



14th INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM
IN SERVICE MANAGEMENT

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**ABSTRACTS
EXTENDED ABSTRACTS
FULL PAPERS**

**14th International Research Symposium
in Service Management**

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14

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*Rethinking Service Research in Emerging Economies:
Sustainability, Digital, and Societal Impact*

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Jay Kandampully, Alper Özer, Yüksel Ekinci

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The Green of Lies, The Green of Silence: The Impact of Sustainability Communication Strategies on Green Trust and Visit Intention in the Hotel Sector

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Abstract

Increasing environmental awareness has made the sustainability communication of businesses a strategic necessity. However, in this process, businesses can overstate their environmental claims, engaging in “greenwashing,” just as they can adopt a “greenhushing” strategy by intentionally concealing their actual sustainability efforts (Font et al., 2017).

Empirical studies show that exposure to greenwashing decreases consumer trust and increases skepticism toward environmental claims (Chen & Chang, 2013; Chen et al., 2019). Conversely, the consequences of the greenhushing practice remain theoretically ambiguous and empirically under-researched (Khan et al., 2025).

The concept of greenhushing mostly focuses on issues such as corporate risks, reputation management, and stakeholder reactions in sustainability communication (Dias et al., 2025; Khan et al., 2025), and the dimension of the issue directly reflecting on consumer responses remains a relatively unexplored area (Ettinger et al., 2021). Despite this strong need for a consumer perspective, mainstream sustainability studies reduce the issue merely to the green consumer or individual purchasing decisions and conceptualize the subject through individual values, norms, and attitudes (micro level). However, addressing multi-dimensional societal issues like sustainability in a way that includes the individual (micro), societal (meso), and ecological levels (macro level) is more suitable for handling the complexity of the subject.

Stemming from this gap in the literature, this study aims to empirically examine the effects of greenwashing and greenhushing communication strategies, applied via a fictional hotel brand in the hospitality sector, on consumers’ green trust and visit intention within the context of individualistic, societal, and environmental levels.

In order to causally explain the impact of these communication strategies on consumers, this research is based on the principles of Signaling Theory. Signaling theory provides a powerful analytical framework to reduce the information asymmetry that arises in situations where the sustainability performance of businesses cannot be directly observed by consumers, and to build trust (Conte et al., 2023). Because consumers cannot directly verify the environmental attributes of products or services, they need these communication signals sent by businesses (Conte et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2025). In the context of this theory, greenhushing is justified not as a simple lack of communication, but as businesses’ decision to strategically restrict their visibility as a

result of assessing their internal credibility and reputation risks (Bernini & La Rosa, 2024), and finding the sharing of existing sustainability signals too risky or weak (Khan et al., 2025).

To test these strategic differences established in the theoretical framework, an experimental research design will be used as the methodology in the research. Participants will be presented with a fictional hotel scenario and will be randomly assigned to one of four different groups via survey software. The research design is planned in a 2×2 factorial structure built on two independent factors: the hotel's actual environmental performance level (high/low) and the way it shares this performance with the public (deceptive green communication/silence). Accordingly, participants in Group 1 will be exposed to a greenwashing scenario where the hotel makes intense eco-friendly claims in its advertisements despite actually having no concrete environmental steps; those in Group 2 will be exposed to a silent-low-performance scenario where the hotel does not engage in any communication; those in Group 3 will be exposed to a greenhushing scenario where the hotel has high-level environmental investments and internationally recognized certifications but does not use them in marketing communication; and those in Group 4 will be exposed to a scenario where the hotel transparently communicates its same high-level environmental performance to the public with concrete data. It is anticipated that this four-group design will allow the testing of the effects of greenwashing and greenhushing on consumer responses in an isolated manner, independent of the hotel's actual environmental performance.

In the research model created in line with this devised experimental design, green trust is positioned as a mediating variable in the ultimate effect of the communication strategies used by hotels on consumers' visit intention.

Accordingly, in the low performance condition, it is expected that deceptive green communication (greenwashing) will create a disproportionately lower perception of green trust compared to remaining silent; whereas in the high performance condition, remaining silent (greenhushing) is expected to provide a lower-than-expected trust gain compared to transparent communication. This high green trust perception is anticipated to directly and positively affect the visit intention toward the hotel.

In addition to this, within the scope of the model, it is argued that individuals' utilitarian motivations at the micro level will weaken the aforementioned positive effect, civic mindedness at the meso level and concern toward environmental issues at the macro level will have a moderating effect that significantly strengthens the relationship between green trust and visit intention.

Keywords: Greenwashing, Greenhushing, Green Trust, Visit Intention, Sustainability Communication, Signaling Theory

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Explaining Gen Z Consumers' Mobile Banking Continuance Intention in Türkiye: A Stimulus–Organism–Response Perspective

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Abstract

Mobile banking applications have become one of the most important digital service encounters between banks and young consumers. For Generation Z, mobile banking is not merely a transactional channel for checking balances, transferring money, or paying bills; it is also a recurring digital service experience shaped by emotional responses, trust, convenience, and satisfaction (Sharma et al., 2024). Although mobile banking research has extensively examined technology adoption (e.g., Foroughi et al., 2019), service quality (e.g., Arcand et al., 2017), customer emotions (e.g., Chaouali et al., 2020), less attention has been given to how digitally native consumers form continuance intention after repeated mobile banking use, particularly in emerging market contexts such as Türkiye.

Drawing on Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) theory, this study investigates the mechanisms through which Gen Z consumers' mobile banking app experiences shape satisfaction and continuance intention. The final research model conceptualizes affective experience, trust, and pragmatic experience as stimuli; customer satisfaction as the organismic state; and continuance intention as the behavioral response. The study addresses the following research question: How do affective experience, pragmatic experience, and trust influence Gen Z consumers' satisfaction and continuance intention in mobile banking applications in Türkiye?

1. Theoretical Background

The study is grounded in S-O-R theory, which holds that external and perceived stimuli influence internal cognitive or affective states, which, in turn, generate behavioral responses (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). In mobile banking, stimuli are not limited to physical service environments; they also include app-based cues, perceived trustworthiness, usability, convenience, and emotional experience. Prior mobile banking research has extended servicescape and service quality perspectives to digital environments, showing that app-related stimuli can shape internal evaluations and subsequent behavioral outcomes (Sahoo & Pillai, 2017; Palamidovska-Sterjadovska et al., 2025).

In this study, affective experience refers to the positive emotional reactions generated during mobile banking app use, such as pleasantness, enjoyment, happiness, and emotional comfort (Chaouali et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2024). Trust reflects users' confidence that the bank and its mobile application are reliable, secure, competent, and capable of protecting personal and financial information (Addula, 2025). Pragmatic experience captures the utilitarian value of the app, including usefulness, convenience, time-saving, efficiency, and the ability to manage banking needs anytime, anywhere (Sharma et al., 2024).

Customer satisfaction is positioned as the organismic mechanism that transforms app-related stimuli into behavioral responses (Abdenneni, 2023; Kumar et al., 2024). In mobile banking, satisfaction reflects the user's overall evaluation of whether the app meets expectations and provides a positive service experience. Continuance intention represents the user's willingness to keep using the mobile banking application in the future. This model is especially relevant for

Gen Z consumers, who are accustomed to high-quality, mobile-first service environments and may evaluate banking apps not only on functional performance but also on emotional experience.

The study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Affective experience positively influences customer satisfaction among GenZ mobile banking app users.

H2: Trust positively influences customer satisfaction among GenZ mobile banking app users.

H3: Pragmatic experience positively influences customer satisfaction among GenZ mobile banking app users.

H4: Customer satisfaction positively influences continuance intention among GenZ mobile banking app users.

2. Methodology

The study used a quantitative survey design with 253 Gen Z mobile banking users in Istanbul. Respondents were asked to evaluate the mobile banking application they use most frequently. Measurement items were adapted from validated scales for mobile banking, customer experience (Rajaobelina et al., 2018; Sharma et al., 2024), satisfaction (Goel et al., 2022), trust (Shahid et al., 2022) and continuance intention (Rajaobelina et al., 2021). Affective experience, trust, pragmatic experience, customer satisfaction, and continuance intention were measured using reflective multi-item scales.

Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) on SmartPLS v4.1.1.7. The analysis followed a two-stage procedure. First, the measurement model was assessed through outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, rho_A, composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), and HTMT. Second, the structural model was evaluated through collinearity diagnostics, R^2 , f^2 effect sizes, path coefficients, and mediation analysis.

The final measurement model showed strong psychometric properties. All outer loadings exceeded the recommended threshold, ranging from 0.765 to 0.973. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.909 to 0.970, rho_A values ranged from 0.912 to 0.974, and composite reliability values ranged from 0.937 to 0.980, indicating strong internal consistency reliability. AVE values ranged from 0.790 to 0.943, confirming convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also supported, as HTMT values ranged from 0.553 to 0.848 and remained below the conservative 0.85 threshold. Inner VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 3.109, indicating no serious multicollinearity problem.

3. Key Findings

The structural model demonstrated moderate explanatory power. Affective experience, trust, and pragmatic experience jointly explained 52.5% of the variance in customer satisfaction ($R^2 = 0.525$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.519$). Customer satisfaction explained 45.9% of the variance in continuance intention ($R^2 = 0.459$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.456$).

The path analysis revealed that affective experience had a strong and significant effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.603$, $t = 5.707$, $p < .001$), supporting H1 and aligning with Sharma et al. (2024). Customer satisfaction also had a strong positive effect on continuance intention ($\beta = 0.677$, $t = 17.025$, $p < .001$), supporting H4. However, trust did not significantly influence satisfaction ($\beta = 0.144$, $t = 1.557$, $p = .120$), nor did pragmatic experience ($\beta = 0.004$, $t = 0.047$, $p = .963$). Therefore, H2 and H3 were not supported.

Effect size results further clarified the relative importance of the predictors. Affective experience had a medium effect on customer satisfaction ($f^2 = 0.246$), whereas trust had a very small

effect ($f^2 = 0.016$), and pragmatic experience had no unique effect ($f^2 = 0.000$). Customer satisfaction had a very large effect on continuance intention ($f^2 = 0.847$).

The mediation results confirmed the central role of satisfaction in the affective pathway. Affective experience had a significant indirect effect on continuance intention through customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.408$, $t = 5.600$, $p < .001$), supporting H5a. In contrast, the indirect effects of trust ($\beta = 0.098$, $t = 1.523$, $p = .128$) and pragmatic experience ($\beta = 0.003$, $t = 0.047$, $p = .963$) were not significant. Thus, satisfaction mediated only the relationship between affective experience and continuance intention.

These findings suggest that Gen Z consumers' continuance intention in mobile banking is primarily an affective satisfaction process. For young mobile banking users in Türkiye, pleasantness, enjoyment, and emotional comfort appear to be stronger drivers of satisfaction than pragmatic usefulness or trust. Pragmatic app benefits, such as convenience, efficiency, and time saving, may be perceived as baseline expectations rather than satisfaction-enhancing differentiators in the competitive Turkish banking market. Similarly, trust may serve as a hygiene factor in mobile banking, necessary for participation but insufficient to generate satisfaction among active app users.

4. Conclusion

This study contributes to service research in three ways. First, it extends S-O-R theory to Gen Z mobile banking continuance by showing that the affective stimulus is the dominant driver of satisfaction and continuance intention. Second, it contributes to digital service experience literature by demonstrating that pragmatic experience and trust may not always directly enhance satisfaction among digitally native consumers, despite their theoretical importance. Third, it provides contextual contribution by examining mobile banking in Türkiye, an emerging market where young consumers actively engage with mobile-first financial services.

Managerially, the findings suggest that banks targeting Gen Z should not rely only on secure, useful, and efficient mobile banking services. These features remain necessary, but they may no longer be sufficient to create customer satisfaction. Instead, banks should design emotionally positive app experiences that feel smooth, pleasant, reassuring, and enjoyable. For service managers, the main implication is clear: retaining Gen Z mobile banking users requires transforming the application from a functional transaction tool into a satisfying digital service experience.

This study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional survey design limits causal interpretation; future studies could use longitudinal data to examine how mobile banking satisfaction and continuance intention evolve over time. Second, the sample is limited to 253 Gen Z mobile banking users in Türkiye, so future research could test the model with larger samples, different age cohorts, and cross-regional comparisons. Third, the study relies on self-reported perceptions of the most frequently used banking app. Future studies could combine survey data with behavioral app usage data, app-store reviews, or qualitative interviews. Finally, future research may extend the model by adding outcomes such as positive e-WOM, loyalty, or switching resistance. Social influence could also be reconsidered with refined items or modeled as an antecedent of trust and affective experience.

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Game Rhythm: The Effects of Service Quality, Club Image, and Word-of-Mouth on Sport Consumption Behavior Using the S-O-R Framework

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Abstract

Stadiums are large-scale facilities designed to host sporting events and other major recreational activities and have evolved into integrated experiential environments featuring food and beverage services, retail outlets, and various entertainment amenities. Football stadiums, in particular, constitute recreational service settings where spectators not only watch events but also undergo multidimensional experiences, making perceived image a significant factor. Within the framework of the stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model, this study aims to examine the effect of service quality in football stadiums on sport consumption behavior and to determine the serial mediating role of club image and word-of-mouth in this relationship. Based on the correlational model, the study group consisted of 252 football spectators ($M_{age} = 28.64 \pm 9.77$) who attended events held in three different stadiums in İstanbul and were selected through convenience sampling. Participants completed the “Stadium Service Quality Scale (SSQS),” “Club Image Scale (CIS),” “Word-of-Mouth Scale (WOMS),” and “Sport Consumption Behavior Scale (SCBS)” via an online questionnaire. In the study, the validity of the measurement model was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis, factor loadings, average variance extracted, and composite reliability coefficients. Furthermore, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed using the bootstrap method to examine the serial mediation effects. The analyses revealed positive and significant relationships among the mean scores of the “SSQS,” “CIS,” “WOMS,” and “SCBS” ($p < 0.01$). The SEM analyses indicated that service quality had positive effects on club image ($\beta = 0.474$; $p < 0.01$), word-of-mouth ($\beta = 0.260$; $p < 0.01$), and sport consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.206$; $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, club image was revealed to have a positive effect on word-of-mouth ($\beta = 0.639$; $p < 0.01$). In contrast, the effect of club image on sports consumption behavior was determined to be statistically non-significant ($\beta = -0.002$; $p > 0.05$). Word-of-mouth was indicated to have a direct positive effect on sports consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.670$; $p < 0.01$). Mediation analyses revealed that club image did not have an indirect effect on the relationship between service quality and sports consumption behavior ($\beta = -0.001$; $p > 0.05$). However, word-of-mouth was indicated to have an indirect effect on the relationship between service quality and sports consumption behavior ($\beta = 0.174$; $p < 0.01$). Serial mediation analyses further indicated that club image and word-of-mouth jointly and serially explained the relationship between service quality and sports consumption behavior, and that this serial mediation effect was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.203$; $p < 0.01$). As a result, it was determined that service quality in stadiums significantly influences sports consumption behavior, while club image and word-of-mouth assume a serial mediation role in this relationship. Theoretically, this study provides a holistic explanation to the literature by examining the effects of service quality, club image, and word-of-mouth on sports consumption behavior within the framework of the S-O-R model through a serial mediation structure. Practically, it demonstrates that stadium managers should collectively and integratively manage service quality, club image, and word-of-mouth processes in order to enhance sports consumption behavior.

Keywords: Service Quality, Club Image, Word-of-Mouth, Sport Consumption Behavior, Recreation Management

Identity-Based Moral Incongruence, Brand Hate, and Consumer Boycott Intention: A Social Identity Perspective

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Abstract

In today's politically charged and socially connected marketplace, consumers increasingly evaluate brands not only on price and performance but on whether their conduct aligns with deeply held group values. When a brand is seen to offend the values of a group that consumers belong to, individual disapproval can escalate rapidly into organized resistance in the form of a boycott. While the boycott literature has advanced considerably, it has been dominated by explanations grounded in consumer animosity and attitude-based, cost–benefit reasoning.

The study introduces identity-based moral incongruence—a consumer's perception that a brand's actions clash with and violate the moral values held by their in-group—as the central cognitive appraisal linking group identity to consumer resistance. It proposes that three identity-related antecedents shape this appraisal: ethnic identity centrality, collective self-esteem, and perceived group threat. Identity-based moral incongruence is theorized to generate brand hate, an intense and enduring negative emotion toward the brand, which in turn drives boycott intention. Moral incongruence and brand hate are thus positioned as sequential mechanisms carrying the influence of group identity onto resistance behavior. Six hypotheses formalize these relationships, including a serial mediation pathway from the identity-related antecedents through moral incongruence and brand hate to boycott intention.

The conceptual model extends existing work in two ways. First, it broadens the boycott literature beyond animosity and attitude models by foregrounding an identity-based mechanism, demonstrating how the social self, rather than the personal self alone, motivates collective consumer resistance. Second, it advances the brand hate literature by specifying a group-level antecedent of brand hate, complementing prior research that has emphasized individual-level symbolic and ideological incongruity.

To test the model, the study employs a quantitative survey design set in the restaurant service context, a consumer-facing service setting in which brand encounters are frequent, identity-laden, and highly visible, making it especially suitable for examining identity-driven service brand resistance. Respondents evaluate a focal restaurant service brand perceived to have acted against their in-group's moral values. Constructs are measured using established, validated scales adapted to this service boycott context, including the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, the Collective Self-Esteem Scale, an intergroup threat measure, a moral congruence measure, an established brand hate scale, and a boycott intention scale, all assessed on seven-point Likert scales. Data will be analyzed using structural equation modeling to examine the hypothesized direct and mediated relationships. By integrating social-psychological constructs into a marketing model of boycotting and testing it in the restaurant service context, the study aims to offer a more psychologically grounded explanation of when and why consumers mobilize

against service brands. The anticipated findings are expected to show that identity-based moral incongruence and brand hate serially transmit the effect of group identity onto boycott intention within this service setting, offering service firms clear implications for how they anticipate, monitor, and navigate identity-driven consumer backlash against their brands.

Keywords: Brand Hate; Boycott Intention; Social Identity; Moral Incongruence; Group Threat; Consumer Resistance; Service Brands

“Finnish Hotel Room Atlas” as a Digital Platform for Research Communication in the Hospitality Ecosystem

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Abstract

Modern hospitality consists of a complex, multilevel networks of different interconnected participants, digital platforms, and service ecosystems. Buhalis and Leung (2018) highlight that the hospitality industry combines many direct and indirect partners. To create value and make the right business decisions, they need access to big data with the tools to analyze it. In this regard, especially digital platforms are able to unite different industry players, coordinate their cooperation, and create new values within the hospitality ecosystem.

In the travel ecosystem, hotels are no longer recognized as separate service providers. According to Joshi and Budke (2026), hotels are transforming from separate service encounters into interconnected service ecosystems. In such ecosystems the value is created by all the participants of the service process. Moreover, travellers are creating their own experiences through personalization with online services and interaction with the digital platforms. From this perspective, the digital platforms are not independent value creators, but rather tools for connecting and coordinating the service processes between travellers and hospitality providers.

Simultaneously, hotel marketing is developing rapidly. Proctor (2026) notices that hyperpersonalisation becomes one of the key trends in temporary hospitality marketing. It covers the whole process of travel – from information search to after-stay feedback. As such, value creation relies on the ability to integrate traveller data into digital solutions, which help to create expectations of the service. Furthermore, these changes are driving the development of the digital platforms as communication tools for hospitality research dissemination.

The current project presents the concept of the “Finnish Hotel Room Atlas” – a digital platform based on the doctoral research on the hotel room meanings (Lvov, 2026). It aims to communicate the research results in the hospitality field in the open, interactive and user-friendly form. The platform presents the doctoral research of the hotel room meanings in the context of leisure and work-related travel, with the focus on the traveller types, hotel guests expectations and experiences of the hotel accommodation. “Finnish Hotel Room Atlas” includes:

- Finnish hotel room database;
- Traveller types;
- Educational material;
- Interactive test;
- Digital interaction tools.

Digital platform presents hotel rooms not just as accommodation units but as experiential, cultural and functional service environments, which can be differently interpreted by different travellers. This project conceptualises the platform as a bigger part of a broader hospitality network, which addresses travellers, hotel managers, hospitality students, researchers, DMOs (des-

tination management organisations) and educational institutions. Currently this project is at the prototype stage, quickly developing into the functioning ecosystem.

Through participatory digital tools, “Finnish Hotel Room Atlas” supports the co-creation of knowledge between academia, industry and society. This platform has a special meaning in the context of doctoral research dissemination. Irion (2015) suggests that science communication is a process of translating the academic language and results into the form perceived by the broader audience. In the modern academy, digital platforms, blogs and social media become important tools of scholarly communication (Zhu & Procter, 2012). In this context, “Finnish Hotel Room Atlas” appears not just as a hotel room catalogue but also as a digital research artefact and a science communication tool. The platform demonstrates how the hospitality research becomes part of a digital service ecosystem, which offers public engagement.

Keywords: Hospitality Service Ecosystems; Digital Research Communication; Hotel Room Experiences

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The Effect of AI-Generated Review Summaries on Consumer Trust: A Multi-Stage Experimental Study in the E-Commerce Context

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Abstract

The rapid growth of global e-commerce has significantly increased the volume of online product reviews, creating a substantial information overload for consumers. To manage this vast amount of data and facilitate the shopping experience, leading e-commerce platforms such as Amazon, eBay, and Walmart have begun integrating AI-Generated Review Summaries (AGRS) into their systems. Despite the increasing prevalence of AGRS, our understanding of the mechanisms through which these summaries shape consumer trust remains limited. While existing studies have primarily focused on perceptions of transparency and authenticity, the effects of critical content-related factors such as presentation format, sentiment orientation, and product context have not been examined in depth. To address this theoretical gap, the present study proposes a three-stage experimental research design.

The study adopts Signaling Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) as its theoretical foundation. Within this framework, the presentation format, sentiment orientation, and product context of AGRS are conceptualized as observable signals that consumers rely upon to reduce information asymmetry. In accordance with ELM, these signals are expected to be evaluated through either central or peripheral processing routes. Accordingly, the study aims to examine the main effects of AI-generated review summary characteristics on perceived credibility, online purchase intention, and platform reuse intention. Furthermore, the mediating roles of perceived helpfulness and perceived information quality, as well as the moderating effects of consumers' AI literacy and general trust propensity, are analyzed within the overall research model.

The three sequential experiments designed for this purpose are as follows. The first study tests the effect of AI-generated review summary presentation format (bullet-point versus paragraph format) on consumer trust through the mediating role of perceived helpfulness using a 2×2 experimental design. The second study examines the effects of AGRS sentiment orientation (positive, negative, and neutral) on the dependent variables through a 3×2 experimental design and incorporates perceived information quality as a second mediator in the model. The third and final study investigates the interaction between product risk and sentiment orientation using a 2×2 experimental design and integrates risk perception into the model as a serial mediator. At this stage, it is anticipated that, particularly for high-risk products, negative summaries may paradoxically exert a positive effect on trust and that this relationship will be moderated by individuals' levels of AI literacy.

The second and third stages of the research will be refined based on academic consultations and feedback received during the conference process. Following these developments, the studies will be integrated and presented as a comprehensive article contributing to the existing literature.

Keywords: AI-Generated Review Summary, Purchase Intention, Perceived Credibility, E-Commerce

Understanding Stakeholder Dynamics in City Branding: Evidence from a Capital City

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Abstract

City branding, as part of destination branding, is an approach that incorporates the socio-cultural values of a city, presents a memorable identity, and quickly communicates the city's core values (Zhang and Zhao, 2009). City branding stands out as an approach utilized in the competition between cities on a global and national scale (Rantisi and Leslie, 2006). It requires highlighting the distinctive features of the city (Zhang and Zhao, 2009), considering public opinion, identity, culture, integration, cooperation, and social media, and taking into account the expectations of a broader stakeholder audience (European Cities Marketing Website, 2019). For instance, it is crucial in attracting domestic and international tourists to cities. Studies show that city branding directly impacts the economic added value created in the hospitality sector, and strengthens the economic status of tourist destinations (Herget et al., 2015; Jojic, 2018). Destination branding is not about defining the essence or DNA of a place, but about creating powerful narratives that generate meaning (Hansen, 2010).

City branding should be viewed as public policy, creating public value and being implemented in a participatory, community-centered manner (Hereźniak and Anders-Morawska, 2021). Recent research emphasizes that instead of relying on destination management organizations (DMOs), a multi-stakeholder and participatory approach allow stakeholders to actively contribute to the formation of the place brand identity (Rodrigues and Schmidt, 2021). Weak inter-institutional coordination and inadequate strategic planning create an ambiguous and often negative city brand image (Dumbrăveanu, 2010). Therefore, proper communication between destination management organizations and stakeholders is crucial.

This study aims to examine how stakeholders perceive Ankara's city brand by integrating Stakeholder Theory (Jones et al., 2002) and Institutionalization Theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). A qualitative research design was adopted, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders. The questions in the semi-structured interview form have been adapted considering Stakeholder Theory (Jones et al., 2002) and Institutionalization Theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), as the both theories are included in the theoretical background of the study. The qualitative data obtained from the study is analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

The findings revealed three themes: Institutional Identity of Ankara, Fragmented Stakeholder Governance, and Repositioning Ankara Beyond the Bureaucratic Image. Participants consistently associated Ankara with its identity as the capital of the Republic while emphasizing weak stakeholder coordination, fragmented governance, and the absence of a shared branding

strategy. Although this identity provides legitimacy and recognition, it also restricts the city's tourism and cultural positioning. Findings further highlighted the need to reposition Ankara by promoting its cultural heritage, universities, museums, congress tourism, gastronomy, and creative assets. The study demonstrates that institutional identity and stakeholder collaboration jointly shape the development of a coherent and competitive city brand.

Consistent with Stakeholder Theory, participants emphasized that successful city branding depends on collaboration among public institutions, local governments, universities, tourism organizations, the private sector, and residents. However, weak inter-institutional coordination, limited communication, and the absence of a shared strategic vision prevent stakeholders from developing and communicating a coherent city brand. From an Institutional Theory perspective, the results suggest that institutional identities can both support and constrain destination branding. While Ankara's established capital-city identity creates stability and credibility, it also overshadows the city's cultural, educational, gastronomic, and creative assets. Participants therefore advocated broadening rather than replacing the existing brand narrative by integrating these underrepresented dimensions.

Therefore, this study contributes to the city branding literature by demonstrating that effective city branding requires not only distinctive city attributes but also collaborative governance and stakeholder engagement to develop a multidimensional and competitive destination identity.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on a single city. Thus, future research should compare multiple cities with different institutional and cultural contexts. Second, the research relies on qualitative data collected from a group of stakeholders and does not include residents' or tourists' perspectives. In this context, future studies should integrate residents' and tourists' perspectives to understand the city branding process. Moreover, studies can employ mixed-methods research.

Keywords: City Branding, Stakeholder Theory, Destination Marketing

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Serving the Activity: Re-conceptualizing the Service Encounter as a Triadic Firm-Customer-Activity Network

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Abstract

In consumption domains centered on experience, customers act not as passive recipients of standardized services, but actively reconfigure offerings to fit their personal meaning systems. Especially where ritualistic consumption practices take shape, this autonomous meaning-making fundamentally alters the role of the service provider.

Customer activity functions as the core operational actant in ritualistic consumption contexts. Grounded in actor-network theory, this paper positions customer activity as a non-human actor rather than a passive event. By independently demanding labor, time, discipline, equipment, and resources, the activity exerts its own agency, acts as the network assembler, and transforms abstract ritualistic meanings into tangible, performative service encounters. Which also means the activity actively co-produces the dynamics of the service encounter.

Although the present service marketing literature positions “firm” and “customer” as agents and “activity” as a passive event in service encounters, this study positions customer activity as a non-human actor that has its own agency. Therefore, unlike traditional dyadic service encounter models, this study proposes a triadic firm-customer-activity network. Reducing customer activity to isolated interactions within a service encounter provides an incomplete theoretical picture. Consumers enact these activities as integral components of a broader system of practices, such as relaxation, mental rejuvenation, or socialization. To perform them, consumers construct their own service ecosystems, ultimately fulfilling the demands of the activity itself, an entity functioning with its own agency. Firms enter this dynamic merely as external resource providers for the activity’s demands. In the proposed firm-customer-activity triad, the activity is positioned at the very top: the central agent that dictates the terms of engagement and renders the entire service process meaningful.

Structured as a conceptual paper, this study draws upon customer-dominant logic and actor-network theory to re-conceptualize the service encounter by integrating “customer activity” as a demanding, network-assembling non-human actor. Accordingly, this study seeks to address how service providers can better accommodate and enhance customer activity within service ecosystems. In doing so, it aims to outline strategic insights for cultivating long-term loyalty and contributing to consumer well-being within ritualistic consumption contexts. Finally, the paper concludes by offering future research directions on how these conceptually presented arguments can be empirically tested.

Keywords: Service Encounter, Customer Activity, Actor-Network Theory, Service Triad, Service Ecosystems

An Evaluation of the Qualified Staff Problem in Tourism from the Perspective of the Staff: Failure to Manage the Service

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Abstract

For decades, tourism has been recognized as a labor-intensive sector; the success of countries in attracting millions of domestic and international tourists has been achieved through the efforts of administrations that formulated and implemented sound policies, combined with the hard work of tourism employees. Turkey has reached the milestone of millions of tourists and billions of dollars in tourism revenue, with short-term targets set at 60 million tourists and \$60 billion in revenue. However, challenges persist regarding the recruitment of suitable tourism staff—the key stone of the industry. The inability of hotel managers to find qualified staff and retain those they hire has become a source of growing concern, frequently voiced on social media. Hotel staff have posted comments in response to interviews given by managers to tourism news outlets regarding this issue. These voluntary comments shed direct light on the state of the industry, revealing the realities of the staff's working environments and their suggestions for better working conditions. The aim of this study is to conduct a situational analysis based on the primary data provided by these comments and to identify the staff's recommendations. When the comments were examined, although common views, concerns, and suggestions among the staff were evident, some unusual comments were also encountered. The comments have consistently shown that hotel employees often express dissatisfaction with their working conditions, citing factors such as excessive workloads, long and irregular working hours, inadequate work-life balance, and limited career development opportunities. These unfavorable conditions may reduce job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall employee well-being while increasing turnover intentions. Although the hospitality industry relies heavily on human capital to deliver high-quality service, managerial attention to employee concerns is frequently perceived as insufficient. The lack of effective responses to workplace issues may further exacerbate employee dissatisfaction and negatively affect service performance. The tourism sector can only achieve its goals with a workforce that enjoys job security and confidence - free from anxiety about the future or the next season - possesses a sense of organizational belonging, and earns monthly income above the poverty line amidst Turkey's 2026 economic conditions. The sector must set itself right by listening to former employees, even those who have already left their jobs; otherwise a hotel manager comment says: by 2036, it will be more difficult to find tourism staff in Turkey. Consequently, managers should adopt a more employee-centered approach and develop sustainable strategies aimed at improving working conditions and enhancing workforce retention.

Keywords: Hotel Employees; Working Conditions; Human Resource Management; Job Satisfaction; Employee Turnover; Service Management; Sustainable Workforce Management

Research Trends and Future Directions in Omnichannel Engagement: A Bibliometric Review

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Abstract

Omnichannel is an approach that involves brands integrating various communication and sales channels to maximize customer experience, making different platforms such as physical stores, online stores, mobile applications, and social media compatible with each other. The main goal of an omnichannel strategy is to provide customers with a seamless and consistent experience. Customers expect the experiences they have across different channels to be complementary; for example, researching a product online and then purchasing it in a physical store, or contacting customer service through a social media platform. These strategies, which have gained particular importance in the retail sector, are forcing businesses to adopt this new approach due to changes in customers' shopping habits and the increase in digitalization. Ensuring a seamless transition between various channels plays a critical role in increasing customer loyalty for brands. In this context, conducting a bibliometric analysis of articles indexed in the Web of Science database in this study will allow us to see the prominent works related to these strategies. This study analysed 272 research articles published between 2012 and 2026 in the Web of Science database (SCI-Expanded, SSCI, AHCI and ESCI). “Omni-channel”, “customer engagement” and “consumer engagement” related research articles with a focus on the English language were analysed. The analysis, conducted using the R Statistics program, examined the articles based on annual scientific production, citation performance, leading journals, authors, countries, keyword co-occurrence, thematic evolution, collaboration networks, and the most influential publications in the field. The findings reveal a significant increase in publications on omnichannel and customer engagement, particularly after 2020, indicating the growing academic interest in the topic. China and the United States emerged as the leading contributors. Keyword and thematic analyses demonstrate a shift from channel integration and retail-focused research toward customer engagement, customer experience, value co-creation, and digital technologies. Collaboration analysis highlights strong international partnerships, particularly among leading research-producing countries. These findings indicate that omnichannel and customer engagement research has evolved into a growing and multidisciplinary field, while also highlighting emerging themes and opportunities for future research.

Keywords: Omnichannel, Consumer Engagement, Customer Engagement

Tattooed Bodies and the Construction of Professionalism in Irish Hospitality Workplaces: A Qualitative Content Analysis of Appearance Policies

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Abstract

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) have become increasingly significant within contemporary workplaces, particularly within labour-intensive service sectors such as hospitality where recruitment, talent retention, employee wellbeing, and organisational reputation are closely interconnected. In an increasingly candidate-driven labour market, organisations are under growing pressure to foster inclusive working environments that attract and retain diverse employees while balancing customer expectations and brand image. Within Ireland, equality legislation recognises nine protected grounds of discrimination, including gender, age, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller community. However, appearance-based discrimination, including stigma surrounding tattoos, remains comparatively underexplored despite its growing relevance within modern workplaces and evolving social norms.

This study critically examines how organisational appearance policies within the Irish hospitality sector regulate tattooed employees and construct normative standards of professionalism. Drawing upon theories of aesthetic labour and appearance-based bias, the research explores how workplace policies function as mechanisms through which organisations shape employee identity, conformity, and inclusion within customer-facing service environments. The study is particularly informed by aesthetic labour theory, which highlights how organisations recruit and manage workers according to preferred embodied appearances, alongside Foucauldian perspectives of disciplinary control that conceptualise workplace policies as subtle mechanisms of regulation and self-surveillance.

Findings reveal that organisational policies consistently frame employee appearance as integral to service performance, customer perception, and brand representation. While explicit tattoo prohibitions were relatively limited, tattoos were frequently positioned as implicitly incompatible with dominant organisational aesthetics through highly standardised yet ambiguous policy language. The findings further demonstrate that managerial discretion plays a significant role in interpreting and enforcing appearance standards, creating conditions where implicit bias and subjective judgement may shape employee experiences and opportunities for inclusion. The study also identifies tensions between organisational commitments to diversity and inclusion and the simultaneous reproduction of homogenised appearance norms that privilege conventional presentations of professionalism.

This research contributes to service management and hospitality literature by demonstrating how seemingly neutral appearance policies may conceal rather than eliminate appearance-based discrimination. The paper argues for more transparent, context-specific, and proportionate ap-

proaches to appearance regulation that balance organisational branding requirements with evolving societal attitudes surrounding identity, authenticity, and self-expression. The study aligns with broader debates concerning inclusion, employee identity, and the societal implications of aesthetic regulation within contemporary hospitality settings. Future research could explore employee experiences of appearance regulation through interviews or ethnographic approaches, while comparative international research may further examine how cultural and organisational contexts shape perceptions of tattoos and professionalism across hospitality industries.

Keywords: Tattoos, Bias, Aesthetic Labour, Hospitality

Co-Creating Sustainable Tourism Futures: A Services Management Perspective on Training Needs in European Destinations

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Abstract

The integration of sustainable tourism principles into destination governance remains uneven across Europe, despite extensive evidence of their value for mitigating negative impacts and enhancing sustainability. Persistent deficits in practitioner competencies and limited collaboration between industry and education providers continue to impede the application of sustainability-oriented practices. From a services management perspective, these challenges reflect broader issues in service ecosystems, including fragmented stakeholder coordination, insufficient service-oriented capabilities, and weak mechanisms for co-creating value across organisational boundaries. Addressing these gaps requires strengthened cross-sector engagement and the development of advanced skills aligned with the complex, relational nature of destination-level service systems. The Erasmus+ WeNaTour project (European Alliance for Innovation and Sustainability Education in Welfare, Nature and Tourism) responds to this need by designing a specialised educational and networking framework aimed at enhancing the service capabilities of tourism professionals and educators.

This presentation details findings from an online questionnaire administered to destination managers, employees, and students across five partner countries. The questionnaire design process included several rounds of feedback acquisition, thereby contributing to the development of a high-quality, unique, and inclusive training programme orientated towards tourism professionals. The questionnaire design was built around 4 key themes: respondent profile, existing sustainable knowledge and skills, identification of sustainable tourism training needs and preferred characteristics of education/training programmes in sustainable tourism. Using the communication channels and networks of the project partners, the online questionnaire was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were required to confirm their informed consent before completing the questionnaire and the data was analysed in an aggregated manner. The questionnaire was completed between 5 December 2024 and 10 January 2025 inclusive.

The resulting dataset informed a comprehensive training needs analysis (TNA), which guided the development of pedagogical interventions and collaborative structures within the project. The TNA reveals a strong demand for both foundational soft skills including communication, negotiation, and relationship building and specialised competencies such as sustainable destination management tools, project management, and environmental and social impact assessment techniques. Interpreted through a services management lens, these findings highlight the need for capabilities that support value co-creation, inter-organisational collaboration, and the effective orchestration of complex service networks. The study underscores the importance of sustained, context-sensitive capacity-building initiatives that reflect the heterogeneous needs of destination stakeholders and contribute to the institutionalisation of sustainable tourism within

European service ecosystems. To support this transformation the results of the TNA directly informed a targeted educational programme for tourism destination practitioners combined with the establishment of the transnational WeNaTour Sustainable Tourism Destination Management alliance.

Keywords: WeNaTour, Sustainability, Tourism, Training Needs Analysis

Workplace Telepressure and Burnout Among Service Sector Employees: The Moderating Role of Psychological Resilience

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Abstract

With recent rapid technological advancements, the service sector is increasingly being shaped by digital transformation. This transformation has increased employees' accessibility through digital communication technologies. Therefore, the boundaries between work and private life have become increasingly blurred, raising justified concerns about the potential long-term costs for employees in the sector.

One manifestation of this challenge is workplace telepressure, which refers to employees' perceived pressure to respond promptly to work-related messages (Barber & Santuzzi, 2015). Although workplace telepressure can increase employees' risk of burnout (Kao et al., 2020; Page et al., 2021), it is still not fully clear for whom it becomes more harmful. Previous studies have largely explained this relationship through mediating mechanisms such as work-related rumination and work-to-life conflict (Liu & Chien, 2025; Qin et al., 2025). However, less attention has been paid to psychological resilience—the capacity to recover from stress and adapt to adversity (Smith et al., 2008)—as a personal resource (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007) that may buffer the effect of telepressure on burnout (Hadžibajramović et al., 2024).

This study addresses this gap by examining whether psychological resilience, conceptualized as a personal resource, buffers the relationship between workplace telepressure and burnout, thereby highlighting the protective role of individual resources in the digitally intensified service sector. This preliminary study collected data via an online survey from 76 employees in two service subsectors (education and banking), using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with 10,000 bootstrap subsamples. Workplace telepressure was measured with a reduced three-item version of the original scale, as three items were removed during confirmatory factor analysis due to low factor loadings (< 0.40).

The results showed that workplace telepressure was a significant positive predictor of burnout ($\beta = 0.319$, $t = 3.273$, $p = 0.001$). Psychological resilience had a significant negative direct effect on burnout ($\beta = -0.451$, $t = 5.538$, $p < 0.001$). Notably, the interaction term (telepressure $\times$ resilience) was significant and negative ($\beta = -0.182$, $t = 2.029$, $p = 0.043$; $f^2 = 0.064$), supporting the moderation. This negative interaction indicates a buffering effect, whereby higher resilience weakens the detrimental effect of telepressure on burnout.

This study provides preliminary evidence on how employee-level psychological resources may help sustain individual functioning under digital intensification, with potential implications for service resilience in this emerging-economy context. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), the findings suggest that psychological resilience functions as a personal resource that, much like job resources, may buffer the burnout-inducing effect of workplace telepressure. Practically, the findings indicate that service organizations should not treat resilience solely as an individual trait, but as a manageable organizational capability that can be supported through resilience-building interventions and informal digital-boundary practices aimed at reducing telepressure. Given the small sample size and the use of a reduced telepressure measure, these findings should be interpreted as preliminary.

Keywords: Workplace Telepressure, Burnout and Psychological Resilience

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The Evolution of a Cultural Service Ecosystem: Stakeholder Engagement and Value Co-Creation in a Contemporary Art Biennial

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial between 1987 and 2025 by conceptualizing it as a cultural service ecosystem through the theoretical lenses of Service-Dominant Logic, the service ecosystem perspective, value co-creation, and Stakeholder Theory. Rather than treating the biennial as a conventional art exhibition, the study conceptualizes it as a dynamic, multi-actor service system in which value is continuously co-created through interactions among diverse stakeholders.

