argument for ecosystem-based analysis of hotel value creation. Technological advancements have fundamentally altered how guests interact with hotels across the service journey. Buhalis and Sinarta (2019) highlight that smart hospitality ecosystems rely on digital platforms that enable real-time interaction, personalization, and co-creation. These technologies integrate multiple actors, including hotels, intermediaries, and destination services, into unified experience networks. Research shows that digital touch points significantly influence perceptions of convenience, trust, and service quality. Importantly, technology-mediated experiences are not confined to operational efficiency but extend to experiential and emotional dimensions.

Recent studies also draw attention to the phenomenon of value co-destruction in hospitality service ecosystems. While co-creation can enhance experiences, poorly managed interactions may lead to negative outcomes. Plé and Cáceres (2010) discussed that value co-destruction occurs when resource integration processes fail or when actors misuse or misunderstand resources. In hotel settings, this can arise from malfunctioning self-service technologies, misaligned partner services, or unmet guest expectations. Such failures often have cascading effects because of the interconnected nature of service ecosystems. The literature suggests that traditional encounter-based models are insufficient to diagnose these systemic breakdowns. Consequently, the inclusion of co-destruction enriches the theoretical robustness of ecosystem-based hospitality research.

According to Wieland, Hartmann, and Vargo (2017), effective ecosystem orchestration involves aligning actors, resources, and institutional arrangements to enable continuous value creation. In hospitality, this includes managing relationships with online travel agencies, technology vendors, local communities, and employees. The literature indicates that such orchestration capabilities contribute to innovation, resilience, and long-term performance. This strategic perspective shifts managerial focus from optimizing individual encounters to enabling systemic coherence. It also underscores the importance of governance mechanisms and shared norms in maintaining ecosystem health.

6. Discussion and Analysis

The discussion begins by analyzing hotel value creation as a dynamic and multi-layered process shaped by interconnected actors rather than isolated service moments. Contemporary service research increasingly recognizes that customer experiences are formed across extended journeys involving multiple touch points and stakeholders. Becker and Jaakkola (2020) conceptualize customer experience as a multidimensional construct that emerges from cumulative interactions across time and channels. Applied to hotels, this perspective explains why guest value perceptions are influenced not only by in-house service delivery but also by booking interfaces, destination mobility, and post-stay digital engagement. The analysis indicates that hotels operating within well-aligned ecosystems are more capable of delivering consistent experiential narratives. Such narratives reduce cognitive friction for guests and enhance perceived value continuity. In contrast, fragmented ecosystems lead to disjointed experiences and weakened satisfaction. This discussion highlights that value creation must be examined holistically rather than through isolated operational metrics.

A second dimension of analysis focuses on the strategic role of actor engagement and resource integration in hotel service ecosystems. Value creation is increasingly dependent on how effectively hotels enable interactions among guests, employees, and complementary service providers. According to Akaka and Vargo (2015), resource integration across networks is central to value formation in complex service systems. In hotel contexts, this includes combining employee competencies, guest knowledge, digital tools, and partner services to produce personalized experiences. The analysis suggests that hotels that actively facilitate such integration achieve higher levels of experiential relevance. However, ineffective coordination can dilute value despite high-quality individual resources. This underscores that competitive advantage lies not in resource ownership but in orchestration capability. The discussion therefore reframes hotel strategy as the management of interaction architectures rather than service outputs. Teixeira et al. (2023) emphasize that service design enables organisations to choreograph interactions across actors and touch points. In hotels, this involves aligning digital interfaces, employee behaviours, and physical environments into a coherent experience logic. The discussion reveals that ecosystem-level experience design enhances predictability while allowing contextual flexibility. This balance is critical in hospitality, where guests seek both reliability and personalization. Poorly designed ecosystems, by contrast, increase role ambiguity and service friction. It also positions experience design as a strategic capability for hotel value creation.

Another important analytical theme concerns the management of risks associated with ecosystem complexity. As hotels integrate multiple actors and platforms, the potential for misalignment and negative outcomes increases. Recent service research highlights that complex service systems are prone to unintended consequences when governance mechanisms are weak. Laud et al. (2019) argue that institutional complexity can disrupt value creation if actor expectations and norms are not aligned. In hotel ecosystems, such disruptions may appear as inconsistent service standards, data misuse, or partner-related failures. The discussion suggests that these risks require proactive governance rather than reactive service recovery. Ecosystem governance includes setting shared rules, clarifying responsibilities, and monitoring performance across boundaries. The analysis therefore positions governance as a critical moderator of value outcomes. Research on service ecosystems suggests that resilience is enhanced when organisations cultivate adaptive networks rather than rigid structures. Lusch and Vargo (2021) argued that service ecosystems enable continuous learning and innovation through actor interaction. In hospitality, this adaptability allows hotels to reconfigure offerings, partnerships, and experiences in response to environmental change. The analysis indicates that ecosystem-oriented hotels are better positioned to absorb shocks and sustain value creation over time. The discussion thus supports a shift from short-term performance optimization to long-term ecosystem health.