Adopting a qualitative case study design, the research draws on document and content analysis of institutional reports and biennial catalogues to identify five major phases of ecosystem transformation: institutional formation (1987), spatial expansion and experiential transformation (1997), global network integration (2007), public engagement and politicization (2013), and the emergence of a platform-based hybrid ecosystem (2025).

The findings reveal a gradual transformation from a centrally coordinated model of cultural production toward a distributed, network-oriented, and ultimately platform-based system of value co-creation. By demonstrating how cultural organizations evolve into complex service ecosystems shaped by stakeholder interactions, institutional arrangements, and resource integration, the study contributes to the service and cultural management literature. It further proposes a longitudinal ecosystem model that advances the understanding of value co-creation and organizational evolution in large-scale cultural events.

Keywords: Organizational Transformation, Stakeholder Management, Service Ecosystems, Network Governance, Value Co-Creation

1. Introduction

Cultural events are increasingly understood not merely as aesthetic occasions for exhibiting artworks but as complex service systems in which multiple stakeholders interact. Particularly in large-scale cultural organizations, the boundaries between production and consumption have become increasingly blurred, while value creation has shifted from a unidirectional output to a relational and collaborative process involving multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). This transformation suggests that cultural events have evolved from organization-centred structures into network-based service systems.

The theoretical foundation for this transformation is provided by Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic and the service ecosystem perspective. S-D Logic conceptualizes value not as an output transferred by producers but as a process co-created through the integration of resources by multiple actors (Vargo & Akaka, 2012). The service ecosystem perspective extends this view by situating value co-creation beyond individual interactions within broader institutional arrangements, governance mechanisms, and network structures (Edvardsson et al., 2011). From

this perspective, value creation is understood as a dynamic and ongoing process that continuously emerges within multi-actor systems.

Against this background, the present study examines the Istanbul Biennial as an empirical illustration of this theoretical transformation. Rather than viewing the biennial solely as a recurring contemporary art exhibition, it is conceptualized as a multi-actor cultural service ecosystem in which value is co-created through interactions among artists, curators, the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), sponsors, public institutions, visitors, and international art networks. Accordingly, the study investigates the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial between 1987 and 2025 not simply as a historical trajectory but as a systemic transformation from an organizational structure to a platform-based cultural service ecosystem.

To illustrate this transformation, the study develops the Cultural Service Ecosystem Evolution Model, which represents the biennial's evolution across four interrelated dimensions: (i) stakeholder diversity, (ii) resource integration, (iii) value creation logic, and (iv) governance structure. The model depicts a cumulative and layered transformation, beginning with an organization-centred structure in 1987 and culminating in a distributed, platform-based service ecosystem by 2025.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following primary research question:

RQ1: Through which stakeholders have value co-creation been realized throughout the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial?

To further examine this transformation, the study also investigates the following secondary research question:

RQ2: At which stages did the Istanbul Biennial evolve from an art event into a cultural service ecosystem?

This study contributes to literature in three ways. First, it develops an integrated analytical framework that combines Service-Dominant Logic, the service ecosystem perspective, Stakeholder Theory, and value co-creation to explain the evolution of cultural organizations. In doing so, it demonstrates that cultural events can be understood not only through the lens of arts management but also from a service and ecosystem perspective. Second, the study shows how recurring large-scale cultural events, such as biennials, can be investigated through a longitudinal qualitative case study and proposes a research design that integrates document-based content analysis with theory-driven conceptual modelling. Finally, drawing on the case of the Istanbul Biennial, the study proposes a five-stage model of cultural service ecosystem evolution spanning the period from 1987 to 2025. The model explains how cultural organizations progressively evolve from organization-centered structures into platform-based service ecosystems.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the conceptual foundations of the study by discussing Service-Dominant Logic, the service ecosystem perspective, value co-creation, and Stakeholder Theory. This is followed by the research methodology, including the data sources and analytical procedures, after which the empirical findings from the five selected editions of the Istanbul Biennial are presented. The findings are then discussed in relation to the theoretical framework to explain the evolutionary nature of the cultural service ecosystem. Finally, the paper concludes by outlining its theoretical contributions, practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Conceptual Framework

This study conceptualizes the Istanbul Biennial as a multi-actor service system rather than a conventional art organization. Accordingly, the analysis is grounded in a theoretical framework that explains the interactions among stakeholders involved in the production and delivery of

cultural events, as well as the processes through which value is co-created. As cultural organizations have become increasingly complex, networked, and participatory, understanding them as service ecosystems has become both theoretically and empirically appropriate (Akaka et al., 2013).

To explain the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial over time, the study draws on four complementary theoretical perspectives: Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic), the service ecosystem perspective, value co-creation, and Stakeholder Theory. Together, these perspectives provide an integrated framework for understanding cultural events not merely as organizations but as dynamic systems in which value continuously emerges through interactions among multiple actors.

a. Service-Dominant Logic

Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) is widely recognized as a paradigm that fundamentally reshaped the understanding of value within the marketing literature. Moving beyond the traditional distinction between goods and services, this perspective argues that value is not an output created by firms and transferred to customers during exchange. Instead, value emerges through the integration of resources by multiple stakeholders who collaboratively participate in value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). From this perspective, value is generated through interaction, resource integration, and reciprocal benefit rather than through transactional exchange. Its central premise is that all economic and social actors are potential service providers and that value emerges through collaborative interactions among multiple actors rather than through unilateral production (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). By shifting the focus from individual actors to networked relationships, S-D Logic provides the theoretical foundation for conceptualizing service systems (Vargo & Akaka, 2012).

Subsequent studies have further elaborated the processual and experiential nature of value creation. Payne et al. (2007) strengthened the operational dimension of S-D Logic by explaining value creation through customer experiences, interaction processes, and resource integration. Likewise, Grönroos (2011) argued that value should not be viewed as an offering delivered by a firm but rather as an experiential phenomenon emerging through interactions between providers and users. Similarly, Edvardsson et al. (2011) conceptualized service systems as dynamic, multi-actor structures in which value is continuously reproduced within specific institutional and contextual settings. More recent studies have expanded this perspective by explaining markets and value creation not only through individual actors but also through multi-actor systems and institutional interaction networks. Accordingly, contemporary approaches to service and market systems have moved beyond actor-level coordination to develop theoretical frameworks that operate at the system level (Brodie & Storbacka, 2014).

From the perspective of S-D Logic, the Istanbul Biennial can therefore be understood not merely as a cultural event in which artworks are exhibited, but as a multilayered service system in which artists, curators, sponsors, visitors, public institutions, and other stakeholders continuously integrate their resources to co-create value. This perspective highlights that the biennial is not a static organization but a dynamic service ecosystem that evolves over time through ongoing stakeholder interactions and collaborative value creation.

b. Service Ecosystems

The service ecosystem perspective extends Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) by conceptualizing value creation as a phenomenon that emerges within dynamic, multi-actor systems rather than as the outcome of individual actors' activities. From this perspective, value is generated through resource integration, institutional arrangements, and reciprocal interactions among interconnected actors (Vargo & Akaka, 2012). Accordingly, the service ecosystem perspective

expands the unit of analysis beyond economic exchange to encompass the complex social and institutional networks through which value is created and sustained.

The service ecosystem literature further emphasizes that these systems are shaped not only by patterns of interaction but also by institutional arrangements and governance structures. Consequently, actors' behaviors are influenced not solely by individual preferences but also by norms, rules, resource allocation mechanisms, and power relations that coordinate and constrain interactions within the ecosystem (Edvardsson et al., 2011; Akaka et al., 2013).

Building on this perspective, subsequent studies argue that value creation within service ecosystems is not merely a structural phenomenon but also a relational process emerging through interaction practices and network-based relationships among multiple actors. Rather than being confined to micro-level exchanges, value is understood as a dynamic and processual phenomenon generated through the interconnected activities of diverse actors operating across the ecosystem (Taillard, 2016). Accordingly, service ecosystems are characterized by continuous, iterative, and relational processes of value creation rather than by static organizational structures (Frow et al., 2019). Likewise, actor interactions are viewed not simply as bilateral exchanges but as dynamic processes embedded within broader networks of interconnected relationships (Alexander et al., 2018). Consequently, a service ecosystem should be understood not as a static network but as an adaptive system that continuously evolves, learns, and reconfigures itself.

Within this conceptual framework, the Istanbul Biennial is viewed not as a single cultural organization but as a cultural service ecosystem comprising interdependent actors, including the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), artists, curators, sponsors, visitors, media organizations, supporting institutions, and international art and cultural networks. Within this ecosystem, each actor functions not merely as a passive participant but as an active contributor that provides resources, generates meaning, and influences the processes through which value is co-created. Sponsorship arrangements, relationships with public institutions, and connections with international art networks represent critical governance mechanisms that shape the evolution of the biennial. This perspective demonstrates that large-scale cultural events should be examined not only in terms of artistic production but also through the lenses of strategic management and stakeholder governance.

Accordingly, the Istanbul Biennial is interpreted as a dynamic cultural service ecosystem that is continuously reproduced through evolving stakeholder relationships, institutional arrangements, and interaction networks rather than as a fixed organizational structure.

c. Value Co-Creation

Value co-creation is a central concept derived from the foundational premises of Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) and operationalized within the service ecosystem perspective. It challenges the traditional view of value as an output unilaterally created by producers and transferred to consumers, proposing instead that value emerges through interactions among multiple actors, resource integration, and experiential processes (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Payne et al., 2007).

Literature increasingly conceptualizes stakeholders not merely as interest groups but as active participants in value creation. From this perspective, stakeholder engagement is understood as an interactive process through which value is co-created within service ecosystems (Conduit et al., 2019). Accordingly, value co-creation extends beyond micro-level interpersonal interactions to encompass a multilayered process shaped by institutional arrangements, stakeholder networks, and governance mechanisms operating across the service ecosystem (Viglia et al., 2023). In this sense, value co-creation represents the analytical link between the philosophical foundations of S-D Logic and the structural context provided by the service ecosystem perspective.

The service ecosystem perspective further emphasizes that value co-creation is influenced not only by direct interactions among actors but also by institutional logic, social norms, and governance structures that shape relationships within the ecosystem (Akaka, Vargo, & Lusch, 2013). Consequently, value should be understood not as a static output but as a dynamic, context-dependent process that is continuously negotiated and reproduced through ongoing interactions (Edvardsson et al., 2011).

Within the context of the Istanbul Biennial, value co-creation emerges through the integration of complementary resources contributed by multiple stakeholders. Specifically:

- **Artists and curators** contribute through the creation of artistic content and cultural meaning.
- **The Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV)** and the organizational structure facilitate institutional coordination and governance.
- **Sponsors and private-sector partners** provide financial resources and strategic support.
- **Public institutions** establish the spatial, regulatory, and policy environment in which the biennial operates.
- **Visitors** contribute through participation, experience, and interaction.
- **Media organizations and international art networks** enhance visibility, legitimacy, and international recognition.

Together, these actors actively participate in the continuous process of value co-creation.

The value generated through these interactions is neither singular nor homogeneous; rather, it comprises multiple interrelated dimensions, including cultural, social, economic, and experiential values. Cultural value is created through artistic production and representation, social value through public engagement and participation, economic value through contributions to the creative economy and cultural tourism, and experiential value through visitor participation and place-based experiences (Grönroos, 2011; Payne et al., 2007).

Accordingly, the Istanbul Biennial can be understood not simply as an exhibition but as a cultural service ecosystem in which multiple stakeholders continuously interact to co-create value through distributed and simultaneous processes. This perspective operationalizes the central proposition of S-D Logic—that value is co-created—by demonstrating how collaborative value creation is enacted through the governance structures, stakeholder relationships, and interaction networks that constitute the service ecosystem.

d. Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory argues that organizations should be understood not solely through their economic actors but through the diverse groups that both influence and are influenced by organizational activities (Freeman, 2010). From this perspective, organizational value creation extends beyond internal efficiency or organizational outputs to encompass stakeholder interactions, interdependencies, and power relationships that shape organizational processes and outcomes (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Contemporary stakeholder scholarship has moved beyond viewing stakeholders as static categories toward conceptualizing stakeholder engagement as a dynamic process of strategic management. Accordingly, stakeholders are understood not merely as passive recipients of organizational decisions but as active participants who shape strategic decision-making and value creation processes (Parmar et al., 2010). This shift has repositioned stakeholder engagement as

a central mechanism through which organizational governance and value creation are developed and sustained.

More recent studies further argue that stakeholder engagement is not simply a managerial tool but a fundamental mechanism that determines an organization's capacity to create value (Parmar et al., 2022). From this perspective, relationships among stakeholders are viewed not as static balances of interests but as dynamic arenas in which value is continuously negotiated, redistributed, and reconstructed (Jones et al., 2018). This perspective therefore extends the analysis beyond value creation itself to examine how value is distributed, negotiated, and reproduced within institutional settings. Rather than evaluating stakeholder relationships solely in terms of participation, it also considers power asymmetries and value distribution as integral dimensions of stakeholder governance. Consequently, Stakeholder Theory provides a framework for understanding not only how value is created but also how it is shared and legitimized among diverse stakeholder groups.

Within the context of this study, Stakeholder Theory serves as a complementary analytical lens for explaining the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial over time. The transformation of the biennial from a relatively limited organizational structure in 1987 to a multilayered, network-based cultural service ecosystem by 2025 is examined through changes in stakeholder diversity, the intensity of stakeholder engagement, and the expansion of interaction networks among stakeholders. This transformation is reflected in the shift from a relatively narrow organizational structure centered on artists, curators, and organizers to a broader stakeholder ecosystem in which sponsors, public institutions, media organizations, international art networks, and visitors play increasingly active roles.

Accordingly, Stakeholder Theory complements the service ecosystem perspective by demonstrating that the Istanbul Biennial is not merely a system for creating value but also a dynamic arena of governance shaped by stakeholder engagement, strategic interactions, and value distribution. From this perspective, the biennial can be reconceptualized as a multi-actor institutional ecosystem in which diverse stakeholders collaboratively shape not only the creation of value but also the processes through which value is shared, negotiated, and legitimized.

3. Methodology

a. Research Design, Data Sources, and Analytical Procedure

This study adopts a qualitative case study design to examine the Istanbul Biennial through the theoretical lenses of Service-Dominant Logic, the service ecosystem perspective, value co-creation, and Stakeholder Theory. A single-case study design was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth and holistic investigation of the biennial's institutional, managerial, and stakeholder-driven transformation over time. Within this framework, the Istanbul Biennial is examined not merely as a cultural event but as a multi-actor cultural service ecosystem and a dynamic arena of value co-creation.

The study relies on secondary data sources and employs document analysis in combination with thematic analysis. Rather than collecting primary data through interviews or field observations, this approach enables a systematic, theory-informed examination of existing documentary evidence. To capture the historical evolution of the Istanbul Biennial, its stakeholder structure, and its institutional transformation, multiple documentary sources were analyzed and triangulated.

The empirical dataset consists of two primary sources. First, institutional reports published by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV) were examined to investigate the biennial organizational structure, financial sustainability, and stakeholder relationships. Second, exhibition catalogues and curatorial texts from the selected editions of the Istanbul Biennial were analyzed to identify the conceptual orientations, exhibition narratives, and stakeholder interac-

tion patterns associated with each period. Biennial catalogues constitute a particularly valuable source of evidence because they serve as official institutional documents reflecting each edition's curatorial vision, organizational structure, stakeholder configuration, and strategic priorities.

The analytical process was based on thematic analysis, with the collected data coded according to four complementary theoretical perspectives: Service-Dominant Logic, the service ecosystem perspective, value co-creation, and Stakeholder Theory. Through this analytical framework, the Istanbul Biennial is interpreted as a cultural service ecosystem in which value is not produced through a linear process but is continuously co-created through multi-actor interactions, institutional arrangements, and resource integration.

To ensure the systematic application of the theoretical framework, the biennial catalogues and other documentary sources were coded using predefined analytical dimensions. Each biennial edition was examined across five analytical dimensions: stakeholder structure, service ecosystem characteristics, resource integration, value co-creation, and ecosystem evolution. These analytical dimensions and their corresponding theoretical foundations are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis Framework and Theoretical Mapping

Analytical Dimension	Coding Indicators	Theoretical Foundation
Stakeholder Structure	Actors, actor roles, emerging stakeholder groups, stakeholder diversity	Stakeholder Theory
Service Ecosystem	Network structures, governance mechanisms, interorganizational relationships, collaborations	Service Ecosystem Perspective
Resource Integration	Use of space, knowledge sharing, financial and institutional resources, international networks	Service-Dominant Logic
Value Co-Creation	Participation mechanisms, visitor experience, creation of cultural, social, and experiential value	Value Co-Creation
Ecosystem Evolution	Structural changes compared with previous biennials, emergence of new actors, governance transformation, and the evolution of the service system	Integrated Theoretical Framework

b. Case Selection and Justification

Rather than examining every edition of the Istanbul Biennial, this study focuses on five critical editions that represent key turning points in its institutional and organizational evolution. The selection was guided by a theoretical sampling strategy, with the objective of identifying the editions that most clearly illustrate the evolution of the biennial as a cultural service ecosystem.

The selected editions and the rationale for their inclusion are presented below.

1987 – Foundation and Institutional Formation

The inaugural edition of the Istanbul Biennial represents the formative stage of the institution. At this stage, the biennial operated through a relatively simple organizational structure involving a limited number of actors. The primary analytical focus concerns identifying who created value and how cultural production was organized within the emerging ecosystem. During this

period, the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), artists, and the international art community constituted the principal stakeholders.

1997 – Spatial Expansion and Experiential Transformation

The 1997 edition marks a significant turning point through the expanded use of public spaces and the transformation of historical buildings into exhibition venues. This period represents the stage at which visitor experience became systematically integrated into the ecosystem, allowing value creation to extend beyond artistic production to include the spatial and experiential dimensions of the biennial.

2007 – Integration into Global Art Networks

The 2007 edition represents a period during which the Istanbul Biennial became more deeply integrated into global art networks and gained greater international visibility. At this stage, the range of stakeholders expanded considerably, positioning the biennial as an active participant within international cultural production networks.

2013 – Public Engagement and Civic Participation

The 2013 edition constitutes a critical turning point, particularly in the context of the Gezi Park protests, during which issues of public space, civic participation, and social engagement became central to the biennial's development. This period reflects the increasing involvement of local communities and civic actors within the cultural service ecosystem, broadening both stakeholder participation and the processes through which value was co-created.

2025 – Digitalization and a Mature Service Ecosystem

The 2025 edition represents the most recent stage in the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial, characterized by the integration of digital communication technologies, sustainability initiatives, and participatory programmes. At this stage, the biennial has evolved into a multilayered, platform-based cultural service ecosystem in which digital and physical forms of participation coexist within an interconnected global network. This edition therefore represents the maturity of the biennial ecosystem and its capacity to facilitate value co-creation across multiple stakeholder groups and institutional contexts.

Collectively, these five editions provide a longitudinal perspective that enables the Istanbul Biennial to be analyzed as:

- an evolving cultural service ecosystem;
- a stakeholder-driven network of value co-creation; and
- a dynamic arena of institutional governance.

Table 2. Selected Biennial Editions and Their Structural Comparison

Biennial Edition	Primary Stakeholders	Co-Created Value	Ecosystem Characteristics	Managerial Transformation
1st International Istanbul Contemporary Art Exhibition (1987)	IKSV, artists	Cultural value	Foundational stage	Establishment of the service system

5th International Istanbul Biennial (1997)	IKSV, artists, visitors	Experiential value	Spatial expansion	Expansion of the service delivery network
10th International Istanbul Biennial (2007)	Global art networks	Global cultural value	Network expansion	Scaling of the service ecosystem
13th International Istanbul Biennial (2013)	Local communities	Social value	Participatory ecosystem	Diversification of stakeholder engagement
18th International Istanbul Biennial (2025)	Multiple stakeholders	Integrated value creation	Mature cultural service ecosystem	Platform-based ecosystem

Considering the five selected biennial editions presented in Table 2, the 1987 edition represents the formative stage of the ecosystem, characterized by a limited stakeholder structure and a primary focus on cultural production. The 1997 edition marks the integration of spatial expansion and experiential value creation into the ecosystem. The 2007 edition reflects the biennial's increasing integration into global art networks and the scaling of the service ecosystem. The 2013 edition signifies the diversification of stakeholder engagement through the active involvement of local communities and broader public participation. Finally, the 2025 edition represents a mature cultural service ecosystem characterized by digitalization, sustainability initiatives, and multilayered governance structures.

Accordingly, these five editions are interpreted not merely as chronological milestones but as critical analytical thresholds that illuminate the transformation of the Istanbul Biennial from an art organization into a multi-actor cultural service ecosystem. This perspective enables a holistic analysis by integrating Stakeholder Theory to examine stakeholder diversity and the distribution of influence, the service ecosystem perspective to explain the evolution of institutional and network-based structures, and value co-creation to understand the progressive development of value creation processes over time.

4. Findings

a. The 1st International Istanbul Contemporary Art Exhibition (1987)

The 1st International Istanbul Contemporary Art Exhibition, held in 1987 under the coordination of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), marked the institutional foundation of what would later become the Istanbul Biennial series (IKSV, 1987). Organized under the theme *Contemporary Art in Traditional Spaces*, the exhibition brought contemporary art into historically significant venues such as the Hagia Sophia Imperial Bath and Hagia Irene, establishing a dialogue between cultural heritage and contemporary artistic practice. This inaugural edition represents a formative stage in which the institutional structure was still emerging, curatorial practices remained relatively limited, and the organization relied primarily on the participation of international artists.

An examination of the stakeholder structure reveals a relatively centralized system with limited stakeholder diversity. The principal actors involved in the ecosystem included:

- IKSV, responsible for the overall organization and coordination of the event;
- International artists, who constituted the primary contributors to cultural production;
- A limited curatorial advisory structure; and
- The local art community.

At this stage, visitors, sponsors, media organizations, and public institutions had not yet become systematically integrated stakeholders within the service ecosystem. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, the biennial therefore exhibited a hierarchical governance structure characterized by centralized coordination, limited stakeholder engagement, and relatively low levels of interaction among actors.

From the service ecosystem perspective, the 1987 edition had not yet developed into a network-based ecosystem. Instead, it functioned primarily as an organization-centered service system coordinated by IKSv. Low network density, centralized governance, limited interaction among actors, and institutionally coordinated resource flows were the defining characteristics of this early stage of ecosystem development.

Value creation during this period was primarily oriented toward the generation of cultural value. Introducing contemporary art to Istanbul, increasing the visibility of international artists, and reactivating historical venues as exhibition spaces constituted the principal value outcomes of the biennial. Resource integration was largely achieved through the combination of IKSv's organizational capabilities, the artistic contributions of participating artists, and the physical and symbolic attributes of the exhibition venues. However, because visitor participation and multi-actor collaboration mechanisms had not yet developed, value creation remained predominantly organization- and artist-centered rather than reflecting the collaborative value creation processes envisioned by Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008).

Overall, the findings indicate that the 1987 edition represents the institutional formation stage of the Istanbul Biennial's evolution as a cultural service ecosystem. This stage is characterized by centralized governance, limited stakeholder diversity, and relatively low levels of resource integration. As such, it provides the institutional foundation upon which the subsequent phases of spatial expansion, network development, and collaborative value co-creation would progressively emerge.

b. The 5th International Istanbul Biennial (1997)

The 5th International Istanbul Biennial, curated by Rosa Martínez, was organized under the theme *On Life, Beauty, Translations and Other Difficulties* and presented a conceptual framework that explored the relationships among art, everyday life, and meaning making through a multi-site exhibition dispersed across Istanbul's historic and public spaces (IKSV, 1997a). This edition represents a critical turning point in the evolution of the biennial, marking its transition from a single-site exhibition model toward a spatially distributed organizational structure on the urban scale. The transformation of venues such as Hagia Irene, the Basilica Cistern, Sirkeci Railway Station, Taksim Square, Atatürk Airport, and the Pera Palace Hotel into exhibition spaces enabled the biennial to evolve into an experience-oriented cultural event (IKSV, 1997b).

The stakeholder structure became considerably more diverse and interactive than that observed in the 1987 edition. The ecosystem was organized around the following principal actors:

- IKSv, responsible for overall coordination and governance;
- The curator (Rosa Martínez), who provided the conceptual and curatorial direction;
- International artists;
- Local and international visitors; and
- Public institutions and cultural organizations that provided and managed the exhibition venues.

A notable transformation during this period was the changing role of visitors. Rather than remaining passive observers, visitors became active participants who engaged with the biennial

through movement across the city's dispersed exhibition spaces. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, this edition reflects a significant increase in stakeholder diversity and a substantial intensification of stakeholder engagement.

From the service ecosystem perspective, the 1997 edition represents an early yet clearly identifiable stage in the Istanbul Biennial's transition toward a network-based cultural service ecosystem. During this period, a spatially distributed organizational structure emerged as multiple institutions and venues became integrated into the ecosystem, while the curatorial framework assumed a more influential coordinating role. Nevertheless, governance remained largely centralized under the coordination of IKSŞ, indicating that the biennial had not yet evolved into a fully distributed ecosystem but rather functioned as a distributed service network operating under centralized coordination.

Value creation also became substantially more diversified and increasingly experience-oriented. The principal dimensions of co-created value included:

- Experiential value, generated through visitors' engagement with the exhibition across multiple urban locations;
- Cultural value, created by connecting international contemporary art with Istanbul's historical and urban context; and
- Meaning-related value, emerging through the questioning of the boundaries between art, everyday life, and urban space.

Resource integration during this period resulted from the interaction among spatial infrastructure, curatorial expertise, artistic production, and visitor experience. Consequently, value creation evolved beyond an artist-centered model toward a collaborative, multi-actor, and experience-based process, consistent with the principles of Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Overall, the findings indicate that the 1997 edition represents the stage of spatial expansion and experiential value creation in the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial as a cultural service ecosystem. This phase is characterized by the transition from a limited stakeholder structure to a more diverse multi-actor configuration, the expansion of the biennial from a single venue to an urban-scale exhibition network, and the systematic integration of visitor experience into the service ecosystem.

c. The 10th International Istanbul Biennial (2007)

The 10th International Istanbul Biennial, curated by Hou Hanru, was organized under the theme *Not Only Possible, But Also Necessary: Optimism in the Age of Global War*. The exhibition presented a multilayered curatorial framework that re-examined the relationship between contemporary art and its social and political contexts through critical reflections on global conflict, modernization, and urban transformation (IKSŞ, 2007a). This edition represents a pivotal stage in the biennial's evolution, marking a transition toward a more complex cultural service ecosystem that expanded not only spatially but also conceptually and organizationally.

The exhibition adopted a distributed organizational model spanning multiple sites across Istanbul, with each venue representing distinct thematic dimensions of the curatorial narrative. Locations such as Antrepo No. 3, santralistanbul, the Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM), the Istanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı (İMÇ), and the Kadıköy Public Education Center were transformed into exhibition spaces addressing themes including globalization, migration, modernization, and urban transformation (IKSŞ, 2007b). In this configuration, space functioned not merely as a physical setting for exhibitions but as an active component in the production of meaning.

Compared with the 1997 edition, the stakeholder structure demonstrates a substantial expansion of both network connections and actor diversity. The ecosystem comprised the following principal stakeholders:

- IKSVM, responsible for overall coordination and governance;
- The curator (Hou Hanru), who shaped the conceptual framework of the exhibition;
- International artists and artist collectives;
- Providers of public, industrial, and cultural venues;
- Corporate sponsors;
- Local and international visitors; and
- International cultural production networks and curatorial platforms.

During this period, the visibility and strategic importance of sponsors, international art networks, and collaborative artistic practices increased considerably. Consequently, the biennial evolved beyond the role of exhibition organizer to become a significant node within global cultural production networks. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, this stage is characterized by increasing stakeholder density, stronger interdependencies, and progressively networked patterns of interaction.

From the service ecosystem perspective, the 2007 edition represents a critical stage in the transformation of the Istanbul Biennial from a centrally coordinated organization into a multilayered and distributed ecosystem. The exhibition expanded across the urban landscape, the curatorial structure became increasingly modular and thematic, and artistic production was embedded within collaborative international networks. Although overall governance remained largely coordinated by IKSVM, the processes of cultural production, resource integration, and stakeholder interaction became substantially more distributed and collaborative. This stage therefore represents a significant increase in both the scale and complexity of the biennial evolution from an organization to a cultural service ecosystem (Vargo & Akaka, 2012).

As emphasized in the biennial catalogue, the exhibition was conceived not simply as a thematic display of artworks but as a cultural production platform grounded in collaborative creative practices and ongoing negotiation with urban space. This perspective redefined the biennial beyond the conventional exhibition format, positioning it instead as an interactive and multi-actor system of cultural production.

Value co-creation became considerably more complex and multidimensional than in previous editions. The principal resources integrated into the ecosystem included:

- Global artistic networks and collaborative creative practices;
- Industrial, public, and cultural infrastructures;
- Curatorial expertise and conceptual frameworks;
- Corporate sponsorship and institutional resources; and
- Visitor experiences and spatial interactions.

The integration of these resources generated multiple forms of value, including:

- Global cultural value, reflected in the international visibility and circulation of contemporary artistic production;

- Socio-political value, generated through critical engagement with themes of modernization, globalization, and conflict;
- Experiential value, created through multi-site engagement across the urban environment; and
- Network value, emerging from collaborative production processes and intensified interaction within international cultural networks.

Accordingly, value creation during this period extended well beyond visitor experience alone. It increasingly emerged through collaborative production processes, network-based interactions, and the integration of diverse resources across multiple stakeholders (IKSV, 2007a; Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

Overall, the findings indicate that the 2007 edition represents the stage of global network integration and ecosystem scaling within the evolutionary trajectory of the Istanbul Biennial as a cultural service ecosystem. This phase is distinguished by the emergence of a multi-site organizational structure, deeper integration into global art networks, a substantial expansion of stakeholder diversity, and the strengthening of collaborative governance practices centered on collective cultural production.

d. The 13th International Istanbul Biennial (2013)

The 13th International Istanbul Biennial, curated by Fulya Erdemci, was organized under the theme *Mom, am I barbarian?* and sought to reconsider the relationship between contemporary art and concepts such as democracy, citizenship, freedom, and civic participation by positioning the public sphere as a site of political debate (IKSV, 2013a). This edition represents a pivotal stage in the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial, marking its transformation from a cultural production platform into a space for public dialogue and political negotiation.

The biennial's conceptual framework was built around the redefinition of the public sphere. Rather than treating artistic production solely as an exhibition practice, it sought to position art as an integral part of collective reflection, public deliberation, and civic dialogue (IKSV, 2013b). Both the exhibition catalogue and the Biennial Guide emphasize that the project emerged through an extended process of research, collective meetings, and continuous discussion, portraying the biennial not as an outcome-oriented exhibition but as a process-oriented platform for cultural production.

Although the exhibition was initially designed for a range of public spaces, the political circumstances surrounding the city during that period required many of the planned projects to be relocated to indoor venues. Nevertheless, the public sphere remained the central conceptual framework of the biennial. This shift demonstrates that the notion of public space functioned not merely as a physical location but as a conceptual arena for dialogue, negotiation, and critical engagement.

Compared with the 2007 edition, the stakeholder structure underwent not only quantitative expansion but also a qualitative and political transformation. The ecosystem comprised the following principal actors:

- IKSV, responsible for institutional coordination;
- The curator (Fulya Erdemci);
- International and local artists;
- Artist collectives;

- Civil society organizations and urban movements;
- Institutions providing exhibition venues; and
- Visitors, whose role evolved into that of active participants in the public sphere.

A particularly significant transformation during this period was the changing role of visitors. Rather than functioning as passive audiences, they became active contributors to public discourse and collective meaning-making. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, the 2013 edition represents a stage in which stakeholders became not only more diverse but also politically redefined through the public sphere, resulting in substantially intensified stakeholder engagement.

From the service ecosystem perspective, the 2013 Biennial marks a critical transition from a network-based cultural production system toward a public sphere-driven politicized service ecosystem. During this stage, the public sphere became an active site of value creation and meaning making, while exhibition venues were reconfigured as spaces for political dialogue and social debate. Artistic production became increasingly intertwined with urban politics, civic participation, and broader social developments.

Accordingly, the governance structure also evolved, becoming more deliberative, contested, and multi-actor in nature. The ecosystem therefore shifted beyond a model of centralized coordination toward a dynamic arena in which diverse societal actors actively participated in the creation, negotiation, and interpretation of cultural meaning.

Value co-creation during this period became distinctly public-oriented and increasingly process-based. The principal resources integrated into the ecosystem included:

- Public spaces and temporary urban venues;
- The curatorial conceptual framework;
- Artistic production;
- Civil society organizations and urban movements; and
- Visitor participation and public deliberation processes.

As emphasized in the exhibition catalogue, the biennial evolved through an extended process of research, collective discussion, and continuous negotiation (IKSV, 2013a). From the perspective of Service-Dominant Logic, this illustrates that value was created not primarily through the final exhibition itself but through the collaborative processes of cultural production and stakeholder interaction.

The interaction among these resources generated several interrelated forms of value:

- Social value, through the reimagining of the public sphere and strengthened civic interaction;
- Political value, through critical engagement with democracy, freedom of expression, and citizenship;
- Experiential value, through visitors' active participation in public deliberation and dialogue; and
- Cultural value, through the transformation of artistic practice into a form of collective reflection and social engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that the 2013 edition represents the stage of public sphere-driven politicization and intensified stakeholder engagement within the evolutionary trajectory of the Istanbul Biennial as a cultural service ecosystem. This phase is distinguished by the conceptual centrality of the public sphere, the transformation of visitors into active civic participants, the integration of artistic production with contemporary social and political processes, and the emergence of more deliberative forms of governance.

Accordingly, the 2013 Biennial represents the stage of a public sphere-driven politicized service ecosystem, in which value is co-created through continuous interaction among cultural, civic, and institutional actors rather than through artistic production alone.

e. The 18th International Istanbul Biennial (2025)

The 18th International Istanbul Biennial, organized by the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (IKSV), was designed as a multi-phase, long-term, and multilayered programme that extended beyond exhibitions to include public programmes, research initiatives, learning-oriented activities, and sustained engagement with diverse communities as integral components of the biennial (IKSV, 2025). In this respect, the biennial evolved beyond a single exhibition taking place within a defined period into a continuous platform for cultural interaction, collaboration, and knowledge production.

The biennial documentation places particular emphasis on digital communication, accessibility, sustainability, and participatory programming, demonstrating that the event has been reconfigured not merely as a venue for presenting contemporary art but as a hybrid cultural infrastructure in which diverse actors participate in shared processes of learning, dialogue, and cultural production (IKSV, 2025). This transformation indicates that the biennial has transcended its physical boundaries, evolving into a networked and platform-based system of cultural production.

Compared with the 2013 edition, the stakeholder structure exhibits an even higher degree of diversity and interdependence. The ecosystem is organized around the following principal actors:

- IKSV, serving as the coordinating institution;
- Artists and curators, acting as partners in both content creation and process design;
- Visitors and active participants;
- Local communities;
- Public institutions;
- International cultural and artistic networks; and
- Digital communication and interaction platforms.

This configuration reflects a polycentric ecosystem in which the traditional role of the audience has been fundamentally transformed, with participants becoming directly involved in processes of cultural production and value creation. From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, the 2025 Biennial represents a mature stage of governance characterized by the highest level of stakeholder diversity, intensive interaction, and highly networked relationships (Freeman, 2010).

From the perspective of the service ecosystem, the 2025 Biennial represents the most advanced stage in the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial as a cultural service ecosystem (Vargo & Akaka, 2012). During this period, production and interaction were no longer confined to physical exhibition spaces but were expanded through digital platforms, resulting in a genuinely hybrid

ecosystem. Governance also evolved into a more distributed, collaborative, and platform-oriented structure than in previous editions, allowing the ecosystem to continuously regenerate itself through ongoing interaction among multiple stakeholders.

Value co-creation reached a highly integrated and multidimensional stage during this period. The principal resources incorporated into the ecosystem included:

- Digital and physical participation infrastructures;
- Curatorial and artistic production processes;
- Local communities and civic participation structures;
- Public institutions and supporting organizations;
- International cultural and artistic networks; and
- Visitor and participant interaction processes.

The integration of these resources generated multiple forms of value, including:

- Cultural value, through the global visibility of contemporary artistic production;
- Social value, through expanded community engagement and broader opportunities for public interaction;
- Experiential value, through hybrid experiences combining physical and digital participation; and
- Institutional value, through sustainable partnerships and strengthened network capacity.

Accordingly, value creation was no longer centered primarily on the artistic object itself but emerged through continuous relationship-building, collaborative learning, and ongoing interaction among ecosystem participants, reflecting a dynamic process of value co-creation (Payne et al., 2007; Grönroos, 2011).

Overall, the findings indicate that the 2025 Istanbul Biennial represents the stage of a mature, platform-based, and multilayered cultural service ecosystem within the evolutionary trajectory of the Istanbul Biennial. This phase is distinguished by extensive stakeholder diversity, distributed governance, the integration of physical and digital interaction, and a process-oriented approach to value creation.

Accordingly, the 2025 Biennial represents the mature stage in the transformation of the Istanbul Biennial from an art organization into a platform-based cultural service ecosystem, in which continuous interaction, broad participation, and collaborative value creation constitute the defining mechanisms of ecosystem development.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the transformation of a cultural organization into a cultural service ecosystem cannot be adequately explained through a single theoretical perspective.

Specifically, Stakeholder Theory explains the progressive expansion and diversification of stakeholder groups, while the Service Ecosystem perspective accounts for the evolution of institutional arrangements and network structures. Service-Dominant Logic clarifies how diverse actors integrate resources throughout the ecosystem, whereas the Value Co-Creation perspective explains how these interactions generate increasingly complex forms of cultural, social, and experiential value.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives indicate that the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial extends beyond the development of an art event. Rather, it represents the evolution of an integrated cultural service ecosystem. Instead of following a linear trajectory of organizational growth, the biennial has evolved through a series of structural turning points, each reshaping stakeholder relationships, governance arrangements, resource integration, and value creation processes.

The findings further confirm that cultural organizations should be understood not merely as sites of artistic production but as service systems in which value is continuously co-created through stakeholder interactions. In this respect, the Istanbul Biennial has evolved from a centralized, organization-based structure into a network-based ecosystem, subsequently into a public sphere-driven ecosystem, and ultimately into a platform-based cultural service ecosystem. This evolutionary trajectory illustrates how recurring large-scale cultural events can progressively develop into dynamic service ecosystems through expanding stakeholder engagement, collaborative governance, and continuous processes of value co-creation.

Table 3. The Ecosystem Evolution of the Istanbul Biennial

Dimension	1987	1997	2007	2013	2025
Stakeholder diversity	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Integrated
Resource integration	Low	Medium	High	Very High	Platform
Value creation	Cultural	Experiential	Global	Social	Hybrid
Governance	Centralized	Coordinated	Networked	Participatory	Distributed
Ecosystem maturity	Formation	Expansion	Scaling	Activation	Platformization

Figure 1 presents a layered and non-linear evolution of the Istanbul Biennial as a service ecosystem. The model synthesizes empirical findings across five critical editions (1987–2025), illustrating how actor structures, value logics, and ecosystem configurations accumulate rather than replace each other over time.

Table 4. Evolution of Istanbul Biennial as a Layered Service Ecosystem (1987–2025): From Organizational Formation to Platformized Co-Creation

	1987 START (Organizational Formation)	1997 EXPANSION (Spatial + Exparimental Layering)	2007 GLOBALIZATION (Network Formation Layer)	2013 PARTICIPATION (Socia-Political Activation Layer)	2025 MATURA ECOSYSTEM (Platformized Co-Creation Layer)
ACTORS (Centralized System)	IKSV (Core orchestrator) International artists Basic curatorial advisors Limitek local art scene	IKSV Curator Artitsts Visitors (emerging active role) Public / cultural venues	IKSV Curator Global artists & collectives Sponsors Cultural institutions International networks Media actors	IKSV Curator Artists Locam communities Civil society actors Visitors Urban political movements	Core: Curator, artists Network: Institutions, sponsors, cultural organizations Public: Visitors, local communities System: Media, global art ecosystem Digital: Platforms, hybrid infrastructures
VALUE TYPE	Cultural value dominance	Cultural experimental value	Cultural + global + political value (coexisting layers)	Cultural + social+ political value layers	Hybrid co-created value system (simultaneous multi-value production)
ECOSYSTEM LOGIC	Organizastional service system (centralized)	Spatially distributed service system	Network orchestration system	Public sphere-driven ecosystem	Platformized co-creation ecosystem
KEY MECHANISM	-Institution-led production -Low interaction density	City-wide exhibition topology Visitor mobility as value input	“Collective intelligence” product logic Biennial as non-conventional exhibition (production field)	Politicization of space Exhibition as public discourse arena Process-based value creation	Hybrid (physical + digital) participation Continuous learning and interaction loops Distributed value creation
EVOLUTION	 Increasing stakeholder diversity, resoruce integration, co-created value and ecosystem maturity 				

a. The Evolutionary Nature of the Service Ecosystem

The analysis of the five selected editions reveals the evolutionary trajectory of the Istanbul Biennial as a cultural service ecosystem. Five distinct developmental stages can be identified:

- 1987: Organization-based formation;
- 1997: Spatial expansion and experiential transformation;
- 2007: Global network integration and ecosystem scaling;
- 2013: Public sphere-driven politicization of the ecosystem; and
- 2025: A platform-based hybrid service ecosystem.

This evolutionary trajectory supports the Service Ecosystem perspective by demonstrating that value is created not by isolated actors but through interconnected, multilayered networks of resource integration and interaction (Vargo & Akaka, 2012). In particular, the post-2007 period indicates that the ecosystem did not merely expand in scale but also became increasingly self-renewing and adaptive, continuously reconfiguring itself through ongoing stakeholder interactions and institutional arrangements.

b. Transformation of the Stakeholder Structure (Stakeholder Complexity)

The findings demonstrate that the stakeholder structure of the Istanbul Biennial evolved from a highly centralized and relatively limited configuration in 1987 into a polycentric and distributed network by 2025.

While the stakeholder configuration in 1987 was largely confined to IKSŞ, artists, and a limited number of curatorial actors, the 2025 Biennial actively integrated local communities, digital platforms, international cultural networks, and public institutions into the ecosystem.

From the perspective of Stakeholder Theory, this transformation has two important implications. First, the evolution is characterized not merely by an increase in the number of stakeholders but by the growing participation of stakeholders in decision-making and value creation processes. Second, stakeholder relationships evolved from hierarchical organizational structures toward network-based systems characterized by interdependence, collaboration, and shared governance (Freeman, 2010).

c. The Transformation of Value Creation: From Production to Co-Creation

One of the most significant findings of this study is the fundamental transformation of value creation over time. Whereas value creation in 1987 was primarily institution- and artist-centred, by 2025 it had evolved into a multidimensional process in which visitors, local communities, digital platforms, and institutional actors collaboratively participated in creating value.

This transformation provides strong empirical support for the central proposition of Service-Dominant Logic: value is not an output transferred from producers to consumers but a process that emerges through the interaction and resource integration of multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2008).

The 2013 and 2025 editions are particularly illustrative in demonstrating that value is created not only during the exhibition itself but throughout the broader processes of preparation, dialogue, participation, learning, and ongoing engagement. These findings strongly reinforce the process-oriented nature of Value Co-Creation within cultural service ecosystems.

d. From Exhibition Space to Strategic Resource: Network-Based Spatial Configuration

The findings also reveal a fundamental transformation in the role of space within the service ecosystem. While exhibition spaces in 1987 primarily functioned as physical venues for displaying artworks, from 2007 onward space increasingly became a strategic resource actively contributing to value creation.

The transition to a distributed, city-wide exhibition structure demonstrates that space should no longer be understood as a passive container but rather as an active component of the service ecosystem that facilitates interaction, resource integration, and collaborative value creation. From the perspective of Service-Dominant Logic, this transformation reflects an expansion in the mechanisms of resource integration across multiple actors and institutional contexts.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that cultural events should be understood not merely as sites of artistic production but as service ecosystems that evolve over time. The case of the Istanbul Biennial illustrates the transformation of cultural organizations:

- from organizations to ecosystems;
- from production to value co-creation;
- from hierarchical governance to network-based governance; and
- from physical exhibitions to platform-based cultural infrastructures.

Accordingly, this study contributes to the Service Ecosystem literature by proposing an empirically grounded and historically informed model of ecosystem evolution in the context of large-scale cultural organizations.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial between 1987 and 2025 through the theoretical lenses of Service-Dominant Logic, the Service Ecosystem perspective, Value Co-Creation, and Stakeholder Theory, demonstrating how a cultural event can evolve into a multi-actor and multi-layered cultural service ecosystem over time. The findings indicate that the Istanbul Biennial has evolved beyond being merely a platform for artistic production and exhibition into a dynamic service system that is continuously reproduced through stakeholder interactions, institutional arrangements, and resource integration.

The analysis of the five critical biennial editions (1987, 1997, 2007, 2013, and 2025) reveals that the evolution of the Istanbul Biennial has not followed a linear growth trajectory; rather, it has progressed through a series of evolutionary stages, each representing a distinct ecosystemic transformation. While the 1987 edition reflected a centralized and organization-oriented structure, the 1997 edition marked the incorporation of spatial expansion and experiential value creation into the system. The 2007 edition represented integration into global art networks and the scaling of the ecosystem, whereas the 2013 edition signified a shift toward public engagement, political participation, and broader social interaction. By 2025, the biennial had evolved into a platform-based service ecosystem characterized by distributed governance and the integration of digital and physical forms of interaction.

These findings support the central premise of Service-Dominant Logic that value is not an output produced by a single actor, but a dynamic process co-created through interactions among multiple actors. In the case of the Istanbul Biennial, value creation has evolved into a multidimensional process shaped by the collective contributions of artists, curators, IKS, sponsors, public institutions, visitors, local communities, and digital platforms. Consequently, cultural value is generated not only through

artworks themselves but also through processes of participation, interaction, learning, and shared experience.

Another significant contribution of this study concerns the changing role of space within the service ecosystem. The findings demonstrate that space has evolved from serving merely as a physical exhibition venue to becoming an active resource for network-based value creation. This suggests that resource integration in cultural events extends beyond human actors to encompass spatial and institutional structures as integral components of a broader service system.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that recurring cultural organizations can be analyzed not only from the perspective of event management but also through the lens of service ecosystem theory. In this respect, it represents one of the pioneering studies to conceptualize the biennial not as a one-off cultural event but as a dynamic service ecosystem in which stakeholders, resources, and institutional arrangements co-evolve over time. Accordingly, the study contributes to management and organization literature by introducing a service-oriented and ecosystem-based perspective for understanding the evolution of cultural organizations.

One of the study's principal theoretical contributions is the Cultural Service Ecosystem Evolution Model, illustrated in Figure 2. The proposed model offers a conceptual framework explaining how recurring cultural organizations evolve over time in terms of stakeholder diversity, resource integration, value co-creation, and governance structures. Consequently, the study not only explains the developmental trajectory of the Istanbul Biennial but also proposes a transferable analytical model that can be applied to the examination of international biennials, festivals, and other recurring cultural organizations from a service ecosystem perspective.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. First, the research was designed as a qualitative case study based exclusively on secondary data sources, including IKSIV reports, biennial catalogues, and institutional documents. As a result, primary empirical evidence obtained through field observations, interviews, or direct participant engagement was not incorporated into the analysis, limiting insights into stakeholders' lived experiences and micro-level interaction dynamics.

Second, the analysis focused on five strategically selected biennial editions rather than the complete historical sequence of the Istanbul Biennial. Although these editions represent key turning points in the ecosystem's evolution, intermediate editions may also contain important ecosystem transformations that remain beyond the scope of the present study.

Third, the theoretical framework primarily draws upon Service-Dominant Logic and the service ecosystem literature. Consequently, alternative theoretical perspectives—such as critical cultural theory, political economy, or the sociology of art—were incorporated only to a limited extent.

Future research could extend this work by employing qualitative field studies, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic methods to investigate cultural events such as the Istanbul Biennial at a more micro level. Examining real-time interactions among artists, curators, visitors, sponsors, and other stakeholders would provide a richer understanding of value co-creation processes within cultural service ecosystems.

In addition, future studies could incorporate quantitative methods to complement qualitative findings. Techniques such as social network analysis may enable researchers to measure the structural characteristics of service ecosystems more systematically, providing insights into stakeholder centrality, interaction density, and the evolution of network relationships over time.

Comparative studies involving the Istanbul Biennial and other major recurring cultural events—such as the Venice Biennale, Documenta, or the Sundance Film Festival—would further contribute to the development of a more generalizable theoretical understanding of the evolutionary dynamics of cultural service ecosystems.

Finally, further research should investigate the implications of digitalization and the platform economy for cultural events. Examining how hybrid participation models that have accelerated since 2020 are reshaping service ecosystems represents a promising avenue for future research.

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Rethinking Service Resilience: A Systematic Literature Review on Service Recovery Capability as a Selection Criterion in B2B Logistics

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Abstract

In today's world, while passing through a period of escalating global disruptions, institutional complexity, and resource constraints, emerging economies, in particular, face profound challenges in maintaining their operational continuity and supply chain resilience. In this direction, while the traditional third-party logistics (3PL) selection criteria of enterprises predominantly prioritize cost, lead time, and baseline efficiency, contemporary service systems demand a radical paradigm shift toward proactive risk mitigation. This study, on the other hand, presents a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) that critically examines and retheorizes the strategic significance of Service Recovery Capability (SRC) during the pre-contractual selection phase in business-to-business (B2B) logistics. Aligned with the theme of "Service Resilience and Recovery," this review aims to map how a provider's crisis-resolution signals influence buyer behavior prior to formal agreement execution. Accordingly, a five-year accumulation addressing periods such as pandemics and geopolitical crises in the logistics and service management literature is systematically synthesized.

In this review, a sample consisting of high-quality studies, thematic analysis, and content analysis were used. The literature synthesis reveals a critical gap in the field of Service Resilience and Recovery. This gap is that the vast majority of existing service recovery research is reactive-oriented. The existing literature focuses almost entirely on post-failure satisfaction and customer retention after a logistics disruption has already materialized. Conversely, in this SLR, Signaling Theory and Justice Theory are integrated as complementary lenses, and the proactive, pre-contractual dimensions of resilience are explored.

This review synthesizes how explicit service recovery protocols—such as contractually codified crisis response teams and automated compensation mechanisms—function as vital quality signals that reduce information asymmetry and alleviate opportunistic anxieties for procurement managers. It demonstrates how initial recovery signals given during the pre-contractual selection phase shape long-term quality expectations and contracting intentions before operational vulnerabilities occur.

Ultimately, this systematic review presents a comprehensive theoretical framework that transforms service recovery from a technical adjustment into a strategic screening mechanism for sustainable partnerships. Bridging the gap between proactive signaling and contractual commitment, this study aims to contribute to the symposium's theme of rethinking service management. It provides clear

strategic pathways for procurement managers to increase their supply chain resilience and establishes a future research agenda for empirical researchers in developing economic contexts.

Keywords: Service Recovery Capability, Third-Party Logistics (3PL) Selection, Systematic Literature Review (SLR), Signaling Theory, Anticipated Justice.

From Digital Expectations to Emotional Labour: Understanding the Role of Tourist Guides in Managing Expectation–Disconfirmation

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Abstract

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has fundamentally transformed tourists' expectation formation. Tourists frequently develop idealized expectations based on curated digital representations. When these virtual expectations fail to match actual destination realities, the resulting expectation–disconfirmation triggers negative emotional responses among tourists.

To explain how digitally constructed expectations generate new emotional demands for tourist guides, this conceptual study integrates Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory and Emotional Labour Theory into a single framework. The proposed model repositions tourist guides as expectation and emotion managers who mediate between digital tourism imaginaries and lived realities.

A principal contribution of this study is introducing "Five-Star Rating Pressure" as a novel trigger of emotional labour in platform-based tourism environments. Under the continuous visibility generated by online reviews, guides are increasingly compelled to perform emotional labour (surface and deep acting) not only to ameliorate tourists' immediate negative reactions but also to mitigate the potential reputational consequences of adverse digital feedback.

Ultimately, this paper reconceptualizes emotional labour in contemporary tourist guiding as a digitally mediated process. It offers practical implications for tourism organizations to support guides in expectation management, while establishing a robust foundation for future empirical research.

Key words: Emotional Labor, Tourist Guiding, Electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM), Five-Star Rating Pressure.

1. Introduction

The tourism industry has undergone profound transformation as a result of rapid developments in information and communication technologies. The widespread adoption of mobile applications, social media platforms, artificial intelligence, and immersive technologies has altered not only how tourism products are consumed but also how tourism experiences are created, shared, and evaluated. Contemporary tourists increasingly rely on digital technologies before, during, and after their travels, becoming active participants in the co-creation of tourism experiences rather than passive consumers. As a result, tourism experiences have become increasingly interconnected, personalized, and technology-enhanced, creating new forms of interaction between tourists, destinations, and service providers (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2013; Neuhofer et al., 2014).

This digital transformation has also reshaped the role of tourist guides. Traditionally, tourist guides were primarily responsible for providing information and interpretation services at destinations. However, the easy accessibility of travel-related information through digital platforms has reduced the exclusivity of this informational role. Consequently, greater importance has been placed on guides' interpersonal competencies, experience facilitation skills, and ability to manage tourist interac-

tions. Contemporary tourist guides are increasingly expected to act as experience co-creators, mediators, and facilitators who contribute to the emotional and social dimensions of tourism experiences (Weiler & Black, 2015; Çetin & Yarcın, 2017; Hillman, 2023). Simultaneously, digital communication technologies have extended guide-tourist interactions beyond the physical tour environment, creating new expectations for continuous accessibility and responsiveness (Neuhofer et al., 2012; Weiler & Black, 2015).

One of the most significant consequences of digitally mediated tourism is the growing influence of social media on tourists' expectations. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and online travel communities expose potential tourists to highly curated and often idealized representations of destinations and tourism experiences. Through user-generated content, influencer marketing, and visually enhanced destination imagery, tourists frequently develop expectations before travel that may not fully correspond to actual on-site conditions. Although digital technologies facilitate information search and destination planning, they may also contribute to unrealistic or inflated expectations regarding attractions, services, and overall travel experiences (Neuhofer et al., 2014; McLean & Barhorst, 2022; Buhalis & Law, 2008).

The discrepancy between expected and actual experiences can be explained through Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT), which suggests that satisfaction is determined by the comparison between prior expectations and perceived performance outcomes. When experiences meet or exceed expectations, satisfaction is likely to occur; conversely, when actual experiences fall short of expected standards, negative disconfirmation may emerge, resulting in dissatisfaction and adverse emotional reactions (Oliver, 1980). Within contemporary tourism settings, social media-generated expectations may increase the likelihood of expectation–disconfirmation because destinations are frequently consumed first through idealized digital representations and only later through direct experience (McLean & Barhorst, 2022; Neuhofer et al., 2014).

In digitally mediated tourism environments, tourist guides increasingly serve as intermediaries between socially constructed destination expectations and the realities experienced on-site. Consequently, guides are required not only to manage their own emotional displays but also to mitigate tourists' disappointment, frustration, confusion, or dissatisfaction when expectations are not fully met. Managing such emotional responses requires more than destination knowledge or interpretive skills; it also demands the ability to regulate emotions and maintain positive interactions throughout the tourism experience (Weiler & Black, 2015; Hillman, 2023).

Emotional Labour Theory suggests that service employees regulate their emotional expressions to comply with occupational expectations and service requirements through strategies such as surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotional expression (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000). Within tourism settings, emotional labour has been identified as a fundamental component of tourist guiding, influencing outcomes such as job satisfaction, authenticity, service quality, and burnout (İrigüler & Güler, 2016; Hillman, 2023). Furthermore, digital environments may intensify emotional demands through continuous accessibility, online visibility, customer feedback mechanisms, and permanent performance evaluation processes (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Neuhofer et al., 2012).

Despite the growing literature on digital tourism and emotional labour, these research streams have largely developed independently. Existing studies have extensively examined technology-enhanced tourism experiences and digital transformation processes (Neuhofer et al., 2013; Neuhofer et al., 2014), while emotional labour research has predominantly focused on employee well-being, service interactions, and occupational outcomes (Grandey, 2000; Lee & Madera, 2019). Comparatively little attention has been paid to how digitally amplified tourist expectations influence the emotional de-

mands placed upon tourist guides, particularly when guides must manage tourists' emotional reactions arising from expectation–disconfirmation. While existing studies highlight the lack of comprehensive theoretical frameworks integrating emotional labour within broader tourism and guiding contexts (Lee & Madera, 2019; Hillman, 2023), comparatively little attention has been paid to how digitally amplified tourist expectations influence the emotional demands placed upon tourist guides. Consequently, there remains a need for an integrative conceptual perspective that explains how social media-driven expectations, expectation–disconfirmation, and emotional labour processes interact within contemporary tourism environments.

To address this gap, the present study develops a conceptual framework that integrates Emotional Labour Theory and Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory within digitally mediated tourism environments. Specifically, the study proposes that social media exposure and platform-based tourism systems contribute to elevated tourist expectations, increasing the likelihood of expectation–disconfirmation during actual tourism experiences. In turn, tourist guides employ emotional labour strategies to manage the emotional consequences of these discrepancies and to maintain positive tourism experiences. By positioning tourist guides as mediators between digitally constructed expectations and lived tourism realities, this study contributes to the emerging literature on digital tourism, emotional labour, and tourist experience management.

The central argument of this study is that tourist guides no longer perform emotional labour solely to comply with occupational display expectations; they increasingly engage in emotional labour to manage tourists' emotional responses arising from expectation–disconfirmation generated by digitally mediated destination representations.

2. Theoretical Background

To better understand how tourist guides respond to the emotional demands arising from digitally mediated tourism environments, it is first necessary to examine the theoretical foundations of emotional labour. As one of the most widely used concepts for explaining emotional regulation in service settings, emotional labour provides an important framework for understanding how employees manage both their own emotions and the emotions of others during service encounters. Accordingly, the following section reviews the theoretical development of emotional labour and its key dimensions.

a. Emotional Labour Theory

Emotional labour has become one of the most influential concepts for understanding employee behaviour in service-oriented occupations. The concept was initially introduced by Hochschild (1983), who argued that employees are often required to regulate their emotions in accordance with organizational expectations and display rules. According to this perspective, emotions are not merely personal experiences but can also become part of the service exchanged between employees and customers. As service industries expanded and customer experience became increasingly important, emotional labour emerged as a critical component of workplace performance.

Building upon Hochschild's pioneering work, later scholars sought to explain why emotional expressions are particularly important in customer-contact settings. Rafaeli and Sutton (1987) argued that emotional displays influence how customers evaluate service encounters and therefore represent an important organizational resource. Similarly, Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) suggested that emotional labour should not be viewed solely as organizational control over employees' emotions. Instead, they emphasized the role of social identity and professional role performance, arguing that employees may naturally express emotions that are consistent with occupational expectations. These contributions broadened the theoretical scope of emotional labour beyond a purely managerial perspective and highlighted its social and relational dimensions.

As the literature evolved, researchers began to examine emotional labour as a multidimensional phenomenon. In this regard, Morris and Feldman (1996) proposed that emotional labour is shaped by the frequency of emotional display, attentiveness to display rules, the variety of emotions required by the job, and the degree of emotional dissonance experienced by employees. Their framework advanced the understanding of emotional labour by demonstrating that emotional demands vary across occupations and service contexts. Consequently, emotional labour came to be viewed not only as an emotional requirement but also as a complex occupational process affected by the characteristics of the work environment.

Following these conceptual developments, attention shifted toward understanding how employees manage emotions in practice. Drawing on emotion regulation theory, Grandey (2000) argued that employees actively regulate their emotional expressions or internal feelings in order to comply with workplace expectations. This perspective was later supported by Diefendorff et al. (2005), who demonstrated that employees rely on different emotional labour strategies depending on situational demands and organizational requirements. Together, these studies contributed to the distinction between surface acting, deep acting, and the expression of naturally felt emotions, which remains one of the most widely accepted frameworks in emotional labour research.

An important issue emerging from this literature concerns the consequences of different emotional labour strategies. Brotheridge and Lee (2002) emphasized that discrepancies between felt and displayed emotions may create emotional dissonance and psychological strain for employees. Extending this discussion, Hülshager and Schewe (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of three decades of emotional labour research and found that surface acting is consistently associated with emotional exhaustion and impaired well-being, whereas deep acting tends to produce more positive outcomes. These findings suggest that the way employees regulate emotions is just as important as the emotional demands they face.

The significance of emotional labour becomes even more evident in hospitality and tourism settings, where service experiences are largely created through interpersonal interaction. Xu et al. (2020) found that emotional labour is influenced by a range of factors, including emotional intelligence, customer interactions, personality traits, and organizational support, while also affecting both employee well-being and customer-related outcomes. Likewise, Lee and Madera (2019) highlighted that emotional labour remains one of the central concepts in hospitality and tourism research because of its close association with service quality, job satisfaction, burnout, and customer satisfaction. These studies collectively indicate that emotional labour is not only an individual coping mechanism but also a strategic factor shaping service experiences.

Taken together, the emotional labour literature demonstrates that managing emotions constitutes a fundamental aspect of service work. Although scholars differ in their conceptualizations of emotional labour, they generally agree that emotional regulation influences both employee well-being and service outcomes. This theoretical foundation is particularly relevant for tourist guiding, where professionals are expected not only to provide information but also to facilitate memorable experiences and manage group dynamics throughout the tourism experience. Weiler and Black (2015) argue that contemporary tourist guides increasingly function as co-creators of tourist experiences, while Hillman (2023) highlights the central role of emotional engagement in guide-tourist interactions. Consequently, understanding emotional labour provides an important basis for examining the evolving role of tourist guides in increasingly digitalized tourism environments.

b. Emotional Labour in Tourist Guiding

The tourism industry is characterized by intensive interpersonal interactions, making emotional labour particularly relevant for frontline tourism professionals. Among these professionals, tourist guides occupy a unique position because they engage with tourists continuously throughout the travel experience rather than through brief service encounters. As a result, their responsibilities extend beyond providing factual information and include facilitating experiences, managing group dynamics, and responding to tourists' emotional needs. Weiler and Black (2015) argue that the role of tourist guides has evolved from that of a one-way communicator to an experience choreographer and co-creator, while Çetin and Yarcın (2017) emphasize the increasingly complex professional relationships that guides manage within tourism systems.

The importance of emotional labour in tourist guiding stems from the very nature of the profession. Tourist guides interact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, age groups, and personal expectations, often within dynamic and unpredictable environments. Consequently, guides are frequently required to display patience, enthusiasm, empathy, and emotional stability even when facing challenging situations. Hillman (2023) highlights that emotional labour constitutes an integral part of guiding practice because guides continuously negotiate social interactions while simultaneously maintaining a positive atmosphere for the group. This requirement makes emotional management an essential professional competency rather than an optional interpersonal skill.

The emotional demands faced by tourist guides are further intensified by their intermediary position between tourists and destinations. Tourist guides play an important role in facilitating tourists' understanding of destinations while simultaneously managing interactions, expectations, and experiences throughout the tour process. Weiler and Black (2015) argue that contemporary guides function as experience choreographers and co-creators rather than mere information providers. Similarly, Hillman (2023) emphasizes that guiding involves continuous emotional engagement and interaction management throughout the tourism experience. As a result, guides frequently become the most visible representatives of destinations and may encounter both positive and negative emotional reactions from tourists regardless of whether the source of those reactions falls within their direct control.

For this reason, researchers have increasingly examined tourist guiding through the lens of emotional labour. İrigüler and Güler (2016) found that emotional labour plays a significant role in shaping tourist guides' job satisfaction and burnout levels. Their findings suggest that the emotional demands associated with guiding may generate both positive and negative occupational outcomes depending on how emotional labour is performed. Similarly, Hillman (2023) reports that many guides consciously or unconsciously employ emotional labour strategies during interactions with tourists, indicating that emotional regulation is deeply embedded within everyday guiding practices.

Previous studies have also demonstrated that tourist guides do not simply manage their own emotions; they frequently engage in the regulation of tourists' emotions as well. During tours, guides are often expected to reduce tensions, alleviate concerns, resolve complaints, and restore positive moods when unexpected situations arise. According to Weiler and Black (2015), contemporary guides increasingly contribute to the emotional quality of tourism experiences by shaping how tourists interpret and respond to events encountered during travel. Consequently, emotional labour within tourist guiding extends beyond emotional self-regulation and encompasses the management of interpersonal emotional dynamics.

Recent developments in tourism further complicate these emotional demands. Neuhofer et al. (2012) argue that technology-enhanced tourism experiences have expanded tourist-service provider interac-

tions beyond traditional face-to-face encounters. Likewise, digital tourism environments have increased tourists' access to information, online communities, and destination-related content before travel takes place. As tourists become more informed, connected, and active in the co-creation of experiences, the emotional expectations directed toward tourist guides also continue to evolve. This transformation suggests that emotional labour in tourist guiding should increasingly be examined within digitally mediated tourism contexts rather than solely through traditional face-to-face service frameworks.

Taken together, the literature indicates that emotional labour constitutes a core component of tourist guiding. However, contemporary guides face emotional demands that differ from those described in earlier studies because tourist experiences are now shaped not only by on-site interactions but also by digital technologies and online platforms. Understanding how these digitally mediated conditions influence tourist expectations and guides' emotional responsibilities therefore represents an important next step in emotional labour research. The following section addresses this issue by examining the relationship between social media, tourist expectations, and expectation–disconfirmation in contemporary tourism experiences.

3. Social Media, Tourist Expectations and Expectation–Disconfirmation

The increasing integration of digital technologies into tourism has fundamentally transformed how tourists search for information, evaluate destinations, and construct travel expectations. Contemporary tourists are exposed to a continuous flow of destination-related content through social media platforms, online communities, travel blogs, and digital review systems long before they physically visit a destination. Neuhofer et al. (2014) argue that technology-enhanced tourism experiences enable tourists to engage with destinations prior to travel, while Buhalis and Law (2008) emphasize the growing importance of digital information environments in tourism decision-making processes. Consequently, tourists increasingly develop expectations based on digitally mediated representations rather than direct experience.

The role of social media in shaping tourist expectations has become particularly significant within contemporary tourism ecosystems. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and various travel-sharing platforms expose potential visitors to carefully curated, visually appealing, and often idealized depictions of destinations and tourism experiences. McLean and Barhorst (2022) demonstrate that digitally mediated pre-travel experiences can substantially influence expectations and subsequent evaluations of tourism products, while Gretzel et al. (2015) argue that digital technologies increasingly influence how tourism experiences are imagined, consumed, and shared. Although these platforms contribute to destination awareness and travel inspiration, they may simultaneously encourage the formation of expectations that are difficult to satisfy under actual destination conditions.

The relationship between expectations and subsequent evaluations is commonly explained through Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (EDT). Oliver (1980) proposes that consumer satisfaction results from a comparison between pre-consumption expectations and perceived performance outcomes. When experiences meet or exceed existing expectations, confirmation occurs, leading to satisfaction. In contrast, when perceived performance falls below expected standards, negative disconfirmation emerges, increasing the likelihood of dissatisfaction. Although originally developed within consumer behaviour research, this theoretical perspective has been widely adopted in tourism studies because tourism experiences are often evaluated against expectations formed before travel.

Within digitally mediated tourism environments, the likelihood of expectation–disconfirmation may be amplified because tourists are frequently exposed to idealized and selectively constructed destination images prior to their visits. Neuhofer et al. (2014) suggest that technology-mediated representa-

tions can significantly influence tourists' perceptions of destinations before actual consumption occurs. Similarly, McLean and Barhorst (2022) report that digitally generated expectations influence how tourism experiences are subsequently evaluated. As a result, even when destinations provide objectively satisfactory experiences, tourists may experience dissatisfaction if reality does not correspond to the expectations generated by social media content and other digital representations.

The consequences of expectation–disconfirmation extend beyond cognitive evaluations of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Oliver (1980) argues that negative disconfirmation often produces unfavourable assessments because consumers compare actual experiences with pre-existing expectations. In tourism settings, such discrepancies may also trigger emotional responses including disappointment, frustration, irritation, anxiety, and dissatisfaction. McLean and Barhorst (2022) further suggest that expectations formed through digital exposure influence post-consumption evaluations and perceptions of tourism experiences. Given the experiential and emotionally charged nature of tourism consumption, these emotional reactions frequently become an important component of the overall travel experience.

When such emotional reactions occur, tourist guides often become the most immediate and visible recipients of tourists' responses. Contemporary research conceptualizes tourist guides as intermediaries and cultural brokers who connect tourists with unfamiliar environments, serving as leaders, educators, and destination representatives (Çetin & Yarkan, 2017; Weiler & Black, 2015). Because guides accompany tourists throughout the tourism experience, they frequently encounter and manage emotional reactions regardless of whether the underlying source of dissatisfaction falls within their direct control. Consequently, expectation–disconfirmation may create additional emotional demands for guides beyond their traditional informational and interpretive responsibilities.

In this context, tourist guides increasingly function as expectation managers. Weiler and Black (2015) argue that contemporary guides contribute to the co-creation and interpretation of tourism experiences rather than merely transmitting information. Similarly, Hillman (2023) emphasizes that emotional engagement constitutes a central component of guide–tourist interactions. Building on these perspectives, guides often attempt to mitigate the effects of expectation–disconfirmation by providing contextual explanations, reframing negative perceptions, demonstrating empathy, and redirecting tourists' attention toward alternative aspects of the experience. Accordingly, the management of tourist emotions becomes an important extension of emotional labour within contemporary guiding practice.

The emotional demands associated with expectation management become even more complex within platform-based tourism environments. Neuhofer et al. (2012) argue that technology has extended tourism interactions beyond traditional face-to-face encounters, while Gretzel et al. (2015) note that digital platforms increasingly shape how tourism experiences are evaluated and communicated. Consequently, dissatisfaction is no longer confined to the immediate service encounter. Tourists can instantly share their evaluations through online reviews, rating systems, social media posts, and destination platforms, making service performance permanently visible to future customers and tourism stakeholders.

This development has contributed to what may be described as the growing pressure of digital reputation management. Gretzel et al. (2015) argue that digital tourism ecosystems increasingly depend on data-driven evaluation mechanisms through which tourism experiences are continuously monitored, shared, and assessed. Similarly, Neuhofer et al. (2012) emphasize that technology has expanded tourism interactions beyond traditional service encounters, creating new forms of visibility and accountability for tourism professionals. For tourist guides, managing tourists' emotional reactions is therefore no longer solely a matter of maintaining positive interpersonal interactions during a tour. It

also involves reducing the likelihood of negative online reviews, low ratings, and public complaints that may affect professional reputation and future service opportunities. Consequently, emotional labour is performed not only to enhance tourists' immediate experiences but also to navigate the increasingly influential evaluation systems embedded within platform-based tourism environments.

Accordingly, this study argues that social media-driven expectations, expectation–disconfirmation, emotional labour, and digital evaluation systems should be understood as interconnected elements of a broader tourism ecosystem. Social media and digital content contribute to the construction of elevated tourist expectations; expectation–disconfirmation generates emotional responses when those expectations are not fully satisfied; tourist guides employ emotional labour strategies to manage these reactions; and online review systems create additional pressure by linking emotional interactions to publicly visible reputational outcomes. By integrating these processes, the present study proposes a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional labour operates within contemporary digitally mediated tourism environments.

The increasing importance of online review platforms has fundamentally transformed the evaluation of tourism experiences. Traditional word-of-mouth communication, which was once largely confined to personal networks, has evolved into electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), enabling tourists to share their experiences with large and geographically dispersed audiences. Reyes-Menendez et al. (2020) argue that eWOM has become one of the most influential sources of information for tourism consumers because travelers increasingly rely on online reviews and social networking platforms when making travel decisions. Similarly, Pourfakhimi et al. (2020) emphasize that eWOM influences tourist behaviour through cognitive, affective, and normative mechanisms, shaping not only destination choices but also perceptions of service quality and tourist expectations.

As the influence of eWOM has expanded, online reviews have become a central component of digital reputation. Abubakar et al. (2017) demonstrate that electronic word-of-mouth contributes to destination trust and influences tourists' behavioural intentions. Similarly, Medeková and Pompurová (2024) report that destination organizations increasingly monitor and respond to online feedback because digital evaluations contribute directly to destination image and visitor perceptions. These findings suggest that managing online reputation has become a strategic concern for tourism stakeholders in digitally connected tourism environments.

This shift is particularly important for tourist guides because guides frequently become the most visible and personally memorable element of an organized tour. While tourists may encounter problems arising from transportation, weather conditions, overcrowding, attraction management, or destination infrastructure, their evaluations are often communicated through assessments of the guide who accompanied the experience. As Weiler and Black (2015) suggest, guides play an important role in shaping tourist experiences, while Hillman (2023) highlights the emotional and interpersonal nature of guide–tourist interactions. Consequently, online evaluations of guides may reflect not only service performance but also tourists' broader emotional responses to their overall travel experiences.

The growing reliance on review scores and publicly visible ratings has created what can be described as a five-star performance culture. Reyes-Menendez et al. (2020) observe that consumers increasingly use digital reviews as decision-making tools when selecting tourism products and services, which enhances the importance of maintaining favourable online evaluations. Under these conditions, tourism professionals may experience pressure not simply to satisfy customers but to secure the highest possible ratings in increasingly competitive digital environments.

From an emotional labour perspective, such evaluation systems create additional emotional demands. Hochschild (1983) argues that employees frequently regulate emotional displays in response to oc-

cupational expectations, while Brotheridge and Lee (2002) emphasize that discrepancies between felt and displayed emotions may generate emotional strain. When service workers become aware that every interaction can potentially result in a public review or rating, emotional regulation may become even more pronounced. In tourism settings, guides may therefore be motivated not only by immediate service goals but also by concerns regarding future evaluations, visibility, and professional reputation.

The relationship between online reviews and emotional labour becomes particularly evident when expectation–disconfirmation occurs. As discussed previously, tourists may experience disappointment when actual experiences fail to correspond to expectations formed through social media and other digital representations. Pourfakhimi et al. (2020) argue that eWOM influences not only pre-purchase decision-making but also post-consumption evaluations and emotional responses. Similarly, Reyes-Menendez et al. (2020) note that tourists actively use digital platforms to express satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and recommendations. Consequently, negative emotional reactions arising from expectation–disconfirmation may subsequently be translated into public reviews, ratings, and online complaints that remain visible to future consumers.

Accordingly, this study introduces the concept of Five-Star Rating Pressure as a complementary component of digitally mediated emotional labour. Five-Star Rating Pressure refers to the perceived need experienced by tourist guides to maintain consistently positive emotional performances in order to secure favourable online evaluations, avoid reputational damage, and sustain professional visibility within platform-based tourism environments. In contrast to traditional emotional labour frameworks that focus primarily on organizational display rules, this perspective highlights how platform-based evaluation systems create additional pressures that influence emotional regulation in contemporary tourism settings.

4. Conceptual Framework: From Digital Expectations to Emotional Labour

The preceding discussion suggests that emotional labour in contemporary tourist guiding cannot be fully understood without considering the digital environment in which tourism experiences are increasingly constructed, evaluated, and shared. Existing studies have demonstrated that social media platforms, online reviews, and other forms of digital content significantly shape tourists' expectations before travel, while emotional labour research has highlighted the importance of emotion regulation during service encounters. However, these research streams have rarely been integrated within a single framework capable of explaining how digitally generated expectations eventually translate into emotional demands for tourist guides.

To address this gap, the present study proposes a conceptual framework that links social media exposure, expectation–disconfirmation, tourist emotional responses, emotional labour, and digital evaluation systems within a unified model. The framework builds upon Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980) and Emotional Labour Theory (Hochschild, 1983) while incorporating insights from contemporary digital tourism research. Specifically, the model suggests that emotionally demanding situations faced by tourist guides increasingly originate from expectations that are constructed through digital environments rather than through direct destination experiences alone.

Collectively, these digital mechanisms contribute to the formation of elevated tourist expectations prior to travel (Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Abubakar et al., 2017). Previous studies have shown that digital information sources play a significant role in shaping tourists' perceptions, destination images, and travel expectations before actual consumption occurs (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2014). Similarly, Reyes-Menendez et al. (2020) and Pourfakhimi et al. (2020) emphasize that online content and eWOM influence tourists' cognitive and affective evaluations of tourism products and destinations.

Once tourists encounter the actual destination experience, these expectations become the reference point against which perceived performance is evaluated. According to Oliver (1980), satisfaction emerges when experiences confirm or exceed expectations, whereas dissatisfaction becomes more likely when perceived performance falls below anticipated standards. Within digitally mediated tourism settings, expectation–disconfirmation may occur when idealized destination representations encountered through social media differ from on-site realities. Consequently, expectation–disconfirmation occupies a central position within the proposed model because it functions as the mechanism through which digitally constructed expectations are translated into experiential evaluations.

When negative disconfirmation occurs, tourists may experience a range of emotional responses including disappointment, frustration, dissatisfaction, anxiety, and complaint behaviour. As tourism experiences are highly experiential and emotionally charged, these reactions often extend beyond cognitive assessments of service quality. McLean and Barhorst (2022) suggest that expectations formed before travel shape subsequent evaluations of tourism experiences, while research on eWOM indicates that emotional reactions frequently influence post-consumption communication and review behaviour.

The model further proposes that tourist guides play a critical mediating role at this stage. When expectation–disconfirmation generates negative emotional responses, guides frequently become responsible for managing those emotions and protecting the overall tourism experience. In line with Weiler and Black (2015), guides are viewed not merely as information providers but as co-creators and interpreters of tourism experiences. Similarly, Hillman (2023) emphasizes that emotional engagement forms a central component of guide–tourist interactions. Consequently, guides perform emotional labour not only to regulate their own emotions but also to alleviate tourists’ disappointment, reframe negative perceptions, and maintain positive group dynamics.

A particularly distinctive feature of the proposed framework is the incorporation of Five-Star Rating Pressure as an additional source of emotional demands. The literature on eWOM and online reputation demonstrates that digital evaluations increasingly influence trust, destination image, and future consumer behaviour (Abubakar et al., 2017; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020). In platform-based tourism environments, tourist guides are aware that tourists can publicly evaluate their performance through ratings, reviews, and social media posts. As a result, guides often manage emotional interactions while simultaneously anticipating their potential reputational consequences. This pressure may intensify emotional labour by increasing the perceived costs of dissatisfied tourists and negative online feedback.

Within this framework, emotional labour is conceptualized as consisting of three primary strategies: surface acting, deep acting, and genuine emotional expression. Consistent with previous research, surface acting is expected to be associated with greater emotional dissonance and burnout, whereas deep acting and genuine emotional expression are expected to generate more sustainable outcomes for both guides and tourists. The effectiveness of these strategies may become particularly important when guides are required to manage expectation–disconfirmation under conditions of public visibility and ongoing digital evaluation.

Finally, the proposed framework identifies outcomes at both the employee and customer levels. For tourist guides, emotional labour may influence emotional exhaustion, burnout, job satisfaction, and long-term professional sustainability. Previous research has consistently linked surface acting with adverse well-being outcomes and deep acting with more favourable occupational consequences (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Hülsheger & Schewe, 2011). For tourists, successful emotional management may contribute to satisfaction, trust, experience quality, loyalty, and positive eWOM (e.g., Abu-

bakar et al., 2017; Lee & Madera, 2019; Xu et al., 2020). Accordingly, the framework suggests that emotional labour functions as an important mechanism through which negative expectation–disconfirmation can be mitigated and positive tourism outcomes can be maintained.

In summary, the proposed conceptual model positions tourist guides as intermediaries between digitally constructed tourism expectations and lived destination experiences. By integrating social media exposure, expectation–disconfirmation, tourist emotions, emotional labour, and five-star rating pressure within a single framework, the model provides a more comprehensive explanation of how emotional labour operates in contemporary platform-based tourism environments. It further suggests that the sustainability of tourist guiding increasingly depends on balancing tourists’ digitally amplified expectations with the emotional realities of tourism experiences.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework of Digitally Mediated Emotional Labour in Tourist Guiding

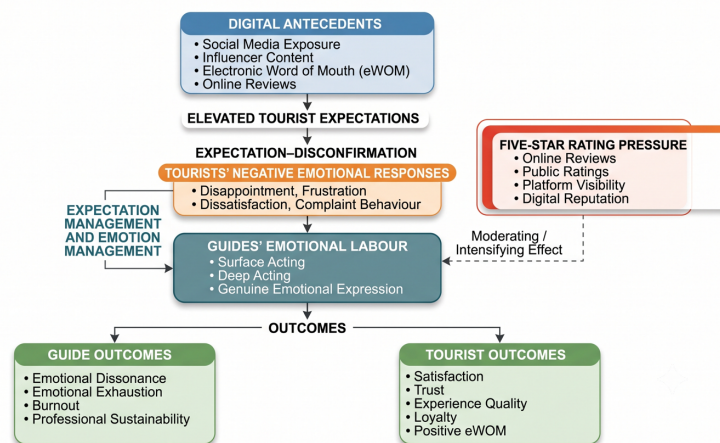


Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework of digitally mediated emotional labour in tourist guiding. The model suggests that exposure to social media content, influencer-generated destination imagery, and electronic word-of-mouth contributes to the formation of elevated tourist expectations prior to travel. When actual experiences fail to meet these expectations, expectation–disconfirmation emerges and generates a range of emotional responses among tourists. Tourist guides subsequently engage in emotional labour strategies to manage these emotional reactions and maintain positive tourism experiences. The framework further proposes that Five-Star Rating Pressure, represented by online reviews, public ratings, platform visibility, and digital reputation concerns, intensifies the emotional demands placed on guides by increasing the perceived consequences of tourist dissatisfaction. Ultimately, these processes influence both guide-related outcomes and tourist-related outcomes.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework of digitally mediated emotional labour in tourist guiding. The model suggests that social media exposure, influencer-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and online reviews contribute to the formation of elevated tourist expectations prior to travel. Previous research has demonstrated that digital content plays an increasingly important role in shaping destination perceptions and travel-related expectations, often exposing tourists to highly curated and idealized representations of tourism experiences (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Neuhofer et al., 2014). Likewise, studies on eWOM indicate that online information sources influence both tourists’ cognitive evaluations and affective perceptions before actual consumption takes place (Pourfakhimi et al., 2020; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020).