7. Findings of Study

The study finds that hotel value creation has decisively shifted from isolated service encounters to integrated service ecosystems, where guest experiences are shaped by cumulative interactions across multiple actors and touch points. Empirical and conceptual hospitality research increasingly demonstrates that guests evaluate value holistically, considering pre-stay digital interactions, on-site service integration, and post-stay engagement as a continuous experience. Helkkula, Kelleher, and Pihlström (2012) indicate that value is phenomenological experienced and constructed over time, rather than produced at singular moments. The findings reveal that hotels capable of aligning these temporal stages deliver stronger experiential coherence and higher perceived value. Fragmentation across channels or partners weakens this coherence and reduces satisfaction. This confirms that encounter-centric performance metrics are insufficient for explaining contemporary hotel value creation. Instead,

ecosystem-level alignment emerges as a decisive factor influencing guest perceptions. The finding reinforces the relevance of service ecosystem theory in hospitality analysis. It also validates the conceptual shift proposed in this study. A second key finding highlights the critical role of multi-actor collaboration in enhancing hotel value creation. The analysis shows that guests perceive higher value when hotels effectively integrate resources from employees, digital systems, and external partners such as destination services. According to Chandler and Lusch (2015), value is co-created through shared institutional arrangements that enable coordinated action among actors. The study finds that hotels functioning as ecosystem orchestrators are better able to manage complexity and deliver personalized experiences. Poor coordination, even when individual service elements perform well, leads to diluted value outcomes. This finding underscores that competitive advantage in hospitality is relational rather than purely operational. Hotels must therefore invest in collaboration capabilities and partnership governance.

The findings further indicate that digital technologies act as enablers of ecosystem-level value creation rather than independent drivers of guest satisfaction. Hotels that strategically embed digital tools within their service ecosystems achieve higher experiential consistency and responsiveness. Research by Homburg, Jozić, and Kuehnl (2017) suggests that digital interfaces enhance customer experience only when aligned with broader service processes. The study finds that technology-driven personalization improves value perception when complemented by human judgment and emotional engagement. Over-reliance on automation without ecosystem alignment leads to experience fragmentation and guest frustration. This finding challenges the assumption that digitalization alone guarantees service excellence. Instead, digital tools must be governed as relational and experiential resources.

Another significant finding concerns the presence of value co-destruction risks within complex hotel service ecosystems. As hotels expand their networks of platforms and partners, the probability of misalignment and negative guest experiences increases. Recent service research by Echeverri and Skålén (2011) demonstrates that value co-destruction arises when interaction practices fail to meet actor expectations. The study finds that such failures often originate outside direct hotel control, including third-party platforms and digital intermediaries. These issues frequently cascade across the ecosystem, magnifying their negative impact. Traditional service recovery mechanisms are insufficient to address these systemic failures. It also establishes co-destruction as a structural rather than incidental phenomenon in hospitality ecosystems.

The study finds that hotels adopting an ecosystem orchestration mindset demonstrate greater strategic resilience and long-term value sustainability. Ecosystem-oriented hotels are better positioned to adapt to environmental disruptions, evolving guest expectations, and technological change. Research by Skålén, Gummerus, von Koskull, and Magnusson (2015) supports the view that value creation in service systems depends on continuous institutional alignment and learning. The findings indicate that ecosystem orchestration enhances innovation capacity and experience adaptability. Hotels focusing solely on encounter optimization struggle to respond effectively to systemic change. This reinforces the conclusion that sustainable competitiveness requires ecosystem-level strategy. The study thus confirms that managing relationships, institutions, and interactions is central to future hotel success. Overall, the findings strongly support the proposed shift from service encounters to service ecosystems as the dominant logic of value creation in hotels.

8. Conclusion

This study concludes that value creation in hotels has fundamentally evolved from isolated service encounters to interconnected service ecosystems that span multiple actors, touch points, and temporal phases. The analysis demonstrates that guest value is no longer produced solely through frontline interactions but emerges through continuous engagement across digital platforms, physical environments, and relational networks. The study calls for rethinking traditional performance metrics and service design approaches. Ultimately, hotels must be understood as dynamic systems rather than standalone service providers. The study further states that value co-creation is a central mechanism through which hotels differentiate experiences and build long-term relationships with guests. Guest participation, enabled through digital interfaces and personalized service options, significantly influences perceived value outcomes. The findings suggest that hotels that actively design participation opportunities achieve higher experiential relevance and emotional connection. The conclusion positions co-creation as both a strategic opportunity and a managerial responsibility. Recognizing this duality strengthens the practical relevance of ecosystem thinking in hospitality. Digital tools enhance responsiveness, personalization, and coordination, but their effectiveness depends on alignment with human service and organisational processes. The study concludes that technology-driven value is contingent upon coherent system integration and experiential consistency. Overemphasis on automation without ecosystem alignment risks eroding authenticity and trust. The study also concludes that managing value co-destruction is as important as enabling value co-creation within hotel service ecosystems. Negative outcomes often arise from misaligned expectations, weak governance, or fragmented partner coordination. Prior service research by Smith (2013) suggests that systemic failures frequently stem from poorly managed service systems rather than isolated employee errors. It also expands the scope of managerial responsibility beyond internal operations. Addressing co-destruction is therefore essential for sustaining positive value outcomes. In addition, it can be said that the ecosystem orchestration is a critical strategic capability for achieving long-term competitiveness and resilience in the hotel industry. Hotels that successfully coordinate actors, resources, and institutions are better equipped to adapt to environmental volatility and evolving guest expectations. The study emphasizes that sustainable value creation depends on continuous alignment and collaborative learning across the ecosystem. This requires a shift in managerial mindset from control to orchestration. By embracing ecosystem thinking, hotels can move beyond short-term performance optimization toward enduring value sustainability.

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