The framework further proposes that elevated expectations increase the likelihood of expectation–disconfirmation when tourists encounter actual destinations and tourism services. Drawing upon Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory, tourists evaluate their experiences by comparing pre-existing expectations with perceived performance outcomes (Oliver, 1980). When experiences fail to correspond to expectations, negative disconfirmation may occur and generate adverse emotional responses such as disappointment, frustration, dissatisfaction, and complaint behaviour. In digitally mediated tourism environments, this process may become more pronounced because expectations are frequently shaped by idealized social media representations rather than direct experience.

The model positions tourist guides as key actors in managing the consequences of expectation–disconfirmation. As tourists experience negative emotional responses, guides become responsible for managing both expectations and emotions throughout the tourism experience. Through interpretation, communication, empathy, and emotional regulation, guides attempt to reduce dissatisfaction, maintain positive group dynamics, and preserve overall experience quality. In line with previous research, emotional labour is therefore conceptualized not only as the management of guides’ own emotions but also as the management of tourists’ emotional reactions (Weiler & Black, 2015; Hillman, 2023).

The relationship between online reviews and emotional labour becomes particularly evident when expectation–disconfirmation occurs. As discussed previously, tourists may experience disappointment when actual experiences fail to correspond to expectations formed through social media and other digital representations. In such instances of negative disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980), tourists may translate their dissatisfaction into negative public reviews and ratings, thereby intensifying the emotional demands placed upon tourist guides. Furthermore, Pourfakhimi et al. (2020) suggest that eWOM influences not only tourists’ pre-purchase decisions but also post-consumption evaluations and communication behaviours. Similarly, Reyes-Menendez et al. (2020) note that tourists increasingly use digital platforms to express satisfaction, dissatisfaction, recommendations, and complaints regarding tourism experiences. Consequently, negative emotional reactions resulting from expectation–disconfirmation may subsequently be translated into public reviews, ratings, and online complaints that remain visible to future consumers.

Finally, the framework proposes outcomes at both the guide and tourist levels. For guides, emotional labour may influence emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion, burnout, and professional sustainability. For tourists, effective emotional management may contribute to satisfaction, trust, experience quality, loyalty, and positive eWOM. Accordingly, the model highlights the interconnected relationships between digital expectation formation, expectation–disconfirmation, emotional labour, and tourism outcomes within contemporary platform-based tourism environments.

5. Discussion

The proposed framework suggests that emotional labour in tourist guiding can no longer be fully understood through traditional face-to-face service perspectives alone. While previous studies have primarily examined emotional labour as a process through which employees regulate emotions to comply with occupational or organizational expectations (Hochschild, 1983; Lee & Madera, 2019), contemporary tourism environments introduce additional sources of emotional demands. The growing influence of social media, online reviews, and digital communication platforms has transformed both the formation of tourist expectations and the conditions under which tourist guides perform emotional labour.

One of the principal contributions of the proposed framework is the integration of Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory and Emotional Labour Theory within a single explanatory model. Previous studies have examined expectation–disconfirmation primarily as a determinant of customer satisfaction

(Oliver, 1980), whereas emotional labour research has focused on the regulation of emotions within service interactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000). By combining these perspectives, the present framework suggests that tourist guides increasingly perform emotional labour in response to the emotional consequences of expectation–disconfirmation. In other words, emotional labour is not only directed toward maintaining appropriate service interactions but also toward managing tourists’ reactions when digitally constructed expectations are not fully confirmed by actual experiences.

The framework further highlights the growing importance of expectation management within contemporary tourist guiding. Previous studies have shown that technology-enhanced tourism experiences and digitally mediated destination representations play an important role in shaping tourist perceptions before travel occurs (Neuhofer et al., 2014; McLean & Barhorst, 2022). As a result, tourists frequently arrive at destinations with expectations that have been influenced by social media content, influencer marketing, and electronic word-of-mouth. When actual experiences fail to correspond to these pre-existing expectations, guides often become responsible for interpreting situations, providing contextual explanations, and maintaining positive group dynamics. This perspective extends previous discussions that describe tourist guides as co-creators and interpreters of tourism experiences (Weiler & Black, 2015).

Another important contribution of the framework is the introduction of Five-Star Rating Pressure as a digitally mediated source of emotional demands. Research on eWOM and online consumer behaviour suggests that digital reviews significantly influence destination trust, consumer decision-making, and tourism-related behavioural intentions (Abubakar et al., 2017; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2020; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020). Within platform-based tourism environments, guides are increasingly aware that tourist evaluations may be publicly communicated through ratings, reviews, and social media posts. Consequently, emotional labour is performed not only to maintain tourist satisfaction during the experience itself but also to reduce the potential reputational consequences of negative online evaluations.

The proposed framework also contributes to the emotional labour literature by emphasizing the interpersonal dimension of emotion management. Earlier emotional labour studies primarily focused on how employees regulate their own emotions (Hochschild, 1983; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). However, the present framework suggests that tourist guides simultaneously engage in the management of tourists’ emotions, particularly when dissatisfaction, frustration, or disappointment emerge following expectation–disconfirmation. This finding is consistent with Hillman’s (2023) argument that emotional engagement constitutes a fundamental component of guiding practice, while also extending existing interpretations by emphasizing the role of digitally generated expectations as a source of emotional demands.

From a practical perspective, the framework indicates that tourism organizations should recognize the growing emotional complexity of tourist guiding. As emotional demands increasingly originate from digitally amplified expectations and publicly visible evaluation systems, guides may require additional support in areas such as expectation management, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, and digital communication. Similarly, performance evaluation systems should acknowledge that online reviews and ratings do not necessarily reflect only service performance but may also be influenced by mismatches between tourist expectations and actual destination conditions.

Finally, the framework offers several opportunities for future research. Empirical studies could test the proposed relationships between social media exposure, tourist expectations, expectation–disconfirmation, emotional responses, emotional labour strategies, and tourism outcomes. Future research may also examine the extent to which Five-Star Rating Pressure intensifies emotional labour across

different tourism contexts, destinations, and platform-based service environments. Such investigations would contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital technologies continue to reshape emotional labour processes within the tourism industry.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Despite its theoretical contributions, this study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study is conceptual in nature and does not rely on empirical data. Consequently, the relationships proposed among social media exposure, elevated tourist expectations, expectation–disconfirmation, tourists’ emotional responses, emotional labour, and Five-Star Rating Pressure remain theoretical and require empirical validation. Future studies may employ quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approaches to test the proposed relationships and assess the explanatory power of the framework in different tourism contexts.

Second, the proposed framework focuses specifically on tourist guides operating within digitally mediated tourism environments. Although tourist guiding provides a particularly suitable context for examining emotional labour due to the intensive interaction between guides and tourists, the transferability of the model to other tourism professions remains uncertain. Future research could investigate whether similar processes operate among hotel employees, destination representatives, tour operators, platform-based tourism service providers, or other frontline tourism personnel.

Third, the framework assumes that social media, influencer-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth, and online reviews generally contribute to elevated tourist expectations. However, expectation formation is a complex process that may vary according to individual characteristics such as age, travel experience, cultural background, digital literacy, travel motivations, and prior destination knowledge. Future studies may therefore incorporate these variables as moderators influencing the relationship between digital antecedents and tourist expectations.

Fourth, the concept of Five-Star Rating Pressure was introduced as a novel component of digitally mediated emotional labour. Although the concept is theoretically grounded in the literature on online reviews, digital reputation, and emotional labour, its dimensions and measurement have not yet been empirically established. Future research could develop and validate measurement scales capable of assessing perceived rating pressure among tourist guides and examine how this pressure influences emotional labour strategies and occupational outcomes.

Finally, the present framework primarily addresses situations involving negative expectation–disconfirmation and the resulting emotional responses. However, tourism experiences may also generate positive disconfirmation when actual experiences exceed tourists’ expectations. Such situations may produce different emotional responses and potentially different forms of emotional labour. Future studies should therefore examine both positive and negative forms of expectation–disconfirmation in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of emotional dynamics within digitally mediated tourism environments.

Taken together, these limitations provide several opportunities for future research. By empirically testing the proposed framework across different tourism settings and cultural contexts, future studies can contribute to a deeper understanding of how digital technologies, tourist expectations, emotional labour, and platform-based evaluation systems interact to shape contemporary tourism experiences.

7. Conclusion

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the tourism landscape by reshaping how tourists search for information, construct expectations, evaluate experiences, and com-

municate their opinions. Social media platforms, influencer-generated content, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), and online review systems have become increasingly influential in shaping pre-travel perceptions and destination images. As a result, tourist expectations are now frequently formed through digitally mediated representations that may differ substantially from the realities encountered during actual tourism experiences.

This study developed a conceptual framework that integrates Expectation–Disconfirmation Theory and Emotional Labour Theory to explain how digitally constructed expectations create new emotional demands for tourist guides. The proposed model suggests that social media exposure, eWOM, and online reviews contribute to elevated tourist expectations, which may increase the likelihood of expectation–disconfirmation during the travel experience. When such discrepancies occur, tourists may experience negative emotional responses, including disappointment, frustration, dissatisfaction, and complaint behaviour. Consequently, tourist guides are increasingly required to engage in emotional labour to manage these reactions and preserve the overall tourism experience.

A key contribution of this study is the repositioning of tourist guides as intermediaries between digitally constructed tourism imaginaries and lived tourism realities. The framework argues that contemporary guides are no longer responsible solely for information provision and experience facilitation. Rather, they increasingly function as expectation managers and emotion managers who help tourists interpret experiences, cope with unmet expectations, and maintain positive perceptions of destinations. This perspective extends existing emotional labour literature by emphasizing that guides regulate not only their own emotions but also the emotional consequences of expectation–disconfirmation experienced by tourists.

The study further contributes to the literature by introducing the concept of Five-Star Rating Pressure as an additional source of emotional demands within platform-based tourism environments. In an era characterized by online reviews, public rating systems, and digital reputation mechanisms, guides operate under conditions of continuous visibility and evaluation. Emotional labour is therefore performed not only to enhance tourists' immediate experiences but also to minimize potential reputational consequences associated with negative online feedback. This finding highlights the growing importance of digital evaluation systems in shaping the professional realities of tourist guides.

From a practical standpoint, the framework suggests that tourism organizations should acknowledge the increasing emotional complexity of tourist guiding in digitally mediated environments. Training initiatives focusing on expectation management, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and digital communication competencies may help guides respond more effectively to the challenges associated with elevated tourist expectations and online evaluation systems. Moreover, tourism stakeholders should recognize that online ratings may reflect not only service quality but also the extent to which tourists' digitally constructed expectations correspond with actual experiences.

Ultimately, this study argues that emotional labour in tourist guiding should be understood as a digitally mediated process shaped by social media, expectation–disconfirmation, tourist emotions, and platform-based evaluation systems. As tourism continues to evolve within increasingly connected digital ecosystems, the long-term sustainability of tourist guiding will depend not only on the ability to deliver memorable experiences but also on the capacity to manage expectations, emotions, and digital reputations simultaneously.

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Global Research Trends in E-Service Quality: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract

Recent advances in digital technologies and the widespread adoption of the internet have transformed numerous industries, particularly the retail sector. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated consumers' adoption of online shopping, and the persistence of this behavior in the post-pandemic period has encouraged businesses to place greater emphasis on e-commerce. Consequently, competition within the e-commerce industry has intensified, prompting firms to enhance their e-service quality to better meet customer expectations and gain a competitive advantage. As e-service quality has been closely associated with customer satisfaction, loyalty, repurchase intention, and organizational performance, it has attracted increasing attention from both practitioners and scholars, resulting in a growing body of academic research. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the development, major research trends, and intellectual structure of the e-service quality literature through bibliometric analysis. The dataset was retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection on June 23, 2026, using the keyword "e-service quality," resulting in a total of 766 publications. Bibliometric analyses were conducted using VOSviewer to evaluate publication performance, leading countries, institutions, authors, keywords, co-authorship networks, and co-citation relationships. The findings reveal a substantial increase in publications on e-service quality, particularly in recent years, with journal articles constituting the predominant publication type. India, the United States, and China are the leading contributors to the literature, while Emerald Group Publishing, Elsevier, and Taylor & Francis are the most prominent publishers in the field. Keyword co-occurrence analysis demonstrates that "e-service quality" occupies the central position within the research network and is strongly associated with concepts such as customer satisfaction, service quality, trust, loyalty, e-satisfaction, and perceived value. Co-authorship analysis indicates that scholarly collaboration is concentrated among specific research groups, whereas co-citation analysis identifies Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Wolfinbarger, and Fornell as the most influential authors forming the intellectual foundation of the field. Overall, the findings suggest that the e-service quality literature has developed into an interdisciplinary and internationally connected research domain and continues to evolve through customer-centered perspectives and emerging digital service paradigms.

Keywords: E-Service Quality, Bibliometric Analysis, Vosviewer, Co-Citation Analysis, Customer Satisfaction.

How Digital-Twin Framing of Human-Grounded AI Influencers Enhances Fintech Communication Legitimacy

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Abstract

AI-powered virtual influencers are increasingly used by financial technology (fintech) firms to communicate with consumers, yet prior research has largely treated them as a single category and focused on outcomes such as trust, authenticity, and purchase intention. Less attention has been given to how the framing of AI influencers shapes consumers' perceptions of the legitimacy of AI-supported financial communication. This issue is particularly important in fintech, where transparency, ethical appropriateness, and legitimacy are essential.

This research examines whether presenting an AI financial influencer as the digital twin of a real financial advisor, that is, human-grounded framing, rather than as a fully AI-generated character, influences consumers' evaluations of AI communication. We argue that consumers respond not only to how humanlike an AI appears but also to whether it is explicitly connected to an identifiable person. Accordingly, we introduce human grounding as a distinct design dimension of AI influencers that differs conceptually from anthropomorphism and human likeness.

Drawing on the Persuasion Knowledge Model and Narrative Transportation Theory, we propose that human-grounded framing enhances perceived legitimacy through two complementary psychological mechanisms. First, through an inferential route, human-grounded framing increases perceived AI disclosure transparency, reducing consumers' activation of persuasion knowledge and their inferences of manipulative intent. Second, through an experiential route, human-grounded framing strengthens narrative transportation, allowing consumers to become more immersed in the advertising narrative and less resistant to persuasion. Following Suchman, legitimacy is defined as consumers' perception that a firm's use of AI is appropriate, proper, and consistent with the norms and expectations of financial services.

We further propose that the effectiveness of human-grounded framing depends on financial decision stakes. Specifically, its positive effect on perceived legitimacy should be stronger in high-stakes than in low-stakes financial decisions, because consumers place greater value on communication linked to an identifiable human source when potential consequences are more significant.

These predictions are tested through three between-subjects experiments with participants from the United Kingdom recruited via an online panel. In all studies, participants evaluate an advertisement for a fictitious robo-advisory application featuring an AI influencer, while the advertising content remains constant and only the framing of the influencer varies. Study 1 examines the direct effect of

human-grounded framing on perceived legitimacy. Study 2 tests the proposed parallel mediation through perceived AI disclosure transparency and narrative transportation. Study 3 investigates financial decision stakes as a moderator and examines the resulting conditional indirect effects.

This research makes three theoretical contributions. First, it introduces human grounding as a novel design dimension of AI influencers, extending existing research beyond appearance-based characteristics such as anthropomorphism and realism. Second, it demonstrates that legitimacy is shaped through both inferential and experiential processes, showing that disclosure transparency and narrative transportation jointly explain consumers' evaluations of AI-supported financial communication. Third, it reconceptualizes legitimacy as a consumer-level evaluation of a specific AI communication practice and identifies financial decision stakes as an important boundary condition. For fintech managers, the findings suggest that explicitly grounding AI influencers in identifiable human advisors, rather than relying solely on realistic or anthropomorphic AI, can strengthen perceptions of legitimate AI communication, particularly in high-stakes financial contexts where accountability, authenticity, and trustworthiness are especially valued.

Keywords: Human Grounding; Digital-Twin Framing; AI Disclosure Transparency; Narrative Transportation; Perceived Legitimacy

Connecting AI Disclosure Sources to Attitude toward Brand: The Roles of Perceived Transparency and Perceived Authenticity

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence Generated Content (AIGC) has become widely spread and dominant all across digital media platforms and social media marketing prompting a noticeable increase in regulations and requirements for AI disclosures. Prior research has extensively examined whether AI disclosure is present or absent, little attention has been given to an important yet underexplored aspect: the source of the disclosure itself. In practice, AI disclosures may originate either from automated platform generated labels or from voluntary creator authored statements. Understanding how these different disclosure sources influence consumer perceptions is important for both marketing theory and managerial practice, particularly as brands seek to balance transparency requirements with maintaining positive consumer attitudes.

This study aims to examine how AI disclosure source influences consumers' attitude toward a brand through the sequential mechanisms of perceived transparency and perceived authenticity. Specifically, the study compares platform mandated disclosures with creator led disclosures and investigates whether transparency and authenticity jointly explain their effects on brand evaluations.

Drawing on the conceptual framework from Montecchi et al. (2024) on perceived brand transparency and the perceived brand authenticity scale from Napoli et al. (2014), this research proposes and tests a sequential mediation model in which the source of AI disclosure influences perceived transparency which then influences perceived authenticity ultimately shaping attitude toward brand.

A quantitative experimental approach was employed using a 2×1 between-subjects online experiment. Data were collected from 200 participants recruited through the Prolific platform and randomly assigned to either a platform disclosure condition or a creator disclosure condition. Perceived transparency, perceived authenticity, and attitude toward brand were measured using validated scales

The findings indicate that creator led AI disclosure significantly increases perceived transparency and perceived authenticity compared with platform mandated disclosure. Perceived transparency positively predicts perceived authenticity, while perceived authenticity strongly influences attitude toward brand. The results further confirm a significant serial mediation pathway in which creator led disclosure enhances transparency, which subsequently strengthens authenticity perceptions and ultimately improves brand attitudes. The direct effect of disclosure source on brand attitude becomes non-significant when the mediators are included, indicating full mediation.

This research contributes to the emerging literature on AI-generated content by introducing disclosure source as a distinct and influential factor in AI disclosure effectiveness. The study extends the Stim-

ulus–Organism–Response framework by demonstrating a sequential transparency authenticity mechanism and provides practical guidance for brands, content creators, and platform designers regarding effective AI disclosure strategies in digital marketing environments.

Keywords: AI Disclosure, AI-Generated Content, Perceived Transparency, Perceived Authenticity, And Brand Attitude.

A Systematic Analysis of AI-Generated Content Regarding Sustainable Service Marketing from the Consumer Perspective

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Abstract

The scope of Content Created using Generative Artificial Intelligence (AIGC) techniques has expanded and become increasingly significant. In particular, large-scale models are favoured for content generation. The use of AI-generated content is also becoming widespread in marketing. This is because the content provided by AIGC not only creates new opportunities in digital marketing but also positively influences personalisation and the user experience. This study aims to examine the impact of content generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI) on consumer behaviour in sustainable service marketing. A systematic review based on a literature search methodology was adopted for the research. Following the PRISMA (Systematic Review Protocol), examined academic articles in the field of business published between 2020 and 2025 in the Web of Science database. The content of 82 high-quality articles, selected according to the criteria defined in the search (published in peer-reviewed journals indexed in Web of Science, written in English, articles published between 2020-2025, quantitative/qualitative or theoretical studies, open access provided), was examined thematically. The findings from the review present opportunities for marketers to promote the sustainable consumption of AI-generated content. The experience of AI-supported services acquired by consumers influences sustainable consumption, consumer attitudes and purchase intentions through consumers' psychological perception mechanisms. At the same time, this process also involves certain challenges. Uncertainty regarding AI-generated content is fuelling consumer scepticism and eroding consumer trust. These effects are leading to changes in consumers' environmental awareness and attitudes towards AI technologies. This study systematically maps the psychological mechanisms underlying the dynamics between artificial intelligence, sustainability and consumers; identifies research gaps and offers practitioners recommendations regarding the process of integrating sustainable service marketing strategies with artificial intelligence technologies.

Keywords: AI-Generated Content (AIGC), Sustainable Service Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, PRISMA, Circular Economy

Legitimization of Post-Ownership Consumption in Circular Platforms: A Service Ecosystems Perspective

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Abstract

Circular economy is a significant sustainability approach that offers an alternative to the linear consumption model by extending the lifespan of products, materials, and resources. However, the success of circular business models cannot be explained solely by technical infrastructure, recycling systems, or environmental performance. The widespread adoption of these models depends on consumers moving away from traditional ownership concepts and accepting reused, refurbished, repaired, or rented products as legitimate, reliable, and preferable consumption options. Therefore, this study examines how circular economy platforms and brand-based circular programs legitimize post-ownership consumption through discursive mechanisms from the perspective of service ecosystems. The main argument of the research is that circular consumption is made acceptable to consumers not only through the discourse of environmental benefits but also through economic value, trust, risk reduction, ease of use, and experience-oriented service offerings.

The research was conducted using a qualitative research approach with thematic document analysis. The dataset consists of the corporate websites, sustainability reports, quality and warranty policies, customer value propositions, and service descriptions of Back Market, Patagonia Worn Wear, IKEA's second-hand and buyback services, and Rent the Runway platforms. The analysis process followed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach; first, recurring discourse patterns were identified using open coding, and then these codes were grouped under themes. The resulting themes were interpreted within the framework of Service-Dominant Logic, encompassing resource integration, value-in-use, value-in-context, and service ecosystems, as well as Suchman's approach to institutional legitimacy.

The analysis revealed that circular platforms legitimize post-ownership consumption through five fundamental mechanisms: moral circularity, economic rationalization, risk neutralization, effortless access, and the redefinition of ownership through use and performance value. These mechanisms are not independent of each other but operate within a complementary service system. By supporting the discourse of sustainability with elements such as economic advantage, quality assurance, guarantees, digital convenience, transparency, and customer experience, the platforms reduce perceived risks for consumers and prioritize use value over ownership. Thus, circular consumption is reframed not as a behavior requiring sacrifice, but as a rational, reliable, accessible, and socially accepted service experience.

This study offers three fundamental contributions to the circular economy literature. First, it conceptualizes circular platforms not merely as sustainability practices, but as service ecosystems that reshape consumption norms. Second, it proposes a unique theoretical framework explaining the adop-

tion of post-ownership consumption by integrating Service Dominant Logic with institutional legitimacy theory. Finally, it transcends the limitations of access-based consumption, addressing post-ownership consumption within a broader conceptual framework encompassing various circular service models. The research findings demonstrate that the success of sustainability-focused platforms depends not only on the discourse of environmental benefit, but also on holistic service designs that inspire confidence in consumers, offer economic value, and facilitate the user experience. In this respect, the study offers significant implications for both the service marketing literature and management practices in the circular economy.

Keywords: Circular Economy; Post-Ownership Consumption; Service Ecosystems; Legitimization; Document Analysis

The Attention Advantage: Why Short-Form Influencer Content Generates Stronger Consumer Engagement

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Abstract

Social media content can be determined by various disclosures and algorithmically customized according to previous user activity nowadays. The posts might be paid, earned, shared, or owned, though it is possible that earned and shared brand content would not elicit the same amount of persuasion knowledge as paid and owned content. In addition, compared to traditional media channels, in social media consumers determine the duration of exposure to the advertisements, ranging from minutes, seconds, or even nanoseconds. There is limited research on how consumers process social media advertisements and whether using social media itself creates cognitive load in literature. If social media use requires little mental effort, consumers will have sufficient cognitive resources to pay attention to and evaluate advertisements. However, if social media use demands mental effort, consumers may experience depleted cognitive resources, reducing their ability to process advertisements effectively.

Drawing on Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) and the Limited Capacity Model of information processing, this study seeks to analyze the impact of influencer video content length on consumers' cognitive processes and engagement intentions in the social media context. CLT and limited capacity models postulate that people have a limited pool of cognitive resources and the amount and nature of information presented affects the allocation of these resources. In social media spaces, people are constantly surrounded by large amounts of information fighting for their attention. The short video content provides brief and comprehensible information whereas the long video content requires greater attention, processing, and cognitive efforts from the viewers. Due to this reason, different video content sizes may generate different levels of cognitive load among consumers. Moreover, the relationship between the content length and cognitive load may be moderated by consumers' level of narrative involvement since more involved consumers allocate more cognitive resources for the processing of information than less involved individuals.

This study employs a between-subjects scenario-based experimental design. Participants recruited from the United Kingdom will be randomly assigned to either a short-form or long-form influencer content condition. Following exposure to the experimental stimulus, respondents will complete validated measurement scales assessing cognitive load, narrative involvement, and continued engage-

ment intention. The hypothesized relationships will be tested using Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 7 to assess the moderated mediation effects.

It is anticipated that the results will contribute to the literature on social media marketing, influencer communication, and consumer information processing through the application of Cognitive Load Theory to short-form and long-form influencer content. In this regard, the paper will add insights into the way in which the influence of content length on cognitive load and engagement intentions is moderated by narrative involvement. From a practical point of view, the results of the research will be useful for the development of communication strategies for service providers in increasingly competitive social media settings. Through the identification of the factors that make influencer content effective, the paper will contribute to the design of content which facilitates customer engagement and builds customer relationships as well as the effective communication of digital services.

Keywords: Social Media, Influencer Content, Narrative Involvement, Cognitive Load, Continued Engagement Intention

The Effect of Brand Authenticity on Brand Loyalty: The Serial Mediating Role of Risk Aversion, Discipline, and Brand Trust

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Abstract

In increasingly competitive and saturated markets, consumers evaluate brands not only on functional attributes but also on intangible and relational qualities such as honesty, consistency, sincerity, and reliability. This shift is particularly pronounced in service-dominant and high-involvement consumption contexts, where perceived risk and uncertainty are elevated due to the intangible, inseparable, heterogeneous, and perishable nature of services. In such environments, consumers tend to rely more heavily on trust-based heuristics, positioning brand authenticity as a critical mechanism for reducing perceived risk and uncertainty. From a service marketing perspective, perceived risk, uncertainty, and trust are central determinants of consumer evaluations. Brand authenticity can therefore be conceptualized as a risk-reducing signal that lowers uncertainty and strengthens trust formation. While prior research has examined the direct link between brand authenticity and loyalty, the underlying psychological mechanisms remain insufficiently explored, particularly in service-oriented contexts. To address this gap, the present study examines how perceived brand authenticity translates into brand loyalty through a sequential psychological process involving uncertainty avoidance, discipline, and brand trust. The proposed model is grounded in the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S-O-R) framework, signaling theory, and commitment–trust theory. Within this framework, brand authenticity is treated as an external stimulus that shapes internal cognitive and emotional states, which in turn drive behavioral outcomes. Specifically, authentic brands are proposed to reduce perceived uncertainty, foster disciplined and self-regulated consumption behavior, enhance brand trust, and ultimately increase brand loyalty. This sequential structure aligns with relationship marketing theory, which emphasizes trust and commitment as key drivers of long-term relational outcomes. Additionally, signaling theory suggests that authenticity serves as a credible signal that reduces perceptions of opportunism and increases reliability judgments. A quantitative research design was employed. Data were collected through an online survey administered to private security officers aged 18 and above in Turkey, with the automobile sector selected as a high-involvement consumption context characterized by intensive risk evaluation and information processing. The final sample consisted of 467 respondents. Data were analyzed using confirmatory

factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) with maximum likelihood estimation. Indirect effects were tested via bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Results indicated that the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The structural model supported all hypothesized relationships. Perceived brand authenticity positively influenced both uncertainty avoidance and brand loyalty. Uncertainty avoidance positively affected discipline, which in turn enhanced brand trust. Brand trust significantly increased brand loyalty. The serial mediation effect of uncertainty avoidance, discipline, and brand trust between brand authenticity and brand loyalty was also confirmed, indicating a partial sequential mediation. However, the direct effect of brand authenticity on loyalty remained stronger than the indirect pathways. Overall, the study contributes to marketing and service marketing literature by explaining the authenticity–loyalty relationship through a multi-stage psychological mechanism integrating risk perception, self-regulation, and trust formation. It further demonstrates that in high-risk, service-dominant contexts, brand authenticity functions not only as a relational driver but also as a cognitive and behavioral risk-reduction mechanism that strengthens long-term loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Authenticity; Brand Loyalty; Risk Aversion; Discipline; Brand Trust; Serial Mediation; Structural Equation Modeling.

How Humanoid AI Service Robots Foster Value Co-Creation: Evidence from a Scenario-Based Study in Hairdressing Services

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Abstract

Rooted in service-dominant logic, value co-creation (VCC) conceptualizes customers not as passive recipients of value but as active participants who contribute to meaningful service experiences. VCC is particularly important in service contexts because service outcomes are inherently shaped by interactions between providers and customers. Compared with goods, services are more interactional, experiential, and relational; therefore, value depends on both what the provider offers and how customers communicate their needs, interpret the encounter, and participate in the process. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have transformed how VCC occurs in service settings. Rather than simply replacing human employees, AI increasingly acts as a collaborative partner, enabling intelligent and personalized interactions that enhance customer participation, service efficiency, and experience quality. Among AI-enabled service technologies, humanoid AI service robots are emerging as operant resources that facilitate VCC by encouraging customer participation. However, the effectiveness of such interactions depends on customers' perceptions. In particular, perceived anthropomorphism may influence customers' willingness to collaborate with the technology and engage in VCC. Despite growing research on anthropomorphic AI, little is known about whether and through which mechanisms perceived anthropomorphism enhances willingness to engage in VCC with humanoid AI service robots. Accordingly, this study aims to examine the mediating and moderating mechanisms underlying the relationship between perceived anthropomorphism of humanoid AI service robots and customers' willingness to engage in VCC. Specifically, it investigates the mediating roles of perceived competence, service customization, and customer trust, while examining the moderating role of perceived risk.

Using a scenario-based structured questionnaire, data were collected from 102 female participants, recruited through an online panel platform. Participants were exposed to a hairdressing service scenario presented through a written description and a visual stimulus. The proposed model was tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling. The findings demonstrate that perceived anthropomorphism positively influences perceived competence ($\beta=0.519$, $t=5.697$, $p<0.001$) and service customization ($\beta=0.677$, $t=13.434$, $p<0.001$). In turn, perceived competence ($\beta=0.436$, $t=5.066$, $p<0.001$) and service customization ($\beta=0.384$, $t=4.243$, $p<0.001$) positively influence trust, which positively affects customers' willingness to engage in VCC ($\beta=0.571$, $t=7.447$, $p<0.001$). The indirect effects support the proposed mediation mechanisms, showing that perceived anthropomorphism is indirectly related to willingness to engage in VCC through perceived competence and trust ($\beta=0.129$,

$t=3.606, p<0.001$) and through service customization and trust ($\beta=0.148, t=2.888, p=0.004$). Moreover, perceived risk positively moderates the relationship between perceived anthropomorphism and perceived competence ($\beta=0.172, t=2.230, p=0.026$), indicating that customers rely more on the robot's perceived human-likeness when evaluating its competence in higher-risk service encounters. This study contributes to AI-enabled VCC literature by uncovering how perceived anthropomorphism leads to willingness to co-create value through competence, customization, and trust. Further, it identifies perceived risk as a boundary condition, showing that anthropomorphism becomes more influential in shaping competence perceptions under higher-risk service situations. Finally, by examining humanoid AI service robots in a high-contact hairdressing service context, the study extends AI-enabled VCC research beyond technology-oriented service settings to personalized services requiring close customer interaction.

Keywords: Humanoid AI Service Robots; Value Co-Creation; Perceived Anthropomorphism; Service Customization; Perceived Competence; Customer Trust; Perceived Risk

Beyond Personal Safety: The Effects of Self- and Other-Oriented Safety Perceptions on Intention to Use E-Scooters Through Functional and Hedonic Benefits

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Abstract

The rapid growth of the sharing economy has transformed the way consumers access goods and services by replacing ownership with temporary access. Within this transformation, shared micromobility services, particularly e-scooter systems, have become an important solution for sustainable urban transportation by reducing traffic congestion, lowering carbon emissions, and improving first- and last-mile connectivity. Despite these advantages, the widespread use of e-scooter services remains constrained by persistent safety concerns. While previous research has primarily focused on users' concerns regarding their own safety, less attention has been paid to consumers' perceptions of the potential risks that e-scooters pose to pedestrians and other members of society. Accordingly, this study investigates how self-oriented and other-oriented safety perceptions influence consumers' intention to use e-scooter services through perceived functional and hedonic benefits. Drawing on the theory of consumption values, this study argues that consumers' intention to use e-scooter services is shaped by the functional and hedonic benefits they associate with this mode of transportation. In this framework, self-oriented and other-oriented safety perceptions are positioned as key antecedents that enhance perceived functional and hedonic benefits, which in turn affect intention to use.

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to potential e-scooter users [N=483]. Measurement scales adapted from prior studies were employed to measure all constructs. The proposed model was tested using partial least squares structural equation modelling with SmartPLS 4. Reliability and validity assessments confirmed satisfactory psychometric properties of the measurement model. The findings show that self-oriented safety perception [$\beta=0.241$, $t=4.790$, $p<0.001$] and other-oriented safety perception [$\beta=0.127$, $t=2.332$, $p=0.020$] positively influence functional benefit. Similarly, self-oriented safety perception [$\beta=0.206$, $t=4.115$, $p<0.001$] and other-oriented safety perception [$\beta=0.121$, $t=2.413$, $p=0.016$] positively influence hedonic benefit. In turn, functional benefit [$\beta=0.215$, $t=4.831$, $p<0.001$] and hedonic benefit [$\beta=0.343$, $t=7.678$, $p<0.001$] significantly and positively affect intention to use. Mediation analysis further indicates that self-oriented safety perception has significant indirect effects on intention to use through functional benefit [$\beta=0.052$, $t=3.133$, $p=0.002$] and hedonic benefit [$\beta=0.071$, $t=3.513$, $p<0.001$]. Other-oriented safety perception also has significant indirect effects on intention to use through functional benefit [$\beta=0.027$, $t=2.025$, $p=0.043$] and hedonic benefit [$\beta=0.041$, $t=2.241$, $p=0.025$]. Furthermore, hedonic benefit demonstrates a stronger impact on intention to use than functional benefit, suggesting that consumers' intention to use is shaped more strongly by the enjoyment and pleasure associated with e-scooter use than by purely utilitarian considerations. This study contributes to the shared micromobility literature

by examining safety perceptions from two perspectives: safety for oneself and safety for others. By integrating functional and hedonic benefits into the model, the study provides a clearer understanding of how safety perceptions are associated with consumers' intention to use. The findings offer practical implications for e-scooter operators and urban policymakers. Investments in rider safety, pedestrian protection, dedicated infrastructure, and communication strategies emphasizing both individual and public safety can improve consumers' perceived benefits and strengthen their intention to use e-scooter services. These insights contribute to the development of safer and more socially accepted shared micromobility systems that support sustainable urban transportation.

Keywords: E-Scooter Services; Self-Oriented Safety Perception; Other-Oriented Safety Perception; Functional Benefits; Hedonic Benefits; Intention To Use

A Scenario-Based AI-Driven Intelligent Transport Systems Framework for Smart Mobility in Data-Constrained Urban Environments: The Case of Tbilisi

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Abstract

Rapid urbanization, increasing travel demand, and traffic congestion have become major challenges for cities worldwide, requiring more intelligent and data-driven approaches to mobility management. Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS), real-time traffic monitoring, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies are increasingly recognized as key enablers of smart and sustainable urban mobility. However, many cities, particularly in developing and transition economies, still face challenges related to fragmented data infrastructures, limited integration of intelligent transport technologies, and the absence of comprehensive frameworks for AI-driven mobility management.

This study proposes an AI-Based Smart Mobility Framework for urban transportation planning and management, using Tbilisi, Georgia, as a case study. The research aims to identify the essential technological, organizational, and data-related components required for the implementation of intelligent mobility solutions and to provide a structured framework that can support future AI-enabled transportation systems. The study adopts a conceptual research approach based on the analysis of Intelligent Transportation Systems, smart city initiatives, urban mobility practices, strategic planning documents, and publicly available transportation information.

The proposed framework integrates several interconnected layers, including transportation infrastructure, sensing and data collection systems, traffic data management, advanced analytics, artificial intelligence, decision-support mechanisms, and performance evaluation. Particular attention is given to the role of real-time traffic monitoring, predictive analytics, adaptive traffic signal control, and data-driven decision-making processes. The framework also considers governance, policy, and strategic planning dimensions necessary for successful implementation within a smart city environment.

The findings highlight that the successful adoption of AI-driven mobility solutions depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on the availability of high-quality transportation data, institutional coordination, interoperability of systems, and long-term strategic planning. The study further identifies opportunities for integrating predictive models, machine learning techniques, and intelli-

gent traffic management approaches to improve traffic efficiency, reduce congestion, enhance service quality, and support sustainable urban development.

The proposed framework contributes to the growing body of knowledge on Smart Mobility and Intelligent Transportation Systems by offering a structured and adaptable model that can support policymakers, city authorities, researchers, and urban planners in designing future AI-enabled transportation ecosystems. While the framework is developed using the context of Tbilisi, its conceptual structure may be adapted and applied to other cities pursuing smart mobility and digital transformation initiatives.

Keywords: Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS); Smart Mobility; Artificial Intelligence (AI); Data-Constrained Cities; Urban Mobility Planning; Scenario-Based Evaluation; Smart Cities;

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The Impact of Perceived Exclusion Created by Prestigious Brands Among Low-Income Consumers on Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Brand Belonging and the Moderating Role of Brand Presence

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of perceived exclusion among low-income consumers, caused by prestigious and high-priced brands, on brand loyalty. The fundamental starting point of the research is that brands are not only economic but also symbolic structures that provide social identity and belonging. In this context, some consumers may experience a feeling of psychological exclusion by perceiving prestigious brands as distant and inaccessible. In the study, brand loyalty is addressed in its behavioral and attitudinal dimensions, and the role of psychological factors in the formation of this loyalty is discussed. The theoretical framework of the research is based on Social Identity Theory and Need for Belonging Theory. The model suggests that perceived exclusion indirectly affects brand loyalty by reducing brand belonging. It is also assumed that brand belonging plays a mediating role in this relationship and that brand prevalence functions as a moderating variable in this effect. The research is designed using a quantitative method, and both experimental scenario and survey techniques will be used in the data collection process. The data obtained will be tested with reliability analysis, factor analysis, correlation, regression, mediation and moderation analyses. The study is expected to contribute to the literature by explaining brand loyalty not only through positive consumer experiences but also through exclusion-based psychological processes.

Keywords: Brand Loyalty

Wellbeing in Personal Service Work: The Impact of Occupational Stigma on Hair and Beauty Employees

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Abstract

Hair and beauty work represents an integral component of the service industry, providing not only aesthetic services but also significant emotional and wellbeing support for clients (Page, Chur-Hansen, and Delfabbro, 2024; Dutta, 2024). Despite this positive contribution, hair and beauty occupations are frequently devalued, belittled and perceived as inferior relative to other occupations (Baden, Horton, and Peel, 2024). The occupation is often viewed as a fallback career rather than a primary occupational aspiration, yet despite the high level of technical skill, emotional labour, and creativity required, these contributions are rarely recognised (Harness, 2022). Consequently, employees are exposed to numerous stereotypes that undermine their intelligence, occupational ambitions, and occupational legitimacy. Furthermore, the feminised nature of the occupation reinforces its low social status (Harness, 2022), contributing to the broader societal patterns surrounding the undervaluation of women's labour.

While hairdressers and beauticians are often subjected to social judgement and lack of professional legitimacy, the effects of occupational stigma and stereotypes on hair and beauty employees' self-esteem, occupational identity, and wellbeing remain largely underexplored, highlighting the need for further research within the hair and beauty sector. These services are not purely transactional, as salons function as emotional, social and leisure spaces for customers that are co-created through employees' affective labour under conditions of inequality. Such spaces can be disrupted when employees experience disaffection (Dutta, 2024). Consistent with transformative service research, this study acknowledges that improving societal wellbeing within service systems depends not only on service recipients, but also on the wellbeing and social recognition of the service providers, who are central to the delivery of service experiences. By exploring the intersection of gendered labour, occupational stigma, and occupational identity, this research aims to advance the understanding of the undervaluation of feminised service labour, a phenomenon rarely addressed in this occupation. In doing so, the study seeks to extend an understanding of the implications of occupational stigma, improve recognition of hair and beauty employees, and contribute to positive social change within service work.

This research employs a triangulated mixed-methods approach to capture employees' lived experiences of occupational stigma, broader societal perceptions of the occupation, and social media portrayals of the occupation. Semi-structured interviews with hairdressers and beauticians explore their occupational experiences in the presence of stigma and how it shapes their occupational self-esteem, identity, and wellbeing. Additionally, content analysis will examine how the occupation is portrayed across TikTok, and whether these portrayals contribute to negative perceptions. Online questionnaires will further capture perceptions of hair and beauty occupations among individuals employed in other service trades and traditional professions.

Keywords: Occupational Stigma, Service Work, Hair And Beauty Industry, Workplace Wellbeing

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Strengthening Agritourism Resilience Through Mediation

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Abstract

Agritourism is a key strategy for rural diversification, providing farmers with an additional source of income while creating opportunities for visitors to engage directly with farming practices and local cultural traditions. However, agritourism service systems operate in an increasingly volatile environment, characterised by climate change, economic challenges, changing consumer expectations, and competing stakeholder interests. These factors highlight the need for resilient service systems that can adapt to change, recover effectively from crises, and enhance long-term community well-being. Against this backdrop, mediation can play a pivotal role in strengthening resilience within agritourism service systems by facilitating collaboration, managing conflicts, and supporting collective adaptation among stakeholders.

This presentation critically assesses the role of mediation in fostering resilience across agritourism service systems. Agritourism depends on the collaboration of multiple stakeholders including, farmers, tourists and tour operators, local communities, government agencies, and environmental groups. While stakeholders may share common objectives, priorities differ, which may result in conflict relating to land use, resource allocation, visitor behaviour, cultural preservation, environmental management, and development objectives. Conflicts that are not effectively managed can negatively affect co-operation between stakeholders, compromise the provision of services, and weaken the capacity of agritourism service systems to competently respond to disruptions.

Consequently, examining the extent to which mediation as a process facilitates communication, mutual understanding and collaborative problem solving, and as a facilitative framework for supporting trust development, rapport, and information sharing, as distinct from a dispute resolution mechanism is pertinent. Mediation provides a platform for inclusive dialogue and collaborative decision-making, allowing stakeholders to align interests, negotiate practical solutions, and mobilise coordinated action in response to evolving challenges. In addition, exploring how mediation strengthens shareholder communication and encourages collaboration in adapting to changing conditions is also relevant. By reducing the negative impact of conflict and promoting collaborative action, mediation can improve the overall sustainability and competitiveness of agritourism. Through the fostering of social cohesion, the strengthening of local networks and the promotion of inclusive participation in tourism development, mediation is instrumental in enhancing human well-being and community resilience.

By integrating mediation into agritourism planning and management, this study proposes that mediation may provide a practical means of enhancing adaptability, by supporting stakeholder well-being, and promoting the long-term sustainability of rural tourism. In enabling effective responses to

disruptions and fostering long-term social and economic capacity, mediation reinforces the continuity, recovery, and well-being outcomes of agritourism service systems.

Keywords: Agritourism, Mediation, Service Systems, Stakeholder Engagement, Resilience, Community Well-Being.

The Impact of AI Interaction Strategies on Customer Autonomy in the Service Sector

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of different artificial intelligence (AI)-based chatbot interaction strategies (reactive, transparent proactive, and non-transparent proactive) on consumers' willingness to follow recommendations in smart hospitality services. To elucidate how AI interaction strategies shape consumer behavior through perceived usefulness and perceived loss of autonomy, it applies the Technology Paradoxes Perspective.

AI systems are evolving from command-based passive tools into autonomous entities anticipating user needs. Traditional acceptance models assume perceived usefulness directly and positively relates to adoption. However, recent researchs indicate that proactive, unsolicited recommendations can weaken customers' perceived competence, causing recommendation rejection. Although explainable AI (XAI) approaches are suggested to mitigate this loss of autonomy, recent studies argue excessive transparency increases cognitive load, triggering metacognitive evaluations that deepen autonomy loss. These contradictory findings regarding the effects of transparency highlight a critical gap.

While current research predominantly focuses on whether AI is proactive, how this proactivity is presented (transparent or non-transparent) is overlooked. Addressing this gap, our study frames the process within the Technology Paradoxes Theory, focusing on the "Efficiency vs. Agency" tension.

According to this paradox, proactive AI encourages compliance by increasing perceived usefulness (efficiency), while simultaneously undermining compliance by creating a perceived loss of autonomy (agency). The main purpose is to examine AI transparency's role in this paradoxical relationship.

Consistent with the Technology Paradoxes, the proposed model hypothesizes that AI interaction styles simultaneously affect perceived usefulness and perceived loss of autonomy. These parallel mechanisms ultimately shape consumers' willingness to follow recommendations. Additionally, consumers' desire for control acts as a fundamental moderating variable that governs this parallel process, determining how AI interaction strategies translate into consumer behavior.

To test the hypotheses, a two-stage experimental study will be conducted involving an AI chatbot providing digital dining recommendations in a smart hotel. Study 1 employs a two-condition (reactive vs. proactive) between-subjects design to examine the effects of AI interaction style on perceived usefulness, perceived loss of autonomy, and willingness to follow recommendations. Study 2 addresses only proactive interactions using a two-condition (transparent vs. non-transparent) between-subjects design to compare presentation formats on the same variables. In each study, participants

will be randomly assigned to experimental conditions. Data will be collected via online survey panels using validated scales, including attention and manipulation checks for methodological validity.

Theoretically extending the Technology Paradoxes perspective, this study reveals that both AI initiative and its presentation format (transparency level) are critical factors determining user responses. Thus, it challenges the prevailing assumption that transparency universally fosters trust. Practically, the study provides strategic recommendations to the hospitality sector on balancing proactivity and transparency in AI systems, offering guidance for designs that mitigate negative customer reactions.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Proactivity, Transparency, Loss of Autonomy, Technology Paradoxes

The Effect of AI-Generated Advertising Disclosure on Consumer Attitude

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Abstract

With generative AI increasingly used in advertising content, regulators have begun mandating disclosure labels for AI-generated content, raising a key question: how does disclosing an ad's AI origin affect consumer attitude? This is especially consequential in hospitality, where services are intangible and consumers rely on advertising visuals as quality signals when booking rental villas (Zeithaml, 1981; Ert et al., 2016). Prior research shows AI labels affect attitudes but has not clarified the underlying psychological mechanisms (Davenport et al., 2020; Puntoni et al., 2021). Some studies find labels increase skepticism (Arango et al., 2023; Baek et al., 2024; Campbell et al., 2022), while others find they can enhance perceived honesty (Kim et al., 2021; Kirkby et al., 2023). In tourism, AI disclosure lowers perceived authenticity and travel intentions (Bui et al., 2024; Li et al., 2025).

This study's contribution is testing how an AI label shapes attitude toward the ad through perceived betrayal and psychological reactance, and how AI avoidance conditions this process, situating the model in a luxury villa rental advertising context involvement hospitality category (Longoni & Cian, 2022).

Reactance is examined at trait and state levels (Hong & Faedda, 1996; Dillard & Shen, 2005). Perceived betrayal reflects a consumer's judgment that a brand has exploited trust (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008); attitude toward the ad is the overall evaluative response to ad exposure (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989) and a key antecedent of purchase intention (MacKenzie et al., 1986). Willingness to pay (Homburg et al., 2005) is operationalized as the nightly booking rate, and AI avoidance denotes systematic resistance to AI outputs (Dietvorst et al., 2015).

Grounded in Psychological Reactance Theory (Brehm, 1966), an AI label is proposed to trigger perceived betrayal, heightening reactance and harming attitude (Quick et al., 2013). Recasting the visual as potentially fabricated, the label violates the implicit promise of accommodation imagery. Study 1 manipulates the presence/absence of an “AI-generated” label on a fictitious luxury villa rental brand’s Instagram ad in a two-group design, all else identical. Study 2 varies the label’s form, size, and position between subjects; all groups see the label. Participants failing manipulation checks will be excluded.

P1: The AI label negatively affects attitude toward the ad via serial mediation of perceived betrayal and reactance, moderated by AI aversion.

H1: The AI label increases perceived betrayal.

H2: Perceived betrayal increases trait reactance.

H3: Perceived betrayal increases state reactance.

- H4: Perceived betrayal negatively affects attitude toward the ad.
H5: Trait reactance negatively affects attitude toward the ad.
H6: State reactance negatively affects attitude toward the ad.
H7: Attitude toward the ad affects willingness to pay.
H8: AI aversion strengthens the relationship between the AI label, perceived betrayal, and trait reactance.
H9: AI aversion strengthens the relationship between the AI label, perceived betrayal, and state reactance.
P2: The effect intensifies as the label's formal/positional salience increases.
H10: A more salient label produces higher perceived betrayal and reactance, and lower attitude toward the ad.
H11: The serial mediation model from P1 holds under Study 2's salience conditions.

Keywords: AI, Psychological Reactance, Artificial Intelligence Disclosure

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Service Resilience in Turkish Air Transport After Global Disruptions: A Comparative Secondary Data Analysis of Passenger Recovery Across Major Airports

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Abstract

This study examines service resilience in Turkish air transport after the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent global disruptions by focusing on passenger demand recovery. The research is designed as a comparative secondary data analysis based on airport passenger traffic statistics published by the General Directorate of State Airports Authority (DHMİ) for the 2019-2025 period. The analysis covers Türkiye as a whole and five major airports: Istanbul, Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen, Antalya, Ankara Esenboğa, and Izmir Adnan Menderes. Rather than relying on a simple descriptive comparison of traffic volume, the study operationalizes service resilience through a multi-indicator framework that includes the recovery rate relative to the 2019 benchmark, the 2020 shock contraction, the year of return to the 2019 level, the 2025 recovery gap or surplus, the domestic-international recovery gap, changes in the share of international passengers, compound annual growth rates, cumulative recovery loss, and system-level concentration indicators. The findings show that total passenger traffic in Türkiye fell to 39.2% of its 2019 level in 2020, exceeded the pre-pandemic benchmark in 2023, and reached a recovery rate of 118.5% in 2025. Recovery was not homogeneous across market segments: by 2025, international passenger recovery had reached 134.1%, whereas domestic recovery remained at 101.7%. At the airport level, Istanbul and Sabiha Gökçen displayed high-growth trajectories, Antalya represented a tourism-driven rebound, and Ankara and Izmir followed delayed but completed recovery patterns. The study contributes to service management and air transport research by showing that post-crisis service resilience is not merely a return to pre-crisis traffic levels but also involves the restoration, reconfiguration, and spatial concentration of service capacity after disruption. It also frames airport recovery as a managerial issue because passenger traffic recovery is treated as an observable system-level outcome of capacity reconfiguration, interorganizational coordination, and service adaptation.

Keywords: Service Resilience, Air Transport, Passenger Demand, Recovery Rate, Secondary Data Analysis

1. Introduction

Air transport constitutes a critical service system for global mobility, tourism, trade, regional accessibility, and service exports. Sudden demand shocks in air transport therefore affect not only airlines and airports but also broader economic domains such as tourism, logistics, employment, regional development, and foreign trade. In this respect, the COVID-19 pandemic represented one of the deepest disruptions in the history of modern aviation. According to the sector outlook report submitted by Airports Council International to the 42nd Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization, global airport passenger traffic decreased by 61% in 2020 compared with 2019, while it reached 9.4 billion passengers in 2024, corresponding to 103% of the 2019 level (Airports Council International

[ACI], 2025). This pattern indicates that research on air transport systems should address not only the immediate effects of crises but also the capacity for post-crisis recovery.

After the pandemic, the sector had to manage the return of passenger demand while also facing geopolitical uncertainty, energy costs, inflationary pressure, capacity constraints, and changing international travel behavior. These developments have made resilience a central concept in air transport studies. Transport system resilience refers to the capacity of a transport system to cope with serious and sudden shocks, adapt to changing conditions, and return to a functional service level after disruption (International Transport Forum [ITF], 2024). In this approach, resilience does not imply that a crisis is avoided or that a system remains unaffected. Instead, it concerns how quickly, to what extent, and through which components the system can restore service provision after disruption.

Türkiye's air transport system provides a particularly relevant case in this respect. The country's geographical position, tourism mobility, Istanbul's international hub function, the network expansion of low-cost carriers, and the strengthening of international connections make Türkiye an important market for examining post-crisis recovery. According to the 2025 year-end statement of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of the Republic of Türkiye based on DHMİ data, 101,655,002 passengers were served on domestic routes and 145,362,150 passengers on international routes. Including direct transit passengers, total passenger traffic reached 247,163,531 and was announced as the highest passenger level in the history of the Republic (T.C. Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı, 2026). However, strong recovery at the national level does not necessarily mean that all airports recovered with the same speed, intensity, or market composition.

Although the existing literature has extensively discussed the effects of COVID-19 on aviation, studies that examine post-crisis service resilience in the Turkish air transport system at the airport level, with a domestic-international distinction and a comparative 2019 pre-pandemic benchmark, remain limited. This gap is important because an increase in total passenger numbers alone does not show whether the system recovered in a balanced and homogeneous manner. Recovery may produce different patterns across tourism-oriented airports, hub airports, domestic-oriented regional airports, and airports experiencing international network expansion. Therefore, the central problem of this study is not only whether the Turkish air transport system compensated for passenger losses after the crisis but also through which airport and market dynamics it generated a resilient service structure.

The aim of this study is to examine the passenger traffic performance of selected major airports in Türkiye over the 2019-2025 period by using secondary data and to identify post-crisis service resilience patterns. The study makes three contributions. First, it operationalizes service resilience through passenger demand recovery using objective and institutional sector data. Second, it discusses how recovery differs between domestic and international markets, thereby showing which demand channels supported post-crisis growth. Third, it demonstrates that major airports in Türkiye did not follow a uniform recovery path: Istanbul airports were characterized by high growth, Antalya by a tourism-driven strong rebound, and Ankara and Izmir by delayed but completed recovery.

From a management and organization perspective, airports can also be viewed as multi-actor service systems. Airlines, airport operators, ground handling companies, public authorities, technology providers, and tourism actors jointly sustain service continuity. For this reason, passenger recovery is not treated only as a demand-side indicator. It is also read as an indirect outcome of coordination, resource redeployment, operational flexibility, and post-crisis capacity governance. This framing connects the study to organizational resilience and service management debates without making claims about employee-level behavior.

The research questions are structured as follows:

RQ1: To what extent and in which year did total passenger traffic at selected major airports in Türkiye reach the 2019 pre-pandemic level?

RQ2: How does passenger traffic recovery differ between domestic and international markets?

RQ3: What major differences emerge across airports in terms of recovery speed, 2025 recovery level, cumulative recovery loss, and market share change?

RQ4: What main tendencies does the Turkish air transport system display in terms of service resilience during the 2020-2025 period?

RQ5: Which recovery pattern best characterizes the recovery process of major airports: a near V-shaped rapid recovery, gradual recovery, or delayed recovery?

2. Theoretical Framework

a. Service Resilience and the Logic of Recovery

The concept of resilience is used across different disciplines to explain the ability of systems to maintain their existence and re-establish functional capacity in the face of disruptions. Its classical foundation in ecological systems research is based on Holling's (1973) approach to the capacity of systems to persist despite disturbances in equilibrium. Subsequent studies have extended the concept to complex socio-technical structures such as infrastructure systems, organizations, supply networks, and service systems (Bruneau et al., 2003; McDaniels et al., 2008).

The organizational resilience literature treats resilience not merely as the capacity to survive without damage but also as the ability to prepare before a crisis, adapt during a crisis, and reorganize after a crisis (Duchek, 2020). This perspective is particularly relevant for service systems because service production depends on the simultaneous interaction of demand, capacity, human resources, technology, infrastructure, regulation, and external environmental conditions. In highly regulated, capital-intensive, and internationally connected sectors such as air transport, service disruption is not only an operational problem but also an issue of economic and social accessibility.

In this study, service resilience is associated with the extent to which passenger traffic returned to its pre-crisis level, how long it took to reach that level, and through which market components growth occurred in the post-crisis period. Accordingly, resilience is evaluated not through the passenger volume of a single year but through multiple indicators, including the severity of the shock, recovery duration, recovery speed, domestic-international differentiation, and market share change. This choice allows resilience to be examined at both the outcome and process levels.

b. Transport System Resilience

Transport system resilience is a multidimensional concept that incorporates infrastructure, network structure, operational capacity, user behavior, and external environmental conditions. Jenelius and Mattsson (2021) emphasize that resilience in transport systems is related not only to physical infrastructure but also to network structure, demand patterns, and the system's capacity to regain functionality. The ITF (2024) defines transport resilience as the capacity of transport systems to cope with, adapt to, and recover from geopolitical uncertainties, climate risks, energy security problems, and similar disruptions.

Within this framework, resilience contains two complementary dimensions. The first is the capacity to limit the effect of a shock. The second is the capacity to return quickly and sustainably to the previous service level after disruption. The logic highlighted in the resilience framework of Bruneau et al. (2003), namely reduced probability of failure, reduced consequences, and reduced recovery

time, can also be adapted to the measurement of passenger demand recovery in air transport. Therefore, in this study, the 2020 crisis contraction indicates the severity of the shock, the year of return to the 2019 level indicates recovery duration, and cumulative recovery loss indicates the magnitude of missing service capacity after the crisis.

In air transport systems, resilience is not limited to the resumption of flights. The return of passenger demand, the renewed use of airport capacity, the restructuring of airline networks, the revival of tourism demand, the strengthening of international connectivity, and the preservation of regional transport accessibility may also be regarded as indicators of resilience. Passenger traffic therefore provides a strong quantitative output indicator for measuring the functional recovery of the system after disruption, particularly when it can be monitored through public and longitudinal data.

c. Passenger Demand Recovery in Air Transport

The COVID-19 crisis showed how sensitive air transport demand is to external shocks. According to the 2025 sector assessment submitted by ACI to ICAO, global passenger traffic declined from 9.2 billion passengers in 2019 to 3.6 billion passengers in 2020, corresponding to an approximate decrease of 61%. The same report states that global passenger traffic reached 8.7 billion in 2023, or 95% of the 2019 level, and 9.4 billion passengers in 2024, corresponding to a recovery rate of 103% (ACI, 2025). These data show that the post-crisis recovery of global aviation followed a gradual but strong trajectory.

The market composition of recovery is also important. ACI (2025) reports that international passenger traffic grew by 13.3% year on year in 2024, clearly exceeding the 4.6% increase in domestic passenger traffic. This finding indicates that the reopening of international mobility, cross-border tourism, and long-haul markets played an important role in post-pandemic recovery. This tendency is particularly important for Türkiye because the Turkish air transport system is strongly connected to international demand mobility through tourism intensity, Istanbul's hub structure, and international route connections.

The year 2019 is accepted as the pre-pandemic reference year in this study. This is because 2019 was the last full year before the pandemic and is widely used as the baseline year in international aviation comparisons (ACI, 2025). A recovery rate of 100% indicates a return to the 2019 passenger level, values below 100% indicate incomplete recovery, and values above 100% indicate that the pre-crisis level has been exceeded. However, the study does not focus only on the 100% threshold. It also analyzes how long recovery took, through which market segment it strengthened, and at which airports it became concentrated within the system.

d. Organizational and Managerial Dimensions of Service Resilience

A stronger organizational reading of service resilience requires moving beyond the idea of recovery as a purely technical or infrastructural return. Airports operate as service ecosystems in which value is produced through the integration of resources across several actors. Service-dominant logic emphasizes that value creation occurs through the application and integration of resources in actor networks rather than through isolated organizational outputs (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Vargo et al., 2008). In an airport context, this means that the recovery of passenger traffic depends on coordinated decisions among airports, airlines, ground handling providers, border authorities, tourism actors, and public regulators.

This perspective also links the study to organizational resilience. Organizational resilience is often understood as the capacity to absorb adversity, develop situation-specific responses, and engage in renewal or transformation after disruption (Duchek, 2020; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011; Williams et

al., 2017). Passenger traffic data cannot directly measure managerial cognition, leadership behavior, human resource practices, or employee resilience. Nevertheless, traffic recovery can serve as a system-level output that reflects whether the service system was able to restore and reconfigure its operating capacity after a severe shock.

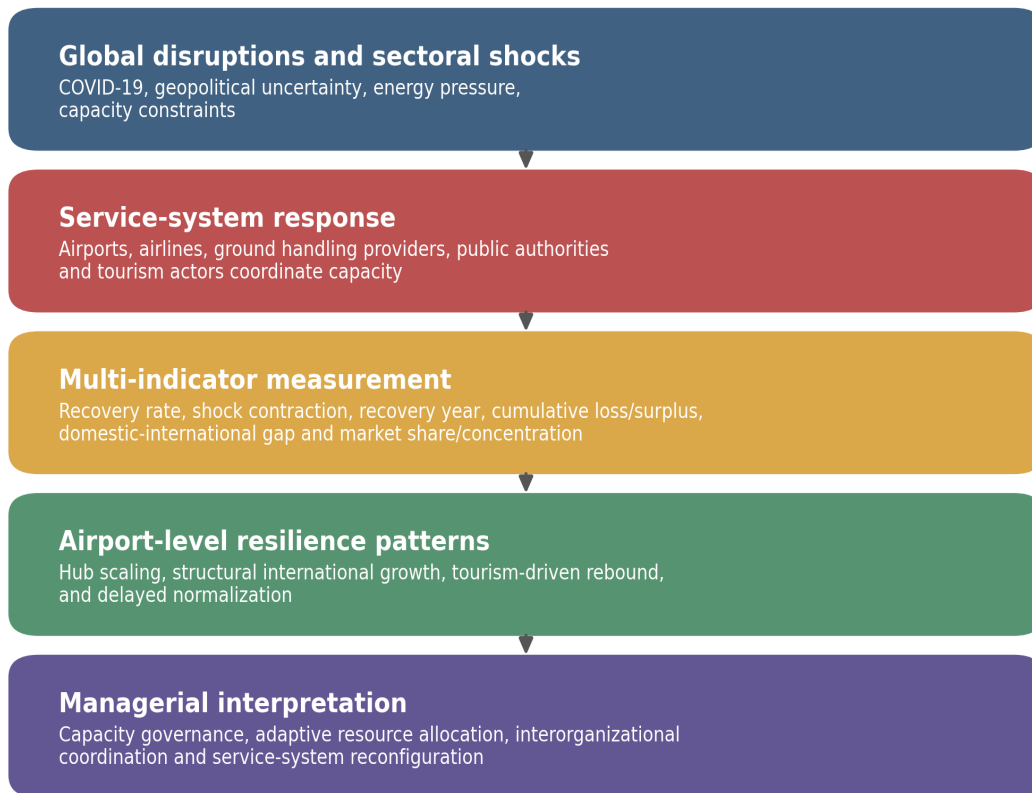
Dynamic capabilities provide an additional bridge to management and organization theory. The dynamic capabilities view argues that organizations must integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies in response to rapidly changing environments (Teece et al., 1997; Teece, 2007). In this study, airport-level recovery patterns are therefore interpreted not only as traffic outcomes but also as signs of different capacity reconfiguration profiles. Rapid hub recovery, tourism-driven rebound, and delayed regional normalization each imply a different managerial challenge in sensing demand shifts, seizing route and capacity opportunities, and transforming service operations after disruption.

Accordingly, the study adopts a cautious multi-level interpretation. It does not infer individual attitudes or organizational practices from aggregate traffic data. Instead, it treats passenger recovery as an observable macro-output of a service system whose performance depends on managerial decisions, interorganizational coordination, and adaptive resource allocation. This allows the analysis to speak to management, organization, and service resilience literature while remaining consistent with the secondary-data design of the study.

The service ecosystem perspective also clarifies why passenger recovery should be treated as a managerial outcome rather than as a purely demand-side statistic. In service-dominant logic, value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). For airports, such arrangements include slot coordination, safety rules, border procedures, ground handling routines, public regulations, digital passenger processes, and tourism-market coordination. Therefore, the visible recovery of passenger traffic can be read as the outcome of coordinated resource integration across a complex service ecosystem, not merely as the mechanical return of travelers to terminals.

Figure 1. Analytical Framework for Service Resilience Measurement

Analytical Logic of Service Resilience Measurement



Note. Created by the author to summarize the analytical logic of the study.

3. Method

a. Research Design

This research is designed as a comparative secondary data analysis based on a quantitative research approach. Secondary data analysis is based on the systematic reanalysis of data previously collected by institutions or researchers within the framework of a new research question (Johnston, 2014). This method is particularly suitable for comparing long-term sectoral data between pre-crisis and post-crisis periods, monitoring trends, and evaluating the performance of service systems through objective indicators.

The study does not seek to test causal relationships. Instead, it aims to reveal the level, speed, market composition, and inter-airport differentiation of post-crisis recovery in the Turkish air transport system through objective sectoral indicators. The analysis strategy is therefore descriptive, comparative, and indicator based. In the findings, the term 'meaningful difference' is not used in the sense of statistical significance testing; rather, it refers to clear differences interpreted on the basis of data patterns.

This design also supports the service-management aim of the study. The indicators are not presented as direct measures of organizational culture, leadership, or employee behavior. They are used as macro-level signals of service-system functioning and adaptive capacity. This distinction limits over-interpretation while still allowing the findings to inform debates on resilience, capacity governance, and crisis recovery.

b. Data Sources, Scope, and Data Verification

The primary data source of the study is the airport statistics published by the General Directorate of State Airports Authority (Devlet Hava Meydanları İşletmesi Genel Müdürlüğü [DHMI]). On the DHMI statistics page, comparative airport statistics are published by year and period for indicators such as total aircraft, commercial aircraft, passenger, cargo, and freight traffic (DHMI, n.d.-c). In the DHMI metadata file, passenger traffic is defined as passengers travelling by air, excluding flight crew and cabin crew, whereas direct transit passengers are defined as passengers who continue their journey with the same aircraft and the same flight number after a short stop (DHMI, n.d.-b). The same metadata file states that the data are compiled from institutional administrative records and external institutional data sources, aggregated on a complete enumeration basis, and validated through various control criteria (DHMI, n.d.-b).

The data verification process was conducted in three stages. First, airport-level passenger values for the 2019-2023 period were checked against DHMI's comparative passenger traffic tables (DHMI, 2020, 2023, 2024). Second, the 2025 values for Türkiye as a whole, Istanbul Airport, and Sabiha Gökçen Airport were compared with the official year-end statement of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure based on DHMI data (T.C. Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı, 2026). Third, differences between the sum of domestic and international passengers and the official totals including direct transit passengers were evaluated in light of the DHMI definition of direct transit passengers. To maintain consistency across all years, the main analysis uses the sum of domestic and international passenger traffic; official totals including direct transit passengers are used only for data control and contextual explanation.

The DHMI statistics page notes that current-year data may be prepared on the basis of preliminary information, that statistical information is updated by the relevant unit, and that statistics for a selected month include cumulative totals covering previous months (DHMI, n.d.-c). In addition, the DHMI Revision and Error Policy states that official statistics may be corrected and revised if errors are detected (DHMI, n.d.-a). Therefore, the official revision and finalization process was taken into account when interpreting values, particularly those for 2025.

Table 1. Variables and Operational Definitions

Indicator	Operational definition	Calculation	Interpretation
Total passenger traffic	Sum of domestic and international passenger traffic	DHMI annual passenger count	Overall service volume
Domestic passenger traffic	Passengers carried on flights within Türkiye	DHMI domestic passenger count	National market resilience
International passenger traffic	Passengers carried on international flights	DHMI international passenger count	International connectivity
Recovery rate	Ratio of passenger traffic in year t to passenger traffic in 2019	$(\text{Year } t / 2019) \times 100$	Return to the pre-crisis level
Crisis contraction	Loss in 2020 relative to the 2019 level	$100 - 2020 \text{ recovery rate}$	Severity of the shock
Recovery year	First year in which the 2019 level was reached or exceeded	$\text{Recovery rate} \geq 100$	Recovery duration

Cumulative recovery loss	Sum of recovery gaps below the 100% threshold during 2020-2025	$\Sigma \max(0, 100 - RR_t)$	Missing post-crisis service capacity
Market share	Airport share in Türkiye's total passenger traffic	Airport passenger traffic / Türkiye total $\times 100$	Intra-system weight
Concentration indicator	System concentration across selected airports and the other-airports group	$HHI = \Sigma si^2$	Spatial concentration of recovery

Note. RR_t denotes the recovery rate relative to the 2019 baseline in year t , and si denotes market share. Variable definitions were prepared on the basis of DHMİ metadata and the calculation strategy of the study (DHMİ, n.d.-b, n.d.-c).

c. Analysis Strategy and Indicators

The data were first organized by airport and year. Recovery rates for 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 were then calculated for each airport relative to the 2019 reference year. The recovery rate was calculated as follows: Recovery Rate (%) = (Passenger Traffic in the Relevant Year / Passenger Traffic in 2019) $\times 100$. In this calculation, 100% represents a return to the pre-pandemic passenger level, values below 100% represent incomplete recovery, and values above 100% represent an exceedance of the pre-pandemic level.

In the study, service resilience was evaluated not only in terms of whether passenger traffic returned to the 2019 level but also through multiple recovery indicators. For each airport, the analysis calculated the recovery rate relative to the 2019 baseline, the 2020 crisis contraction, the year of return to the 2019 level, the 2025 recovery gap or surplus, the domestic-international recovery gap, changes in the share of international passengers, the 2019-2025 compound annual growth rate, the 2020-2025 low-base recovery growth rate, and cumulative recovery loss. In this way, post-crisis service resilience was analyzed in terms of recovery level, recovery speed, and changes in market composition.

The year 2019 requires particular methodological attention for Istanbul Airport because it includes the operational transfer effect from Istanbul Atatürk Airport to Istanbul Airport. Therefore, the main tables use the DHMİ row for Istanbul Airport, while the interpretation also includes a robustness check based on the combined 2019 total of Istanbul Airport and Istanbul Atatürk Airport, as well as a broader Istanbul airports system approach. This strategy was used to reduce the risk of overstating recovery due to the single-airport 2019 baseline.

d. Ethical Considerations

No data were collected from human participants in this research. The study did not involve a survey, interview, focus group, or experimental procedure. It is based entirely on public, institutional, and aggregated secondary data. The data used in the study do not contain personal information at the level of individual passengers, employees, or business representatives. Therefore, the study does not constitute personal data processing or direct human participant research.

4. Findings

a. Crisis, Recovery, and Growth in Passenger Traffic in Türkiye

The first finding of the study shows that the Turkish air transport system experienced a severe demand shock in 2020 but exceeded the pre-pandemic passenger level by 2023. Total passenger traffic in Türkiye decreased from 208,373,696 in 2019 to 81,616,140 in 2020. This value corresponds to only

39.2% of the 2019 level. In other words, the pandemic shock produced an approximately 60.8% contraction in passenger demand in the Turkish air transport system in the first year. This finding is largely consistent with the approximately 61% decline in global aviation passenger traffic recorded in 2020 (ACI, 2025; DHMİ, 2020).

The recovery process became more visible from 2021 onward. Total passenger traffic in Türkiye increased to 128,155,762 in 2021, 181,789,339 in 2022, and 213,693,163 in 2023. Thus, the Turkish air transport system exceeded the 2019 passenger level in 2023 and reached a recovery rate of 102.6%. Total passenger traffic increased to 230,291,231 in 2024 and to 247,017,152 in 2025 based on the sum of domestic and international passengers. In the official statement including direct transit passengers, total passenger traffic in 2025 was announced as 247,163,531 and described as a record in the history of the Republic (T.C. Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı, 2026).

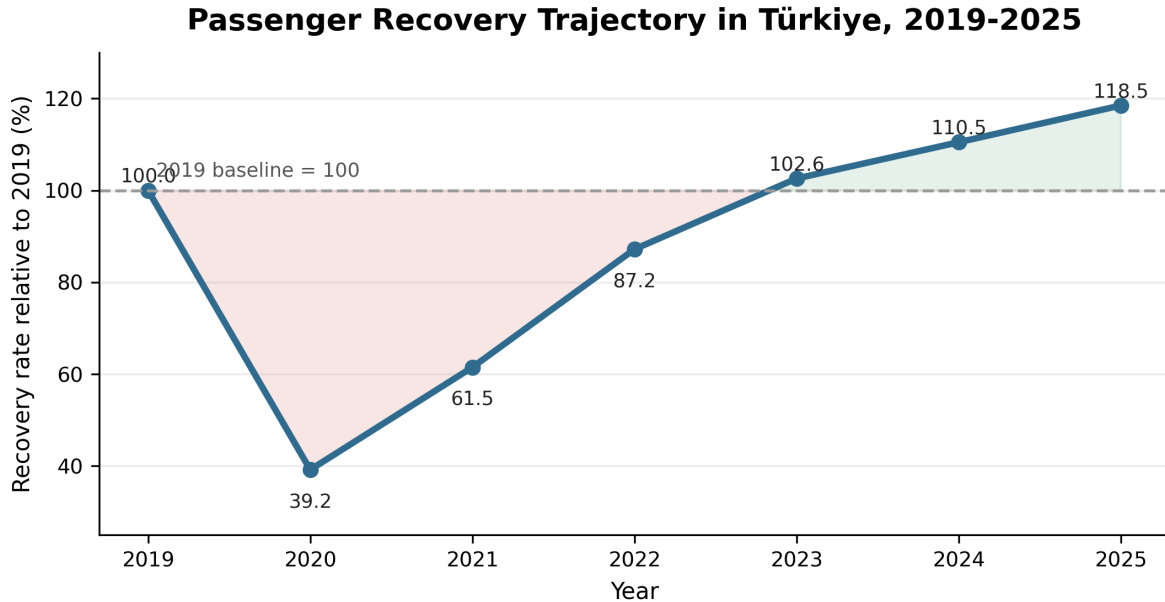
Table 2. Total Passenger Traffic in Türkiye and Selected Airports

Airport	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Türkiye overall	208,373,696	81,616,140	128,155,762	181,789,339	213,693,163	230,291,231	247,017,152
Istanbul	52,009,220	23,410,380	37,181,907	64,518,073	76,011,907	80,430,740	84,457,421
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	35,560,610	16,951,190	24,900,907	30,737,854	36,825,424	41,449,044	48,420,757
Antalya	35,679,421	9,711,195	22,013,861	31,108,181	35,664,138	38,133,273	39,160,491
Ankara Esenboğa	13,740,595	5,162,569	7,029,630	8,679,594	11,950,940	12,913,753	13,987,298
Izmir Adnan Menderes	12,365,256	5,464,858	7,569,054	9,834,578	10,556,199	11,507,296	12,660,080

Note. Compiled from DHMİ airport passenger traffic statistics. The 2025 values were checked against the official DHMİ/Ministry year-end statement (DHMİ, n.d.-c, 2020, 2023, 2024; T.C. Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı, 2026). The main analysis uses the sum of domestic and international passengers.

Table 2 indicates a three-stage recovery pattern in Turkish air transport. The first stage is the sharp crisis contraction observed at all airports in 2020. The second stage is the rapid rebound in the 2021-2022 period. The third stage is the exceedance of the 2019 level after 2023 and the transformation of recovery into a growth phase. This pattern is consistent with the capacity to return to a functional service level and adapt after disruption, as emphasized in the transport system resilience literature (Bruneau et al., 2003; ITF, 2024).

Figure 2. Passenger Recovery Trajectory in Türkiye, 2019-2025



Note. Recovery rates are calculated relative to the 2019 passenger level. The dashed line shows the 2019 benchmark.

b. Recovery Rates Relative to the 2019 Baseline

Table 3. Total Passenger Recovery Rates Relative to the 2019 Baseline (%)

Airport	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Türkiye overall	39.2	61.5	87.2	102.6	110.5	118.5
Istanbul	45.0	71.5	124.1	146.2	154.6	162.4
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	47.7	70.0	86.4	103.6	116.6	136.2
Antalya	27.2	61.7	87.2	100.0	106.9	109.8
Ankara Esenboğa	37.6	51.2	63.2	87.0	94.0	101.8
Izmir Adnan Menderes	44.2	61.2	79.5	85.4	93.1	102.4

Note. Recovery rate = passenger traffic in the relevant year / passenger traffic in 2019 $\times$ 100. Because 2019 was a transition year for Istanbul Airport, a separate robustness check was also conducted.

According to Table 3, recovery speed differed markedly across airports. Türkiye's total passenger traffic fell to 39.2% in 2020, exceeded the pre-pandemic threshold with 102.6% in 2023, and reached 118.5% in 2025. Istanbul Airport exceeded its 2019 level in 2022 according to the main 2019 baseline and reached a recovery rate of 162.4% in 2025. However, because 2019 did not represent a full operational year for Istanbul Airport, this rate should not be interpreted in isolation.

Sabiha Gökçen Airport exceeded its pre-pandemic level in 2023 and reached a recovery rate of 136.2% in 2025. This finding indicates that Sabiha Gökçen, as Istanbul's second airport, not only recovered after the crisis but also expanded in terms of market capacity. Antalya Airport experienced the sharpest contraction among the selected airports, falling to only 27.2% of its 2019 level in 2020. Nevertheless, it exceeded the 2019 level in 2024 and reached a recovery rate of 109.8% in 2025. Ankara Esenboğa and Izmir Adnan Menderes airports exceeded the pre-pandemic level only marginally in 2025 and therefore displayed more gradual and delayed recovery profiles.

Table 4. Robustness Check for the 2019 Baseline in Istanbul

Comparison approach	2019 baseline passengers	2025 passen- gers	2025 recov- ery (%)
Istanbul Airport single-airport baseline	52,009,220	84,457,421	162.4
Istanbul Airport + Atatürk Airport 2019 alternative baseline	68,122,024	84,457,421	124.0
Istanbul airports system: Atatürk + Istanbul + Sabiha Gökçen in 2019; Istanbul + Sabiha Gökçen in 2025	103,682,634	132,878,178	128.2

Note. Alternative baseline calculations were conducted because 2019 included the operational transfer from Istanbul Atatürk Airport to Istanbul Airport. The main conclusion is that the Istanbul market displayed strong recovery; however, the single-airport Istanbul Airport rate should be interpreted cautiously because of the transition-year effect.

Table 4 shows that Istanbul Airport should be interpreted cautiously due to the 2019 transition-year effect. While the 2025 recovery rate appears to be 162.4% according to the single-airport 2019 baseline for Istanbul Airport, it declines to 124.0% when the combined 2019 total of Istanbul Airport and Atatürk Airport is used as an alternative baseline. When the broader Istanbul airports system is considered, the 2025 total of Istanbul and Sabiha Gökçen corresponds to 128.2% of the 2019 total for Atatürk, Istanbul, and Sabiha Gökçen. This robustness check preserves the conclusion of strong recovery in the Istanbul market while showing that the main rate should not be overstated because of the transition-year effect.

c. Recovery Differences Between Domestic and International Passenger Traffic

Table 5. Domestic and International Recovery Rates in 2025

Airport	Domestic re- covery (%)	International recovery (%)	International- domestic gap (points)	2019 interna- tional share (%)	2025 interna- tional share (%)	Change in in- ternational share
Türkiye overall	101.7	134.1	32.4	52.0	58.8	6.8
Istanbul	141.0	169.2	28.2	75.8	79.0	3.2
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	98.6	193.7	95.1	39.5	56.2	16.7
Antalya	99.8	112.2	12.3	80.5	82.3	1.8
Ankara Esenboğa	90.2	159.9	69.7	16.6	26.0	9.5
Izmir Adnan Menderes	84.0	152.2	68.2	27.0	40.1	13.1

Note. Domestic and international recovery rates were calculated relative to 2019 domestic and international passenger counts. The 2025 domestic and international values for Türkiye, Istanbul, and Sabiha Gökçen were verified through the official DHMİ/Ministry statement (T.C. Ulaştırma ve Altyapı Bakanlığı, 2026). The 2025 domestic and international values for Antalya, Ankara, and Izmir were checked through DHMİ year-end passenger traffic tables.

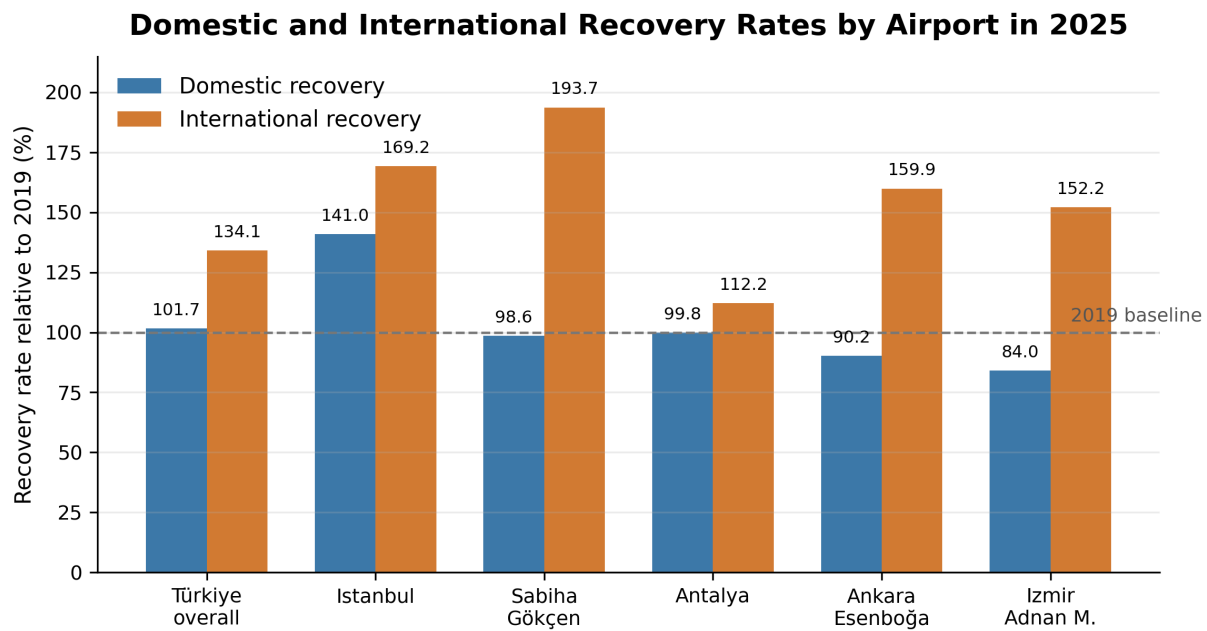
Table 5 shows that international recovery was stronger than domestic recovery at all selected airports. In Türkiye overall, domestic passenger traffic reached 101,655,002 in 2025, while international passenger traffic reached 145,362,150. Relative to 2019, the domestic recovery rate was calculated as 101.7%, whereas the international recovery rate was 134.1%. This indicates that post-crisis growth was supported primarily by international passenger traffic.

The most striking divergence was observed at Sabiha Gökçen Airport. At this airport, domestic recovery in 2025 was 98.6%, while international recovery reached 193.7%. International recovery was also much stronger than domestic recovery at Ankara Esenboğa and Izmir Adnan Menderes. In An-

kara, domestic recovery was 90.2%, compared with 159.9% international recovery; in Izmir, domestic recovery was 84.0%, compared with 152.2% international recovery. This result indicates that international growth was decisive in allowing total recovery at Ankara and Izmir to exceed the 2019 level.

Although international recovery was strong in Antalya, the domestic-international gap was more limited. The main reason is that Antalya already had a very high international passenger share in 2019. Antalya's international share increased from 80.5% in 2019 to 82.3% in 2025. By contrast, the international share increased from 39.5% to 56.2% at Sabiha Gökçen and from 27.0% to 40.1% at Izmir. These findings show that service resilience should be evaluated not only through total demand but also through changes in the domestic-international composition of demand.

Figure 3. Domestic and International Recovery Rates by Airport in 2025



Note. Rates are calculated relative to 2019 domestic and international passenger traffic for each airport.

d. Annual Change, Recovery Speed, and Cumulative Loss

Table 6. Annual Change Rates in Total Passenger Traffic (%)

Airport	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Türkiye overall	-60.8	57.0	41.9	17.5	7.8	7.3
Istanbul	-55.0	58.8	73.5	17.8	5.8	5.0
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	-52.3	46.9	23.4	19.8	12.6	16.8
Antalya	-72.8	126.7	41.3	14.6	6.9	2.7
Ankara Esenboğa	-62.4	36.2	23.5	37.7	8.1	8.3
Izmir Adnan Menderes	-55.8	38.5	29.9	7.3	9.0	10.0

Note. Annual change rates were calculated relative to the previous year. The values for 2021 and 2022 should be interpreted together with the low-base effect.

According to Table 6, all airports experienced a sharp contraction in 2020, followed by a strong rebound during 2021-2022. Total passenger traffic in Türkiye decreased by 60.8% in 2020 and then increased by 57.0% in 2021, 41.9% in 2022, 17.5% in 2023, 7.8% in 2024, and 7.3% in 2025. This pattern indicates that recovery initially occurred through high-rate rebound growth and later shifted

toward more balanced growth. Antalya Airport experienced the sharpest decline in 2020, with a 72.8% contraction, but recorded the highest annual increase in 2021, at 126.7%. This suggests that tourism-oriented airports may display high vulnerability during crisis periods but also strong rebound potential during reopening periods.

Table 7. Crisis Contraction, Recovery Year, and Cumulative Recovery Loss

Airport	2020 crisis contraction (%)	Year of return to 2019	2025 recovery (%)	2025 gap/surplus (points)	Cumulative recovery loss
Türkiye overall	60.8	2023	118.5	18.5	112.1
Istanbul	55.0	2022	162.4	62.4	83.5
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	52.3	2023	136.2	36.2	95.9
Antalya	72.8	2024	109.8	9.8	123.9
Ankara Esenboğa	62.4	2025	101.8	1.8	167.1
Izmir Adnan Menderes	55.8	2025	102.4	2.4	136.6

Note. Cumulative recovery loss = $\sum \max(0, 100 - \text{recovery rate})$ for the 2020-2025 period. A lower value indicates a shorter or more limited incomplete recovery, whereas a higher value indicates a deeper and/or longer incomplete recovery.

Table 8. Compound Growth and Recovery Surplus Indicators

Airport	2020-2025 CAGR (%)	2019-2025 CAGR (%)	Cumulative recovery surplus
Türkiye overall	24.8	2.9	31.6
Istanbul	29.3	8.4	187.2
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	23.4	5.3	56.3
Antalya	32.2	1.6	16.6
Ankara Esenboğa	22.1	0.3	1.8
Izmir Adnan Menderes	18.3	0.4	2.4

Note. CAGR = compound annual growth rate. The 2020-2025 CAGR indicates low-base post-crisis recovery momentum, whereas the 2019-2025 CAGR indicates net long-term growth from the pre-pandemic baseline. Cumulative recovery surplus = $\sum \max(0, \text{recovery rate} - 100)$ for the 2020-2025 period. This value shows the accumulated years in which traffic exceeded the 2019 benchmark.

When Table 7 and Table 8 are considered together, airport-level resilience patterns clearly diverge. Istanbul Airport exceeded the 2019 level in 2022 according to the main baseline and had a relatively low cumulative recovery loss among the selected units, although this finding should be interpreted together with the 2019 transition-year effect. Sabiha Gökçen exceeded the pre-pandemic level in 2023, reached a recovery rate of 136.2% in 2025, and recorded a 5.3% compound annual growth rate during 2019-2025.

Antalya Airport experienced the highest crisis contraction in 2020 but exceeded the pre-pandemic level in 2024. Therefore, Antalya's recovery profile can be interpreted as a pattern of 'high vulnerability plus strong rebound.' Ankara Esenboğa and Izmir Adnan Menderes reached the 2019 level only in 2025, and their 2025 recovery surpluses remained limited at 1.8 and 2.4 points, respectively. The high cumulative recovery loss at these two airports indicates that recovery was completed late and within a narrow margin.

e. Market Share Change and System-Level Concentration

Table 9. Share of Selected Airports in Türkiye's Total Passenger Traffic

Airport	2019 share (%)	2025 share (%)	Change (points)
Istanbul	25.0	34.2	9.2
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	17.1	19.6	2.5

Antalya	17.1	15.9	-1.3
Ankara Esenboğa	6.6	5.7	-0.9
Izmir Adnan Menderes	5.9	5.1	-0.8
Selected five airports total	71.7	80.4	8.8
Other airports	28.3	19.6	-8.8

Note. Market share = airport total passenger traffic / Türkiye total passenger traffic × 100. Point changes were calculated using unrounded values and then reported with one decimal place.

Table 10. System-Level Concentration Indicator

Year	Selected five airports share (%)	Other airports share (%)	HHI-like concentration indicator
2019	71.7	28.3	2,088.3
2025	80.4	19.6	2,245.7

Note. The HHI-like indicator was calculated descriptively across the selected five airports and the 'other airports' group. An increase in the value indicates that passenger traffic is concentrated in a more limited number of centers. This indicator is not used in a competition-law sense.

According to Table 9, the combined share of the selected five major airports in Türkiye's total passenger traffic increased from 71.7% in 2019 to 80.4% in 2025. The share of Istanbul Airport increased from 25.0% to 34.2%, and the share of Sabiha Gökçen increased from 17.1% to 19.6%. By contrast, Antalya, Ankara, and Izmir experienced limited decreases in their shares. This result suggests that post-crisis growth in the Turkish air transport system became more concentrated around Istanbul.

The HHI-like concentration indicator presented in Table 10 supports this interpretation. The indicator, calculated across the selected five airports and the other-airports group, increased from 2,088.3 in 2019 to 2,245.7 in 2025. This finding shows that major hub airports played an important role in the rapid restoration of national passenger capacity. At the same time, it indicates that more balanced capacity policies may be needed for the regional distribution of system resilience.

f. Airport-Level Resilience Classification

Table 11. Airport-Level Recovery Typology

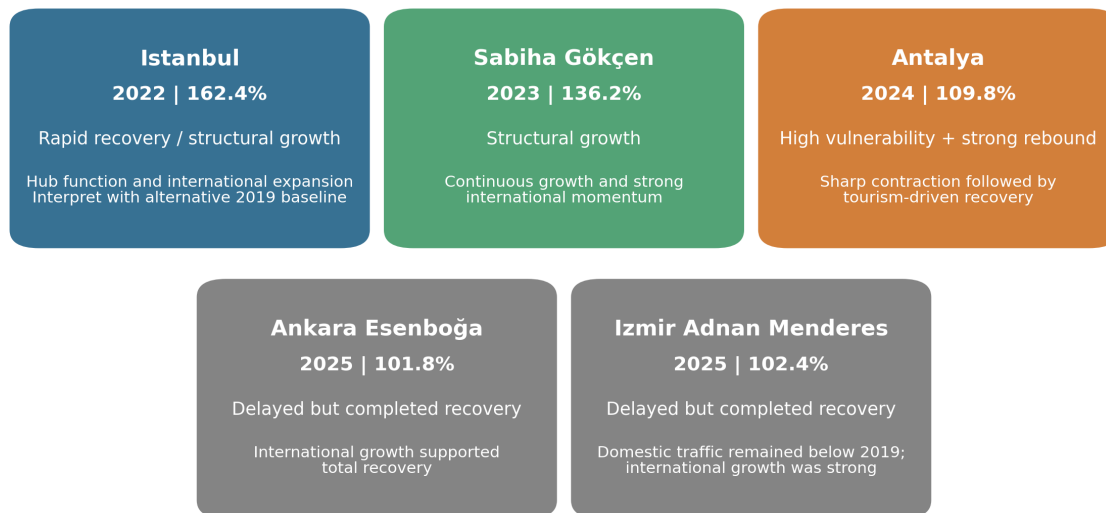
Unit	Main pattern	Recovery year	2025 recovery (%)	Recovery type	Academic interpretation
Türkiye overall	2020 shock + post-2023 growth	2023	118.5	Near V-shaped national recovery	International growth and major hub airports were decisive
Istanbul	Hub function and international expansion	2022	162.4	Rapid recovery / structural growth	Should be interpreted with an alternative baseline because of the 2019 transition year
Istanbul Sabiha Gökçen	Continuous growth and international momentum	2023	136.2	Structural growth	International recovery was very strong; the international share increased markedly
Antalya	Sharp contraction + strong tourism rebound	2024	109.8	High vulnerability + strong rebound	Tourism and international demand were decisive
Ankara Esenboğa	Gradual normalization	2025	101.8	Delayed but completed recovery	International growth supported total recovery
Izmir Adnan Menderes	Gradual normalization	2025	102.4	Delayed but completed recovery	Domestic traffic remained below 2019; international growth was strong

Note. The recovery typology is an interpretive classification based on the indicators calculated in the study; it is not the result of statistical clustering. Because annual data are used, the near V-shaped classification should be interpreted descriptively.

Table 11 shows that there was no single recovery model in the Turkish air transport system. Istanbul and Sabiha Gökçen airports were distinguished by high growth and international expansion, whereas Antalya displayed a tourism-oriented pattern of sharp contraction and strong rebound. The later recovery of Ankara and Izmir suggests that post-crisis recovery may occur more gradually at airports with stronger domestic and regional demand characteristics. At the national level, passenger traffic displayed a near V-shaped recovery pattern in annual data, with a sharp decline in 2020 and rapid growth during 2021-2023. However, because monthly or quarterly data were not used, this classification should be interpreted descriptively.

The typology also has managerial meaning. Istanbul represents a hub-based scaling pattern in which network centrality and international route density accelerate recovery. Sabiha Gökçen reflects a structural growth pattern shaped by internationalization and low-cost carrier dynamics. Antalya reflects a seasonal and tourism-dependent resilience profile, where exposure to external shocks is high but rebound capacity can also be strong. Ankara and Izmir represent delayed normalization profiles in which international growth compensated for weaker domestic recovery. These profiles suggest that resilience strategies should be differentiated rather than standardized across airports.

Figure 4. Airport-Level Service Resilience Typology



Recovery year and 2025 recovery rate are used to summarize descriptive airport-level patterns.

Note. The typology is descriptive and based on recovery year and 2025 recovery rate. It should not be interpreted as a statistical clustering result.

5. Discussion

The findings show that the Turkish air transport system was strongly affected by the COVID-19 shock but recovered above its 2019 passenger level by 2023. By 2025, the national recovery rate reached 118.5%. This result supports the view that resilience should not be reduced to survival. It also in-

volves rebuilding service capacity and adapting to altered demand conditions (Bruneau et al., 2003; Duchek, 2020; ITF, 2024).

a. Recovery as Service-System Reconfiguration

Recovery was not observed as a uniform return to the pre-crisis order. It was distributed unevenly across airports and market segments. Istanbul and Sabiha Gökçen expanded strongly. Antalya recovered through a tourism-driven rebound. Ankara and Izmir reached the 2019 level only in 2025. These patterns suggest that resilience was produced through service-system reconfiguration rather than through a simple restoration of traffic volume.

From a management perspective, this point is important. Passenger traffic can be restored only when several processes are recombined. Route planning, slot allocation, ground handling, terminal flows, workforce scheduling, border procedures, digital services, and tourism-market coordination all matter. These processes were not directly measured in the present study. Therefore, the interpretation is kept at the system level. Still, the differentiated recovery patterns indicate that airport roles shaped the way recovery was organized.

This argument is consistent with service-dominant logic. Service systems are shaped by actors that integrate resources through institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016; Vargo et al., 2008). In this study, the visible outcome of that resource integration is passenger recovery. Hub airports benefited from network scale and international connectivity. Antalya reflected the rebound capacity of a tourism gateway. Ankara and Izmir showed slower normalization in regional and mixed-demand markets.

b. International Demand as a Resource and Exposure Channel

International demand was the strongest source of recovery. In 2025, international passenger recovery reached 134.1% in Türkiye, while domestic recovery remained at 101.7%. This shows that international connectivity, tourism flows, and hub operations acted as key resilience resources. They enabled the system to move beyond restoration and to generate a recovery surplus.

The same pattern also creates exposure. Recovery that depends heavily on international markets may be sensitive to geopolitical tensions, energy prices, exchange rates, visa regimes, and changes in tourism demand. Thus, internationalization should be read as both a strength and a vulnerability. The managerial issue is not whether international growth is valuable. It is how such growth can be balanced with domestic accessibility, route diversification, and contingency capacity.

This interpretation is aligned with the dynamic capabilities view. Organizations are expected to sense changes, seize opportunities, and reconfigure resources in unstable environments (Teece, 2007; Teece et al., 1997). The airport recovery patterns observed in this study point to the same logic. Capacity had to be reopened, but it also had to be redirected toward changing demand channels.

c. Hub Concentration and the Efficiency-Resilience Tension

The concentration results add a strategic dimension. The share of the five selected airports increased from 71.7% in 2019 to 80.4% in 2025. The HHI-like indicator also rose from 2,088.3 to 2,245.7. This means that national passenger recovery was carried increasingly by large airport centers, especially Istanbul. Such concentration can support scale, connectivity, and faster national recovery.

Yet concentration may also narrow the basis of resilience. A system may restore aggregate volume quickly while leaving regional capacity more fragile. This is an efficiency-resilience tension. Large hubs can accelerate recovery, but excessive dependence on a few nodes may weaken redundancy and alternative routing capacity. For this reason, resilience should be assessed not only by total passenger volume but also by how recovery capacity is distributed across the network.

This issue is relevant for management and public policy. Organizational resilience requires crisis response as well as longer-term adaptation (Boin & van Eeten, 2013; Williams et al., 2017). In air transport, this means that resilience should be designed at both airport and network levels. Hub strength and regional adaptability should be treated as complementary priorities.

d. Managerial and Organizational Implications

Several managerial implications can be derived. Capacity planning should distinguish domestic and international demand instead of relying only on total passenger forecasts. Hub airports should focus on scalable capacity, congestion control, passenger-flow management, and interorganizational coordination. Tourism-oriented airports require flexible capacity models, seasonal workforce planning, off-season market diversification, and route-risk monitoring. Airports with delayed recovery may require targeted international route development and stronger links with regional economic strategies.

The findings also open a route for organizational behavior research. Passenger recovery is a macro-level outcome, but it depends on people, routines, knowledge, and coordination under pressure. Strategic human resource management research suggests that resilient organizations are supported by employee capabilities, behavioral flexibility, and enabling contexts (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Future studies should therefore connect airport-level recovery indicators with crisis leadership, employee resilience, psychological safety, safety climate, service climate, and organizational learning.

Overall, the study contributes to service management by showing that service resilience can be examined through realized output data. Passenger recovery is not produced by a single organization. It emerges from the coordinated functioning of a service ecosystem. Aggregate traffic data can therefore be used to trace the visible outcomes of service-system adaptation after disruption.

6. Conclusion

This study examined service resilience in Turkish air transport by using passenger traffic data for the 2019-2025 period. Türkiye's total passenger traffic fell to 39.2% of the 2019 level in 2020. It exceeded the pre-pandemic level in 2023 and reached 118.5% in 2025. Strong national recovery was therefore observed.

Recovery, however, was not evenly distributed. Istanbul and Sabiha Gökçen showed high growth and international expansion. Antalya displayed a tourism-driven rebound. Ankara and Izmir followed delayed but completed recovery paths. International traffic played the main role in the recovery surplus, while domestic recovery remained more limited.

The main contribution of the study is the use of a multi-indicator framework. Recovery rates, shock contraction, recovery year, cumulative loss, compound growth, domestic-international differences, market share, and concentration indicators were combined. This approach provides a clearer picture of how resilience was produced and where it became concentrated within the airport system.

The study also connects aviation recovery with management and organization research. Airport recovery is interpreted as an outcome of capacity governance, adaptive resource allocation, interorganizational collaboration, and service-system reconfiguration. Major airports are therefore positioned as service-system nodes whose recovery reflects both market dynamics and organizational capability.

Several limitations should be noted. The study is based on aggregated secondary data and does not test the causes of passenger demand changes. Ticket prices, seat capacity, load factors, airline network decisions, tourism policies, macroeconomic conditions, and geopolitical effects were not included. The 2019 baseline for Istanbul Airport also requires caution because of the operational transfer from Atatürk Airport. In addition, recent official statistics may be revised.

Future research should combine passenger traffic with aircraft movements, seat capacity, load factors, cargo traffic, tourism arrivals, exchange rates, income indicators, and airline network connectivity. Monthly data may also allow break analysis, panel models, time-series analysis, or airport clustering. More importantly, system-level recovery indicators should be linked with organizational and behavioral variables such as crisis leadership, strategic human resource management, employee resilience, safety climate, service climate, organizational learning, and interorganizational coordination. Such work would explain not only whether air transport systems recover, but also how organizations and people make recovery possible.

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Friction Lost: AI-Mediated Retail and the Structural Conditions for Sustainable Consumer Choice

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Abstract

Contemporary retail is increasingly shaped by AI-mediated systems designed to reduce the distance between consumer desire and purchase. Personalized recommendations, real-time interactivity, and algorithmically engineered decision environments are built around a single operating logic: eliminating the friction that stands between wanting and buying. This logic applies across digital retail formats such as livestream shopping platforms, where algorithmic curation and real-time social engagement are optimized for conversion, and the AI-driven personalization is increasingly embedded in physical retail experiences, where digital layers now guide store navigation, product discovery, and post-visit re-engagement.

Sustainable consumption operates on the opposite logic. It requires consumers to pause, weigh consequences, and sometimes decide not to buy. It depends on deliberative space that AI-mediated retail is systematically designed to foreclose. This paper argues that the tension between AI-mediated retail and sustainable consumption is structural rather than incidental. It is not primarily a question of whether retailers communicate sustainability values sincerely, though that matters. It is a question of whether the cognitive conditions required for sustainable consumer choice can survive in environments optimized to bypass deliberation entirely.

This structural incompatibility is particularly acute in hybrid retail contexts, where digital and physical retail experiences are no longer separate but increasingly integrated. Consumers move between AI-curated digital touchpoints and physical store environments that are themselves becoming algorithmically instrumented. At each layer, the architecture is oriented toward reducing resistance to purchase. The deliberative space in which sustainable choices are made is squeezed from both sides.

This tension is surprisingly underexplored. Research on AI in retail has focused predominantly on commercial outcomes: conversion, engagement, and personalization effectiveness. Sustainable consumption research has examined consumer values, intentions, and behaviors but has paid limited attention to how the architecture of AI-mediated decision environments shapes the conditions under which sustainable choices are actually made. Consumer decision-making research has long distinguished between automatic and deliberative processing, yet this distinction has rarely been applied to how algorithmically engineered retail environments suppress or enable each mode. The two literatures have not seriously encountered each other on this ground.

Our conceptual work takes a first step toward addressing this gap by framing the structural incompatibility between AI-mediated retail optimization and sustainable consumption as a central research

problem. We examine how the operating logic of AI-mediated systems, across digital and physical retail contexts, shapes the cognitive conditions under which consumers either bypass or engage deliberative processing. Drawing on the hybrid retail environment, we develop a set of research questions and propose an empirical research agenda for investigating how consumers navigate this structural tension in practice.

Keywords: AI-Mediated Retail, Sustainable Consumption, Consumer Decision-Making, Hybrid Retail

Association-Based Brand Contamination: An Empirical Analysis of the Epstein Scandal Across Cultural-Civilizational Segments

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1. Introduction

Digitalization has transformed corporate reputation into something judged not only by what a brand delivers, but by whom it associates with. Institutions can now suffer lasting reputational damage without committing any direct wrongdoing, because mere symbolic proximity to a morally stigmatized actor is often enough to trigger cascading legitimacy losses. This study examines that mechanism, termed association-based brand contamination, through the Jeffrey Epstein network scandal, perhaps the most thoroughly documented real-world case of reputational contamination by association in recent history. Existing research has largely tested this mechanism through fabricated scenarios and has treated audience heterogeneity as a demographic footnote rather than a structural force. This study addresses both gaps at once: it grounds the design in a genuine scandal, and it models socio-cultural segmentation (religious orientation, civilizational identity, political alignment, and socioeconomic standing) as an active structural moderator rather than a background control.

2. Theoretical Background

The study draws on contamination theory (Rozin & Nemeroff, 1990), which holds that people can come to perceive brands as symbolically tainted after contact with a morally stigmatized source, and on Keller's (1993) brand association framework. Guilt-by-association and attribution theory (Weiner, 1985) explain how consumers assign corporate responsibility for indirect ties. Brand sincerity and brand trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005) are modeled as the relational-affective mediators linking contamination perception to purchase and boycott intentions. A further theoretical strand, Haidt's (2012) Moral Foundations Theory, is used to interpret a cross-ideological consensus item tied to the Gaza conflict, framed around the Care/Harm foundation rather than partisan politics.

3. Method

A real institution with documented Epstein-network ties, anonymized throughout as “Firm X,” anchored a 2×3 factorial experimental vignette design. Two levels of association strength (weak: indirect institutional contact; strong: documented personal contact) were crossed with three crisis response strategies (Denial, Apology, CSR/Transparency). Data were collected online from N = 347 adult consumers across ten cultural-civilizational segments in the first half of 2026, following institutional ethics approval and informed consent. Manipulation checks confirmed that the two association conditions were perceived as meaningfully distinct (MC1 = 2.73; MC2 = 4.53). Association strength (AS), moral contamination (PMC), and corporate responsibility (PCR) were specified as formative constructs and assessed with VIF diagnostics; brand sincerity (BS) and brand trust (BT) were specified as reflective constructs and met standard reliability thresholds ($\alpha = .819$ and $.839$, respectively). Hypotheses were tested via path analysis with bootstrap mediation (5,000 iterations).

4. Results

Five of seven hypotheses received statistical support. Even under the weak-association condition, contamination reached $PMC = 5.48$, and the item “this contamination cannot be cleansed regardless of what is done” scored highest of all items in both scenarios (5.86 and 6.50). Denial produced the worst outcomes across every segment ($CRE = 1.75$; $ABI = 5.72$), while CSR/Transparency performed best but still fell short of full recovery ($PI = 3.93$). Brand sincerity strongly predicted brand trust ($\beta = +.830$), and trust shaped both purchase intention ($\beta = +.322$) and boycott intention ($\beta = -.398$).

The study's most theoretically interesting result is what failed. H3 ($PMC \rightarrow BS$) and H4 ($PCR \rightarrow BT$) were both rejected, and the full sequential mediation chain produced non-significant bootstrap intervals, indicating that cognitive appraisal of contamination does not directly reorganize relational-emotional brand structures such as sincerity and trust. Socio-cultural segments diverged meaningfully: the Western secular segment showed the strongest contamination perception and the strongest CSR acceptance; the Islamic segment showed the highest boycott propensity under denial but a more cautious acceptance of reform; income and education shaped how credible CSR reform was judged to be. A Gaza-related item on the Social Values Orientation scale produced statistically indistinguishable scores between very conservative (6.09) and very liberal (6.20) participants, consistent with a Care/Harm-based moral consensus that cuts across ideological lines.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

These findings make five contributions to the brand contamination literature: empirical validation of contamination theory in a real-world case; the reframing of socio-cultural segmentation as a structural moderator rather than a control variable; a “contamination permanence” construct grounded in the dominant PMC3 item; documentation of cross-ideological moral consensus; and a “cognitive-relational disconnect” framework that challenges the linear contamination-to-behavior chain assumed in prior literature.

For practice, the results suggest that no institutional connection is reputationally “innocent,” that denial reliably backfires, and that even a well-executed CSR response cannot fully restore trust once contamination has set in; crisis communication therefore needs to be both concrete and segment-calibrated rather than one-size-fits-all. Limitations include the cross-sectional design, several formative constructs with limited reflective-style reliability (addressed here through VIF diagnostics rather than Cronbach's alpha), and small civilizational subgroups in some cells. Longitudinal and multi-region designs would help address both boundaries in future work.

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Artificial Intelligence And Brand Management In Turkish E-Commerce Platforms: A Structural Equation Modelling Study

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1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has diffused rapidly across digital retail environments, yet the brand-level consequences of AI-mediated customer journeys remain insufficiently examined. Most existing research links individual AI features, such as search accuracy, recommendation quality, and chatbot responsiveness, to purchase intention in isolation, leaving open how these experiences translate into brand attitude, brand loyalty, and switching intention, and whether these relationships vary with a platform's market origin and geopolitical positioning. The Turkish e-commerce market, where a domestic start-up leader (Trendyol), an established domestic corporate (Hepsiburada), and the local extension of a global brand (Amazon.com.tr) compete side by side, offers an unusually informative setting for testing this question.

2. Theoretical Background

This study draws on the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974), integrated with customer-based brand equity theory (Keller, 1993), brand experience research (Brakus et al., 2009), and the consumer animosity model (Klein et al., 1998). AI-powered journey quality (AIJQ), a composite construct encompassing search accuracy, recommendation and personalization, virtual assistance, and AI-powered social proof, is modeled as the stimulus; perceived utilitarian value, hedonic value, trust in AI, and brand attitude as organism-level evaluations; and consumer engagement, purchase decision, brand loyalty, and switching intention as behavioral responses.

3. Method

Cross-sectional survey data were collected online from 419 adult users of the three platforms between 18 May and 11 June 2026 (Trendyol $n = 201$; Hepsiburada $n = 163$; Amazon.com.tr $n = 55$). Constructs were measured on five-point Likert scales adapted from validated source scales. Data were analyzed via covariance-based structural equation modelling (CB-SEM) following the two-stage approach of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed convergent validity ($AVE \geq .64$) and discriminant validity by both the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratios; reliability coefficients ranged from .87 to .96. Structural model fit was acceptable-to-good ($\chi^2/df = 2.22$; CFI = .927; TLI = .922; RMSEA = .054). Cross-platform differences were tested via one-way ANOVA with Tukey HSD post-hoc comparisons.

4. Results

AIJQ strongly predicted utilitarian value, hedonic value, and trust in AI, but exerted no significant direct effect on brand attitude (H11 not supported; $\beta = -.082$, $p = .268$); its influence operated entirely through those three mediating states. Brand attitude strongly predicted brand loyalty ($\beta = .711$), while consumer engagement's contribution was more modest ($\beta = .121$). AIJQ's direct effect on switching intention was significant but opposite in sign to the hypothesized direction ($\beta = +.205$), consistent

with a suppression pattern in which strong negative indirect paths through brand attitude and loyalty dominate the total effect.

Across platforms, AI experience dimensions showed no significant differences, yet brand-level outcomes diverged sharply: brand attitude ($F = 17.84$), brand loyalty ($F = 39.63$), and switching intention ($F = 62.33$) all varied significantly by platform (all $p < .001$). Amazon.com.tr users showed substantially lower brand loyalty and higher switching intention than domestic-platform users, a pattern aligned with Klein et al.'s (1998) consumer animosity model and partly explained by Gaza-related boycott sentiment reported by 68% of Amazon.com.tr respondents.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

These findings indicate that AI investment builds brand equity indirectly, through perceived value and trust, rather than through a direct AI-to-brand-attitude link; positioning AI capability as a brand campaign in itself risks misaligning with the underlying mechanism. They also show that the returns to AI investment are sensitive to the geopolitical and ethical context in which a platform brand operates: comparable AI quality across platforms did not translate into comparable brand outcomes once animosity-related sentiment entered the picture.

For managers, engagement metrics such as time-on-platform and recommendation usage should not be treated as reliable proxies for loyalty when they are not grounded in favorable brand evaluation. Limitations include the cross-sectional design, a comparatively small Amazon.com.tr subsample ($n = 55$) that precluded multi-group SEM, and treatment of the animosity mechanism as exploratory rather than as a formally modeled moderator; longitudinal and better-powered multi-group designs are natural next steps.

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Does Message Concreteness Matter? The Effects of Claim Concreteness on Green Advertising Skepticism, Green Trust, and Green Purchase Intention

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1. Introduction

In recent years, climate change, the depletion of natural resources, and sustainable development goals have made environmental sustainability a strategic priority for the tourism industry. In response, hotel businesses have increasingly incorporated sustainability practices into their marketing communications to gain a competitive advantage, strengthen their corporate reputation, and meet the expectations of environmentally conscious consumers (Marciniak, 2009; Butt et al., 2021; Boncinelli et al., 2023; Garcia & Vargas, 2024). Environmentally friendly initiatives, such as energy efficiency, water conservation, carbon emission reduction, and waste management, have become not only operational improvements but also important communication tools through which hotels promote their sustainability efforts to consumers (Cheung et al., 2015; Alhamad et al., 2023). However, the growing prevalence of sustainability communication has also increased consumers' scrutiny of the credibility and authenticity of environmental claims. These developments have intensified scholarly interest in greenwashing, which refers to misleading environmental communication practices whereby firms exaggerate or overstate their environmental performance or present limited environmental initiatives as evidence of a substantial commitment to sustainability (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Szabo & Webster, 2021). Previous research has shown that greenwashing undermines consumers' trust in environmental claims while negatively affecting brand value, corporate reputation, and purchasing behavior (Qayyum et al., 2023; Lopes et al., 2023; Vilkaitė-Vaitonė, 2024; Liu et al., 2025). Similar findings have been reported in the tourism and hospitality context, where sustainability messages perceived as insincere or exaggerated lead to less favorable evaluations of hotels (Majeed & Kim, 2023; Alyahia et al., 2024; Garcia & Vargas, 2024).

One of the most important consequences of greenwashing is the development of green advertising skepticism among consumers. The literature consistently identifies a strong theoretical and empirical relationship between greenwashing and green skepticism, suggesting that consumers increasingly evaluate environmental claims with greater caution and critical scrutiny (Leonidou & Skarmas, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019; Farooq & Wicaksono, 2021; Sivapalan et al., 2024). Accordingly, although greenwashing is not directly included in the proposed research model, it provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding green advertising skepticism. Previous studies have demonstrated that consumers with higher levels of advertising skepticism perceive sustainability messages as less credible and are consequently less likely to prefer environmentally friendly products and services (Yu, 2020; Chuah et al., 2022; De Sio et al., 2022).

The influence of green advertising skepticism on consumer behavior is largely explained through green trust. Green trust refers to consumers' willingness to rely on a firm's environmental commitments based on perceptions of honesty, reliability, and credibility (Chen & Chang, 2013). Higher levels of green trust have been shown to increase consumers' willingness to choose environmentally responsible firms and products (Lam et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2022; Alhomaid, 2025). Conversely, advertising skepticism weakens trust in environmental claims, thereby reducing consumers' purchase intentions (Chen & Chang, 2013; Tarabieh et al., 2026). Consistent with these findings, studies in the tourism literature indicate that consumers who trust hotels' sustainability practices are more likely to choose environmentally friendly hotels and exhibit stronger purchase intentions (Han, 2020; Patwary et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Tavitiyaman et al., 2024). Despite the growing body of research, previous studies have largely focused on greenwashing, perceived greenwashing, or general skepticism toward environmental advertising. However, little is known about whether the way sustainability information is communicated influences consumers' responses. More specifically, empirical evidence remains limited regarding whether presenting identical sustainability claims in either a vague or a concrete manner changes the relationships among green advertising skepticism, green trust, and green purchase intention in the hotel context.

To address this gap, the present study employs two experimental scenarios developed for a fictitious hotel, GreenStay Hotel, in which sustainability information is presented using either vague or concrete sustainability claims. The study examines whether the level of claim concreteness influences the structural relationships among Green Advertisement Skepticism, Green Trust, and Green Purchase Intention. In doing so, it provides empirical evidence on the role of message concreteness in sustainability communication while positioning greenwashing as the theoretical foundation of green advertising skepticism. Consequently, the study contributes to the sustainable service marketing literature by demonstrating that not only the content of sustainability communication but also the concreteness of sustainability claims shapes consumer evaluations.

2. Method

This study adopted an experimental research design to examine the effect of sustainability claim concreteness on consumer evaluations. A total of 425 participants were recruited for the study. During the data screening process, respondents who failed the attention check, submitted incomplete questionnaires, or exhibited irregular response patterns were excluded from the analysis. As a result, data from 387 participants were retained, of whom 206 were assigned to the Concrete Claim condition and 181 to the Vague Claim condition. Participants were assigned to one of the two experimental conditions based on the last digit of their phone number, resulting in an allocation procedure independent of the researchers. In the Vague Claim condition, GreenStay Hotel's sustainability initiatives were presented using general and ambiguous claims. In the Concrete Claim condition, the same sustainability initiatives were presented using specific, measurable, and verifiable claims supported by numerical information. Thus, the substantive content of the sustainability message remained constant across the two scenarios, while only the level of claim concreteness was manipulated to examine its effect on consumer evaluations.

After reading the assigned scenario, participants were asked to complete measures of Green Advertisement Skepticism, Green Trust, and Green Purchase Intention. All measurement items were adapted from previously validated scales and assessed using a five-point Likert scale. The data were analysed using SmartPLS 4. First, the reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed separately for each experimental group. Subsequently, the structural model was evaluated. Before comparing the structural relationships between the two groups, measurement invariance was established using the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) procedure. Finally, a

Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) was conducted to determine whether the structural path coefficients differed significantly between the Concrete Claim and Vague Claim conditions.

3. Results

The measurement model assessment indicated that the constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability and validity across both experimental conditions. All factor loadings exceeded the recommended threshold, while Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above the acceptable levels. Furthermore, cross-loadings, the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, and the Fornell–Larcker criterion confirmed adequate discriminant validity for both groups. The structural model results supported the hypothesized relationships in both experimental conditions. In the Vague Claim condition, Green Advertisement Skepticism had a significant negative effect on Green Trust ($\beta = -0.697$, $t = 14.941$, $p < .01$), whereas Green Trust had a significant positive effect on Green Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.673$, $t = 14.894$, $p < .01$). Similarly, in the Concrete Claim condition, Green Advertisement Skepticism exerted a significant negative effect on Green Trust ($\beta = -0.806$, $t = 29.486$, $p < .01$), while Green Trust had a significant positive effect on Green Purchase Intention ($\beta = 0.806$, $t = 35.355$, $p < .01$). These findings indicate that greater skepticism toward green advertising reduces consumers' green trust, whereas higher levels of green trust enhance green purchase intention. Before comparing the two experimental conditions, the Measurement Invariance of Composite Models (MICOM) procedure confirmed compositional invariance for all constructs and established partial measurement invariance. These results indicated that the necessary assumptions for conducting a Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) were satisfied. The MGA results revealed significant differences between the two experimental conditions for both structural relationships. Specifically, the relationships between Green Advertisement Skepticism and Green Trust and between Green Trust and Green Purchase Intention were significantly stronger in the Concrete Claim condition than in the Vague Claim condition. In other words, presenting sustainability claims using specific, measurable, verifiable, and numerically supported information strengthened consumers' evaluation processes. While trust in concrete sustainability claims resulted in a stronger increase in green purchase intention, skepticism toward the same claims led to a more pronounced decline in green trust. These findings suggest that, beyond the content of sustainability communication itself, message concreteness plays a critical role in shaping consumers' evaluations of environmental claims.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study demonstrates that not only the content of sustainability communication but also the level of message concreteness plays an important role in shaping consumers' evaluations. The findings indicate that Green Advertisement Skepticism has a significant negative effect on Green Trust, whereas Green Trust has a significant positive effect on Green Purchase Intention in both experimental conditions. However, the results of the Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) reveal that these relationships differ significantly depending on how sustainability claims are communicated. Specifically, in the Concrete Claim condition, where sustainability information was presented using specific, measurable, and verifiable claims, both the negative effect of skepticism on trust and the positive effect of trust on green purchase intention were significantly stronger. These findings suggest that consumers evaluate concrete sustainability claims more critically, resulting in stronger positive responses when trust is established and stronger negative responses when skepticism arises. In other words, concrete sustainability claims intensify consumers' evaluation processes. This implies that in sustainability communication, not only what organizations communicate but also how they communicate it plays a critical role in shaping consumer decision-making.

From a managerial perspective, the findings highlight the importance for hotel managers of using specific, measurable, and verifiable sustainability claims rather than vague environmental statements. However, such claims should be supported by genuine sustainability practices and communicated transparently. Otherwise, consumers' skepticism toward environmental advertising may increase, ultimately undermining green trust and green purchase intention.

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The Impact of AI-Powered Service Robots' Apology Styles and Loss Type on B2B Customer Intentions in Firm-Induced Service Failures

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Abstract

The rapid integration and deployment of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies within the hospitality sector have significantly influenced the landscape of service delivery and customer-firm interactions. While the existing body of literature has predominantly focused on how individual consumers react to service failures caused directly by AI systems, there remains a notable theoretical gap concerning the service recovery process of firm-induced failures managed by AI-powered service robots acting as immediate, first-line responders. This gap is particularly pronounced in business-to-business (B2B) contexts, where corporate clients frequently experience high-stakes scenarios, and the quality of service directly reflects upon their professional image and operational efficiency. A prevailing assumption within contemporary service research suggests that AI-powered service robots are structurally inadequate at recovering from complex, status-related service breakdowns. Grounded in the theoretical framework of Social Presence Theory, this study re-evaluates that assumption. It offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that the success of a service recovery process driven by an AI-powered service robot is not strictly dependent on the structural emotional capabilities of the machine, but rather on the strategic and contextual alignment between the selected robot's apology style and the specific nature of the customer's loss.

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how an AI-powered service robot's apology style (polite vs. humorous) influences B2B customers' negative electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) behaviours and repurchase intentions, contingent upon the type of loss (utilitarian vs. symbolic) experienced by the consumer. Specifically, the study differentiates between utilitarian losses (functional and economic disruptions, such as internet outages) and symbolic losses (threats to professional prestige and status, such as VIP misidentification). To explain the underlying psychological mechanisms governing these relationships, the study proposes and aims to test a serial mediation model. This model examines the sequential mediating roles of the three-dimensional ROBOQUAL scale's sub-dimensions—comprising robotic service quality, robotic empathy, and robotic effectiveness—and subsequent customer forgiveness.

To empirically test the proposed conceptual model and hypotheses, a 2x2 between-subjects factorial experimental design will be employed. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of four scenario-based conditions involving a firm-induced failure at a luxury business hotel and a direct interaction with an AI-powered service robot. Data will be collected via an online survey instrument, which is

planned to incorporate attention and manipulation checks to ensure data quality and methodological validity.

The theoretical framework posits that the traditional bias against AI-powered service robots in recovering symbolic failures could be overcome through conversational design. The proposed model anticipates that aligning a polite apology style with utilitarian losses, and a humorous apology style with symbolic losses, will optimise customers' robotic evaluations. Specifically, in cases of symbolic loss, a humorous approach is posited to highlight the robot's social intelligence and relieve tension, thereby functioning as a mechanism to repair the customer's damaged prestige. This cognitive and affective optimisation is expected to subsequently foster higher levels of customer forgiveness. Ultimately, this serial mediation mechanism is anticipated to reduce negative e-WOM intentions while simultaneously preserving repurchase intentions. This research aims to contribute to the service recovery literature by shifting the academic focus from generic AI-induced errors to corporate crisis management via AI-powered service robots. Practically, it will equip hospitality managers and software developers with actionable, context-aware communication strategies for programming AI service robots, ensuring the retention and satisfaction of high-value corporate clients following service failures.

Keywords: AI-Powered Service Robots, Service Recovery, Apology Style, Loss Type, B2B Hospitality, Social Presence Theory, Customer Forgiveness.

A Comparative Assessment of Organizational Failure in Two Airline Companies Using Non-Financial Indicators

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Abstract

Airline organizations operate as time-sensitive, complex and highly competitive service businesses. Unlike physical products, airline services are intangible and experience-based processes in which price, schedule, comfort, service accessibility and image shape the service (Canöz, 2017). Studies on airline organizations that ceased operations often emphasize financial indicators such as debt, cash-flow problems, profitability ratios and financial deterioration. However, detailed financial data are often unavailable for non-public airline organizations. This makes it important to trace organizational failure through non-financial indicators. Accordingly, this study compares the organizational failure processes of Onur Air (Airline OA) and Atlasjet/AtlasGlobal (Airline AG), which ceased operations.

This study uses a qualitative and descriptive case study approach. The secondary data sources, covering the 2011–2019 period, consist of annual reports of the State Airports Authority (DHMI) and General Directorate of Civil Aviation (SHGM), sector reports of the TOBB Türkiye Civil Aviation Council, also publicly available news concerning the two organizations. The number of passengers carried, number of aircraft, seat counts and domestic and international market shares constitute the main data set. Market share can help evaluate an organization's relative standing, presence and ability to accompany market growth. A decline in market share may suggest that the organization is losing presence in an expanding market and having difficulty attracting emerging demand relative to its competitors. News on organizational and managerial changes is used as supporting material.

The findings indicate that although the airline passenger market in Türkiye grew during the 2011–2018 period, Airline OA and Airline AG experienced declining domestic market shares and weakening of their relative standing in domestic operations. At Airline OA, while domestic passenger numbers remained at similar levels during 2013–2016, this decline suggests that the organization's market presence weakened in the expanding domestic market. Similarly, in the Airline AG case, despite preserving passenger numbers in certain years, its domestic position gradually weakened and eventually marginalized. In contrast, both organizations followed a more stable pattern in international operations, with even slightly increased in some years.

In terms of management, frequent top-level management changes were observed in Airline AG after 2012. Together with the brand transformation in 2015, these changes can be read as part of a broader restructuring and strategic reorientation effort that gave greater weight to international than domestic routes. However, these efforts remained limited in creating a sustainable market presence. At Airline OA, no significant changes in top management were observed following the ownership and management transition in 2012–2013. Nevertheless, the decline in market share and passenger numbers continued. This suggests that managerial continuity alone does not guarantee organizational success.

The study shows that as service businesses, organizational failure in airline organizations is not a sudden or one-dimensional outcome. Rather, it is a multidimensional process that can be evaluated through non-financial indicators such as market share, passengers carried, aircraft and seat counts, domestic and international operations and management transitions. In this respect, the study offers case-based insights into assessing the organizational failure processes of airline service businesses through non-financial indicators.

Keywords: Organizational Failure, Civil Aviation, Airline Transportation

Redefining Human Resource Services Through Generative AI: From AI Assistants to AI Agents

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Abstract

The integration of artificial intelligence into service design and delivery processes has fundamentally transformed traditional workflows in service systems, taking service quality and efficiency to a new level. In this context, Generative AI is fundamentally transforming the way human resources (HR) services are delivered, going beyond traditional automation approaches. In the initial phase, AI assistants which generate content for job descriptions and job postings, provide access to information, and offer decision support have increased efficiency and standardization in HR processes. Today, evolving AI agents are enabling the creation of more autonomous, multi-step, and goal-oriented workflows, paving the way for a new service paradigm capable of managing these workflows. This transformation requires not only the digitization of human resources services but also considerations for their redesign.

This study aims to examine, from a conceptual perspective, the transition of human resources services from AI assistants to AI agents within the framework of generative artificial intelligence. The study first compares traditional HR services, digital HR applications, and generative AI-supported service models. It then discusses the roles that AI assistants and AI agents can assume in core HR functions such as recruitment, candidate assessment, employee experience, learning and development, performance management, employee support services, and workforce planning. In this context, the study presents an analytical perspective on how the dynamic data processing capabilities of generative AI, unlike traditional static HR systems, make operational processes more flexible. Therefore, the transformation process of HR departments from a reactive support unit to a proactive and strategic business partner is structurally outlined. In this context, the contributions that human-AI collaboration, multi-agent service architectures, and decision-support mechanisms will make to future HR services are evaluated.

In the conclusion, the opportunities that generative AI offers to HR services are discussed in the context of operational efficiency, personalized employee experience, data-driven decision-making, and improved service quality, while fundamental risks such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, governance, ethical responsibility, and the need for human oversight are also addressed. In conclusion, this study argues that the future of human resources services will be shaped by a hybrid service model in which human expertise and autonomous AI agents jointly create value. By providing a conceptual framework for this transformation, the study aims to contribute to service research and the human resources literature.

Keywords: Generative AI, AI Agents, Human Resource Services, Service Design and Delivery, Human-AI Collaboration.

1. Introduction

The integration of artificial intelligence into service design and delivery processes has radically transformed traditional workflows within service systems. This transformation has taken service quality and efficiency to a new level. Previously limited to rule-based automation and static decision-support systems, this transformation has taken a qualitative jump with the emergence of Generative AI. Generative AI distinctly sets itself apart from traditional AI tools through its capacity to generate original content such as text, visuals and code. Consequently, it is redefining organizational applications in terms of decision-making, creativity and user interaction (Jiang et al., 2025; Budhwar et al., 2023). In fact, the use of generative AI in the workplace has been rapidly expanding in recent times. As of 2024, approximately three-quarters of global knowledge workers are using these tools, and their use has nearly doubled in six months (Microsoft & LinkedIn, 2024).

One of the most prominent areas of this transformation is human resources (HR) services, a service area involving intensive knowledge and interaction. Initially, AI assistants that generate content for job descriptions and vacancies, facilitate access to information and provide decision support have enhanced efficiency and standardization in HR processes (Afzal et al., 2023; Aguinis, Beltran & Cope, 2024). Currently, evolving AI agents are capable of planning and executing multi-step, goal-oriented and autonomous workflows. This is paving the way for a new service paradigm in the delivery of HR services.

This trend is not limited to assistant-based tools. The adoption of AI agents is also increasing in service-intensive sectors, with the vast majority of sales leaders using such agents viewing them as critical to growth (Salesforce, 2026). Differing from traditional static HR systems, generative AI's dynamic data-processing capacity makes operational processes more flexible. It enables HR departments to transform from a reactive support team into a proactive and strategic business partner (Priksat et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2025).

This transformation, however, requires not only the digitalization of HR services but also their redesign. Furthermore, fundamental risks such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, governance, ethical responsibility and the need for human oversight highlight the importance of human expertise (Vrontis et al., 2022; Tambe et al., 2019).

This study aims to examine the transition of human resources services from AI assistants to AI agents conceptually within the framework of generative artificial intelligence. First, the study compares traditional HR services, digital HR applications and generative AI-supported service models. Then, it discusses the roles that AI assistants and AI agents could assume in key HR functions such as recruitment, candidate assessment, employee experience, learning and development, performance management, employee support services and workforce planning. In this context, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- (i) In the context of generative artificial intelligence, how are HR services transitioning from assistant-based to agent-based models?*
- (ii) What new professional roles and service architectures emerge within core HR functions as this transition unfolds?*

The study's main argument is that the future of human resources services will be shaped by a hybrid service model where human expertise and autonomous AI agents generate value together (Jiang et

al., 2025; Rabenu & Baruch, 2025). By presenting a conceptual framework for this transformation, this study aims to contribute to both service research and the human resources literature.

The remainder of the study is organized as follows: Chapter 2 addresses the conceptual and theoretical background; while Chapter 3 explains the theoretical framework adopted by the study. Chapter 4 compares traditional, digital and generative AI-supported HR service models and examines core HR functions through the assistant–agent distinction. Chapter 5 discusses a new service paradigm based on human–AI collaboration; Chapter 6 concludes the study with findings and implications, having assessed the opportunities and risks.

2. Theoretical Background

a. Generative AI: Definition and Key Features

Generative AI refers to a type of artificial intelligence that, having been trained on large datasets, particularly large language models, is capable of generating original content such as text, images, audio and code (Budhwar et al., 2023; Jiang et al., 2025). The key feature that distinguishes generative AI from previous generations of AI applications is not only its ability to classify or predict existing data, but also its capacity to generate contextual, dynamic and creative outputs.

While traditional artificial intelligence tools rely largely on static rules and predefined models, generative AI is able to interact using natural language, work with ambiguous and unstructured inputs, and adapt as the process flows (Aguinis et al., 2024). These capabilities allow generative AI to redefine organizational applications in terms of decision-making, creativity and user interaction (Chowdhury et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the distinctive capabilities of generative AI also bring their own unique limitations. In human resources, where decisions directly affect individuals' careers and livelihoods, three limitations are especially consequential: hallucinations, the generation of factually incorrect or implausible content, an incomplete grasp of context, and a tendency to reproduce biases present in the training data (Aguinis et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2025). Consequently, the organizational value of generative AI depends not on the technology itself, but on the competence of the professionals using it and the availability of appropriate verification mechanisms (Aguinis et al., 2024).

b. The Conceptual Difference Between AI Assistants and AI Agents

Generative AI applications emerge in organizational processes in two basic forms: AI assistants and AI agents. AI assistants are human-driven, one-step, and task-specific tools. They produce content, provide information, or provide decision support in line with a prompt (Aguinis et al., 2024). In these tools, the initiative and final decision belongs to the human user. The assistant acts as a reactive support layer that helps the user complete his/her task. Functions such as preparing a job description draft, answering employee questions or summarizing can be given as examples in this category (Afzal et al., 2023; Aguinis et al., 2024).

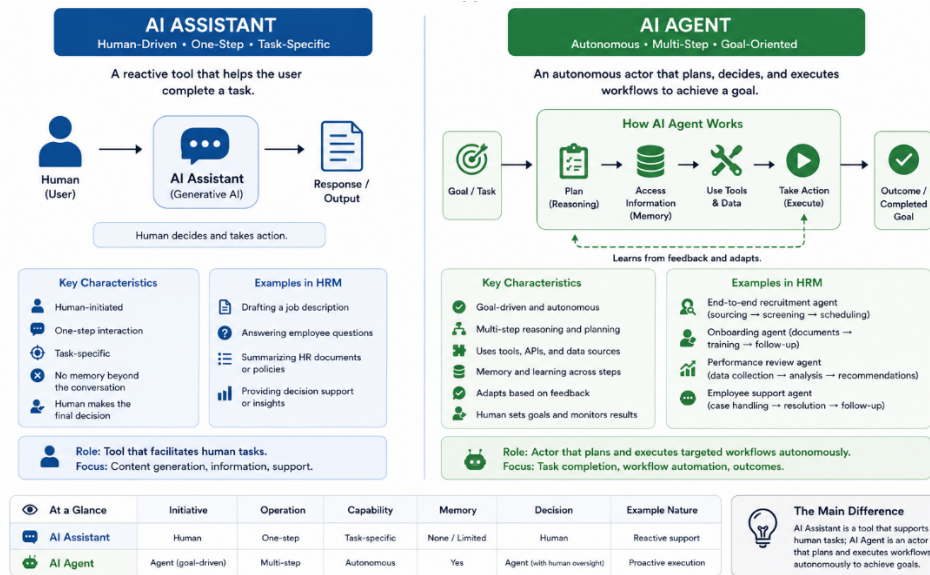


Figure 1. Comparison of AI Assistant and AI Agent¹

On the other hand, AI agents go beyond the assistant paradigm with their capacity for autonomy, memory, tool use, and multi-step reasoning. Studies on large language model-based autonomous agents define these systems as integrated structures consisting of planning, memory, tool use and action components (Wang et al., 2024). When a goal or task is given, the agent can plan the subtasks necessary to achieve that goal itself, deploy different tools and data sources, and tailor their actions based on the feedback they receive throughout the process (Wang et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2025). In this context, the main difference is that the AI assistant is a tool that facilitates the human task, while the AI agent is an actor who plans and executes targeted workflows autonomously. Furthermore, multi-agent architectures, which involve the coordinated interaction of multiple autonomous agents, provide a more effective approach for managing complex and multi-step workflows that cannot be efficiently handled by a single agent alone (Guo et al., 2024). This shift is part of a broader transformation in which generative AI evolves from static data processing to dynamic, reasoning-based workflows (Kim et al., 2025). Since research on human-artificial intelligence cooperation is still at an early stage, it is important to clarify the conceptual roles of these two paradigms in service processes, both in theoretical and practical way (Rabenu & Baruch, 2025).

c. Human Resources as a Service System: A Service Design and Delivery Perspective

HR function is essentially the process of designing and delivering a range of services to employees and managers. Therefore, considering HR as a service system provides a suitable theoretical basis to make sense of the transformation caused by generative AI. According to the service-dominant logic perspective, value is not solely produced by the firm and transferred to the customer. Instead, value is collaboratively created through the interactions and experiences of service providers and customers, a process referred to as value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Grönroos, 2011). Studies on the role of artificial intelligence in the service field reveal that AI is increasingly undertaking service delivery throughout mechanical, analytical, intuitive and empathic tasks (Huang & Rust, 2018). From

¹ Figure 1 was created by the author.

this perspective, the value of HR services emerges in the interaction between HR professionals, employees, managers, and increasingly artificial intelligence systems.

The integration of generative AI into service systems changes the actor composition of this value creation process. AI assistants, and in particular AI agents, are increasingly becoming interaction partners in service delivery, not just tools. Research on service robots and autonomous frontline technologies also emphasizes that these systems have become active actors of the service encounter, not just tools (Wirtz et al., 2018). This situation places human-AI collaboration and multi-agent service architectures at the center of service design (Jiang et al. 2025). Accordingly, the integration of generative AI into HR creates new opportunities to enhance service quality, personalization, and operational efficiency. At the same time, it challenges traditional assumptions about how HR services are designed, delivered, and co-created among the various actors involved in the service process.

d. Transition of HR Services: From Personnel Management to Generative AI-Enabled Models

Human resources services have transformed significantly in both structure and functionality in the last three decades (Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024). The initial stage of HR was dominated by an administrative and transaction-oriented personnel management approach. This evolved with the emergence of digital HR (e-HRM), which introduced the digitalization of HR processes and promoted the adoption of HR analytics and data-driven decision making. (Bondarouk & Ruël, 2009; Afzal et al., 2023). HR analytics has emerged as an important tool for evidence-based decision making (Marler & Boudreau, 2017). At this stage, artificial intelligence is positioned as a tool that increases efficiency and accuracy in functions such as recruitment, learning and development, performance management and compensation (Afzal et al., 2023; Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024). However, these practices were largely based on static data structures and predefined rules.

With the emergence of generative AI, HR services are evolving from static and transaction-oriented models to dynamic and context-sensitive service models. The literature suggests that generative AI is transforming HR processes at both the strategic and operational levels. It offers significant opportunities for tasks such as drafting job descriptions, responding to employee inquiries, delivering personalized learning experiences, and generating performance feedback. (Jiang et al., 2025; Aguinis et al., 2024). These developments allow HR departments to move away from routine administrative tasks and focus on strategic areas such as workforce planning, talent development and employee engagement (Priksht et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2025). In the human resources literature, it has been emphasized for a long time that HR should transform from an administrative function to a strategic value partner (Ulrich, 1997). This supports the realization of HR's long-standing vision of serving as a "strategic business partner" (Aguinis et al., 2024). However, it should be emphasized that this transition will be possible not only through the digitization of static systems, but also through the redesign of services, roles, and service architectures (Chowdhury et al., 2024).

3. Methodological Approach

This study is conceptual in nature and draws on a critical synthesis of the existing literature to develop a conceptual framework rather than relying on empirical data collection. The integration of generative AI into HR services, particularly the shift from AI assistants to AI agents, remains an emerging and rapidly evolving phenomenon. Therefore, a theory-driven approach was adopted to examine this transformation from a holistic perspective. As a matter of fact, it is emphasized that conceptual and integrative approaches are more appropriate in creating the theoretical basis that will guide future research and applications in newly emerging and interdisciplinary areas (Pan & Froese, 2023; Jiang et al., 2025).

The study adopted an integrative literature review approach to synthesize the existing body of knowledge and develop a conceptual framework. Unlike systematic reviews that follow a predefined protocol, an integrative review provides the flexibility to examine broad and multidimensional topics while identifying gaps in the literature (Afzal et al., 2023). This approach enabled the integration of diverse and multidisciplinary insights at the intersection of generative AI and human resource management. The following criteria were considered in the selection of resources:

- (i) It is directly related to generative AI, AI assistants, AI agents or HR management,
- (ii) It primarily focuses on peer-reviewed studies published between 2019 and 2025,
- (iii) It also includes seminal works in areas such as service dominant logic and organizational change that form the conceptual basis.

Only studies that focus on the technical or algorithmic development of artificial intelligence and do not establish a connection with human resources applications have been excluded. These criteria aim to create a knowledge base that reflects the current and rapidly changing landscape of generative AI in HR (Jiang et al., 2025).

The study's analytical framework is built on two main dimensions. The first dimension examines the transformation of human resources services through 3 evolutionary stages: traditional personnel management, digital HR (e-HRM), and generative AI-powered service models.

The second dimension is the systematic application of the assistant-agent distinction to key HR functions such as recruitment, candidate assessment, employee experience, learning and development, performance management, employee support services, and workforce planning. This framework structures the study's analysis and guides the discussion in the following sections (Figure 2).

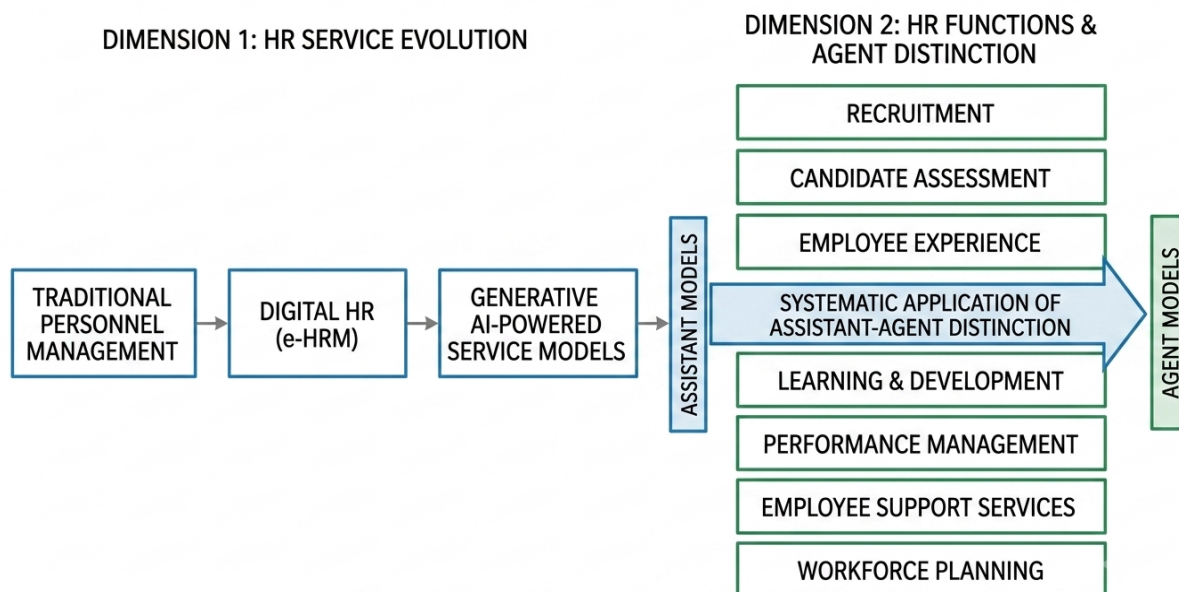


Figure 2. Analytical Framework of the Study

The analysis is supported by two complementary theoretical perspectives: service-dominant logic, which suggests that value is co-produced between the service provider and the customer (Vargo & Lusch, 2008), and the organizational change perspective, which reveals that technological change

transforms the organization among the interaction between human, task, structure, and technology components (Leavitt, 1965; Jiang et al., 2025). These perspectives allow for a holistic assessment of the transformation of generative AI in HR services at both the service system and organizational structure level.

4. Generative AI-Powered HR Services: The Evolution From Assistants To Agents

This section presents a two-stage analysis. First, traditional, digital (e-HRM), and generative AI-supported HR service models are compared. Then, the roles of AI assistants and AI agents in core HR functions are examined in terms of functional areas.

a. A Comparison of Three Service Models

Human resources services have evolved from administrative and process-oriented personnel management toward digitalization and, ultimately, generative AI-supported models (Afzal et al., 2023). The generative AI-supported model is qualitatively different from the previous two models in terms of dynamic data processing, generative output, and increasing autonomy (Jiang et al., 2025; Chowdhury et al., 2024). A comparison of the three models based on their basic dimensions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of Traditional, Digital, and Generative AI-Powered HR Service Models

Dimension	Traditional HR	Digital HR (e-HRM)	Generative AI-Powered
Data processing	Manual, static	Structured data, automation	Dynamic, unstructured data; generative
Level of autonomy	None (entirely human)	Low (rule-based)	Medium–high (from assistant to agent)
Human role	Executor / decision-maker	System operator / analyst	Supervisor/strategic partner
Personalization	Limited, standardized	Segment-based	Individual, context-sensitive
Decision logic	Experience and intuition	Rules, defined metrics	Rational, adaptive
Scalability	Low	Medium	High
Form of interaction	Face-to-face / paper-based	Portal / self-service	Natural language / dialogue
Use case	Manual performance evaluation	Applicant tracking systems (ATS)	Content-generating assistants, autonomous workflow agents

The key difference highlighted in the table is that, unlike static systems, generative AI can execute operational processes in a context-sensitive and flexible manner (Jiang et al., 2025). This flexibility lays the groundwork for the differentiation of assistant and agent roles in the following functions.

b. Recruitment and Candidate Assessment

Recruitment and candidate assessment are some of the areas where generative AI is most heavily used. At the assistant level, generative AI increases efficiency in tasks such as preparing job descriptions, screening the candidate pool, evaluating resumes, and creating interview questions; it also helps reduce biased language in job postings (Aguinis et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2025).

At the agent level, the process transforms into a goal-oriented, integrated workflow in which steps ranging from candidate sourcing to pre-screening and interview planning are executed autonomously (Black & van Esch, 2020; Wang et al., 2024). Since candidate assessment is the area where the risk of algorithmic bias is highest, it is essential to maintain human oversight in the final decision.

c. Learning and Development Across the Employee Lifecycle

The employee lifecycle following recruitment is the most visible area where the personalization capabilities of generative AI are most evident. At the assistant level, generative AI provides automated guidance during onboarding, responds to employee questions, and dynamically adapts training content to individual learning needs (Chowdhury et al., 2024; Malik et al., 2023).

At the agent level, these functions can evolve into an autonomous journey that continuously monitors an employee's skills gaps, recommends appropriate resources, and updates the development plan in real time. The coordinated management of these processes, which includes various functions, is made possible through multi-agent architectures (Guo et al., 2024). In order to prevent excessive automation from undermining employee engagement, a human-centered approach must be adopted to maintain balance.

d. Performance Management and Workforce Planning

At the assistant level, generative AI provides objectivity and predictability in both performance and planning processes. In performance management, it offers a more consistent process for setting metrics, providing real-time feedback, and conducting regular evaluations. It has been shown that properly communicated AI-based negative feedback can improve performance by increasing perceived equity (Pei et al., 2024). In employee support services, chatbots reduce HR's administrative workload by answering questions about company policies (Aguinis et al., 2024). In workforce planning, generative AI analyzes workforce data to help forecast future needs and identify skill gaps, enabling HR professionals to focus on strategic activities (Priksht et al., 2023).

At the agent level, both functions shift from periodic and individual tasks to continuous and integrated processes. A performance agent can identify issues at an early stage by continuously monitoring metrics and proactively alert managers (Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024; Jiang et al., 2025). Similarly, workforce planning may become a dynamic process that integrates various data sources (performance, turnover, skills assessments, market data). In a multi-agent architecture, outputs generated by agents with different functional roles can be coordinated and synthesized to support a holistic understanding of complex processes (Guo et al., 2024). Given the risk of hallucination and the fact that strategic decisions are closely connected to organizational context and ethical values, analytical outputs should be complemented by human judgment. Therefore, human oversight remains essential, particularly during the final evaluation and decision-making stages.

This functional analysis reveals a common pattern. While AI assistants increase efficiency in specific tasks, AI agents transform these tasks into autonomous, multi-step, and goal-oriented workflows. However, every function requires the presence of a human oversight mechanism to guard against risks such as algorithmic bias, hallucinations, and loss of context. This pattern forms the foundation of the new service paradigm—a hybrid model in which human expertise and autonomous agents collaborate to create value—which will be discussed in the next section.

5. A New Service Paradigm: Human–AI Collaboration And A Hybrid Service Model

The move from assistants to agents not only accelerates HR processes but also redesigns how the service is structured and who collaborates to deliver it. In this regard, this section examines this transformation along three dimensions.

a. From a Reactive Support Function to a Proactive Strategic Partner

Even though HR has expressed its goal of becoming a “strategic business partner” for quite a while, this objective has largely remained unfulfilled. The reason for this is that HR professionals devote a significant portion of their time to operational and administrative tasks (Ulrich, 1997; Aguinis et al., 2024). The emergence of Generative AI enables the delegation of routine tasks to autonomous workflows, allowing HR professionals to focus to proactive areas such as workforce planning, talent development, and organizational strategy (Priksht et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2025). Beyond automating repetitive tasks, AI agents’ capacity for continuous monitoring and early warning is transforming HR from a reactive function into a proactive strategic partner that anticipates future challenges (Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024). As a result, HR is evolving from a reactive support function into a proactive strategic partner that contributes more directly to organizational performance and long-term strategy.

b. Human–AI Collaboration and Multi-Agent Architectures

At the core of the new paradigm is the understanding that artificial intelligence does not replace human expertise, but rather augments human expertise. In this context, sustainable value arises from the balance between automation and augmentation (Raisch & Krakowski, 2021). While artificial intelligence provides speed, scale and analytical capacity in this collaboration, human professionals retain responsibility for contextual reasoning, ethical evaluation and final decision (Aguinis et al., 2024). With the development of agents, complex HR workflows that exceed the capacity of a single agent can now be managed using multi-agent architectures in which multiple autonomous agents work in coordination. As a result, HR services are evolving from disconnected silos of processes into an integrated, cross-functional ecosystem (Guo et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024).

c. Hybrid Value Creation

When these dimensions are considered together, it becomes evident that the future of HR services will be neither fully human nor fully autonomous. Instead, human expertise and autonomous AI agents will operate within a hybrid service model in which they jointly create value (Jiang et al., 2025; Rabenu & Baruch, 2025).

This perspective is consistent with service-dominant logic, which suggests that value is co-created through interactions among multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Grönroos, 2011). As illustrated in Figure 3, core HR functions are supported by the autonomous, multi-step workflows of AI agents on one side and the contextual oversight of human experts on the other. Value is co-created through the human-in-the-loop control points that connect these two layers, drawing on the complementary strengths of artificial intelligence and human expertise.

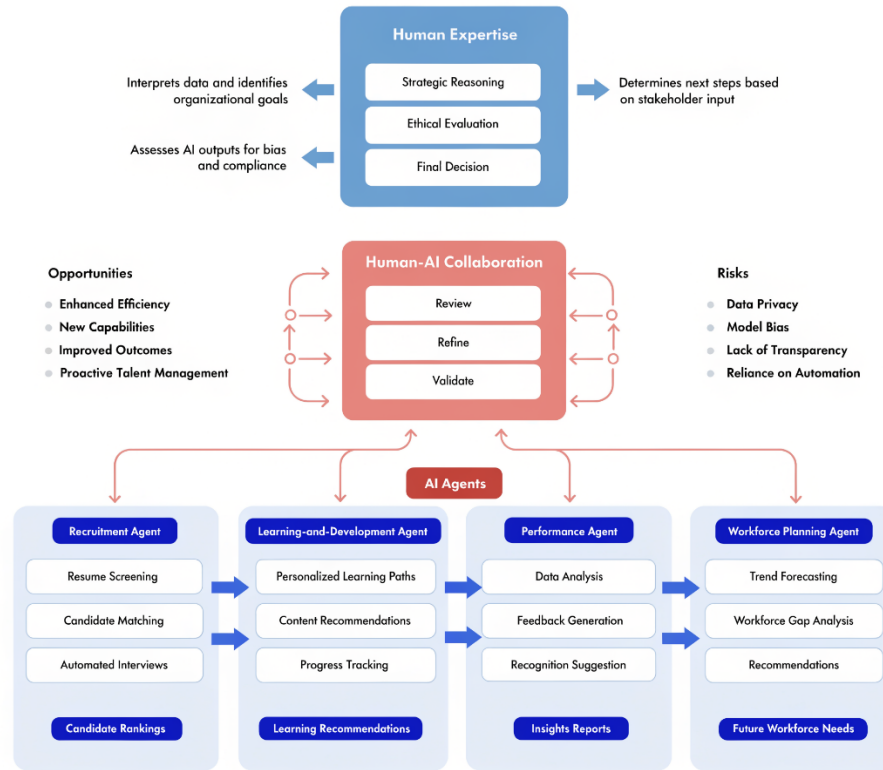


Figure 3. A Hybrid Value Creation Model for Generative AI-Powered HR Services ²

This proposed hybrid value creation model (Figure 3) represents the study's primary contribution and serves as the foundation for the discussion of the opportunities and risks examined in the next section.

6. Discussion

This study conceptually examined the transformation of human resources services from AI assistants to AI agents within the context of generative AI. It argued that this transformation points to a hybrid service model in which human expertise and autonomous artificial intelligence agents jointly create value. This section discusses the opportunities and risks associated with this transformation, followed by the theoretical and practical contributions, limitations, and directions for future research..

a. Opportunities

The integration of generative AI into HR services offers four key areas of opportunities:

- (i) *operational efficiency* : by delegating routine tasks, HR's workload and the risk of burnout are reduced, allowing time for strategic issues (Aguinis et al., 2024);
- (ii) *personalized employee experience* : dynamic data processing enables context-sensitive service delivery (Jiang et al., 2025; Malik et al., 2023);
- (iii) *data-driven decision-making* : the analysis of large datasets provides more objective decision support (Chukwuka & Dibie, 2024);
- (iv) *improved service quality* : proactive monitoring enables the early prediction of issues and the continuous improvement of service (Kim et al., 2025).

² Figure 3 was created by the author.

b. Risks and Governance

While these opportunities are significant, the integration of Generative AI into HR services also introduces several critical risks. Algorithmic bias poses the most critical risk of systems based on historical data producing biased results in hiring and performance evaluations (Köchling & Wehner, 2020; Tambe et al., 2019). Additionally, data privacy and security necessitate legal compliance due to the extensive processing of personal data (Jiang et al., 2025). In this context, governance and ethical responsibility require robust frameworks to ensure transparency and accountability (Charlwood & Guenole, 2022; Vrontis et al., 2022). Finally, the fact that systems can produce erroneous outputs (hallucinations) highlights the indispensability of human oversight (human-in-the-loop) in the HR field, where decisions directly affect individuals (Aguinis et al., 2024). These risks are interconnected. Weak governance in one area can also exacerbate trust and ethical issues (Jiang et al., 2025).

c. Theoretical and Practical Contributions

From a theoretical perspective, this study makes two contributions. First, it extends the existing literature, which focuses largely on assistants, by systematically applying the assistant-agent conceptual distinction to core HR functions.

Second, it positions the transformation of Generative AI in HR as a bridge between service research and the human resources literature by proposing a hybrid service model in which human expertise and agents create value together (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Jiang et al., 2025).

From a practical perspective, the study provides HR managers with a roadmap showing in which functions AI can be positioned as an assistant and in which as an agent, and where human-in-the-loop mechanisms must be maintained.

d. Limitations and Future Research

The conceptual nature of the study brings some limitations. While assistant applications are supported by tangible examples in the literature, AI agent applications are still in their early stages. Therefore, the agent roles discussed here largely represent forward-looking scenarios rather than extensively validated practices (Wang et al., 2024; Guo et al., 2024).

Future research can empirically test the proposed hybrid model with case studies and field studies. Furthermore, optimal forms of human–AI collaboration, as well as coordination and accountability issues in multi-agent architectures, emerge as priority research areas (Rabenu & Baruch, 2025).

7. Conclusion

This study argues that the future of human resources services will be neither entirely based on human expertise nor fully autonomous AI-driven service. Instead, it suggests that it will be shaped by a hybrid service model in which human expertise and autonomous AI agents collaborate to create value.

The transformation from assistants to agents creates the potential to transform HR from a reactive support function to a proactive and strategic business partner. However, the sustainability of this transformation depends not only on the digitization of services but also on their redesign and the maintenance of human oversight. By presenting a conceptual framework for this transformation, this study aims to contribute to both service research and the human resources literature.

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Synthesizing the Synthesized Service Research Knowledge: A Panoramic Stance with Mega-SLR Approach

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Abstract

The accelerating transformation of service economies through digitalization, ecosystem interdependence, and societal pressures has fundamentally reshaped the scope and orientation of service research. Over the last decade, service scholarship has expanded rapidly across domains such as transformative service research, service ecosystems, digital service innovation, customer experience, servitization, sustainability, and artificial intelligence-enabled services. While this intellectual growth has generated substantial cumulative knowledge, it has simultaneously intensified conceptual fragmentation. Parallel research streams have evolved with limited theoretical integration, producing overlapping conversations in some domains while leaving critical societal and institutional questions insufficiently connected. This fragmentation becomes particularly consequential in emerging economies, where service systems are increasingly shaped by institutional complexity, technological asymmetries, vulnerability, and sustainability pressures. To address this challenge, this study conducts a Mega-SLR, a systematic review of systematic literature reviews, to provide a macro-level synthesis of the intellectual architecture of contemporary service research. Unlike conventional reviews focusing on a single subdomain, this study synthesizes 141 SLR articles published in six leading service journals(i.e., The Service Industries Journal, Journal of Services Marketing, Journal of Service Management, Journal of Service Theory and Practice, International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences, and Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services), collectively encompassing approximately 15,000 analyzed articles across the broader service literature. By synthesizing the syntheses, the study moves beyond isolated thematic reviews and captures the structural evolution, thematic clustering, and cumulative direction of service scholarship at the field level. Methodologically, the study employs an inductive and theory-building approach grounded in Gioia methodology. Author keywords and review search-string keywords were systematically extracted and treated as first-order empirical codes representing the conceptual foundations of each review stream. Through iterative coding, thematic clustering, and cumulative synthesis, the analysis develops an integrated intellectual architecture revealing how knowledge accumulates, diverges, and converges across service research domains over time. The findings demonstrate that contemporary service scholarship is increasingly organized around interconnected themes associated with intelligent service systems, hybrid human–technology interactions, immersive and platform-based experiences, ecosystem governance, transformative well-being, and sustainability-oriented service configurations. At the same time, the analysis reveals significant theoretical silos between technologically oriented and societally oriented streams, limiting the field’s ability to fully theorize the systemic implications of emerging service realities. The study further identifies critical future research needs surrounding AI governance, inclusive service ecosystems, institutional resilience, ethical service infrastructures, and adaptive service architectures capable of responding to societal disruptions and sustainability transitions. By offering a panoramic and

forward-looking synthesis of approximately 15,000 studies indirectly embedded within prior SLRs, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to rethink service research under conditions of technological acceleration and societal transformation. The study advances service scholarship by shifting attention from fragmented domain-level accumulation toward an integrated understanding of how service systems evolve, govern value, and shape societal futures across increasingly complex and interconnected economies.

Keywords: Service Research, Service Scholarship, Systematic Literature Review (SLR), Mega-SLR

Reconceptualising City Branding as a Service Ecosystem: The Role of Local Governments in Co-creating Sustainable Societal Value in Emerging Economies

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1. Introduction

City branding has traditionally been conceptualised as a strategic marketing and communication activity aimed at enhancing a city's reputation, competitiveness and attractiveness to tourists, investors and skilled labour (Anholt, 2006; Dinnie, 2011). While this perspective has significantly advanced place branding scholarship, it remains largely grounded in a promotional logic that privileges destination image and reputation management over broader societal outcomes. Consequently, city branding research has paid comparatively limited attention to the governance processes through which multiple stakeholders collaboratively create value and contribute to sustainable urban development, particularly within emerging economies.

This limitation is increasingly problematic as cities in developing contexts face interconnected socio-economic, environmental and governance challenges that cannot be addressed through promotional branding alone. Local governments are expected not only to market cities but also to coordinate public services, facilitate stakeholder collaboration, stimulate local economic development and improve citizens' quality of life. Despite these expanded responsibilities, existing city branding frameworks provide limited theoretical explanation of how local governments facilitate value co-creation across diverse institutional actors. Similarly, although Service-Dominant Logic and Service Ecosystem Theory have transformed service research by positioning value as co-created through actor interactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2016), these perspectives remain underutilised within city branding scholarship.

Responding to this theoretical gap, this paper argues that city branding should be reconceptualised as a governance-driven service ecosystem rather than a destination promotion strategy. Drawing upon empirical evidence from the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, South Africa, the study positions local governments as institutional orchestrators that facilitate stakeholder collaboration and enable the co-creation of sustainable societal value. Rather than proposing city branding as an image-building exercise, the study advances a service ecosystem perspective that explains how governance structures, institutional arrangements and stakeholder interactions collectively shape city brand development and long-term societal outcomes.

2. Research Objectives

The study seeks to develop a service ecosystem perspective of city branding that advances service research beyond traditional promotional approaches. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine how local governments orchestrate stakeholder interactions within city branding initiatives;
- Explore the mechanisms through which stakeholder collaboration facilitates the co-creation of sustainable societal value;
- Reconceptualise city branding as a governance-driven service ecosystem grounded in Service-Dominant Logic; and
- Develop a theoretically informed perspective that extends service ecosystem research to city branding within emerging economy contexts.

3. Theoretical Background

This study integrates three complementary theoretical perspectives to develop a new conceptual understanding of city branding.

The first is Anholt's (2006) City Brand Hexagon, which explains city reputation through six dimensions: presence, place, potential, pulse, people and prerequisites. Although the framework provides a valuable understanding of destination competitiveness, it primarily evaluates brand outcomes rather than explaining the institutional processes through which city brands are created.

The second perspective is Dinnie's (2011) place branding framework, which positions stakeholder participation and place identity as central components of successful city branding. Dinnie acknowledges that place brands emerge through collaboration among multiple actors; however, limited attention is given to the governance mechanisms that enable such collaboration.

The principal theoretical lens is Service Ecosystem Theory, grounded in Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2016). Service ecosystems conceptualise value as co-created through interactions among resource-integrating actors operating within shared institutional arrangements. Rather than viewing organisations as sole producers of value, Service-Dominant Logic recognises that value emerges through collaborative processes involving governments, businesses, communities and other stakeholders.

Integrating these perspectives enables the study to challenge the dominant communication-oriented view of city branding. Instead, city branding is conceptualised as a governance-driven service ecosystem in which local governments function as institutional orchestrators responsible for enabling stakeholder collaboration, resource integration and sustainable societal value creation. This theoretical integration provides a novel conceptual bridge between city branding and service research.

4. Methodology

The study adopts an interpretivist philosophical orientation using a qualitative exploratory case study design to investigate the governance processes underpinning city branding within an emerging economy.

The research was conducted within the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Purposive sampling was employed to recruit ten senior municipal officials responsible for city branding, tourism, strategic planning and local economic development. These participants were selected because of their direct involvement in developing and implementing city branding initiatives.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to provide detailed accounts of stakeholder engagement, governance practices and collaborative value creation. The interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, enabling recurring patterns relating to governance, institutional coordination, stakeholder collaboration and societal value creation to emerge inductively.

The qualitative design was particularly appropriate because it facilitated an in-depth exploration of the institutional mechanisms through which city branding is enacted, thereby generating theoretical insights that extend beyond descriptive accounts of branding practice.

5. Key Findings

The findings challenge the conventional assumption that city branding is primarily concerned with destination promotion and reputation management. Instead, four interrelated theoretical insights emerged.

First, local governments perform an institutional orchestration role rather than merely acting as brand custodians. Participants consistently described municipalities as facilitators responsible for coordinating relationships among businesses, tourism organisations, investors, residents, educational institutions and civil society organisations. This finding shifts the role of local government from brand communicator to service ecosystem orchestrator.

Second, stakeholder collaboration emerged as the primary mechanism through which city branding generates value. Rather than being produced through marketing communication alone, successful city branding depends upon continuous collaboration, shared decision-making and reciprocal resource integration among multiple actors. This finding extends Service-Dominant Logic by illustrating how public institutions facilitate value co-creation within complex governance environments.

Third, the study demonstrates that sustainable societal value constitutes the principal outcome of city branding ecosystems. Participants associated successful branding with improved service delivery, enhanced community participation, increased investment, strengthened tourism competitiveness and local economic development. These findings broaden prevailing understandings of city branding by positioning societal wellbeing, rather than destination image alone, as the central objective.

Finally, institutional coordination was identified as the critical enabling mechanism underpinning effective city branding. Fragmented governance structures and limited stakeholder engagement constrained value co-creation, whereas integrated governance arrangements strengthened collaboration and enhanced sustainable developmental outcomes. This finding highlights the importance of institutional arrangements within service ecosystems and contributes to a more governance-oriented understanding of value creation.

Collectively, these findings provide empirical support for reconceptualising city branding as a governance-driven service ecosystem that creates value through institutional collaboration rather than promotional communication.

6. Contributions to Service Research

This study contributes to service research by offering a substantive conceptual extension rather than merely applying existing theory to a new context.

First, it reconceptualises city branding as a governance-driven service ecosystem, challenging the dominant destination promotion paradigm that has characterised much of the place branding literature. By positioning city branding as an institutional process of collaborative value creation, the study advances a fundamentally different theoretical understanding of how cities create and sustain value.

Second, the study extends Service Ecosystem Theory into the domain of city branding and public governance. While service ecosystem research has predominantly focused on commercial service settings, this research demonstrates its explanatory power within local government contexts, thereby broadening the applicability of Service-Dominant Logic.

Third, the study advances the concept of value co-creation by positioning sustainable societal value as the principal outcome of city branding ecosystems. Unlike existing branding frameworks that prioritise reputation and competitiveness, the proposed perspective recognises social inclusion, community wellbeing, institutional collaboration and local economic development as central expressions of value.

Fourth, the research provides an original theoretical integration of Anholt's City Brand Hexagon, Dinnie's Place Branding Framework and Service Ecosystem Theory. Rather than treating these perspectives independently, the study demonstrates how they collectively explain governance, stakeholder collaboration and value co-creation within emerging economy contexts.

Finally, the study contributes to emerging debates within transformative service research by illustrating how public institutions facilitate collective wellbeing through collaborative governance. This positions city branding as a strategic mechanism for societal transformation rather than simply a marketing activity.

7. Practical Implications

The findings suggest that local governments should move beyond communication-driven branding campaigns towards governance models that institutionalise stakeholder collaboration. Municipalities should establish formal mechanisms that integrate businesses, communities, tourism organisations, educational institutions and civil society into city branding processes. Such collaborative governance structures are likely to enhance service delivery, strengthen place competitiveness and generate sustainable societal value.

8. Conclusion

This study argues that the dominant promotional paradigm within city branding no longer adequately explains how cities create value in increasingly complex governance environments. Drawing upon Service Ecosystem Theory and empirical evidence from an emerging economy, the paper proposes that city branding should be understood as a governance-driven service ecosystem through which institutional actors collaboratively co-create sustainable societal value.

This reconceptualisation represents a theoretical contribution to both city branding and service research by shifting scholarly attention from destination image towards institutional orchestration, stakeholder collaboration and transformative value creation. In doing so, the study establishes a new conceptual foundation for future research examining the role of service ecosystems in public governance, place branding and sustainable urban development.

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Sustainable Digitalization of Public Services – Consumer Perspective

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary economy, an efficient administration must go far beyond ensuring only the provision of high-quality services to society. Efficient flow of information and resources, flexible response to market needs, and effective service to partners: customers, contractors, and, more broadly, citizens are becoming increasingly important. Meeting these challenges requires appropriate infrastructure and procedures, as well as fostering adaptive attitudes of consumers. Building public infrastructure must incorporate solutions related to the implementation of the concept of sustainable development. Implementing a sustainable development policy requires action from all parties: central and local governments, businesses, and consumers. One of the directions of sustainable development is the digitization of public services. Therefore, it is crucial to assess whether digital public service proposals are keeping pace with consumer needs, and to what extent consumers are prepared and ready to use them.

The main aim of this paper therefore, was to develop a typology of consumers in the public services market in the context of digitalization and sustainable consumption. Selected demographic and socio-economic characteristics were used to describe the identified types of consumers. Furthermore, the aims were to determine the level of consumer acceptance of digitalized public services, to identify factors determining consumer acceptance of digitally provided public services, and to identify the level of consumer awareness of the relationship between the use of digital public services and sustainable consumption.

The research verified the main hypothesis that the relationship between digitalization and sustainability significantly differentiates consumers in the public services market, which allows for the identification of individual homogeneous types of consumers, among which the dominant type is the one involved in only digitalization.

The paper began with a comprehensive literature review designed to provide the research background. A quantitative research method was applied to gain deep insight into phenomena. It involved a survey with a standardized questionnaire of consumers in Poland. The empirical analysis were divided into two parts. In the first, the characteristics of consumer involvement into digital public services were presented along with determinants and relations with sustainable consumption. In the second part, consumer typology was carried out, using digitalization and sustainability as criteria of typology and (i) Schwartz's universal values, (ii) demographic, and (iii) socioeconomic determinants, to describe identified types of consumers. The study ended with conclusions, limitations, and directions for further research.

2. Theoretical Background

a. Digitalization of consumer behavior in public services

The concept of consumer behavior digitalization is difficult to define, and at the same time, it is understood in various ways, both static and dynamically. In the first approach, consumer behavior digitalization refers to the state of satisfying consumer needs through electronic media, particularly the Internet (Barney, 2008, Smyczek, 2010, Bywalec, 2010). In the dynamic approach, consumer behavior digitalization will be considered in the context of the increasing saturation of social and economic life with Internet technologies, and the growing number of consumers who spend increasing amounts of time on online activities. In the dynamic, or process-based, approach, digitalization can also be defined as the spectacular development of information and communication technologies over the years, enabling the use of Internet, mobile, and electronic solutions in consumption processes, influencing changes in existing and creating new consumer behaviors (Sobocińska, 2012).

The digitalization of consumer behavior is therefore a multifaceted and multi-faceted phenomenon, which is why it should be considered in terms of several types: mimetic, creative, and autonomous digitalization (Sobocińska, 2012). Mimetic digitalization can be conceptualized as the copying of existing consumer behaviors into cyberspace. Creative digitalization, in turn, will encompass consumption behaviors that have no reflection outside of cyberspace. Autonomous digitalization is currently a utopian state and assumes self-learning and self-organization of programs within cyberspace. The literature most often analyzes the digitalization of consumer behavior from a mimetic perspective. This means that most literature discussing the topic of consumer behavior digitalization focuses on analyzing behaviors that also exist offline. Behaviors specific to cyberspace, i.e., behavior digitalization from a creative perspective, are often overlooked (Grybś-Kabocik, 2024).

Given the above, it should be assumed that the digitization of consumer behavior is the state of satisfying consumption needs using the internet, both mimetic and creative. This means that the digitization of consumer behavior is assumed to manifest itself both in the transfer of existing behaviors to cyberspace and in the creation of new ones.

The digitization of consumer behavior was initially observed primarily in relation to online purchases of goods. However, its dynamic development is increasingly observed in the services market as well. This also applies to services that were previously offered exclusively through traditional channels, i.e., public services (Andersson et al., 2022).

In this case, through digitized public services (e-government), it is the process of transferring traditional official procedures to the digital space, aimed at increasing the operational efficiency of the state and raising the level of citizen satisfaction. The dynamic development of e-government systems focuses on building an integrated infrastructure that enables handling administrative, tax, and healthcare matters without the need for physical visits to offices (Boll, 2015).

Effective digital transformation of the public sector relies on several fundamental technical and legal elements. These include: digital identity, which is secure online identity verification and a prerequisite for accessing personalized services; data interoperability, which is a system architecture enabling various institutions and state registries to seamlessly exchange information; the Once-Only Principle, which is a legal and technical assumption according to which citizens provide data to public administration only once, and offices exchange it automatically; and digital financial services, which is the integration of secure online payments, enabling immediate payment of stamp duties and taxes (Baptista, 2020).

b. Sustainable consumption in the public services market

The concept of sustainable development represents an innovative model for socio-economic development, shaping civilizational progress in recent years, ensuring a high quality of life through the sustainable protection of natural, human, and man-made capital. It is clear that the economy is

undergoing rapid changes influenced by the implementation of sustainable development principles. This idea is a factor that strongly influences the changes taking place in global markets, encompassing almost every sphere of human life. The concept of sustainable development extends not only to production, which is called sustainable production, but also, and perhaps above all, to consumption, which takes the form of sustainable consumption.

Consumers are becoming increasingly environmentally aware and responsible. There is also a noticeable trend toward reduced consumption or changing form of consumption (Cleveland et al., 2012). Consumers have started acting in line with the principles of sustainable consumption (Lavelle et al., 2015).

Sustainable consumption, understood as the process of satisfying the consumer's needs leading to an improvement in the quality of life, and thus the level of consumer satisfaction with the entirety of existence, does not limit the possibility of satisfying the needs of other consumers and future generations and requires that the "use" of the product be perceived from the perspective of all stages of its life cycle - from the moment of production to the disposal stage (Zrałek, 2018). The main areas of sustainable consumption should cover: meeting needs and the next stages of the decision-making process, improving resource efficiency, increasing the use of renewable energy sources, minimizing waste, perceiving products from a life-cycle perspective, and following the principle of equity in access to resources (Giulio et al, 2014).

The market constitutes an important area of research, highlighting how everyday consumer decisions influence both environmental outcomes and purchasing behaviors. Therefore, sustainable consumption should be assumed to take the form of specific consumer behaviors (Stern, 2000). In this approach, the criterion for recognizing a given behavior as sustainable is not the consumers' intention, but an assessment of the effects of their actions. It is therefore an impact-oriented approach (Giulio et al, 2014). By adopting this approach, sustainable consumer behavior can be treated as a broad category encompassing a variety of differently motivated consumer activities with a common denominator of supporting sustainable development.

In this case, sustainable consumption of public services means using essential government offerings—like public transport, water, healthcare, and energy—in a way that meets basic needs while protecting natural resources for the future. It relies on smart infrastructure, efficient public spending, and active community participation to reduce waste (Coote, 2021).

There are three main principles of sustainable consumption of public services. First one is related with resource efficiency, which means using less energy, water, and material goods in public buildings and transit networks. Second one is connect to universal access, by ensuring fair and equal access to essential services for all residents without overstraining local ecosystems. And finally, third one is related with green procurement, which mean that governments need to buy eco-friendly goods and low-carbon services from responsible suppliers (Fuchs, 2020).

One of the most important elements aimed at improving the sustainability of consumption in the public services sector is digitalization. Digitalization, however, is understood not as shifting paperwork and public administration online to reduce paper waste and travel emissions, but rather as actual consumer use of digitalized public services.

3. Research Methodology

Due to the complexity of digitalization and sustainability in public sector, as well challenges in operationalizing them, research often adopts a narrower approach. In this perspective, first, when it comes to sustainable consumption, a narrow understanding of this phenomenon has been adopted, as ecological, environmentally friendly consumer behavior. However, in the case of the digitalization of

public services is was necessary to select the types of public services for examination. Given that public services cover three main areas. First one is related to social services, covering: education, healthcare, social assistance, culture and sports. Second one is connected with technical (infrastructure) services, like: public transport, municipal services, energy and heating. And finally, administrative and law enforcement services: public safety, justice, public administration (Lorek et al., 2023). Accordingly, in this study of five type of digital services connected with public sector were taken in consideration. There were: online payments for cinema and cultural tickets, as well online contact with doctors and medical facilities, representing social services. There we also online payments for technical public services and buying e-tickets for public transport, representing technical services. And finally were services related to all administrative matters.

The research process was divided into two main phases:

- Phase I – diagnosis of consumer adoption of digital public services and their perception of influence on sustainable consumption,
- Phase II – consumer typology according to digitalization and sustainable consumption of public services.

To this end, direct quantitative research was conducted using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) technique. A standardized questionnaire was employed in the study.

The survey was conducted on a sample of the adult (≥ 18) Polish population ($N = 1,247$). The field-work took place between April and July 2024.

Taking into consideration characteristic of research sample, in could be underline that there is no significant gender predominance among consumers, who were primarily of working age (35–54 years; 45.2%). Single-person households were in the minority (14.2%), while the remaining households exhibited a relatively even distribution in size, with two-, three-, and four-or-more-person households each falling in the range of 28.0%–29.3%, showing no single group dominance. Additionally, the majority of consumers resided in urban areas (63.0%), including large cities with populations between 100,000 and 500,000 (25.8%). In contrast, a minority of consumers lived in rural areas (37.0%). The socioeconomic profile of the consumers reveals a relatively well-educated population, with a majority holding higher education degrees (54.1%). The group demonstrates occupational diversity, with office workers (23.5%) and manual workers (16.6%) being the most represented. Their economic situation is predominantly stable, with 10.7% rating it as very good, 46.9% as good, and 36.6% as average.

Standard statistical methods were used to analyze the collected data. For typology of consumers based on sustainable consumption and digitalization was conducted using K-means (K-centroids cluster analysis) to identify the most similar types of consumers (Leisch, 2006). The number of consumer types was determined by repeating the clustering procedure for different group counts and then comparing the sum of the distances of all observations to their respective cluster representatives. A smaller distance indicates a better clustering solution (Dolnicar et al., 2018). The Pearson's χ^2 test was used to examine the relationship between identified types of consumers and the following variables: (i) the demographic, (ii) socioeconomic determinants, and (iii) universal values of Schwartz's theory, Pearson residuals, as determined by the χ^2 test results, were used to describe the nature of these relationships.

4. Research Results

a. Consumption of digital public services and sustainability

Research shows that consumers use digitized public services on relatively lower level. The most common way of using digitized public services among respondents is to pay online or via a mobile app for technical public services, such as energy, heating, or municipal services. Over half of respondents (51.9%) report using such services constantly, while 36.2% report using them frequently.

Only 3.2% say they never use such services, and 7.6% rarely. Slightly less respondents use electronic tickets for cinema and cultural institutions: 43.9% always use them, 30.2% frequently. 15.5% rarely use such services, and 10.4% never use them. Slightly fewer respondents use electronic public transportation tickets. Nearly one-third of respondents (32.5%) use such tickets constantly, and 17.6% frequently. 9.7% of respondents do not use this facility, and 14.5% say they use it rarely. Over one-fifth of respondents (21.7%) often conduct official matters online. However, only 7.6% always do so, and 16.3% never do so. Nearly one-third of respondents (31.8%) never contact a doctor or clinic online, and about one-quarter admit they rarely communicate with healthcare providers. Only 10.9% of patients use this channel regularly, while 32% use it frequently.

In an attempt to explain the relatively low level of respondents' use of digitized public services, barriers to using these services were identified. Respondents were very consistent in identifying the most important reasons that prevent consumers from using digital services. For all behaviors (except for using public transportation), approximately 40% of respondents cited a lack of appropriate skills. Regarding the use of administrative services, this reason was cited by a staggering 43.5% of respondents. Second place was occupied by an objective lack of opportunities (unavailability of solutions), with responses ranging from 19% to 25%, and third by laziness, cited by 10.9% to 18% of respondents. Reasons such as the belief that it won't change anything, lack of time, others not doing it, why bother, and the high cost were cited by fewer than 5% of respondents. The opinion of other people is taken into account to a small extent: the answer "I do not want to be considered uneducated or poor" is given by up to 1.5% of respondents.

When assessing the degree of difficulty in using digital services, respondents found it easiest to pay for public technical services (71.5%) and for cinema tickets or cultural events (56.1%). 7.2% of respondents rated paying for technical services as very difficult, while 10.8% rated paying for cinema tickets or cultural events as difficult. One in three respondents rated purchasing e-tickets for public transport and using public administration services as difficult or very difficult, but in these cases, approximately 30% of respondents rated using such services as easy. Using medical services and communicating with medical facilities online was rated as the most difficult – 12.8% of respondents considered it very difficult, and 34.6% considered it difficult, while only one in four found it very easy.

Respondents were also asked to assess the extent to which they believed using digital services had an environmental impact. According to respondents, the greatest environmental impact is posed by the use of electronic tickets for public transport – over three-quarters of respondents believe this behavior has a large or very large environmental impact. Less than 10% of respondents stated that this impact is small, including 1.8% who stated that it has no impact at all. Significantly fewer, less than half (28.5%), also rated paying for technical public services and purchasing electronic tickets for cultural events as having a very large or large environmental impact (46.9%), with almost one in four reporting this impact as very large. Less than half of respondents (47.9%) rated handling official matters online as having an environmental impact. The least important thing for protecting the natural environment is remote contact with a doctor or clinic: only 13.7% of people believe that this impact is very high or high, and as many as 26.1% claim that such behavior has no impact on the environment.

To determine the relationship between the use of digitalized public services and the perception of these behaviors as influencing sustainable consumption, Kendall's Tau b correlation coefficients were performed, which took into account the scope of use of digital public services, the assessment of the difficulty of using them and the impact they have on the natural environment.

b. Consumer typology in the public services in context of digitalization and sustainability

The diversity of consumer attitudes and behavior in the area of digitalization and sustainability, in the public services market, prompts the analysis related to the typology of consumers. The typology consists of ranking and the logical ordering of elements of a given set according to the principle of comparing their features with the features of elements recognized as types within a given set (Lewandowska et al., 2018; Ramadan et al., 2023). As a result of the conducted study, the presence of three types of consumers was demonstrated, *i.e.*, Modern Sustainable – 18%, Digital Focus – 31%, Traditional Sceptic – 43%.

The Modern Sustainable type of consumers

The first identified type of consumers in the public services market is the Modern Sustainable. This type of consumer relates to use public services in cyber space and to sustainable consumption. This is the most complex type of consumer identified in the study.

The study conducted among this identified type several statistically significant variables. The Modern Sustainable are very active in using digital public services, *i.e.* buying e-tickets for public transport, online payments for cinema and cultural tickets, dealing with administrative matters, as well online contact with doctors and medical facilities. They also perceive usage of digital public services as easy or on moderate level. This type of consumers also demonstrate the most environmentally attitudes within the public services sector. For them by using digital public services can strongly or on moderate level positively influence on natural environment.

Table 3: Characteristics of Modern Sustainable consumers on public services market

Criteria of typology	Features of consumer types
Use of electronic services: • E-tickets for public transport • Online payments for cinema and cultural tickets • Dealing with administrative matters • Online contact with doctors and medical facilities Degree of difficulty in using electronic services: • Easy • Moderate Impact on the natural environment: • Big • Moderate	Gender: women* Age: average age between 35 and 44* Education: higher* Occupation: white-collar workers and self-employed Size of household: 2-persons Economic situation: good* Place of leaving: bigger cities above 100,000 Social values: power and achievement, stimulation and self-direction*

*Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

Source: Own elaboration based on results of direct research.

Finally, this study conducted among this type identified several statistically significant variables. The Modern Sustainable are mostly women. They are mostly consumers of an average age between 35 and 44, with higher education, and most assess their household's economic situation as good. They also represent following social values: power and achievement, as well stimulation and self-direction. Additionally, although not statistically significant, most Modern Sustainable live in bigger cities above 100,000 inhabitants. They are mostly white-collar workers and the self-employed. They represent smaller households—2 people.

The Digital Focus type of consumers

The second identified type of consumer in the public services market is the Digital Focus. The study conducted among this type identified several statistically significant variables, which are related to digitalization in the absence of pro-environmental tendencies.

In the aspect of digitalization, the statistically significant characteristics of the Digital Focus in the public services market indicate that this group is highly active online, *i.e.* online payments for technical public services, buy e-tickets for public transport, online payments for cinema and cultural tickets and dealing with administrative matters in cyber space. They also perceive usage of digital public services as easy or very easy. It should be noted that, the Digital Focus do not exhibit any tendencies toward ecological behavior or sustainable consumption.

Table 2: Characteristics of Digital Focus consumers on public services market

Criteria of typology	Features of consumer types
Use of electronic services: • Online payments for technical public services • E-tickets for public transport • Online payments for cinema and cultural tickets • Dealing with administrative matters Degree of difficulty in using electronic services: • Easy • Very easy Impact on the natural environment: • Low • Very low	Gender: men* Age: below 34 years Education: secondary and higher Occupation: manual workers, middle and higher level managers Size of household: 2-3 persons Economic situation: very good and good Place of leaving: cities between 20 and 500 thousand Social values: hedonism*

*Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

Source: Own elaboration based on results of direct research.

Finally, statistical analyses also show that the Digital Focus consumers are most often men and typically rate their household's economic situation as very good or good. According to social values, they represent mostly hedonic approach to life. Although not statistically significant, the Digital Focus are most often younger consumers, below 34 years old, with secondary- or higher-level education, and live mostly in smaller towns. The Digital Focus are usually manual workers and managers, both middle and higher level. They represent 2-3 persons households.

The Traditional Sceptic type of consumers

The third, and last identified type of consumer is the Traditional Sceptic. This type of consumers have limited digitalization tendencies on public services market, with absolutely no positive influence on natural environment.

In this study, statistically significant findings indicate that the Traditional Sceptic in this market use the Internet only to pay for technical public services. They also perceive usage of public services in cyber space as difficult or even very difficult. In the aspect of sustainability, the Traditional Sceptic do not exhibit pro-ecological attitudes.

Table 3: Characteristics of Traditional Sceptic consumers on public services market

Criteria of typology	Features of consumer types
Use of electronic services: • Online payments for technical public services Degree of difficulty in using electronic services: • Difficult • Very difficult Impact on the natural environment: • Non	Gender: women and men Age: above 45 years* Education: secondary and lower Occupation: blue-collar workers and retailers/pensioners Size of household: 4 persons and more Economic situation: average* Place of leaving: rural area and small towns Social values: security*

*Correlation significant at the 0.01 level

Source: Own elaboration based on results of direct research.

Finally, statistical analyses show that Traditional Sceptic consumers are rather older, above 45 years old, most often assess their household's economic situation as average and according to social values focus on security. Although not statistically significant, most of the Traditional with a secondary or lower level of education, living in rural area or small towns. The Traditional Sceptic are both women and men, usually blue-collar workers and retailers/ pensioners. They represent big households of 4 and more people.

5. Conclusions

Digitalization and sustainability as key trends on contemporary market were the primary focus of this analysis on public services sector. The conducted study revealed that in the area of digitalization, the most popular are online payments for technical public services and for entertainment events. There are also more and more popular e-tickets for public transport. The least popular are online contact with medical doctors and healthcare units. It can therefore be stated that the public services market is mainly represented by the mimetic version of digitalization.

Research also shows that consumers who use digitalized public services rate them as easy or very easy to use. Those who do not use such services report the greatest difficulties in using public services in cyberspace. As the research results also show, not all consumers who use digitalized public services perceive their environmental impact in this regard. Only in the case of purchasing e-tickets for public transport are more than twice as many consumers than consumers who use these services claim that such behavior significantly contributes to sustainable consumption. Thus, it can be concluded that respondents use public digital services at a moderate level. They mainly use services they have the easiest access to and perceive as easy to use. The magnitude of such behavior's environmental impact is significantly less important when deciding on such behavior.

The conducted study also confirmed the hypothesis that the relationship between digitalization and sustainability significantly differentiates consumer in the public services market. The analyses conducted allowed the identification of three distinct consumer types, depending on their engagement,

or lack thereof, in digitalization and their attitudes toward sustainability. The consumers types identified in this study are Modern Sustainable, Digital Focus, and Traditional Sceptic. The presence of distinct consumer types indicates the heterogeneity of digitalization and sustainability, shaped by demographic and socioeconomic factors, as well social values.

It should be borne in mind that the conducted study has some limitations, which, however, can be turned into an advantage for future studies. The key limitation of this study may result from the use of the CAWI method, which, by its nature, restricts the participation of older adults and the digitally excluded. An important limitation of the study is its focus solely on one market: public services. Consumer approach to digitalization and sustainability, are certainly different, which affects the significance of decisions made in the market. Finally, the direct research was conducted solely using a survey, which represents quantitative methods. However, the application of a triangulation approach and qualitative research, among other methods, would have allowed a deeper look at the identified consumer types in the pharmaceutical market. It is believed that focusing future research on using other quantitative research techniques, also supported by qualitative research, as well as on diverse consumer groups, will contribute to a better understanding of digitalization and sustainability in the public services sector.

Considering the obtained results in a broader context, the developed consumer typology in the public services sector could have many practical implications. It can be applied in the practical operations of the government and local administration, as it offers a clear and accessible explanation of the relationship between digitalization and sustainability within the studied market. The possessing knowledge of the different consumer types could be essential for the development of any marketing program, including the formulation of marketing strategies by public sector.

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The Role of Hotels' Green Practices in Service Recovery Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Victims and Observers

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Abstract

As sustainability becomes a strategic priority in the hospitality industry, understanding how green practices shape customers' responses to service failures and recovery efforts has gained increasing importance. Although prior research has established that green hotels benefit from more favorable customer evaluations, existing studies largely overlook whether these positive effects extend to service failure and recovery contexts, and whether they differ between directly affected customers and observing third-party customers. This gap is particularly important given that service failures are inevitable in hospitality settings and customer judgments may be influenced by sustainability-related cues even in the absence of direct experience. Drawing on Attribution Theory and the Halo Effect, this study explains how sustainability cues shape customers' evaluative processes, and extends Deontic Justice Theory to account for observing customers' fairness perceptions. Accordingly, we investigate whether hotel greenness influences customers' recovery evaluations and behavioral intentions across both victimized and observing roles.

Two scenario-based experimental studies were conducted. Study 1 examined the effect of hotel type (green vs. non-green) on service recovery satisfaction, forgiveness, and revisit intention. Study 2 extended this design by incorporating customer role (victim vs. observer) in a 2×2 between-subjects experiment. Data were collected from online consumer panels consisting of adults (Study 1: $n = 235$; Study 2: $n = 283$). Established measurement scales adapted from prior literature were used. Data were analyzed using SPSS, and mediation and moderated mediation effects were tested using PROCESS macro. Participants were randomly assigned to experimental conditions.

Results of Study 1 indicate that customers exposed to green hotels report higher service recovery satisfaction ($M_{\text{green}} = 5.10$, $M_{\text{non-green}} = 4.08$, $t(354) = 6.35$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.67$) and forgiveness ($M_{\text{green}} = 5.15$, $M_{\text{non-green}} = 4.13$, $t(354) = 7.14$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.76$) compared to those exposed to non-green hotels. Forgiveness mediates the relationship between recovery satisfaction and revisit intention, with a stronger indirect effect in the green hotel condition. Study 2 further demonstrates that this mediation model holds across both victimized and observing customers. Notably, the indirect effect is strongest among observing customers in green hotels ($B = 0.553$; $t = 9.766$, $p < .05$, $CI [0.4417, 0.6647]$), and weakest among victimized customers in non-green hotels ($B = 0.182$, $t = 3.199$, $p < .001$, $CI [0.0700, 0.2938]$). Overall, findings suggest that sustainability functions as a form of reputational capital that enhances post-recovery evaluations and strengthens the translation of recovery satisfaction into future behavioral intentions via forgiveness. Importantly, results show that these effects extend beyond directly affected customers, as observing individuals also incorporate sustainability cues when forming fairness judgments. This study contributes to service recovery literature by demon-

strating the boundary-spanning role of sustainability in shaping both direct and vicarious customer evaluations and by integrating attributional and justice-based mechanisms in explaining recovery outcomes in green service contexts.

Keywords: Green Hotels, Sustainability, Service Recovery, Satisfaction, Customer Forgiveness, Observing Customers

Flow Experience and Consumer Engagement in Generative AI-Supported Interactions: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming consumer-brand interaction from a functional service channel into an experiential process. Systems powered by large language models allow consumers to search for information, evaluate options, and contact brands in natural language, in a context-sensitive and adaptive way. The emotional and experiential side of the interaction therefore gains importance alongside functional efficiency. The literature that has grown rapidly since the popularization of ChatGPT remains focused on applications and technology adoption, appears conceptually fragmented, and does not explain through which psychological mechanism generative AI interaction turns into consumer engagement. Existing studies also tend to treat generative AI and earlier chatbot or conversational AI forms interchangeably, which weakens the originality of any proposed mechanism. To address this gap, the study develops an integrative conceptual framework in which flow experience links the experiential affordances of generative AI to consumer engagement. Positioned as theory adaptation (Jaakkola, 2020), the study carries the established flow-engagement mechanism into the generative AI context by reviewing seminal theoretical sources together with the recent generative AI and customer experience literature.

The framework separates affordances that are qualitatively new relative to earlier conversational agents (co-creation, multimodal generation, and contextual creativity) from affordances inherited from those agents but intensified in generative systems (personalization, conversational interactivity, and human-like cues). Rather than matching affordances to flow dimensions one by one, the framework offers a mechanism map that preserves the antecedent-experience logic of flow theory. Each affordance is mapped onto the flow-related psychological mechanism it most directly engages, such as skill-challenge balance, sense of control, immediate feedback, social presence, and telepresence. These pathways jointly support one holistic flow experience. Because the framework operates at the mechanism level, it remains compatible with the classic, online, and social media conceptualizations of flow and leaves the choice of measurement model to empirical research. Flow in turn strengthens the three engagement dimensions of cognitive processing, affection, and activation (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Engagement is treated as conceptually distinct from its transactional (purchase intention), relational (brand loyalty and platform attachment), and social (electronic word of mouth) outcomes. The structure is consistent with stimulus-organism-response logic, yet the explanatory backbone remains flow theory itself.

These relationships are contingent rather than universal. AI literacy, perceived transparency, privacy concern, and task type moderate them, and perceived authenticity conditions the effect of human-like cues. The framework also incorporates four tensions specific to generative AI through conditional propositions. These are anthropomorphism versus eeriness, personalization versus privacy, transparency versus immersion, and ease versus challenge. The last tension arises because a system that removes all difficulty can erode the very skill-challenge balance on which flow depends. The contribution is not merely contextual. The study argues that generative AI transforms the antecedent structure of flow. Because the user and the system now dynamically co-calibrate the skill-challenge balance, flow becomes a co-created state. The resulting proposition set offers a stepwise agenda for empirical research and yields managerial and ethical implications for designing engaging yet transparent generative AI experiences.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Generative Artificial Intelligence, Flow Experience, Consumer Engagement, Anthropomorphism

Human–AI Collaboration in UAE Organizations: Effects of AI-Enabled HR Analytics on Employee Performance and Retention in the Hospitality Sector

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Abstract

The UAE hospitality sector is a major employer and a strategic contributor to national economic diversification. At the same time, hotels face persistent workforce challenges, including turnover, skill gaps, and inconsistent service quality. AI-enabled HR analytics (e.g., predictive turnover models, performance dashboards, and talent-matching tools) offer organizations new ways to enhance decision-making and workforce outcomes. This study examines how AI-enabled HR analytics adoption influences employee performance and retention intentions in UAE hotels, and whether these effects occur through human–AI collaboration quality and perceived fairness. Drawing on socio-technical systems thinking and established IS/technology adoption and success perspectives, the paper proposes a conceptual model and a mixed-method methodology combining surveys of hotel employees/managers with interviews and organizational HR metrics (Davis, 1989; DeLone & McLean, 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2003). The study contributes to management research by clarifying the mechanisms through which AI tools generate value in HR—not merely through automation, but through improved human decision-making processes and trust (Jarrahi, 2018). Practically, results will guide UAE hotel leaders in implementing AI analytics responsibly, improving workforce stability, and aligning digital transformation with employee well-being and ethical governance (Stone et al., 2015).

Keywords: AI-Enabled HR Analytics, Human–AI Collaboration, Employee Performance, Retention, Hospitality, UAE, HRM Digital Transformation

When the Product Is Taken for Granted: Corporate Image and Billing as the True Drivers of Customer Satisfaction in a Moroccan Urban Utility

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Abstract

In essential utility services, the core product is a regulated commodity that customers consume passively and presume to be reliably supplied, raising the question of what generates satisfaction when the product itself is taken for granted. This study examines the relative contribution of utilities provided by the billing relationship, and corporate image to overall customer satisfaction, using a survey database of 606 residential customers of a large Moroccan urban multi-utility operator (water, electricity, public lighting, and sanitation). To guard against method-specific artefacts, four complementary techniques were triangulated: binary logistic regression, hierarchical clustering, neural-network regression with permutation-based feature importance, and a mediation (process) model. The findings converge on a single, robust finding. In the logistic model (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .40$; 81% classification accuracy), corporate image was the dominant predictor of being satisfied (odds ratio = 4.78, $p < .001$), followed by billing (OR = 3.16, $p < .001$), while sanitation and public lighting were modest but significant and, strikingly, water and electricity—the core utilities—were not significant ($p = .58$ and $.47$). The neural network reproduced this hierarchy on hold-out data, ranking image and billing as the most influential features ahead of all technical services, confirming the result is not an artefact of the linear specification. Hierarchical clustering identified a large, broadly satisfied majority and a small “detractor” segment whose discontent generalized uniformly across every touchpoint, including image. Finally, the mediation model showed that billing affects satisfaction both directly ($c' = .49$, $p < .001$) and indirectly through image (indirect effect = $.29$, $p < .001$; total effect = $.77$), with billing strongly shaping image perceptions ($a = .56$, $p < .001$); image thus partially mediates the billing–satisfaction link. These results extend the cumulative-satisfaction tradition. Consistent with SERVQUAL, SERVPERF, and Grönroos’s distinction between technical and functional quality, satisfaction is produced by how the service is experienced rather than by the homogeneous technical outcome. The non-significance of electricity and water is best understood through Kano’s notion of “must-be” attributes: continuous supply is an expected entitlement whose presence cannot create satisfaction, only destroy it when it fails. Satisfaction is therefore generated higher up the value chain—at the billing encounter, a utility’s most frequent and tangible moment of truth, and through corporate image, which national satisfaction indices (ACSI/ECSI) identify as a central antecedent. Managerially, the study reframes customer-experience priorities away from the commodity and toward the relational and reputational interface, where marketing efforts yields the greatest satisfaction returns.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction; Corporate Image; Service Quality; Billing Experience; Utilities; SERVQUAL; SERVPERF

Rejecting Digital Service Ecosystems and Customer-to-Customer (C2C) Stigmatization: A Qualitative Proposal on Smartphone Abandonment

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Abstract

As smartphones and digital platforms become pervasive participation infrastructures, continuous connectivity has emerged as a dominant consumption norm within digital service ecosystems. When individuals intentionally withdraw from these ecosystems in pursuit of personal well-being, their exit disrupts the service experience of remaining participants. This study examines how mainstream consumers respond to deliberate withdrawal and how these responses shape service system well-being (SSW). SSW emerges from multi-actor interactions across micro, meso, and macro levels (Finsterwalder & Kuppelwieser, 2020). This research focuses on the tension between micro-level subjective well-being (Beirão et al., 2017) and meso-level community interactions (Leo et al., 2019; Laud et al., 2023). The primary research question asks: how is a peer's conscious digital withdrawal interpreted by those who remain as a threat to the collaborative and social value dimensions of SSW, and how does this interpretation mark the withdrawing individual with a spoiled service identity? Drawing on stigma theory (Goffman, 1963; Link & Phelan, 2001), the study explores how the micro-level choice to exit is met with peer stigmatization. This extends the framework from intrapersonal identity management to a customer-to-customer (C2C) mechanism: withdrawal becomes the discrediting attribute, and remaining users label the disengaging actor with a "spoiled service identity," informally enforcing continued participation. Treating disengagement as a peer-stigmatized act, this study investigates how these customer-level processes may sustain ecosystem membership. This study makes three interconnected contributions to service research. First, it addresses the underexplored dark side of SSW by directing analytical attention toward C2C dynamics rather than organizational service failures. Second, it proposes spoiled service identity as a novel construct, extending Goffman's framework to capture how individuals who voluntarily disconnect are discursively cast as deviant by their social networks. Unlike prior marketplace stigma research focusing on how consumers manage personal discrediting attributes (e.g., Mirabito et al., 2016), this study reframes stigma as peer-enacted. Third, it conceptualizes this stigmatization as a meso-level normative policing process through which mainstream consumers reinforce continuous connectivity. The study frames this as a constitutive tension between micro-level and meso-level well-being. When individuals exit for personal well-being, the collaborative well-being of the remaining community is diminished. Stigmatization is theorized to operate as a meso-level mechanism that may resolve this tension in favor of the collective. By pressuring would-be disconnectors to remain, it is theorized to preserve the community's meso-level well-being, potentially at the expense of the individual's micro-level autonomy. The research thus foregrounds a trade-off often overlooked in optimistic conceptions of SSW: well-being at one level might be sustained precisely by sacrificing it at another. This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing purposive sampling (Etikan et al., 2016) and vignette-

based scenarios (Finch, 1987) to explore consumer reactions to digital withdrawal. The resulting data are evaluated through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Keywords: Transformative Service Research, C2C Interaction, Digital Stigma, Spoiled Service Identity, Social Exclusion

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The Two Faces of Prestige: The Bright and Dark Effects of Perceived External Prestige on Turnover Intention

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to examine the mediating roles of organizational identification, organizational pride, and a competitive work environment in the effect of perceived external prestige on turnover intention, within a holistic model framework. Based on Social Identity Theory, this research suggests that a high perception of external prestige strengthens employees' perceptions of social identity and status, increasing organizational identification and subsequently organizational pride; this "bright" mechanism ultimately weakens the turnover intention. On the other hand, it is argued that on the "dark" side of the coin, high perceived external prestige triggers a competitive work environment by creating high performance expectations and pressure to maintain status within the organization, which can increase the turnover intention. The research aims to provide a more comprehensive explanation to the literature by combining these opposing mechanisms of external prestige into a single model. The study's findings are expected to highlight the need for businesses to consider the potentially destructive effects of excessively competitive working conditions that prestigious organizations can create when developing employee engagement and retention strategies.

Keywords: Perceived External Prestige, Organizational Identification, Organizational Pride, Competitive Work Environment, Turnover Intention

The Impact of Change-Based Brand legitimacy on the Credibility of Change Advocacy

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Abstract

Today, brands are not only considered economic actors offering products and services, but also corporate actors expressing opinions on social issues such as the environment, equality, human rights, and justice. This phenomenon, known as brand activism, allows brands to openly take sides in demands for social change, but it also brings with it a significant credibility problem for consumers. Consumers do not always perceive brands' stances on social issues as sincere, consistent, or value-based; in some cases, they may view these stances as opportunistic, marketing-driven, or hypocritical. This research aims to examine the role of brand heritage in this evaluation process.

The fundamental assumption of the study is that a long-standing brand history alone does not legitimize advocating for social change. Brand heritage is a concept related to a brand's connection to the past, its continuity, its historical identity, and the values it has represented over time. However, a brand having a strong historical identity does not automatically make its current demands for social change credible to consumers. Therefore, this research will examine how brand heritage shapes consumers' perceived of authenticity and hypocrisy through perceived value congruence and brand-cause fit.

The research will be conducted using a quantitative research method and a cross-sectional survey design within the context of service brands. Data will be collected from consumers residing in Turkey via an online survey. Participants will be asked to answer scale items related to brand heritage, perceived value congruence, perceived brand-cause fit, issue involvement, perceived authenticity, perceived hypocrisy, brand advocacy, and brand boycott tendencies in the context of a service brand they are familiar with, and the obtained data will be analyzed through structural equation modelling.

This study will examine whether perceived value congruence plays a moderating role in the relationship between brand heritage and brand-cause fit, and whether the level of issue involvement plays a moderating role in the relationships between brand-cause fit and perceptions of authenticity and hypocrisy. Furthermore, it will evaluate how perceived authenticity affects brand advocacy and how perceived hypocrisy affects brand boycott tendencies. In this respect, the study aims to explain, by bringing together the literature on brand activism and brand heritage, under what conditions historically based brand legitimacy can generate credibility in advocating for social change.

Keywords: Brand Heritage, Perceived Value Congruence, Perceived Brand-Cause Fit, Issue Involvement, Perceived Authenticity, Perceived Hypocrisy, Brand Advocacy, Brand Boycotting